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## **RADICAL AND DESTRUCTIVE CULT GROUPS: CONCEPT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

EVALUATION NOTE

### **Introduction: November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1978, Jonestown, Guyana**

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1978, in Jonestown, Guyana, 909 people committed the largest mass suicide recorded to date. Many of the dead were children. “Die with your honor. Don’t lie down with pain and tears like that. Death is nothing but a step to another lane.” Jim Jones said these lines in his sermon before the mass suicide took place. During one of his sermons, he turned to an old woman in a wheelchair and allegedly said, “Dear, today is your day. You will get healed today, we will heal you crippled legs and you’ll be able to walk again!” The whole audience took these words in great craze and zeal, and began carefully watching what would happen with excitement. Jones continued to call out to the old woman from his podium, “Now, sister– Sister, I say walk! I say walk! I say walk! First step you’ve taken in seven and a half years. But I say walk. Walk out of that wheelchair. Wheel that wheelchair right behind you. Wheel– bring that wheelchair right behind you. Walk! Walk, child! Good God Almighty! Walk! Love God. Love God. Look at her shouting and dancing now. Look at her dancing now. Spirit of God. Walking.”

While delivering his fiery speech from the podium he was making bizarre gestures, trying to encourage the elder. The old woman gripped the two armrests of the wheelchair with trembling hands, clenched her teeth, and with the support of people around, she barely began to stand up. The woman screamed “I feel it!” She took a shaky step forward. Jim said “Now, I want you to walk towards me. One more step, go ahead, move forward my dear, you can do it!” She tilted her

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feet and confidently took two more steps. Only a little while later, she started running with her hands opened spread wide, fully healed. The people in the hall could not believe what they were witnessing, their screams mixed with tears.

Jones decided to commit mass suicide with his followers by drinking cyanide mixed in fruit juice. On November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1978, 909 people died in Jonestown, Guyana. There were corpses laying all around. What about the woman who got out of her wheelchair? It turned out to be a staged scenario, and that there were indeed numerous rapes, fraudulent actives, and abuses taking place within the group. The five people who fled to the forest escaped.

### **March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1997, California**

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1997, corpses of 39 men and women were found covered in purple sheets in a million-dollar mansion with a swimming pool and tennis court in San Diego, California. The average age of victims were between 18 and 24. "They were dressed the same, they were all in the prone position lying down and lined up as if they were sleeping side by side."

In the weeks that followed, disturbing details and facts crept to the surface. It turned out that they committed mass suicide as part of a purge process. In the note they left behind, it was written that they left their bodies behind the physical door to reach the next evolutionary level. The cult's leader, Marshall Applewhite, age 66, told his followers that a UFO, following comet Hale-Bopp, would transport the group's bodies into space or to the Kingdom of God. "The Heaven's Gate" cult, one of the most ocular mass suicides committed on U.S. land, aroused great curiosity. How did it happen? And why would anyone do such a thing to themselves?

### **Kerry Noble, the Arm of the Lord**

Born in 1952, in Abilene, Texas, Kerry Noble said, "I used to take an active role in the church, I was never prone to violence, and I was raised to treat all the people the same." He was seeking a Christian scholarship and stating that "I wanted to live and work with Christians and raise my family in a truly Christian environment." He responded to Jim Ellison's invitation. And then it went on like this, according to his own words: "My parents were God-fearing, moral, ordinary middle-class citizens who always encouraged me. I went to college for a year and a half and continued to Bible school for a year. I got married when I was 21. I celebrated my 28th wedding anniversary in September 2001, as a father of three children. In 1977, my wife and I joined a small religious community, a quiet, naive, peaceful dream world that turned into a devastating nightmare. In 1985, I was the second man of the number 2 domestic terror organization in the country."

Over time we have witnessed several destructive cult communities begin innocently, perhaps with individuals just seeking some kind of divine warmth, only to become radicalized without their expectations and even turn into terrorists. Cults' philosophical orientations may vary, but their methods are strikingly similar. The radicalization of cult groups in the Western world is a well-known phenomenon. On the other hand, in Turkey, this issue has not been discussed in depth. It is possible to call some groupings viewed as religious-esque community structures as cults.

