

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ANALYSIS OF CULTIST UNDUE INFLUENCE TO THE UNDUE INFLUENCE USED IN THE PROCESS OF RADICALISATION

The approach to cultist undue influence is usually made only from the angle of the psychological processes used to put an individual in a position of subjugation (seduction, isolation, weakness, indoctrination...)

Much of the concerned governments' approach to "radicalisation" is based on the psychological processes that highlight the convergence between cultist undue influence and jihad fanaticism.

This approach is quite useful but linked to a fragmented analysis of the dimension of cultist undue influence which cannot be resumed by psychological processes. Many decades of personal accompaniment of former cult followers have taught us also to consider the operating mode of the cultist power structure within the organisational dimension and the way this power is used on individuals in the group.

This approach allows a better understanding of the type of processes involved when undue influence is used both in cultist organisations and in "radical" groups, they appear as relevant to politics as to individual psychology.

Several tragedies sparked by cults (i.e. the mass suicides of the Order of the Solar Temple whose gurus expressly regretted that Waco has preceded with an "educational" form of suicide, or terrorist attacks like those of "Aum Shinrikyo" in Japan) show that a real political objective existed in these cases: that of creating a new and imaginary type of human being.

There were no other objectives for the leaders of these groups (and this applies to every cult be they small or large, even though it may shock our logical mind) than to create a true political utopia: gain world power by destabilising States and copy the archaic cult model of exercising power. When this happens the citizen's dimension of a State disintegrates.

The means to obtain this may vary: in one case the group "benefits" by natural disasters that will be interpreted with an apocalyptic vision as the role played by nature in the preparation of the expected political revolution, in the other case the transition to terrorist acts accelerates and embodies the process of empowerment.

It is because the modern cult represents a dangerous model for democratic societies, over and above the danger it is for the individual, for the followers and their families, a danger which should under no condition be minimised, that the study of the way cults function is of major interest.

From this perspective the hegemonic pretensions clearly expressed by the Islamic State group and other jihadist groups should shed particular light on the political alternative model that cults also carry, even if in their case, it is less apparent.

The Islamic State, like any micro cult State, is structured not only around what we may call the "Sovereign attributes", (legislative power, declination of the executive and the judiciary) but also around a regressive system of temporal power on a territory both virtual and geographic, built on a utopian spiritual power that only the analysis of doctrinal texts can render understandable.

Everyone will understand that behind the mask of seduction and propaganda (whether religious, educational, medical, welfare, personal development ...) it is about power and its exercise.

In this sense , not just in terms of psychological processes, the "Islamic State" group must be approached as a cult, and even as a successful cult. But the process of undue influence as the way power is used within the group should not hide the rampant insidious and steady form of empowerment that contemporary cults have distilled over many decades.

J-P. Jouglà

President of the FECRIS Scientific Committee