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Presentation of a study prepared by the Scientific Committee (Francophone branch)

Do there exist specific features concerning the type of cultic manipulation by and against women?

("By women" meaning as "guru perpetrators" and "victim perpetrators" and "against women" meaning as victims).

The FECRIS scientific committee, francophone branch, is made up of 10 professionals trained in the framework of teaching by the faculty of medicine Paris-Descartes (doctor, psychologist, lawyer, judge, specialised educator, police), relied on direct interviews with the 35 victims.

The initial project, which focused on an analysis of written testimonies of victims, was abandoned to focus on direct interviews with victims.

Each of the interviews lasted for a minimum of two hours.

The interview was non-directive and voluntary, without the use of listeners throughout the discussion.

These victims, ex-followers, accepted to provide their testimony to allow professionals to better understand the process that led them to drawn in to and then leave this cultic influence.

Only some of these victims (40%) were able to, after leaving the cult, start separation psychotherapy.

The anonymity of the former followers was kept.

Cultic groups were managed by male gurus (28), or female gurus (7). Two cults were managed by a guru couple.

Victims

The committee listened to 35 former female cult followers, among which were 5 minors. Among these 35 victims were two victim perpetrators, meaning that they committed criminal acts when under their influence.

The professions of these victims cover the whole social spectrum: doctor, engineer, social worker, dentist, artist, lawyer, psychologist, company manager, unemployed. The age of these women (not including the 5 children) varied from 19 to 75 at the time of being under cultic influence.

The time spent in cultic groups varied from 2 to 42 years.

The data from the interviews is sorted based on the following categories:

Type of cultic grouping:

Esoteric and syncretic (Cordées, A.R.E., Nao, Gimel; F.B.U., "Children of God", Order of the Solar Temple; Scientology; Galacteus);
Orientalist (Krishna);

Christian (TJ, Welcome Centre, Bliss);

Therapeutic ("IVI", "Total biology of human beings");

Psycho-therapeutic ("le petit groupe"; "Les jardins de la vie");

Artistic ("Jogging rose", "Sylvain Lefèvre group")

Humanitarian and fair trade ("W. and E.", "Amma");

Attraction of group

Of the 35 women who entered a cult:

13 were attracted by esotericism and spirituality

8 by psychotherapy

5 by humanitarianism

5 by alternative care

2 by artistic research

1 by yoga

1 by fair trade

Type of cultic trauma experienced

With all the victims, we always find situations of:

Subservience

Submission

Affront to dignity of person

Humiliation

Breaking with old benchmarks and environments

De-socialisation

Disindividualisation

Cultic alienation implemented against the victim

For some women victims we can add specific situations:

3 situations of rape

4 orders for forced sexual practices with other followers

3 orders for sexual slavery

2 orders for prostitution

2 practices of pedophilia

1 forced pregnancy

3 obligations for total chastity

4 situations of forced confinement

4 situations of physical mistreatment
3 situations of denial of physical care
1 situation of homelessness

Elements leading to exiting the cultic group

4 triggered by the death of the guru
1 by the death of a follower
5 during legal proceedings (trial, arrest of guru, dismantling of the group)
5 confronted with unreasonable financial requests
3 love encounters
4 revolted by the guru's behaviour towards another follower who they defended by opposing the guru
1 helped by the external intervention of a family member
2 wanted to protect their child
2 who took refuge in another cult

Period after their exit from the cult

15 former followers took psychotherapy
4 created a victim's association
4 published a book of testimonials
6 testified in the media (TV, radio, etc.)
4 formed a sustainable couple
1 was welcomed by their family (after being separated for 45 years)
3 founded a family
1 created an artistic group

Difference between female and male victims

The female follower is frequently placed in a subservient position for affective reasons; She can be treated as inferior to male followers in certain cults, a situation that can be amplified by male followers in the group. The impurity dimension plays an important role in certain cults on this issue. Female followers are more frequently abused and humiliated sexually. The difference in treatment between female and male followers depends on the guru and their fantasies. To this regard, it seems that a female guru's pathology differs little from a male guru's.

The victim perpetrator of a crime

Two former followers who spoke participated, under the influence or following orders from their guru, in criminal offences

Both received an acquittal, in consideration of the cultic influence to which they were victim (for one of them, an appeal of the acquittal decision pronounced by the criminal jurisdiction was filed by the prosecutor)

Other data concerning the specifics of the victimisation of female followers could have been used, but the brief nature of this presentation meant we had to leave it out.

As several members of the scientific community have worked in penitentiary establishments with extremists under the influence of Islamic groups, their contribution could have in large part confirmed the cultic nature of the influence process at work within these groups, but for clear reasons we preferred not to deal with this in this presentation.

In conclusion of this overly short study, it is possible to consider that the treatment reserved for female followers within cultic influenced groups translates into an archaic method of exercising power which is structured around submission.

This regression in relations with the other indicates of a loss of the values that the democratic form of managing human relations took centuries to develop.