## What are Cult Groups?

The use of the term *cult* is rather old. It can be traced back to the religious sociologist Ernst Troeltsch's 1912 work dubbed, "Die Soziallehren der Christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen"- *On the Social Doctrine of Christian Churches and Groups*. Bruce Campbell's work, which was written in 1978, "A Typology of Cults", divides cults into three: mystically oriented, inner experience oriented, and service oriented. In his study, Campbell discusses the validity of these ideal types by applying them to 6 different cult groups. He defines cults as non-traditional religious groups based on an individual's belief in the divine. One of the most important features that distinguish them from traditional structures is that cults are seen as a reflection of secularized communities or individual behavioral patterns. Often these groups may not even need to have a religious reference as a prerequisite. They may have even created their own holy values like Scientology.

In the early periods, cults were seen as small innocent groups with mystical orientations independent of traditional religiously authoritarian structures such as churches. They particularly assumed that spiritualism, independent of the Judeo-Christian tradition and outside the Orthodox interpretation, would contribute to liberalism. It may have been thought that these new spiritualists and mystical structures would also have non-religious support against materialism and Communism.

Nevertheless, great panic was created especially following the two cult group cases of 1978 Jonestown and 1984 Solar Temple, which extended from Europe to Canada. The first of these, known as the People's Temple, founded by the aforementioned Jim Jones, culminated in mass suicide in Jonestown. The second, founded by French Joseph Di Mambro and dubbed The Order of Solar Temple, is a trail of mass murders and assassinations extending from Europe to Canada. Both of these cases created the discussion of "cult wars" on legal grounds the U.S. and Europe.

During the debate within Western society, some blamed the churches and other the State for not doing their duty in delivering the necessary religious education to their children. Although some thought it would not be the appropriate solution, there were those who also recommended outright banning these groups. In 1971, the first anti-cult organization, the *Parent's Committee to Free Our Children from the Children of God*, was established.

As a result, a rather large chunk of literature emerged in the fields of academia and legislation. In civil society, some associations emerged to oversee cults and disseminate appropriate information about them. In academia, these groups were examined with persistent research. Groups of experts and consultants in courts were established for the resolution of the complaints against cults. Security units were restructured to monitor violent tendencies, and physical and mental morality abuses of suspected groups. To potently fight against organized crime, psychological counseling and academia-police cooperation intensified. Governments built capacity consisting of the steps of "informing, prevention, and fighting" to protect society and people without bans.

Consequently, Professor Benjamin Zablocki describes a cult as an ideological group that is brought together by influential relationships which demand boundless loyalty. In essence, a cult organization can be a group that shows excessive or risky devotion or dedication to a

person, idea, or thing, by employing manipulative methods of persuasion aimed at fulfilling the goals of its leader. On the other hand, cult organizations might be shaped to control the present or potential harm of members and their families or society as a whole.

### **What is the difference between sect and cult?**

The word cult is in fact used to refer to pre-Christian beliefs. It is an idea that expresses the beliefs of paganist groups outside official religion. Today, in fact, the meaning has transitioned to mean constructions systematized around a charismatic leader who makes their own beliefs and rituals that are different from the official religion. As such, there is a significant distinction between cults and sects – latter of which portray differences in explanation of the teachings of an organized religion. A sect has historical continuousness within a religious practice. Cults do not wish to be marginal figures of another religion or at its center. Sects have continuity to their teachings by creating an epistemic monopoly. The policy they established is always revised by followers.

This is why cults generally speaking have a short lifespan, while sects and religious orders have centuries long histories and traditions. As the cults depend on a magnetic figure, their existence frequently expires with their leader. Cults group around an alluring figure instead of an epistemic monopoly. Even though sects can be called after their original religious curator (such as *Hanafism* paying homage to Abu Hanifa), sects are regularly changed by religious scholars deemed fit and qualified in the teachings of the sect. And disagreement with founders among the sect is never unwelcomed. Whereas disagreeing with the alluring figure in cults is never approved. Moreover, though there is a spiritual bond between the Master and the Disciple in the sects, it is still possible for the follower to leave and join another religious group or sect. However, leaving cults after joining is usually not accepted, nor left without punishment.

### **What is a radical and destructive cult?**

Cults may be evaluated between one another by considering if they are radicalized cults or non-radical cults by examining if they have damaging consequences on their members- if they exploit the physical and spiritual aspects of the individuals that are its members.

