

# On totalitarianism and its levers : the study of Sismondi as a user's manual

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Jean de Sismondi is a perfect test case for identifying the tenets of totalitarianism : irrefutability, good reasons to hate scapegoats, to obey the State and let it intervene in markets as defender of the new order. Ludwig von Mises was first to claim that Sismondi was one of the main fathers of Nazi economic thought. His point can be demonstrated by showing the interrelatedness of nationalism and economic thought, as well as racist conceptions of mankind, in Sismondi's thought. Sismondi aimed at developing a military Republic, where a work guarantee for the peasantry through compulsory sharecropping on latifundary tenancy would be imposed on proprietors, ensuring quick development of future recruits for the Republic's militia (with the argument that sharecropping would increase proprietary gains, hence prefacing fascist demagoguery about « class cooperation »). Sometimes Sismondi openly pressured for colonial expansion for economic purposes, contradicting his own

views on Say's Law. He especially campaigned for the conquest of Algiers, mixing economic arguments with a humanistic discussion about the fate of the Arabs under Turkish rule and with piracy issues. Sismondi also contradicted himself on slavery, suggesting in a comment that slaves must work a few years to pay for their freedom, thus acknowledging implicitly owners' economic rights on them. Sismondi was in fact close to Rousseau. Fascism has usually been defined as a nationalistic, pragmatic reconstruction of idealistic Socialism, and this reconstruction can be traced to the Rousseau-Sismondi line, even though they in fact intermerge.

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## Introduction

Sismondi, machist, nationalistic, racist and sometimes anti Semitic economist and civil rights thinker of the 19th Century, with Swiss origins and Protestant (Unitarian) beliefs, repeatedly assimilated himself to Rousseauism, even though he criticized Rousseau's political economy of expropriation, criticized frequently socialist models such as Owen's and expressed fear as regards jacobinism and the *Terreur*, which he experienced in 1794 when *sans-culottes* invaded Geneva.

Virilism is a key in his writings. Attacks about the « effeminate » are obvious and numerous. Sismondi also expresses very frequent preoccupations about « races » and their « glory », yet solely European « races ». Some elements allow to underline a latent anti-Semitism in his thought (already suggested by Bridel, Dal Degan and Eyguésier, in an introductory note of one of Sismondi's economic writings (*Oeuvres complètes*, IV, p. 399) and reinforced by the late definition by Sismondi of Jews in Poland as « a foreign people » followed by a comment about the « lack of a race » in Poland, implying that Jews may be taking space that others should use instead and that they should thus be evicted - in *Discourse for the Wilna Academy on the « two systems of political economy »*, 1836, p. 114). He was also absolutely obsessed by the Muslim “infidels”.

J. A. Schumpeter defined Sismondi as an « amateur » politician, which is easily demonstrated by strong changes in his economic and social thinking from one piece of work to another (as opposed to a progressive “conversion”). He is known for having criticized Say's law and demanded salary increases for workers as a response to gluts, both in metropolises and for indigenous peoples in colonies, but in *De l'expédition coloniale contre Algiers* (May 1830), article in which he associated himself with the absolute monarchy of Charles X, he actually suggested the opposite, demanding colonial expansion for France for both reasons of

competition with foreign powers and *commercial openings for the French* « surplus », hence meaning that the industry would not have to increase wages anymore as usually demanded by the author. This could be seen as one of the first theorizations of economic exploitation in colonies, in contradiction with Sismondi's considerations about short trade circuits and autarky for workers' sake, and the more general and very insistent definition of political economy as a « moral science », earlier and later in life. For instance in the *Nouveaux principes* éd. 1819, chapter 4.11. « un pays qui a très-peu de capitaux peut désirer de les employer tout entiers au commerce intérieur ou à son propre usage » ('a country which has very little capital may desire to use them wholly for internal trade or for its own use'), and 4.12 « le commerce est un lien entre les nations... mais (il) excite aussi une rivalité secrète de chacun contre tous » ('Trade is a link between nations... but (it) fosters also a secret rivalry of one against another') - the same sub-chapter incorporates one definition of political economy as, dominantly, a « moral science ». References to self consumption (implicit autarky) and economic protectionism are even more numerous in Sismondi's writings after 1830.

Machismo and insistence on state intervention are intrinsically bound up. This is obvious from a moral judgment, from an exterior viewpoint, but is also demonstrated by the *motives* of Sismondi's demands for state intervention. It is to build a **republic of soldiers**

trained and capable to wage wars. Sismondi's history of the Republics of Italy is obsessed with wars and his view of literature, for instance, also demonstrates an obsession with crusades and the struggle for « Christendom ». Sismondi intended to draw the path for a national rebirth in Italy in 1802 – 1808 and undertook a similar work for France later in life, before Jules Michelet (under the constructivist title *Histoire des Français*). Both works will make a significant contribution to historical romanticism and are testimony to *palingenetic project* (to use Roger Griffin's definition of fascism). Sismondi's nationalism is original in what he is centered not on a single country, but on the whole Latin area which he seemed to favor, attempting to construct separate identities on the model of Rousseau's project formulated in *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*, perhaps the first explicitation of an intended constructivist project regarding national identities (prime proof of what Hobsbawm and Ranger called "invention of tradition", Anderson "imagined communities"), associated with demands for the building of Republics based on these constructed identities. « Un Français, un Anglais, un Espagnol, un Italien, un Russe sont tous à peu près le même homme... A vingt ans un Polonois ne doit pas être un autre homme ; il doit être un Polonois » ; « il faut maintenir, rétablir ces anciens usages et en introduire qui soient propres aux Polonois » (« A Frenchmen, an Englishmen, a Spaniard, an Italian, a Russian are all more or less the same man... At 20 years old a Polish man must not be another man ; he must be a

Polish man' ; 'It is needed to maintain, re establish old customs and to *introduce* [I underline] which be proper to Polish men ») in *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne* – suggesting to *introduce* new customs for a group of populations is especially constructivist in nature.

Sismondi closely followed Rousseau's ideas, saying as early as in his *Recherches sur les Constitutions des Peuples Libres* (1803) that he disagreed with Rousseau « more on words than on things »<sup>1</sup>. The words in the introduction of the *Histoire des républiques italiennes* make clear that there is a project for national rebirth at the root. It is also in this text that appear the some of the earliest recommendations for state intervention in the economy (even though they are already in *Richesse territoriale* (1802) where Sismondi says that the « sovereign » « can and ought » to limit uses of property - *Oeuvres complètes*, III, pp. 119 - 121), suggesting that property is a « concession from the social order granted to some for the benefit of all » and denouncing the capture of political power by « philosophers, nobles or the wealthy » - *Histoire des républiques italiennes*, IV, 1807 edition, p. 159. The *Histoire des républiques italiennes* insists on the need to train soldiers for instance with the example, likely drawn from Macchiavelli's *Discourses*<sup>2</sup>, of Cincinnatus, the Roman general who owned a farm under a sharecropping agreement and saved the Roman Republic, immediately in

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1 Rousseau also was deeply preoccupied by « effeminate » - see again the *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de la Pologne*

2 In *Littérature du Midi*, Sismondi explains that the *Prince* should not be taken seriously but seen as satirical, whereas the *Discourses* are « for the honest man », which is highly contradictory. Both writings defend trickery and are highly militaristic in nature.

the introduction before despising Italians of his time for their « decline », and is mostly a *military* history of Italian medieval times centered on heroism and treason.

Rousseau's *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* proposed expropriation of commerce and forced work to provide goods for state-owned outlets, in clear prefiguration of Stalinism. Sismondi's proposals are more subtle yet also lead to landholders' demise through forced adoption of peasants with long-term contracts, based on arguments about class cooperation and suggested mutual benefit, which is dubious even based on actual economic history of Italy's regional productivity before the disappearance of sharecropping agreements in the 1970s (as Tuscany was the model for Sismondi's proposed class cooperation)<sup>3</sup>. And while Sismondi campaigned for the immediate liberation of slaves in the *Etudes d'économie politique* (1836), he actually contradicted himself in a comment he wrote on Agénor de Gasparin's proposal for a similar system in 1838 (*Oeuvres complètes*, IV, 30), explaining that slaves must work for several years in order to *buy themselves from their owners*<sup>4</sup>. Sismondi also criticized the expansion of the principle of property to state sovereignty in the *Nouveaux principes* (Book 7 Chap. 4), opening way to intervention in foreign countries as Sismondi himself used piracy from the

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3 Grizi's comparative study on agricultural productivity in early 20th century Italy is far from convincing regarding the agricultural productivity of sharecropping areas even though differences in soil fertility must also be ponderated

4 Sismondi also mentioned at the end of his chapter on the subject in the *Etudes* that room must be allowed for the punishing of emancipated slaves that would refuse to participate to sharecropping schemes



« Barbaresques » in Algiers as reason for overrule. Security issues, « co-development » through sharecropping agreements granted to Arab peasantry and colonial exploitation interbred in Sismondi's writings on Algiers until 1830.

