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### **The confessions of "the monster in the mirror"**

#### ***Arkeon, the anti-cult associations and the Order of Psychologists: a personal experience***

Dimarzio (12.06.2013) - This is the personal experience of one well known member of the Italian anti-cult world, who - at a certain point of her anti-cult path - came to a stop and started questioning first of all herself and the ethic value of her own actions. A painful self-examination, as all those in which we play the role of the prosecutors of ourselves and investigate the ethic value of our own actions and of the aims we pursue.

Indeed that was the beginning of my greatest troubles. I have never had serious problems before, when I used to "fight against the cults": they simply caused me some negligible annoyance, despite the presumed "very serious danger for our society" embodied by the "cults", if I well remind what I used to say until no more than ten years ago. In fact, Just like many other persons who answered to requests for information on this phenomenon in various "listening centers", I found myself facing people worried and disoriented by the affiliation of their relatives to some "different" religious or spiritual group . Anyway, thanks to the experience and the study, over the years I realized that the "cult issue", with all its consequences, is not a "social alarm", and it can be addressed with the same methodologies applied to the familiar and social conflicts, which are part of the normal social conflicts in a multi-religious and pluralistic world, as the one in which we all live.

The final outcome of myself examination, once realized the unwillingness to listen to and accept my criticisms and to start a process of change, has been the painful leave a group in which I had friendships, a small community in which I was recognized and which was an important reference point. Anyway, you can't have your cake and eat it too, so I had to choose. And, once I tried any possible dialogue and confrontation, I chose to follow my conscience, because I couldn't keep on sacrificing truth and charity on the altar of anti-cult propaganda.

I'm a teacher of catholic religion: truth and charity are two basic values of my life, as a person daily committed to testify through actions and not only through teaching.

Despite my leaving the association I belonged to and where I played managing roles, I kept on studying in this particular field in cooperation with organizations and center for studies less partisan and more oriented to address the "cults" without prejudices.

Since then, dating 2005, with no input from my side, many people belonging to religious groups labelled by the media as "cults" started writing to me, complaining for discriminations and persecutions of different kinds, also through media propaganda promoted by some former members and/or anti-cult movements. These cases made me think, but only marginally, because I did not believe that the situation of these associations were so serious as they claimed.

Anyway, I tried to consider these events and to follow the evolution of their judicial cases and the media propaganda about them. Media propaganda labelled these associations as cults, psycho cults, satanic cults, abusive cults, destructive cults, and so on.

At the peak of this quest, in which many of my anti-cult certainties crumbled as a marble giant eroded by weather, in November 2007 I received a request for information and help by one "master" of Arkeon, an unknown association inquired by the Prosecutor of Bari. As I always do, I took the chance to report the existence of this association to CESNUR, asking whether they were interested in dedicating to such group a chapter of their project "Religions in Italy", as we used to do for many years. CESNUR accepted and, as usual, I started collecting information for my study, I met other members - including the founder - and I decided to attend a conference meeting with him, other former members and other interested people. At the time (February 2008) there was no request for a trial, even if the association was "in the first row" since many years due to the propaganda of the media and of the anti-cult movements which described it as a very dangerous psycho-cult which already entrapped 10.000 members all over Italy.

After the meeting, dating 9th February 2008, I published on my website an article in which I described it and I reported my impressions on Arkeon, which were different from what the press and the anti-cult movements had been saying since many years. I didn't claim I had the "final truth", obviously. I simply wanted to add one further point of view, backed by some information, and I believed I had the right to state my ideas.

That was a big mistake, because things were not like that.