In this distinct subcategory of social psychology, The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA), which has been operating in the U.S. since 1979, gives importance to these features in the description of cult: “A ‘cult’ is an ideological group emerged by alluring relations, demanding a serious level of devotion. Cults have the risk of turning into a structure that is extremely manipulative and abusive of their followers.”

### **The Features of Cults:**

According to ICSA, groups that have all five of the following features should be labelled as “cults”:

- I. Groups which recruit their followers through psychological pressure, confirm their devotion to the group and brainwash the followers,
- II. Embodies an elitist totalitarian nature,

- III. Its founding figure is a self-proclaimed, dogmatic, messianic, or Mahdist, or alluring person, that is not deemed accountable to anyone,
- IV. Followers may resort to any technique to gather money and followers with the “the end validate the method” mindset,
- V. Members cannot benefit from the group’s collective wealth.

By adding the following features on top of these, I think that a cult group will turn into a radical/destructive cult.

### **Disruptive Features (Radical/Destructive Cults):**

Additionally, some groups can also have disruptive features which can be investigated by not only academics. Because they may possess a real threat to public order, both law enforcement and researcher could find an interest in cult studies. A number of disruptive features can be listed as follows:

- I. Harming the mental and physical integrity of a person,
- II. Harming family integrity
- III. Attaining wealth through illegal means
- IV. Being accused of allegations of sexual abuse
- V. Having illegal activities (such as blackmail, threats)
- VI. Creating a parallel hierarchy that restrains the function of the law

Once there these six features can be witnessed in a cult group, it could be said that the group has become a radical/destructive cult. For obvious reasons, the detection of these features in a cult is in the interest of the academic community and of our security apparatus’. Therefore, cult studies have also begun to be considered as a subtopic of security and radicalization research. In line with the aforementioned, a conference in 2018 was held by the Federation of European Cultures and Sects Research and Information Center (FECRIS), which was founded in 1994, to debate and discuss the radicalization of cults.

### **What are the Characteristics of Radical/Destructive Cults?**

In general, leaders and followers of cult groups strictly believe in the decency of their actions, and make great effort to project their beliefs outward. Many of these groups convince attractive, intelligent people in society like famous artists and use them as publicity stunts to gain validity. The group from time to time claims to be able to accomplish lofty goals through violence (for instance, to attain the redemption of people, to enlighten the world for the sake of peace, or to give resolutions to injustices).

Taking a closer look at these groups will reveal to us that they operate to please the group leader's narcissistic ego or is a front to attain affluence. The main characteristic of the group leader is to please followers' desire for eternity and need for worship. Group leaders utilize all the power tools at their disposal (intimidation, seduction, reward, and punishment systems) to enforce the obedience of members. These leaders self-claim themselves as superior, metaphysical, spiritual beings. Whether it be for work, money, or gaining more followers, group supporters are commonly persuaded that all of their moral and materialistic desires can be met only through complete obedience to the leader's desires. More often than none, the mental

persuasion ends with the thought process of, "I do not want to do this, but if God wants me to do it then I'll do it."

On the other hand, cult organizations and groups are not required to have a religion per se. Occasionally a political identity and the leader can become the main figure of the cult community. In a community, the change of the leader into an alluring figure that is undeniable, cannot be criticized and must be obeyed, is also considered as the development of a personality cult. Cults are typically shaped around high charismatic figures and their striking messages on a new view of life. The term "Personality Cult", was indeed commonly used to describe figures like Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini in political literature in the first half of the 20th century, which we also witnessed into in the middle of the 19th century in French and German works.

In that viewpoint, I can state that a cult has the following basic characteristics:

- I. The image of a "uniquely organized group" in the key areas of religious life in the society, outside of the generally known forms in the society,
- II. An authoritarian and charismatic leadership,
- III. A totalitarian ideology shared among the group,
- IV. Totalitarian, rigid, and fixed borders both inside and outside of the group,
- V. Persuasion methods that threaten the financial and spiritual integrity of the members within the group,
- VI. Gaining financial profits from followers.