The fascist flag used by the Italian fascist party is another way to look at the influence of Sismondi's ideas in Italian fascism. Ludwig von Mises (1936) says that Italian fascism did not originate in Mussolini's writings and will survive him. Mussolini was once an « adamant adversary of patriotism, nationalism, imperialism, monarchical rule and all religious creeds » and his choice for the flag suggests the centrality agriculture and of class cooperation bound up by the authority of the State, as the “branches of society” are tied up by the force of the State to constitute the bundle. Von Mises certainly proposed that Sismondi, before Sorel, was key in Nazi economic policy because of Sismondi's corporativist proposal of organizing a right to work for peasants through the partial expropriation of tenants by law, with the argument of mutual benefit through sharecropping. Sismondi also suggested a progressive income tax (on the argument that the wealthy benefit the most from state intervention, which « protects their holdings », in contradiction with the fact that Sismondi actually proposed state intervention for the benefit of the poor – for instance in *In Nouveaux principes*, book 6 chapter 1<sup>5</sup>) and attacked in

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5 Whereas for instance in the same book Sismondi makes the first calls for forced landshare through an agrarian law.

general what he called « chrematistics » and inequality of wealth, based on a demand-side approach to economics.

I will first demonstrate Sismondi's racism, machismo, antisemitism and religious fanaticism, as well as militarism, through a lecture of his literary analysis of the Southern Europe works from the Middle Ages and Renaissance (*Littérature du Midi de l'Europe*), then comment on his institutional organicism, bind it up with his political economy, and eventually discuss Sismondi's strategies for dissimulation of his national-socialist project. Throughout that research this will be a very exciting opportunity for investigation onto the fundamental mechanics of all forms of totalitarianism.

## **Sismondi's romanticism of violence and hatred as seen in the *Littérature du Midi de l'Europe***

### **Machismo, imperialism and political violence**

Sismondi's machismo and, especially, obsession about "effeminates" is reflected both in Machiavelli's own machismo, adhesion to what Françoise Héritier calls "differential valence of the sexes", and, anteriorly, in Rousseau's identical obsession about "effeminates" (a topic almost never raised in public debates about Rousseau in France). Graeme Garrard also notes Rousseau's conjunction of hatred for the Enlightenment in Paris and

admiration of Geneva's adornments as a small cohesive community with 'masculine' virtue to which Sismondi also clearly identified as he spent most of his life in the area, except for travels (mainly in Italy where he stayed some years in Pescia). Ludwig von Mises has exposed the deep link between socialism and domination of women in *Socialism*. In the *Littérature*, Sismondi presents "effeminate" feelings as leading to "Opera tears", far from the tears from "drama" (p. 340 book 2), opposes "nobility and courage" in behavior to "effeminate gentleness" dominant in a country where, hence, a drama centered on nobility and courage would express best (p. 384 book 2<sup>6</sup>). Alfieri is the "poet of liberty", everything in his writings is "political" in a country where the men, on the model of Metastasio and Guarini, have become "effeminate" in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (pp. 437 – 439 book 2). Sismondi's definition of "liberty" and "politics" is thus highly masculine. Whatever "effeminate" is "corrupt" (p. 445 book 2). This can be directly linked with the homophobia of the Marx – Engels "couple", very clear in the June 1869 letter from Engels to Marx denouncing "rampant pederastia" in the German state.

Sismondi sees in Machiavelli a « satirical author » which would not have written the *Prince* to « consolidate the reign of a tyrant he hated » (« Le vrai but de Macchiavel, cependant, ne peut pas avoir été d'affermir sur le trône un tyran qu'il détestait », p. 225 book 2) but more as a consequence of a general despise of human beings (« Une

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6 (wrong numerotation, « 584 » in the edition)

amertume universelle contre tous les hommes », *ibid*), which is in total contradiction with Sismondi's reading of Machiavelli's *Discourses* in the same book, in which he says that Machiavelli « goes much more frankly to his aim », he writes « for every honest man which loves to reflect on the destinies of nations » and he is « much more moral » than in the *Prince* (pp. 226 – 227 book 2 « Tout ce qui, depuis cette époque, a été écrit, dans aucune langue, de plus profond sur la politique, est né de ces premières méditations de Macchiavel ; et comme dans cet ouvrage il marche beaucoup plus franchement à son but, comme il n'écrit point en même temps pour un tyran et pour un peuple libre, mais pour tout homme honnête qui aime à réfléchir sur les destinées des nations, ce livre est beaucoup plus moral, tout en contenant des leçons non moins profondes... »). This is in total contradiction with the actual purpose of the *Discourses*, which is in fact another apology of war, imperialism (on the model of Rome against Venice and other mixed regimes) and of trickery (See also Ch XLVIII book I, Ch. XIII book 2, Ch. XL book 3). On this topic Murray Rothbard (1995) says that Niccolo Machiavelli « was unquestionably a new phenomenon in the western world: a conscious preacher of evil to the ruling class ». « The Old Nick of the *Discourses* is in no sense transformed by goodness; he is simply adapting his doctrine to a republican as against a monarchical polity ». « Machiavelli condemns the pursuit of private interest as 'corruption' ». « In short, Machiavelli is still holding the maintenance and expansion of state power to be the highest good, except that now the state is oligarchic and republican ».

On imperialism, Chapter VI of the first book of the *Discourses* is essential in what Machiavelli actually explains that belligerence and conquest of foreign lands is the « most

honorable choice » as a response to political « instability » *inside* the Republic, as the title of the chapter refers to a possible solution to conflicts between the Roman Senate and the Roman people (it is not stated in open words, Machiavelli being as always sibylline, but is a direct consequence of the two last paragraphs of the chapter – gentleness is seen as worse than warmongering, and the Republic must « at least » conserve what it annexed). It is a pure theory of perpetual movement as a way to unite « the Roman Senate and the people » and thus the first and most explosive statement of conquest as a response to « disequilibrium »<sup>7</sup>, both a confirmation of Girard's scapegoat theory (internal catharsis of the polity through sacrificial wars abroad) and a foundational moment for political fascism – and the direct consequence is that all authors, including for instance J. G. A. Pocock, that referred to Machiavelli's Discourses as a good foundation for

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7 There are quite few writings critical of Machiavelli's Discourses outside Rothbard, Mark Hulliung in *Citizen Machiavelli* (1983) is one of the few, he makes several extremely good points, is the only author I have found to actually discuss Disc I. 6. but he did not went up to the « political catharsis through violence against a scapegoat » argument that is core in all brands of fascism, and, as is more and more well known, very frequent with « left-wing » socialism as well, be it the Soviet Union's rabid policies against minorities, for instance Ukrainians, Tatars, Chechens, the scapegoating of Jews in Poland for instance in 1968 and the more general obsession around Jews in the USSR leading to their confinement in Birobidzhan, the expulsion of Turkophone Bulgarians in the 1980s, the lesser-known recourse to Orthodox Christianity by Stalin in Winter 1941, the use of nationalism by movie makers, for instance during the 30s in USSR (Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky*) and under Ceaușescu in Romania, and the state-driven oppression of LGBTs during most of the existence of the USSR... Avraham Shifrin, in *the First Guidebook to Prisons and Concentration Camps of the Soviet Union* (1982), reported about the existence of several death camps in the Gulag, including mostly uranium mines and nuclear industry plants, with almost 100 % death rate (Anne Applebaum, in *Gulag, a history* (2005) discusses one particular case in Czechoslovakia, and says that « In retrospect, it is clear that political prisoners with long sentences – the equivalent of the Soviet katorga inmates – were sent to these mining camps in order to die. Although they worked extracting uranium for the new Soviet atomic bomb project, they were not given special clothing or any form of protection at all. The death rates are known to have been high – though how high, exactly, is still unknown ». Jaurès Medvedev, the biologist known for having shed light on the Mayak disaster, discusses as well the issue, explains that uranium mines in the Far East were part of a « special group of very harsh camps » established on « Stalin's personal directive » for so called « especially dangerous criminals » (political groups, as well as nationalist groups), with no chance to escape alive, in « Stalin and the Atomic Gulag », *The Unknown Stalin*, 2003).