After the publication of that article, one user opened a forum on Arkeon on my website ([www.dimarzio.it](http://www.dimarzio.it)). At the same time, in the forum of two associations - the Association for the Rights of Users and Consumers (ADUC) and the Center for Studies on Psychological Abuses (CeSAP) - some users anti-Arkeon started making incredible accusations against me. The same accusations were sent, via fax, to the Prosecutor investigating on Arkeon and to tens of people active in the anti-cult world: the accusations, which spread behind my back also through an email written by Lorita Tinelli - The CeSAP President - sent to many recipients and forwarded by them to an unknown number of persons, stated that I was defending a very dangerous psycho-cult, that the President of the Order of Psychologists confirmed I was committing a professional abuse and, as a result, I was making further victims, just like the "guru" Vito Carlo Moccia. Furthermore, the email assured the recipients that "the Magistrates were informed" of my actions. But who were the recipients of that email ? Certainly some members of the Association for Research and Information on Cults (ARIS) Veneto, ARIS Toscana, and of FAVIS (National Association of Parents Victims of Cults), which are the three organizations belonging - together with CeSAP - to the European Federation of Centers for Research and Information on Cults (FECRIS).

Nearly one month after these events, on March the 26th 2008, my website was closed by the Prosecutor of Bari and I received a notice of investigation which listed "science fiction" accusations, based on misunderstandings, fancies and slanders, spread during the previous months, fed with the hysteric environment typical of some Italian anti-cult groups. That day, while still shocked I was visited by the Police which gave me the notice of investigation, the users on the CeSAP forum were virtually partying for the news. Part of this documentation has been published on the web.

In the scientific and academic world, both Italian and international, where I am well known, people looked rather shocked to this kafkian story: a researcher studying a group for her study aims, who was accused of being the "new guru" of the same group and was inquired for the same very serious crimes reported against the defendants, included the criminal conspiracy.

On July 2008 my case was divided from the main case and the total oblivion fell on my file. On March the 8th 2011 the Judge signed the closing of my case as "the crime was not committed". During the three previous years all the documents included in my file had been widely diffused in many ways, on the websites of some Arkeon former

members or their parents, on the Facebook pages " Psicosetta Arkeon " and "Centro Studi sugli Abusi Psicologici". Some files accusing me had been sent to many persons, included my Professional Order.

During the obscurization of my website, I opened a Blog (See English version) where I told my story and my thoughts on what was going on. I called those articles "Fragments of experience" (Frammenti di esperienza) as these were really the reflections I made based on my experience, especially after the shock caused by the wrongs suffered. Only after being hit directly I understood how the extreme anti cultism can create victims just like the so called cults. Any form of "extremism against something" can degenerate and give rise to witch hunt and discriminations against innocents, just like in my case and in that of the people involved in the mediatic-judicial massacre organized against Arkeon.

Those articles - especially the one I called "The Fear Factory" (La Fabbrica del Terrore) - and my public position on the Arkeon case increased the rage of a certain part of the Italian anti-cult world, which did not answer directly, nor criticized my ideas with others ideas or arguments, rather started an unceasing work of filing behind my backs which - as it always happens - finally came to light.

This action against me intensified after the publication of my book "New Religions and Cults: Psychology in front of new Cults", my subscription to the Order of Psychologists in march 2010 and my hearing at the second Senate Commission on Justice on September the 21th 2011, where it was discussed the proposal to introduce in our Penal Code the crime of "mental manipulation" (DDL 569), a law strongly supported by the Forum of Italian Anti-cult Associations, members of FECRIS.

After my subscription to the Order, between March 2010 and September 2012, the associations affiliated to the Forum and some of their individual members sent:

- three letters to three Senators of the Commission on Justice and, in copy, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Police, Central Operating Service Manager of SAS (The Anti-cult police team) Mrs. Maria Carla Bocchino, to "report" me and other persons for the presumed activities in defense of the Cults, asking to investigate on us;
- three notes to the Order of Psychologists of Lazio regional government;
- two Lawsuits in Lecce and Rimini.