A cult group is a community-run by an alluring and authoritarian figure, and its members are generally abused. For that reason, a cult uses persistent persuasion to keep its followers in check. This is why cults are also totalitarian structures. As Alexandra Stein stated, "just as a total lunar eclipse fully covers the light, totalitarian groups try to block any alternative relationships or beliefs, burying the daylight outside of the picture they drew into darkness." Hannah Arendt's statement about totalitarian ideologies is also true for these organizations; "They are isms that pretend to have key clarifications for all the mysteries of life and the world. Holistic ideologies claim to have answers to all thinkable questions of all times.

Similar to firmly woven cocoons, cults want to cut off all interaction with the external world. Breaking off all ties to the past and society, a follower is then totally reprogrammed. The most basic issue with cult groups is that these constructions are depicted purely as religious structures. The core problem branches from religions, as in the "militant" atheism in Richard Dawkins' best-selling book, "The God Delusion". At the very beginning of his book, Dawkins asks us to imagine, "a world without religion." To him, in this world, there would be no suicide bombers, witch hunts, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, conflict in Northern Ireland, or the Taliban blowing up antique sculptures.

Yet, the slaughterer of millions of people, Stalin, was a non-religious communist, and the ex-leader of the Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot, who also had no connection to religion, accused people of being bourgeois because they were wearing glasses and did not have coarse hands. Religion was not important for the Symbionese Liberation Organization, or the Baader Meinhoff gang, an anarchist group that originated in Germany in 1967 created by Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. Serial killers, gangs, and dozens of liberation groups constantly commit

atrocities against humanity over non-religious motives across the global. Last but not least, religion does not come to fore at all for the PKK terror organization in Turkey, which did not hesitate when its members murdered a 11-month-old baby.

The root of the issue is not whether these groups' ideologies are religious, political, or anything else, but how firmly they are organized and the kinds of instruments of control they employ over their followers. To fully comprehend this, our analysis must surpass religious texts and references. It would be more appropriate to focus on the basic instruments in the working of the system, rather than the beliefs and ideologies flowing in the vessels of the system. Just as cults and totalitarian groups are not completely religious, not all religions are cults or totalitarian. In this context, maybe it would be more suitable to dwell on the differences between ideological radicalization and cult radicalization.

In ideological radicalization, the individuals freely chooses an ideology to embody, ensures that they become the sole defender of this ideology, and tries to gain name recognition through actions. Cult radicalization, on the other hand, an individual who joins believes they are becoming a part of an innocent, legally religious or self-declared group. Over time, the member becomes conscious of the group's actual ideology and at this point it is too late to do anything about it. Furthermore, a person in a cult never states that they are in a cult. They also do not carry any visible symbols of the group outside. Shrouded in mystery and secrets, what is going on inside the group must not come out. Last but not least, ideological groups, in contrast, appear more actively to the outside, as a matter of propaganda, and to produce public opinion through their actions. This is why the fight against radical cult groups contains more unusual elements than the fight against ideological radical terrorist organizations.

### **Why do cult groups increase and become destructive?**

The phenomena of the destructive cult has become an immense issue of social and political consequence within the last two decades. Estimates indicate that currently in the U.S. there are roughly 3,000 destructive cults housing more than three million people. In fact, there are also numerous cult activities in Turkey as well, such as FETÖ, Evrenesoğlu the false prophet, Adnan Oktar, and the OSHO group. Why is the interest in cults rising at a time when official religions are rapidly losing their followings? In essence, it may entirely depend on what the cults promise. The cults promises to be "different" in reaching what no one else can reach, finds itself in a position of advantage in the current age of technology, where everything is reachable and consumed quickly. It is a considered a distinction to think in a different way that from the rest of our vast society. As such, the elite and economically ricker segments of society tend to feed cults more.

Another cause is that the increase in the use of technology does not correlate with people becoming more rational. Quite the reverse, technology impacts the critical and rational thinking to become almost automated. Intelligence is a sign of data processing, the mind's ability to analytically evaluate data. Today, humanity can process much more data thanks to technology. But that doesn't make us any smarter. As noted by Sherry Turkle the founder of MIT's *Initiative on Technology and Self*, as our brains adapt to short streams of information in the digital age, our ability to think profoundly, which is essential to comprehend printed resources and be involved in extensive conversation is lost. People may become more reliant on cults in pursuit for a meaning of life due to these reasons as well.