republican theory should be seen as well as fascists. Keynesianism, based on the « market disequilibrium » theory (spilling to an actual theorization of the « disequilibrium » as a way to defend state intervention in the market by Malinvaud, Drèze, Leijonhufvud...) can be seen as the economic homologous of Machiavelli's disequilibrium theory, another justification for state imperialism in the market, and Sismondi was among the firsts (with Malthus) to expose the « global glut » theory, ancestor to Keynesianism<sup>8</sup>. The combination of these two interpretations of Machiavelli leads directly to Ayn Rand's thesis that mixed economies are instable and will evolve into dictatorships if market controls are not released. Both instability inside the national economy and in international relations may be alternatively or conjointly used to justify state intervention. Von Mises in *Human action* (1940) says that « All varieties of interference with the market phenomena not only fail to achieve the ends aimed at by their authors and supporters, but bring about a state of affairs which — from the point of view of their authors' and advocates' valuations — is less desirable than the previous state of affairs which they were designed to alter. If one wants to correct their manifest unsuitableness and preposterousness by supplementing the first acts of intervention with more and more of such acts, one must go farther and farther until the market economy has been

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<sup>8</sup> Even though Keynes did not read Sismondi and solely took inspiration from Malthus, another early French Keynesian, Albert Aftalion, wrote his PhD thesis on Sismondi's economic thinking in 1899.

entirely destroyed and socialism has been substituted for it. ». René Girard does not discuss economic policy yet his comment of war in *Achever Clausewitz* (2007) leads to the same conclusion as state intervention in the market is easily assimilated to a form of economic war. These views can be summarized and totalitarianism can be defined as a permanent war against society. The “theory of disequilibrium” which gathers popular passions and produces the “spectacle” (to quote Guy Debord – it is all about appearance of success, especially when the media are under total control) of victory to consolidate the regimen opens the way to fascism.

One good way to merge René Girard’s scapegoating theory with methodological individualism is to look at the “good reasons” individuals have to design what is understood, from an external viewpoint, as scapegoat, but that they of course do not see on their own as irrational scapegoats but as the *actual* cause of all their ills. “Good reasons” i.e. subjective rationality is the thesis of Raymond Boudon. “Good reasons” are provided by political entrepreneurs wishing to develop their own path to power (or, simply, monetary income from donations) by providing an explanation to the current economic (geopolitical...) situation alternative to the mainstream one. They thus need to insert it into the “public debate” (which is less dependent on a limited supply of gatekeepers now thanks to the Internet and social networks, which have increased

competition and allowed more voices in). Jews, for instance, are not hated “because of their long nose, pale skin and curly hair” but *because they own a number of banks that impose their conditions to the rest of the economy and thus control policymakers*. This is a simple case for subjective rationality<sup>9</sup>. *LGBTs are attempting to turn our children into homosexuals by getting “gender issues” into school programs*. *The government is deliberately attempting to replace us with immigrants to have a more submissive population and immigrants steal our jobs*. There is nothing like scapegoating, like a rise to the extremes, without subjective rationality behind each act, and electors need to be provided with such “rational” arguments to elect leaders that will take action against scapegoats. Even pure mimetism can be seen through the eye of subjective rationality : when searching for information is costly (groups that want to benefit from mimetism have of course all interest to make that search as costly as possible), believing that the crowd has the good information is essentially a calculation to save energy. It leads to blind mimetism but relies on pure subjective rationality.

Sismondi clearly attempted to present “effeminate” as a threat to the military abilities of the new Republic and thought that the State had as a mission to develop military virtues in the population (to defend itself against foreign enemies, like non-Republican governments), a mission

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Le Goff, in *Your Money or Your Life, Economics and Religion in the Middle Ages* (1988), links the Christian stigma against money lending (which led Israelites to occupy most money lending jobs) to the subsequent stigma against the « Jewish banker »



achieved among other things through intervention in markets (see Part 3). Both Marx and Sismondi could have seen homosexuals as a threat to the strength of the state. To be accepted by the many, the political act of scapegoating has to rely on a subjective rationality (which most of the time has an economical core) that the task of the economist is thus to deconstruct. And the failures of central planning lead to more pinpointing of “traitors” to explain them, as in Ayn Rand’s proposal. The political entrepreneurship of antiliberals is a highly rational process even though criticism of human rationality is a keystone in their propaganda.

### **Racism, religious fanaticism**

Sismondi expresses through the lines of the *Littérature* his desire for heroes and dramatic battles. Discussing Arabic counts and legends, he underlines the « lack of nobility » and of « heroism » that « we are accustomed to desire » (p. 64 book 1). He claims that « heroic times are the ideal of the next generations » while himself having just claimed that « epic has *with reason* the first rank in all kinds of poetry, in all productions of the human mind », and is a sign of « the primitive forms of beauty, which nothing equates in the world » (p. 154 book 2). While having defined taste as a product of *imitation of past eras*, he is in fact suggesting again his personal views as the best ones. It clearly proves again the military romanticism in Sismondi’s discourse.

Crusades are for Sismondi a « perpetual communication » (« *la prédication de la croisade en 1095 , et la communication continuelle qui s'établit dès-lors entre la chrétienté et le Levant* ». p. 121, first book) and a « poetic event » where romanticism spills from sacrifice of « prosaic interest » to feelings and passion ; the violence is cause for the sacrifice which Sismondi has always demanded to owners through his works, thus already demonstrating how Sismondi's thrives for militarism and expropriation conjoin together (« *De tous les événemens de l'histoire du monde , aucun n'est peut-être plus hautement poétique que la croisade ; aucun ne présente de plus grands effets de l'enthousiasme, de plus grands sacrifices de l'intérêt, qui toujours est prosaïque, à la croyance, au sentiment, à la passion, qui sont du ressort de la poésie* ». p. 122 first book). Hatred is, here, poetic and the link between military sacrifice and the rejection of the “calculatory interest” is certainly the most central definition of the “fascist way to socialism” (see also on anti-rationalism, below).

The word « infidels » about Muslims comes by and by. Richard, king of England, inflicted « so much terror to the infidels » and Sismondi expresses his overall positive feeling about the king (even though he criticizes his rudeness, lack of loyalty to entourage and assassination of war prisoners) by narrating a small anecdote « which we would like to love » about him (pp. 144 – 145 and 147 for the anecdote, book 1). On Charlemagne, Sismondi again

criticizes the « golden legend » of the king yet talks of Muslims as « the infidels » (p. 286 book 1), and on the next page again says that Alfonso VI king of Castilla and Leon and French knights went through the Pyrenees to battle the « infidels ». Argant, in *La Gerusalemme liberata*, is « the most fearsome of the infidel heroes » (p. 110 book 2,). The Ariost writes a poem about heroes that « save the Occident » from Arabic invasions, Charles Martel « delivers » France and the Ariost again gets « a great number of infidels to perish in his last songs » (pp. 64 – 66 book 2). The world of the Ariost is a world where « no calculation cools down the anima », sadness and fear « from inequality of wealth » are forgotten and this factice world « is a *quite pleasant* relief from the real world » (pp. 68 – 69 book 2), bringing us back again to the fascist way to socialism.

Ssmondi talks about « God (allowing) that the whole of Europe be governed by heroes », i.e. Frederick 1 in Germany, Henri II and his three sons, Raymond in Toulouse, Berenguer and his son Alfonso in Catalunya, « heroes » which all 'shined' through their wars against the Arabs, Crusades and the Reconquista in Spain. Vidal, a troubadour which narrates an epic about that era, showing « these heroes [the kings and barons] united by poetry », « shines through a nobleness of language and a wisdom of thought » according to Sismondi (p. 174 book 1). Sismondi's racism is also suggested by comments about Arabs « ignorants,

cowards and perfidious » alike « Greeks, Syrians and Egyptians fellahs », as opposed to « Europeans ». Beyond religious appeal for warmongering in the East, Sismondi suggests that any reason would be actually enough to justify crusades, that « in the Clermont council knights ought to shout, not God wants it, but honor wants it, fatherland wants it, humankind wants it ; whatsoever... »(p. 102 – 103 book 2 - I underline).

Antisemitism can also be suggested through some comments, especially Sismondi's need to *specify* the Jewishness of some characters (for instance « a Jew named Léon » - « *A la fin du seizième siècle, douze ou quinze poètes italiens publièrent des drames pastoraux ; quatre ou cinq femmes , un souverain de Guastalla , un juif nommé Léon , s'essayèrent dans le même genre* » p. 176 book 2). Jewishness is always used as the equivalent of a national belonging in the *Littérature*. Sismondi even talks once about « Jewish blood » (p. 509 book 4) mixed with the “blood of the Portuguese nobility”. He explains antisemitism in Spain not because of religious or racial motives but because of “jealousies linked to trade” (p. 265 book 3) and, even though he once expresses sympathy for Spanish Jews under the Inquisition, he clearly partakes to the defining of a “Jew” type separated from other nations (and they are the only major Mediterranean population whose literature is not studied at all by Sismondi in the book – even Arabic literature is the topic of the first chapter as Sismondi's thesis

is that it inspired Latin literature<sup>10</sup>), leading to the obvious conclusion that Sismondi was an adept of the cliché of the “wandering, stateless Jew” already in 1813.