The reports to SAS (Anticult Squad), the notes and the lawsuits were based on the same accusations, always the same: my criticisms, published on the web and exposed during television programs and radio interviews, to the methodology "masterfully" applied in the Arkeon case to create moral panic and social alarm; my position firmly opposing the introduction in our penal code of a new crime against mental manipulation; my criticism against the SAS; my complaint about the many cases of "deviance creation" induced by the anti-cult propaganda which brought, as in the arkeon case, to inquiries and trials based on nothing which ended with acquittals or with, as in the arkeon case, sentences for crimes which have nothing to do with the cults.

Even the three notes to the Order of Psychologists included mainly these accusations.

In July 2012 the first degree trial against arkeon ended with the acquittal of all the defendants for the crimes related to the concept of cult: private violence, induced state of inability to understand and will, deception, slander, mistreatment of minors. The defendants have been condemned for criminal conspiracy aimed to act as psychologists without the license required in Italy. The requests for compensation for damages suffered by people were refused by the judges, because they said that no damages occurred in Arkeon's seminars, with the exception of the Orders of Psychologists of Puglia, whose reimbursement will be set in a further session.

During the last five years what I consider a real persecution changed my life. I suffered and still suffer many damages: to my health, my already limited financial resources, my image of researcher and scholar, etc..

Anyway the most difficult thing to manage for me has been having to defend me from nothing. I still remember when, with the notice of inquiry in front of me, I had to think to a defense paper to give to my lawyer. I had to find arguments to defend me from accusations of being "the new guru of Arkeon", of trying to "reorganize the group" after the confusion which followed the investigations, of trying to "convince those who witnessed against Arkeon to change their mind" and so on, in a crescendo of criminal activities worth of a true monster, so serious to require the immediate closing of my website, which by 95% includes documents of the Catholic Church and some news on New Religious Movements. Nothing was included about Arkeon, except for only one article and a Forum. It was really hard to elaborate a defense, because those accusations were meaningless.

I felt the same bewilderment trying to reply to the accusations included in the three notes sent to the Order: it's always very difficult to defend yourself from your own ideas, mainly because you can't understand the reason why you should justify yourself for your own ideas, which you express openly in public events like congresses, hearings, press, scientific publications, internet, etc...it's difficult to defend yourself when you are accused of thought crimes. I tried anyway, for more than three years, with the only result that, more than one year after the end of the Arkeon trial, one further accusation adds up to the various ones already advanced against me, dealing with my public criticism of the way this witch hunt has been managed, just as if it was still possible today pretending Arkeon is a danger. The phantom of the " Arkeon psycho-cult" , which indeed never existed, still wonders in the rooms of the Order of Psychologists of Lazio. That was the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Everything has a limit and I'm no more ready to accept "kafkian trials" like the ones I suffered in the last years. So, I took the difficult but needed decision to ask for my cancellation from the Orders of Psychologists of Lazio, which was, in the last three years, the preferred recipient of the files prepared by the usual senders (that is Anticult Movements, members of FECRIS in Italy).

If someone considers me a monster, maybe he's right. I admit my guilt: I am a monster because I claim the right to publicly express my opinions, because I state and write that some anti-cult campaigns creates more victims than the alleged "cults", that cults represent no social alarm and that people should be defended because they are human beings, and their belonging to a cult makes them no worst or better. I am a monster also because I stated that sometimes " the victims of cults", in fact, turn into executioners of their own former friends and that the associations which aim to help the "victims" should learn self-criticism, not in order to blame but to improve themselves, to increase their research and studies, to verify and compare different points of view. So: I am a monster because, starting from an extreme anti-cult position, I have become a strong critic, first of all of myself, and then, as a consequence, of the world I belonged to, where I was very appreciated. The answer to my detailed criticism, based on my own direct experience of the modus operandi of some extreme anti-cult groups, has been to treat me like they treat "cults", "gurus" and "plagiarists": you don't answer on the issues and the facts to these people - who lost their humanity - because they are no more human beings: they are monsters. You must not speak to them, you must stab them in the back.

Maybe looking themselves in the mirror they saw their own image and they did not like it? It would be better to take a big stone and break the mirror. That way the image of the monster disappears and everything is again as before.

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