The new tech age is pushing us towards more outsourcing. Smartphones and computers, even homes becoming smart with artificial intelligence software is now becoming the new ordinary. The segments of society with higher income and higher wages are the first to attain this new norm. Nicholas Carr, in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, states that this amplified use of outsourcing is causing us to lose our capacity to pay attention. It leaves us with a kind of illusion of knowing. We like to think we know everything, but in reality we have no in-depth information of any kind other than shallow data and snippets of facts. This drives us to believe more strictly in what we think we know. Our ignorance is our belief.

Technology and digital media attract people into a world of more instability and action. This makes the real world more uninteresting. People consequently have trouble focusing on long-term education and thinking critically. The colorful, glamorous, fantastic, and pornographic world offered by the cults is more attractive. Religions need to discover a language that appeals to generations Z and Y. Radicalization is partly appealing to this generation's thrill-seeking youthfulness. This also causes the great majority of this age group to detach themselves from religions. The cults profiteer the most from this unfortunate cycle.

Some may wonder why cults were not so damaging in the past? This is because they didn't have such a widespread modern inventory of techniques and tools. The potentials of the digital age make wicked cult leaders more dangerous. Nowadays, they have more options of control than before. Moreover, the modern man tentatively has access to much more damaging tools. Most of them believe it is acceptable to transcend the norms of society, to use mind control to attain their goals in unethical manner – lying, stealing, cheating – as long as they have faith that what they are doing is “true” and “fair”. All destructive cults believe they are above the law as they think the ends justify the means. At the very least, they violate the personal freedoms members.

Interestingly, those who join cults are usually educated, elite or of high social standing. As such, these groups prefer individuals from the branches of science of engineering and medicine, in addition to wealthy families. For this reason, they are perceived as groups that can easily enter intelligence agencies.

### **How do they persuade?**

Members in cult groups are forced to be persuaded rather than freely being persuaded. One of the general mistakes made in defining cult members is to think that these individuals are robots, incapable of making their own choices. This is rather an incorrect line of thinking. The dynamics behind cult organization members' unthoughtful submission to their cults and leaders is not that they are robots, but that they are forced into "persuasion". The pressure of forced persuasion here does not refer to physical pressure but rather to a psychological and social process. This why it is frequently underlined that followers have been brainwashed. The term "brainwashing" may be repulsive as it evokes some military practices of the pre-Cold War era. The first use of the term is grounded on the practices used on some American soldiers who were taken as prisoners in the Korean War during the 1950s.

Edward Hunter's book which was published in 1951, *Brainwashing in Red China*, and Edgar H. Schein's 1961 book, *Coercive Persuasion*, which are frequently cited in discussions regarding brainwashing, as well as Robert J. Lifton's 1961 book, *Thought Reform and The*

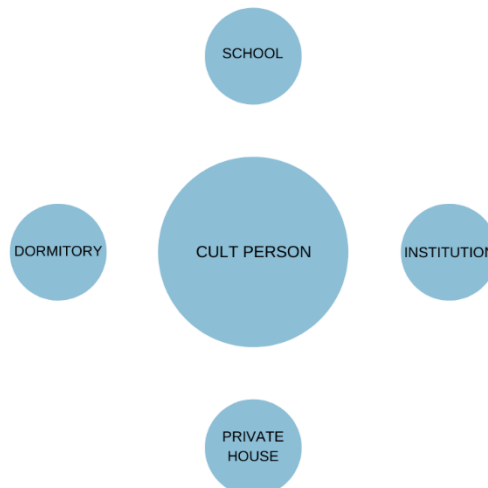


*Psychology of Totalism, A Study of Brainwashing*, defines the approaches used by Chinese and Korean communists on political prisoners in changing their ideologies. On this subject, Steven Hassan's book, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, and Margaret T. Singer's, *The Process of Brainwashing, Psychological Coercion and Thought Reform*, reveals to us that brainwashing is a mind control process.

Therefore, what is deemed as brainwashing is not an individual's shift towards a new character with external influences such as violence, torture, or drugs, but a process of gaining a new character through psycho-social effects of the group that is entered. As underlined by Hassan, mind control is not brainwashing. Brainwashing is often difficult. One often knows first and foremost that they are in the hands of an enemy. Hassan declares that mind control can be understood as an organization of effect that twists an individual's identity (belief, behavior, thought)- substituted with new ones. This new character, in many cases, will become one that the individual would formerly, usually speaking, would not accepted, and may even have been infuriated by.