We already see that criticism of kings and apology of old “Republics” is combined with alignment on deep medieval ideologies of racism and antisemitism, only debased from Christian beliefs, arriving to a pure principle of racist hatred which is presented as people’s deep root ideology through literary analysis of counts and legends. Christian principles of tolerance (as Sismondi claims to be a Christian he could have been expected to promote these principles) could have threatened its « Machiavellian efficiency » in forming a new motor for catharsis through imperialism beyond the borders of Europe and for state intervention in the economy (where it is clear that personal interests and calculations have to bow down), so Christianity disappears behind more general ideas about “mankind” and “nation” and, crucially, “the Republic” as core values for the community to regenerate. It

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10 One could point that Sismondi, as an Unitarian, could have felt closer to Muslims. In the *Histoire de la chute de l'Empire romain*, written later in life by Sismondi, the Arabic civilization is depicted much more positively, as an independent nation, Mahomet is presented as the « reformer of the Arabs », founder of « one of the biggest revolutions that changed the world » followed by decline and corruption in his successors. Sismondi nevertheless underlines at one point Mahomet’s « hatred » against Jews. There is a similar viewpoint in Thomas Carlyle, another founder of Nazi economic thought according to Von Mises. August Bebel, German late-19th Century Marxist who wrote on Islamic tolerance, eventually came to defend the SPD as a “school for militarism” in a reply to Bismarck (see Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*). Mahomet’s « revolution » against Christendom may have been the conscious or unconscious reference for all revolutionaries that saw the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal consensus as a “figure of Christianity”, and associated the absence of miracles in Islam (noted by Sismondi, who also as a Christian disliked mysticism) with some kind of revolutionary pragmatism. I have always wondered how consciously the Communist “sickle and hammer” emblem has been made similar to the Islamic crescent and star, and the Red Square Lenin mausoleum to the Kaaba in Mecca, as a similar reference to that anterior “Revolution” (see also : Roger Garaudy, former Communist converted to Protestantism, then Catholicism and then Islam, Carlos, left-wing terrorist that eventually converted as well to Islam, Bernhard Falk, another left-wing terrorist converted to Islam...). Of course no need to point out how Hitler will ally with the Palestinian mufti in the eve of WW2, and how Nazi ideology is still visible in some Middle Eastern countries, esp. Syria with the SSNP (or even the swastika seen in March 2018 in Gaza demonstrations led by Hamas), Hezbollah (which uses the Nazi salute in its political meetings)...

is a tract of racist propaganda and an open call to expansionism.

This political tract will translate later in Sismondi's life in demands for wars against Turks addressed to the French Restoration government (at the end of Charles X's reign) that, as a self-defined Republican he could not have been expected to support, yet as a mere opportunist did. Sismondi was mostly craving for national *grandeur* (as he himself says that the conquest of Algiers will bring « glory » to France in *De l'expédition contre Alger*, op. cit). He already had come to support Napoleon's coming back in the « Cent-Jours » in 1815 after Bonaparte conceded a few constitutional changes. These moves must have prompted J. A. Schumpeter's definition of Sismondi as « amateur politician ». Sismondi's politics are racist and palingenetic. Here the national revival project relies on national expansion in the South, domination of the foe, both supportive of the national economy through protectionism (export of surplus in a classical mercantilist project). The ideological project of Sismondi was to scapegoat Muslims in order to justify national union behind a common foe, recycling old Christian-Muslim rivalries in a dechristianized context, creating a new secular religion of the nation, and thus to construct the military Republic of his dreams in which he may have hoped to play a political role as he for instance had a meeting with Louis-Philippe d'Orléans in 1824 (see on this *Fragments*, p. 79). At the end of his life Sismondi

attacked “colonialism” and imperialism in almost Marxist terms, but his attacks targeted mostly English imperialism (in Egypt, Syria, China...) - see Fragments, *letter to Bianca Mojon*, 13th March 1841, p. 213 - and whereas France was at the same time setting foot in Guinea, Madagascar, Mayotte, was supporting Mehemet-Ali’s expansionism and had waged war in Mexico, Sismondi did not of course comment on that. He clearly was utterly pro-French.

### **Anti-rationalism**

Anti-rationalism has been underlined as foundational in the « Counter-Enlightenment » by philosophers such as G. Garrard who pointed out the specific contribution of Rousseau to that political and philosophical movement, from his « Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts » in 1750. Sismondi, in his *Littérature*, confirms the legitimacy of his own comments about sympathy to Rousseau’s thinking by exposing his own taste for the refusal of rationality in literature. The whole romantic movement in literature, which Girard attacked in his first opus (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 1966), can be seen as a direct continuation of the first Counter-Enlightenment and Sismondi was an active member of it.

There are very significant occurrences of anti-rationalism in Sismondi’s *Littérature*. The first point is that Sismondi argues repeatedly that the beauty of the *eloquence* of the narrator of old counts and legends is enough to believe the reality of the facts. He for instance states his point in an

account of Attila's court customs in the *Nibelungen* (« the events in this poem are historical, they are narrated with such truth, with such knowledge of the mores of Attila's court, that we cannot have written them for the first time in a much posterior era » - p. 30 book 1), or in a discussion of *La Gerusalemme liberata*, where according to Sismondi, Torquato Tasso exposes a « scrupulous truth » where even the paths of heroes in the woods of Jerusalem are real and the 1st Crusade « cannot be separated » from Torquato Tasso's narration (p. 121 book 2). It has « a degree of *grandeur*, divine and humane interest as well as variety, dramatic movement » (p. 105 book 2) which has seduced the commentator. The Ariost, discussed above also for his religious radicalism, « has in his language, in his abandon, an inimitable grace, that we pardon his nonchalance as naiveness, and as another proof of the truth of what he narrates » (pp. 75 – 76 book 2).

Sismondi's anti-rationalism is directly stated at one point in the *Littérature*, when he says that « we cannot, without fleshing out a story and taking out of it what makes it lively, separate facts from beliefs » (pp. 142 – 143 book 2). Nevertheless Sismondi's facts are directly drawn from his own religious beliefs, blowing out all possibility for axiological neutrality. He reads with repugnance legends about « Apollo, nymphs, faunas and satyrs » because they are « known to be wrong ». He thus demonstrates his will to search through fictive literature for *historical facts* and not



for the beauty of dramas. He is trying to look for truth in novels and counts and would include for instance the « Mysteries of Passions », a Biblical fable from late medieval times, into « romantic theater » (p. 329 book 1) but nothing coming from classical Greek inspirations, for instance, would have his true adhesion because they were not part of Christendom. He is, however, in his review of southern European literature, in search of « epic or dramatic inventions », « grand concepts of poetics », « passionate fervor » (p. 191 book 1 for the first two quotes, p. 276 book 1 for the last).

There are actually several historical mistakes demonstrating Sismondi's will to construct ex-post nations in the Mediterranean areas. He for instances imagines a « pure provençal tongue » which would include Toulouse, Provence and go up to the Puy en Velay, at the time of the crusades against the Albigensians (pp. 220 – 221 book 1), a claim which many historians would regard as extravagant. Another claim, according to which Italian would have appeared at the same time, during the reign of Roger 1st in Sicily, is also extraordinary in what the Italian language was heavily influenced by French (as well as, less significantly, Spanish) in later times. Frankish language is not « old French » according to Sismondi (p. 256 book 1), even though it had a major influence on the French language, old French seems according to him to derive solely from Southern Europe language (the Langue d'Oïl is categorized as “South

European” and studied in his book), whereas Frankish also contributed in fact substantially to the formation of the French tongue (Sismondi shows his bias by presenting this contribution essentially as a “corruption of Latin” which led to abandonment of the “finesse of its syntax”, and depicting the Franks as “barbarians” - p. 255 book 1). Sismondi, early in his book, also romanticizes the political economy of Charlemagne, suggesting « the beginnings of a new prosperity » (p. 16 book 1) under his reign (a claim which he will himself later contradict, in his *Histoire de la chute de l'Empire romain et du déclin de la civilisation*). More extravagant even, the claim that the Reign of Aragon in the 12th Century spoke « Provençal » (p. 232 book 1). At one point he criticizes the « mixing of old myths and Christian religion » in Boccaccio, while he later contradicts his own point (usually based on religious views), saying that Charon being in Michelangelo’s depiction of Dante’s Inferno is « a mix of two religions, that is nevertheless conform to Christian beliefs » (p. 355 book 1). The book is an accumulation of clichés, for instance the “rational French” trope (pp. 299 – 300 book 1, see also p. 342 book 1 « Cette justesse de raisonnement qui fait toujours marcher (la nation française) droit à son but » - ‘this truth in judgement that makes the French nation go always straight to its aim’), German “loyalty”, Arab “imagination”, French “gallantry” (p. 266 book 1), the idea that *no woman ever* was a soldier in the “Orient” (p. 109 book 2 - not a single one in thousands of years of history ?), that in Provence, in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>

century, « the spirit of cities had become almost absolutely republican », dominated by « principles of equality » and « a great zeal for public good » (p. 226 book 1)... On the contrary, Arab decadence in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is explained by the fact that « the poison was inside » (p. 76 book 1) the “national Arab spirit”. This comes directly before the suggestion that « Europe », shining at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, might fail, turn into a desert land like Mauritania and would be watched by foreigners (indigenous peoples of the Amazon and Oceania) with « astonishment » (p. 77 book 1), suggesting again palingenetic nationalism and demonstrating once again the link of palingenetic nationalism with anti-rationalism, or, better said, the imperative of anti-rationalism for a national rebirth movement (the best “good reason” being actually to discard reason as treason). Sismondi despises Orientals and Germans ; his judgment is deeply influenced by this absence of axiological neutrality and bias for peoples of the Northern Mediterranean shore, leading to major mistakes in historical writing. His influence on 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism in Italy through its *Histoire des républiques italiennes* would certainly have promoted his economic thinking (exposed not only in books dedicated to economy but also in historical works) in Italy and perhaps directly in Mussolini’s hands as he (Mussolini) was a teacher likely to use historical works such as Sismondi’s for class lessons. Adolf Hitler also owned a lot of books in his private library and may have come across Sismondi’s writing. Yet antisemitism, which is

not usually said to be a core element in Mussolini's thinking, was also present, confirming once again Ludwig von Mises' point about Sismondi and the origins of Nazi ideology.

### **Institutional organicism**

Sismondi can be defined as an "institutional heterodox" as some elements in his thinking clearly represent an attempt at defining the economic dynamics of societies through its institutions. Veblen's institutions of consumption seem here to have an antecedent : Sismondi, in the *Etudes d'économie politique*, suggests that each antique society had specific institutions *dedicated to the reduction of production*, i.e. that ancient *mores* had actually a *purpose* which is to avoid the "glut" - Sismondi suggests that the glut was avoided in Egypt by getting workers to build monuments instead of merchandise, in Sybaris by the dedication of production forces to luxury goods for the wealthy classes, and in Athens by distracting citizens with culture and democratic life. These ex cathedra claims are used by the author to legitimate his own denunciation of gluts in the modern economy, without any comment about the lack of overproduction during the 2000 years that separate him from ancient Athens in spite of the absence of any institution dedicated to the control of production. This is one example of "good reason" needed to justify his demands for state intervention (to increase consumption and restrict luxury), and there will be many other "good reasons" for state intervention in markets in the coming lines.

Sismondi's anti-individualism can be confirmed through his general theory of relativism, formulated several times through his writings, and for instance in the introductory lines of the *Etudes sur les Constitutions des Peuples Libres*, using the famous "blind men and elephant" image (with, in his example, students in a painting academy that would start quarreling because of disagreements on the nature of the object) to defend the relativity of judgment and demand union around faith and fatherland (in *Etudes sur les Constitutions des Peuples Libres*, introduction, pp. 20 - 21). Sismondi also claims in the *Etudes d'économie politique* that individuals are shaped by institutions and that considering the individual « abstractedly », « isolated from the world », have come to conclusions that were « refuted by experience » (Introduction, iii - iv), in an obvious anticipation on Emile Durkheim's holistic tradition in sociology. This brings us back to the rejection of rationality underlined above, and to the justification of restrictions to liberty.

In the introduction to the *Etudes sur les Constitutions des Peuples Libres*, Sismondi, using a version of Medea's legend, elaborates what might be one of the first theories of the people as a "body", by saying that the legislator, when elaborating a « progressive and liberal constitution », must suppress no bias, no habit, that even though « science would have come to a precision [...] from which it is still far away », the legislator « should not hurt any popular feeling

by suppressing what looks like a monstrosity », « exactly as the doctor would not reshape a living body, even irregular, even monstrous, according to the anatomic theories learned at school » (pp. 29 – 30.). This theory, which may have inspirations in the idea of *Volksgeist*, in particular leads directly to the concept of *volk* key in Nazi propaganda. Sismondi's idea of the "people" as a "body" and the defense of all primitive tendencies in it is the archetypal expression of populism. His arguments about the necessary "respect of mixedness" in societies (leading to corporativism) must be read from that fascist perspective.

These two theories, that institutions shape individuals and that the people is a "body" that must be left untouched, are contradicted by Sismondi's economic proposals, which would have a direct impact on the "shape" of the people. Another way to look at it would be to say that Sismondi sees the *prolétariat* as the body that *needs certain economic institutions adapted to its shape*, in direct extension of Sismondi's Rousseauvian claims that property is a right that spills from a primitive social contract and that it would have been granted *because it benefits to all* (especially : that it would be *protected by public force because it benefits to all, since very ancient times*, as if ancient public institutions had been generally preoccupied by the interest of the collectivity, of the poor, and were not simply extractive institutions) and thus can be withdrawn if it does not benefit anymore to the many (See for instance *Etudes d'économie politique*, book 1

p. 189). This claim, pre-dating Karl Polanyi's, and like the claim on the intended control of production in ancient times, does not resist Karl Popper's criteria for refutability, it is plainly impossible to demonstrate, yet it is one of the core tenets of Sismondi's economic thinking, leading to the invention of social rights based on the "social contract". All socialists tend to attempt to base their thinking on anterior institutions (as they feel they have a lack of legitimacy) – Karl Marx's communist theory relies heavily on the supposed "primitive communism" of ancient tribes, another claim highly impossible to demonstrate, and, as shown by Lucas Carroll, Marx actually contradicts himself on the theory of value by sometimes referring to a subjective definition of value which breaks down all of his argument about exploitation (incoming paper presented at the Austrian Economics Research Conference 2018). Karl Polanyi did not do much more than reinventing Rousseau's and Sismondi's social contract and Marx's primitive communism. Populist theories are always filled with contradictions (what Mises calls polylogism and which can frequently be caught red-handed with a very careful reading of authors) and always rely on non-demonstrable claims which need to have some "Machiavellian efficiency" (ability to lure, relying mostly on sibyllinity, as in Machiavelli's Discourses<sup>11</sup>) to reconstruct history with a bias and, eventually, to settle a teleological basis (the "good reasons") for the legitimacy of an interventionist State. These non-demonstrable claims much

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11 The « Sokal case » in 1996 is a good reminder of this.

be pinpointed and directly attacked to dis-inflate the bubbles created by irrefutability<sup>12</sup>.

## **State intervention in the economy driven by militarism and corporativism**

Rousseau expressed his love of “martial virtues” and despise to the softness of the bourgeois (linked with his hatred of effeminates) in the Discourse (1750). In his *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*, he also exposed the basic principles of Stalinism, that is prohibition of private trade and closure of shops (« Je regarde si bien tout système de commerce comme destructif de l'agriculture, que je n'en excepte pas même le commerce des denrées qui sont le produit de l'agriculture. [...] Le projet d'une égale population demande donc une circulation de denrées, un versement facile d'une juridiction dans une autre et par conséquent un commerce intérieur. Mais je dis à cela deux choses. L'une qu'avec le concours du gouvernement ce commerce peut se faire en grande partie par des échanges; l'autre, qu'avec le même concours et par une suite naturelle de notre établissement, ce commerce et ces échanges doivent diminuer de jour en jour et se réduire enfin à très peu de chose. [...] l'administration publique pourra sans inconvénient présider à ces traites, à ces échanges, en tenir la balance, en régler la mesure »), and compulsory work for public works (« Je tire une troisième sorte de revenu, la plus

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12 One should remember that there is actually a controversy in French sociology, with a great number of French « militant » sociologists following Jean-Claude Passeron, who defends the « non-Popperian space of reasoning in sociology » ! (Passeron is known for having worked with Pierre Bourdieu). Militant ethnography, a « burgeoning, deliberately politicised approach to qualitative research » (as defined by Apoifis (2017)) is another good example of self-proclaimed refusal of refutability.



sûre et la meilleure, des hommes mêmes, en employant leur travail, leurs bras et leur cœur plutôt que leur bourse au service de la patrie, soit pour sa défense, dans les milices, soit pour ses commodités par des corvées dans les travaux publics. Que ce mot de corvée n'effarouche point des Républicains! ») and for providing goods to state-owned shops (« Cependant je sais qu'il reste dans l'Île une grande quantité d'excellente terre en friche dont il est très facile au gouvernement de tirer parti soit en les aliénant pour un certain nombre d'années à ceux qui les mettront en culture soit en les faisant défricher par corvées chacune dans sa communauté »). This text centered on agriculture as the main economic motor and could have been an inspiration in Sismondi's economic thinking even though Sismondi seems mostly to have been influenced by the tradition of sharecropping agreements in Tuscany. Sismondi's prime project was to define a political economy for the new Republic which he intended as a reply to the « decline » ; national rebirth required soldiers to prepare for wars and the political economy he proposed was directly intended at the preparation of war.