The character contains new elements such as beliefs, behaviors, thought procedures, and feelings that form a certain pattern. The individual, under the influence of mind control, often replaces their original character which was formerly shaped by family, education, friendship, and above all another identity. The psychological control exercised and exerted by destructive cults is a social process, usually conducted in large groups. An individual is drawn into a social situation in which they must part ways with their old character and obey the new character chosen by the group. It takes days or even weeks for the person to be whole and solidify their fundamental character modification. This is done primarily in a closed totalitarian setting of control. For this reason, cult mechanisms such as private houses, associations, dormitories, schools, and camps are monitored and controlled 24/7. The emotional and physical energies of the group followers must be fully engaged, kept away from the external world and outside influences.

### **Cult Cocoon - The Radical Totalitarian Environment Cycle**



As Hassan has pointed out, each of us whether at work, at home, in the military or at school, are subject to numerous social pressures on a daily basis. Indirectly or overtly, control

mechanisms are applied to put us into shape and patterns. What differentiates the mind control done by destructive cults from the aforementioned is that they are schemes that try to decrease not only the instructions that command us but also the integrity of our freedom of choice. The core of mind control is that it endorses addiction and conformity while rejecting self-sufficiency and individuality.

Take for instance a number of drug therapy and juvenile crime treatment programs which use a range of these methods to eradicate a person's former identity as an addict or criminal. Yet, the caveat is that after being given a new identity through such programs, the individual should have regained their self-sufficiency and individuality. It is undesirable if the individual still feels dimly reliant on their therapist. Stein, alternatively, states that for mental control the group must accomplish six conditions:

- I. Not be aware that the group has an agenda to change or control the person
- II. Determine control through time and physical setting
- III. Create a state of mind of powerlessness, fear, and dependence
- IV. Suppress old behaviors and attitudes
- V. Instill new behaviors and attitudes
- VI. Create a closed system of logic

In fact, in modern society, there are institutions, from military structure to religious communities, that want to control the minds of their members, subject them to a modification of mindset. Stein, nevertheless, accurately states that when joining these groups, the person understands what they will enter and what is going to happen to them. On the other hand, as cult groups are not open and controllable, people never know what they are getting themselves into. In fact, their path often crosses unwillingly with these groups. In these groups, individualistic behavior must first be controlled. Behavior is generally controlled by the need for everyone to act as a group. In most cults, people eat together, work together, hold group meetings, and sometimes even sleep together in the same room.

The second step is thought control- indoctrination. This phase includes programming. This is the phase where new followers adopt group policy, produce a new range of rhetoric, and grasp methods that stop thinking outside the cult, so as the cult can be substitute by nothing else. To become a "good" member, one learns to manipulate their own thought processes. In totalistic cults, ideology is adopted as the only "map" of reality. The policy not only filters received information but also regulates how information can be thought of. The division and dichotomy established through reinterpreting the world around as "black versus white" and "us versus them" is a totalitarian policy. All the good is personified in the leader and the group, all the bad is personified in the external. The doctrine answers all claims and questions.

A follower does not need to think for themselves because the policy thinks for them. The clichés or the value-laden implicit verbal commination of the cult enacts an invisible wall between supporters and outsiders. Excessive rhetoric makes followers feel different and sets them apart from the overall public. It also advises new followers have to work tougher to comprehend the cult's doctrine. The most effective way to short-circuit a person's ability to test reality is through stopping their thoughts. Certainly, if an individual can only think of positive thoughts about being included in the group, he is undeniably trapped. Since the doctrine is perfect and the leader is also perfect, every problem that rises derives to be understood as the responsibility

of the followers. Therefore, members always fault themselves and push themselves to work harder. Thought control can successfully block members' moods which go against the cult's liking. This enables the individual to be present in the group as a compliant slave. At any rate, when thought is controlled, emotions and behavior is also controlled.