The link between agricultural policy and militarism is very clear in a number of writings of the author. In the *Etudes d'économie politique*, his 1836 follow-up to the *Nouveaux principes*, for instance, he underlines that « no manual labor maintains health, the vigor of the body, happiness, than agriculture, no (manual labor) prepares better soldiers for

the defense of the fatherland » (p. 132 Book 1 « *Aucun travail manuel ne maintient aussi bien la santé, la vigueur du corps, la gaieté, que celui de l'agriculture; aucun ne prépare de meilleurs soldats pour la défense de la patrie* »). Sismondi's reference to Cincinnatus at the beginning of the *Histoire des républiques italiennes*, just before a denunciation of the current decline and a call to national rebirth, is another example. There are several references in the *Etudes* to the contribution of agricultural work to the development of muscles (Le fils « aîné [du métayer toscan], à dix ans, est déjà intelligent et adroit; il a appris de son père la raison de tout ce qu'il fait, et sa jeune expérience s'ajoute à celle de ses prédécesseurs; il s'amuse et se repose par la variété de ses occupations, et il croît en force et en intelligence, tout en gagnant déjà pleinement sa vie par son activité ». « Il y a pour la santé, pour la beauté de la race, un prodigieux avantage à développer tour à tour tous les muscles, au lieu de fatiguer tout le jour toujours les mêmes, et de recommencer tous les jours suivants ». « En suivant le calendrier du métayer toscan, nous jugerons mieux de cette variété de travaux, de l'art avec lequel ils sont distribués dans toutes les saisons de l'année, du mélange d'exercices qui demandent de la force [musculaire] avec ceux qui demandent de l'adresse »). Italy's "national rebirth" in the second part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century is linked by Sismondi to the kings' call for peoples to take arms and contribute to their defense (« Les rois avaient enfin reconnu leur incapacité pour défendre la société par leurs armées, ils

avaient été contraints d'appeler les peuples eux-mêmes à prendre les armes; » p. 20 book 2 *Etudes d'économie politique*). This appears in the introduction to the second book of his last major economic opus and just before a defense of state intervention to promote peasants' right to work in the Latium. In the same chapter, Sismondi refers to ideal times under the Colonna family where « agriculture allowed a numerous population to live in these districts, the population increased with a great rapidity, and did not provide solely cultivators and defenders to the mountains where it was born, but also *adventurous soldiers, ready to spill their blood in all the wars of Italy* » (p. 24 book 2 *Etudes d'économie politique*). Indeed Sismondi's project is to constrain tenants to host peasants as workers on non-cultivated lands (for instance lands dedicated to pasture). Peasants would have in exchange the obligation to share half of their products with the proprietor, in a typical sharecropping agreement on the model of what was seen at these times in Tuscany. Sismondi defends his corporatist proposal mainly for Italy's Latium and South, for Ireland, for indigenous populations in colonies and for liberated slaves. His point is that proprietors would be in a "mutual benefit" situation (hence the class cooperation argument) as sharecroppers, being incited to work by their participation to the benefits, would become highly productive, yet they would be compelled to keep these peasants for very long on their lands, with no possibility to use the lands otherwise, making of course very difficult the reallocation of land

capital. Furthermore it is not a model allowing for an intensive, highly-productive agriculture as sharecroppers are expected to do by themselves, with their own tools, the bulk of land ameliorations. Sismondi insists on the possibility to produce high-end crops such as wines or mulberries and defends peasant self-sufficiency with e.g. kitchen gardens to limit dependence on markets but is mostly opposed to large-scale agriculture for market supply, as his main argument is about “gluts”, and he is opposed to large-scale import-export trade and to the international division of labour (for example : « How can the two systems of renouncing to your manufactures to rely on those of foreign countries, and to establish at the same time new manufactures to do all the work of foreign countries, can be on your advantage at the same time ? » p. 231 book 2 *Etudes d'économie politique*)<sup>13</sup>. Sismondi's arguments about peasant self-sufficiency complement a more general discussion about short circuits and the limitation of international trade. The condemnation of technological advances “which do not create jobs”<sup>14</sup> would also impede the development of an highly productive agriculture and is obviously highly unfavorable to technological progress in general. At one point Sismondi

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13 Even in his *Richesse commerciale*, Sismondi says that trade treaties must be delayed until enough capitals have been accumulated, that trade is more beneficial inside a country than with foreigners, and that industrial development must be directed so that foreign imports are « naturally excluded », starting from the most essential necessities to « less useful goods ». See pp. 126, 136, 140, 341 and 342 in the edition in the *Oeuvres complètes*, II. P. 284 Sismondi suggests state subsidies to companies that would be recognized as being able to support « foreign competition ». The *Richesse commerciale* is Sismondi's earliest major economic text, in which he has been said to be closest to Smith's thinking – yet these points contradict directly that assumption.

14 Sismondi does not attack all technological advances, only those which « destroy jobs » ; see for instance p. 227 book 1 *Etudes d'économie politique*. Of course Sismondi never discusses the fact that technologies that destroy jobs at a given moment can be needed to develop further technological advances which will then create more jobs !

explains that the risk with the development of industrial machines is the risk that « *all muscular work* » would disappear (*Etudes d'économie politique*, book 2, p. 183). He also includes encouragement to muscular work as contribution to « national progress » in the *Etudes* (*Etudes d'économie politique*, book 1, p. 218). In his introduction to the *Etudes sur les Constitutions des Peuples Libres* (the first part of the *Etudes*), Sismondi includes “military science” as part of social science as it « teaches to nations how to defend themselves » (Introduction, first page) and in the same book he explains that citizen participation to militias is a key “power” given to the “people” as it teaches discipline and helps him to understand its own “freedom” (« un peuple armé, et organisé de manière à pouvoir soutenir le premier choc des troupes de ligne, est un peuple libre. Nous sommes très loin de lui proposer de tourner les armes qui lui sont confiées contre le gouvernement qui les lui a remises, très loin de vouloir transporter les délibérations des conseils dans les corps-de-garde, ou de recommander aucun recours à la force. Mais quand le peuple est armé et organisé militairement, ce peuple sent que la force est en lui, et le prince le reconnaît en même temps. » p. 349). Machiavelli’s call for people’s participation to military victories in the Discourses (Book 2, Ch. II) is also politically motivated, as a way to avoid citizen insurrections, and can surely have inspired Sismondi’s. Machiavelli’s claims that corruption and the lack of interest in freedom would spill from high inequality of wealth, and that therefore

“extraordinary means” are needed to reduce such inequality of wealth (Book 1, Ch. XVII), have also certainly been key in Sismondi’s demands for state intervention in the economy, especially regarding peasants. Sismondi expressed his high interest for Machiavelli’s Discourses. These proposals were certainly a reference for all early antiliberals, like Rousseau and Harrington, and even for later representatives of antiliberalism. Machiavelli may be seen as the inventor, or at least one of the prime proposers (with Xenophon), of military Socialism.

Sismondi’s economic model of owner-peasant co-development through sharecropping and of salary hikes against gluts is directly contradicted by his proposals for Algiers in the *Nouveaux principes* (in the two editions, 1819 and 1827) as well as in *De l’expédition contre Algiers* (1830). In these texts Sismondi recommends the colonization of the Mediterranean South not only for security issues (elimination of pirates) but also to provide commercial outlets to the French industry. This would in Sismondi’s thinking involve an increase of unemployment in these areas but the topic is of course not at all discussed. In the *Nouveaux principes*, Europe « would find in the wealthes of the Africans, a vast market for the products which are in surabondance in its manufactures » (Book 7, Ch. IV). In *De l’expédition contre Algiers*, « The kingdom of Algiers will not only be a conquest ; it will be a colony, a new country, on which the surplus of population and economic activity of

France will be free to spill out ». Sismondi's classification as "demand-side economist" (he even was one of the firsts to explicitly talk about "effective demand" - *Oeuvres complètes*, IV, p. 206) is here directly contradicted, or, better put, Sismondi's racism appears blatantly through his own contradictions. Sismondi's calls for a strong internal market and even to some prototypical forms of import-substitution industrialization applied to Italians (where sharecropping, according to him, fosters commerce in Tuscany), to the Irish suffering from famine, or to freed slaves, do not extend to Muslims because it is not anymore in France's personal interest.

Say himself suggested in his *Treaty* that there may be short-term glut issues (« *Cela étant ainsi, d'où vient, demandera-t-on, cette quantité de marchandises qui, à certaines époques, encombrant la circulation, sans pouvoir trouver d'acheteurs ? [...] En termes plus vulgaires, beaucoup de gens ont moins acheté, parce qu'ils ont moins gagné ; et ils ont moins gagné, parce qu'ils ont trouvé des difficultés dans l'emploi de leurs moyens de production, ou bien parce que ces moyens leur ont manqué* »), which leaves open the discussion about whether Sismondi simply re-used these comments to attack Say without underlining that the criticism came from Say himself (nevertheless a relevant point is that Sismondi's main target when coming to Say's Law was actually Ricardo, not Say, perhaps an implicit acknowledgment at least that Say himself had formulated

his limits to the law). Other unquoted economic inspirations of Sismondi may include James Maitland, earl of Lauderdale, and perhaps as well Heinrich Friedrich von Storch (it was quite usual not to quote your sources at these times).

Regarding slaves after their liberation, Sismondi suggests sharecropping on their former owners' lands, with as always participation to the profits to put the freemen in a better situation that they would be if they were day laborers with small carriages, but there also is a little-noted punitive dimension to the scheme, as an "ad terrorem" clause (in the own words of the author) where freed slaves refusing to work "in their own interest" under the new sharecropping agreements would be punished through a return to serfdom (« Il ne serait point mal cependant peut-être de l'admettre comme exception, 'ad terrorem', et pour châtier ceux des nègres qui ne voudraient se plier à aucun système de culture, qui se montreraient sourds à leur propre intérêt, et incapables de travailler, dès qu'on les aurait soustraits au fouet de l'inspecteur. » p. 298 book 1 *Etudes d'économie politique*, and on the next page « le servage ne peut être considéré que comme un système pénal, auquel on aurait recours en cas d'insubordination »). Inspiration from Rousseau's *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse* can be suggested. Forced work in combination with an insistence on the military directly leads to fascism or Stalinism. Class cooperation and corporativism are more relevant to fascism.



Sismondi also regularly chastised “idleness” of the poor in all his writings, as well as tastes of “ostentation” from the high bourgeoisie. In a less-noted article of 1837, a comment of A. de Gasparin’s project for the liberation of slaves, Sismondi demanded that the slave pays for his own freedom through years of work. The slave owner must be compensated by his own “property” (de Gasparin had suggested a similar scheme, Sismondi softens it a bit yet keeps the bulk of it). This can be seen directly in link with Sismondi’s racism. His project has to be read in the perspective of national remobilization through organized work and is a direct reminder, for instance, of Pétain’s *Révolution nationale* (see also Schmitter (1974)) and of all other fascist regimes. Pétain was born in 1856 and may have directly read Sismondi. Sismondi’s writings were the object of publications in Vichy France, for instance by J. H. Rilliet in June 1942 (“Actualité de Sismondi”) and by Paul Chanson for the “Institut d’études corporatives et sociales” (Institute for Corporativist and Social Studies) in 1944. Pétain’s projects for class cooperation and denunciation of the greed of company executives and financiers are well known. He insisted on the “right to work” of all and on agriculture, calling among other things for access of peasants to property. Yet Sismondi’s racism and antisemitism, military-state economics and imperialism certainly had influences throughout Europe, in Germany through the SPD, to Bismarck, in Italy with Mussolini and, through Mussolini and Bismarck, to Hitler (or directly through Hitler’s readings),

even though it is always difficult to assess “who influenced who” as each writer would tend to refrain from quoting other authors, especially writers willing to engage into politics such as Sismondi, that obviously always attempt to pretend they have developed ideas of their own.

## **Hiding behind Adam Smith and republicanism**

### **Using Smith as a firewall**

Sismondi gives a good example of economic demagoguery, by using throughout his economic articles several apologetic references to Adam Smith while questioning in fact a number of the core tenets of his theory. One could first underline the radical opposition between Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and Sismondi’s ultranationalism, militarism, antisemitism, racism. Sismondi, in fact, does not refer to this text but solely to the *Wealth of Nations*, from his first publications up to the *Etudes d’économie politique* in 1836. Yet Sismondi’s protectionism, mercantilism and strong economic interventionism directly contradict the core element in Smith’s political economy. Sismondi also defends the implementation of a number of rights for workers but for these, do not refer to Smith’s Book V of the *Wealth of Nations*, again leading to the suggestion that Sismondi attempted to appropriate some of the ideas of another author to his own profit, as many writers attempted to do in these times.

Smith has clearly been used so as to gain confidence from the reader in order to then advance a much more

conservative project than Smith's. It can be seen under the light of later « neo-socialist » movements which used the marxist *lingua* yet promoted a fascist vision of society<sup>15</sup>. Smith's name appears in fact much more frequently than Rousseau's and Rousseau is the object of attacks in his *magnum opus*, the *Nouveaux principes*, where private appropriation is described as an « happy usurpation » in a satire of Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité parmi les hommes*. Nevertheless, Sismondi's underground attacks on property rights emerge even in the earliest of his works. As noted in the introduction, in 1802 (*De la Richesse territoriale*, circa 1802, in *Oeuvres complètes*, III, p. 119 - 121) Sismondi says that the sovereign « can and ought, for the good of the whole society, limit and control the free disposition of the goods of owners composing society » and « appropriate for the benefit of all some portion of each own's property ». He then explains that the 'criteria' to judge public action on this regard is that public intervention should be allowed when the wrong that it corrects is a bigger disutility than the imposition of more red tape. Sismondi in fact resuscitates Rousseau's theory of the « distinction of rights that the sovereign and the owner have on the same fund » (*On the Social Contract*, book I, Ch. 9) : in the *Richesse territoriale* he says that on land capital there are « opposed rights of the owner and the sovereign ». In 1808 and the *Histoire des républiques italiennes*, Sismondi suggests (in a

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15 For instance De Man in Belgium, Déat and Doriot in France... it is today the thin divide between abhorers of « globalization » and contempters of « mondialism »...

denunciation of the Physiocrats' views) that in case land owners were in position to "impose" their laws, violating them would be the sole issue to achieve respect of the "rights" of workers that were recognized through "the social contract". « *And who doubts that laws should be violated, when laws are solely the expression of the will of an usurper class which would have deprived the nation of its heritage ; that property, which has no other guarantee than social contract, would be considered as giving the right to destroy all the guarantees that the social contract has guaranteed to all citizens* » (Book 4, Ch XXV, p. 161). I would also point out that very early in his life (in the *Recherches*), Sismondi suggested a criteria for revolution, which should not be a formal right of the citizens but must be recognized if there is a general agreement of the people and no foreign intervention (so with an insistence on the "national" dimension of the revolution). In a text written during the Troppau Congress in 1820, Sismondi said that « the sole free constitutions are the constitutions that peoples conquered with their arms » (quoted in *In Sismondi européen*, Sven Stelling-Michaud (ed), 1973, p. 162<sup>16</sup>). This confirms again very well Sismondi's claim that he differed « more on words than on things » with Rousseau in his *Recherches sur les Constitutions des Peuples Libres*. Sismondi's revolution, which can be strongly expropriatory, is a *national* one. It is very clearly in the direction of national-socialism even though these comments were hidden in the

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16 A book that is part of a numerous literature aimed at defending or rehabilitating Sismondi

middle of his books (the questioning of property rights was much clearer from the *Nouveaux principes*), certainly out of knowledge that they were controversial in the *bourgeois* society which Sismondi targeted. Finding such arguments in very early writings also encourages to dismiss again the hypothesis of a « conversion » of Sismondi to socialism in 1815 (defended recently by Ghislain (2013) and criticized by Bridel, Dal Degan and Eyguésier in their introduction to the *Oeuvres complètes*).

Nevertheless Sismondi made several open references to Smith's *Wealth of Nations* from the earliest to the latest of his published works, still calling him « the true renovator of the [economic] science » and « our master » (talking of himself in plural form) in the *Etudes* in 1836. It is a stark reminder of how anti-liberalism frequently tries to trick audiences by advancing under a mask – it can be related to J. M. Keynes' (the famous “liberal” who headed the Eugenics Society from 1937 to 1944) affirmation that « the theory of output as a whole [...] is more easily adapted to the conditions of a totalitarian state », in the preface to the German edition of the *General Theory* in 1936 – as Keynes' antisemitism (See on this Chandavarkar (2000)). Marx's antisemitism (expressed in *On the Jewish Question* in 1844, with the plain assimilation of Judaism to greed) can be seen as a clear reflection of Sismondi's own antisemitism (as discussed above), and obsession about money and rejection of free capitalism as a likely consequence of

antisemitism. Sismondi's long reflections about the control of population growth, especially of the *prolétariat*, also find a direct equivalent in Keynes' neo-Malthusianism. Sismondi indeed kept the bulk of Thomas Malthus' ideas about population growth and the subsequent lack of means of subsistence (see for instance *Etudes d'économie politique*, book 2, p. 187), linking them with reduction of the size of the market associated with state intervention and peasant self-sufficiency (let's underline a particularly revealing extract of the *Etudes*, p. 189 book 2 : « *The State, for the safety [of the consumer], must make sure that most of its supply comes to the consumer without being submitted to the chances of trade* » (« l'État, pour sa sûreté, doit veiller à ce que la plus grande partie de ses approvisionnements arrive au consommateur sans être soumise aux chances du commerce ») - the « safety of consumer » relates, in the context, to the possibility of food shortages, yet Sismondi just mentioned one line above in the same text the issue of agricultural *overproduction* and *gluts*!). Sismondi's model relies on a vastly constrained society with families of peasants bound to soil from one generation to another ; it is not clear whether they would be free to leave or not. Sismondi's comments on slaves and general denunciation of "idleness" suggest they may not, which in this case would allow to put Sismondi's ideas in the direct ancestry of the Nazi "Blood and soil" agricultural reforms in 1933.