The third stage is the control of feelings. The third part of mind control, emotional control, attempts to modify and narrow down a person's feelings. Guilt and fear are essential instruments to keep people in check. Guilt is exploited by destructive cult leaders. Disordered characters can find many figures of guilt, such as familial unworthiness, sinfulness, failure, etc. Moreover, distress is used to form cult followings in two distinct ways. The first way is the making of an external enemy that will oppress you – the government that will imprison or kill you, the soldier, the Satan that will lead you to hell. The second is losing leading figures. Being frightened of what might happen if you do not do your job well. Falling out with the leader may form a strong attachment and devotion.

“There is no escape, solution, or exit.”

Attachment lifts both panic and fear. The mixture of isolation and fear often leads to giving oneself up to the group with no questions being asked. Emotions frequently have to be redefined so to control a person. For instance, happiness is an emotion that everyone needs. Yet, if happiness is defined as being nearer to God, and misery is the way to be near to God, then happiness contains misery. Thus, you can get closer to God. In some groups, happiness just means obeying the leader's orders, enlisting new members, or making considerable amounts money which you then give to the group. For those of good status, happiness should be seen as the sense of community provided by the cult. Devotion and obedience are the most valued emotions and feelings however. It is not allowed for members to express their negative feelings other than towards projecting those feelings towards the world that is outside. Followers learn to always consider the group and never complain for themselves or their own needs. They never criticize the leader, quite the reverse, followers criticize themselves.

According to Hassan, information control is the ultimate factor of mind-control. Knowledge can be assumed as the fuel that keeps our minds working correctly. A person may become thoughtless if they discard the information required to make the right choices and decisions. People are stuck in destructive cults since they not only reject access to critical evidence but also lack the appropriate inner instruments to process it. This control of information results in dramatic and disturbing effects.

Various cults limit the access to outside newspapers, television, and other informational resources. This is partly because they are either too busy and have no free time, or because they are censored. Information control also extends to all relationships. To talk about anything that is critical to the leader, doctrine, or organization is forbidden. Followers must spy on others and report unsuitable comments or activities to cult leaders. New members are not allowed to talk to each other without the presence of an older member.

Family relations, phones, emails, and computers of the followers are kept under strict control. To stop members from understanding the bigger picture, information is usually segmented. In larger cults people are told "as much as they need to know" to do their job. Not every member possess all of the knowledge. Everyone gives an explanation to a superior within their unit.

Cult followers naturally think they know more about the cults inside matters than outsiders, yet when the ex-followers are reviewed, it is frequently discovered that these people know the least. As a result, a radical change happens to the individual with the control of behavior, thought, emotion and information.

*Attitude & Behavior Control -> Thought Control -> Control of Emotions -> Control of Information  
-> Devotion and Obedience*

### **Conclusion: What should we do?**

There is a tendency to only hear about the true motives of the cult, whether they are destructive to the individual or society, when they are released to the press. Unfortunately, the security and legal procedure also begins when these groups are no longer manageable. Yet, we need institutional capacity building in which such structures are at least academically concerned, both in the civil and public domains. These groups should be known much earlier, not when their destruction reaches uncontrollable levels in society, and essential precautionary steps must be taken by creating social sensitivity in the civil domain.

Studies so far have focused on the following effects that enable the individual to leave such groups:

- I. Decline of two-sided relations between followers
- II. Change in group dynamics
- III. Conflict over roles
- IV. Leader's failure to act in order with group norms and members' expectations
- V. Police suppression
- VI. Family relationships

Distrust, especially among cult followers, leads to psychological distancing from the cult's ideology, a push to no longer be associated with the group, and the final decision to leave. This proves to show that dissecting the group and undermining its inner reliability is of significant important.

As a result, a mechanism which provides interdisciplinary understanding and collaboration must be constructed. Research centers, departments, or institutions, which incorporate the fields of psychology, theology, sociology, anthropology, and security studies, where wide-ranging all-encompassing studies can take place is yet to be enacted in Turkey. Under the current circumstances, it is not difficult for lawmakers and decision-makers to know which policies to advance, which precautionary steps should be taken to mitigate these groups. Nevertheless, decision-makers will have the currently lacking guidance following the creation of academic structures producing the consequential knowledge and information on the matter. This cornerstone effort of both academia and the public will alleviate blindness and provide the necessary insights into these cult structures.