## **Hiding opportunism behind republicanism**

Sismondi's frequent claims that he is a "republican" have thus to be denounced as pure entryism. He clearly rooted himself on feudalism and even Byzantine traditions to build his model for state intervention regarding peasants, defending as well papal state policy. His "republicanism" is therefore constructed on a history of non-Republican governments and has to be confronted with the 1815 support to Bonaparte and the 1830 support to Charles X's absolute monarchy through calls to invade Algiers. More generally, the *need* to base public policy on anterior models of government denotes a lack of innovativeness and a deep conservatism of mind. The exchange of services between landowners and peasants granted land in return for their military contribution, the laws of autocrats such as Theodoric the Great, Constantine the Great, Arcadius, Honorius, Sixtus IV and Julius II (which according to Sismondi have all implemented some protection of peasants' "right to work") cannot be seen as decent sources for any Republican. Seeing mere preoccupation for the public good where in fact it is likely that populism and preoccupation for personal popularity are more important drivers for state intervention denotes a great deal of hypocrisy from someone who, at an early point in his career, still pointed out that public intervention in the economy in favor of the poor may be aimed at increasing dependence to institutions (in a footnote to the *Tableau de l'agriculture toscane*, in the 1801 Paschoud edition, pp. 212 - 213). Such common sense

disappeared almost immediately to leave room for anti-liberalism and deep chauvinism. Zeev Sternhell's claim that France was the laboratory for fascism (1995) is supported by the figure of Sismondi, who, even though of Swiss nationality, was much involved in French public life. Nevertheless, Sternhell famously considered Rousseau as a prime figure in the Enlightenment and shall therefore have as well neglected for this reason Sismondi as cofunder of fascism. His *Histoire des républiques italiennes* inspired an Italian nationalism that almost naturally gave birth to fascism. Sismondi's long-lasting friendship with Jules Michelet (see Pellegrini (1967)), the most famous 19<sup>th</sup> Century French Romantic historian also influenced by Rousseau, reflects Michelet's fear of technological advances (see Viallaneix (1979)<sup>17</sup>), extreme nationalism and sometimes as well violent antisemitism, as underlined by Bénichou (1978). Bénichou's suggestion that Michelet "secularized Christian tradition [on antisemitism] more than contradicted it" can easily be extended to Sismondi. This is what I would call a "vestigial form of christianism" used to drive more conservative audiences to socialism (epitomized by the Nazi swastika). Michelet's influences in the Third Republic have been immense – his historical writings have been the textbooks of generation of schoolboys and schoolgirls and Michelet is still regarded very widely in France as one of the founder of the French Republican spirit, even though his writing of the national history has

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17 Viallaneix is devoid of any criticism of Michelet and presents of course Sismondi as a « philanthropist ».



been widely criticized by academics. In both cases, the need to set the foundations for a secular religion of the Republic seems to have required the conservation of religious scapegoats, as a lifeline able to attach Christians to the new political movement. In the absence of a scientific basis for a community that discards parts of the humanity as eternally foreign race (Sismondi), essentially “dirty”, “usurer” (Michelet), political entrepreneurs such as Michelet and Sismondi take their inspiration in old hatreds<sup>18</sup> to constitute their dreamed polity around the eviction of the most traditional scapegoat, there is nothing left of the Republican spirit in their secular religion of seclusion and violence, and the outlines of national-socialism are drawn for political entrepreneurs to seize.

## **Conclusion**

The rejection of individual rationality and use of non-Popperian, teleological arguments to defend state intervention as well as of polylogism, the construction of holistic communities through the invention of tradition, the rejection of foreign peoples, of women, the use of religious traditions to tie the knot allow Sismondi to delineate transcending communities of white Christian males with a specific destiny which the State will be in position to accomplish and where, implicitly, the role of the State in evicting minorities is also self-evident. Antisemitism as

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<sup>18</sup> It is always difficult to separate personal convictions from political opportunism...

“vestigial Christianity” is needed as the open attack on Christian virtues of tolerance would frighten conservative “customers” if not bound up with a kind of counterweight. The rejection of reason as opposed to the national spirit is also an excellent lever to violently reject any Popperian discussion of the political entrepreneur’s proposals. Sismondi, as Marx afterward, produced very long articles to obscure polylogism and appear more serious to the outside reader, as part of an attempt to construct what Marx was first to call “scientific socialism”.

The role of Rousseau in the invention of traditions as well as of state Socialism should obviously be exposed as initiative of nationalism, socialism and national-socialism even though Rousseau contributed more to socialism and Stalinism, whereas on nationalism and national-socialism Sismondi’s contribution is much more substantial<sup>19</sup>. Sismondi gives its true substance to Machiavelli’s program for military Republics where the people would be anesthetized by military successes and the *princeps* thus all-powerful. The justification of state intervention through a non-Popperian, teleological creed of social rights which the State is always legitimate to reveal and defend through intervention in the market, when joined with imperialism, leads to a theory of economic disequilibrium where each claimed success for public intervention in the economy (presented as a kind of major victory in an economic “war”),

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<sup>19</sup> It is at least difficult to attack Rousseau on antisemitism, but both authors have several common points, on the « social contract » and state intervention in the economy, machismo, militarism, nationalism and anti-rationalism.

creating in fact more disorder, requires new battles which allow to maintain a permanent state of excitation through propaganda, up to the point where the succession of economic failures requires wars against foreign countries to acquire more resources. There is obviously a very strong propaganda dimension around all of these state interventions (what matters is an appearance of success). The link between state intervention and militarism in Sismondi's writings is here the keystone as each military failure opens the way to more socialisation and expropriation, as the State, this new inflated animal, needs to appear stronger inside whenever he fails outside and, of course, needs to increase its resources by any means to pay for more wars – this is the key lever for the “rise to the extreme” and Sismondi paves the way to it.

Sismondi's political opportunism can be suggested through the numerous contradictions in his writings. As a politician attempting to build his career he played with fire and opened the way to even more nationalism. René Girard, Ludwig von Mises and Ayn Rand conjoin with the theory of the “rise to the extremes” where every foot in the direction of state intervention opens the way to the next, every call to hatred from an educated politician leads to more from a competitor, up to the “apocalypse”. Sismondi, Romantic economist and historian, has provided the footprint of Nazism in his writings : the community invented and constructed through the constant designation of scapegoats, bankers, “foreign”

peoples of a different religion and “race”, women, queers, the romanticism of war and epics, malthusianism, corporativism, state intervention to build military power to wage wars for the *grandeur* of the country and many calls to expropriation. There are also some suggestions for “national revolution”, violence needed to overthrow old powers and give birth to the new national regimen, the theorisation of colonialism for economic exploitation, and the “ad terrorem” clause for classes of people (especially of a “bad race”) refusing the generously-granted “right” to work. If Nazis had quoted all of their sources, Sismondi would certainly be very high in their firmament.

Nevertheless it is clear that even in a frame that rejects reason as anti-national or anti-social, electors must always be provided with “good reasons” to support antiliberalism. Scapegoating works thanks to the subjective rationality of the elector who calculates he gains more by saving the energy of the effort of searching for reliable information than by attempting to oppose him or herself to a crowd and its leaders, that do everything to appear as impressive as possible, in the simple logic of the spectacle (Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*). The elector is further disoriented by the massive use of irrefutable claims about society that allow to advance polylogism and, more visibly perhaps in the case of the far right, by a more general criticism of reason and of its application to political argumentation<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Which is also implicitly present in journalistic work that focuses on the appearances of leaders, on their charisma, and deal with politics as an horserace

(since after scientific socialism the left has been slightly more constrained to keep the appearances of reason). Jean-Paul Sartre's *existentialist* philosophy should be seen not as the "humanism" it claims to be, but as the *actual* philosophy of Machiavellians, be they Socialists or National-Socialists.

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