

Introduction

In 1996, when I escaped from the Mojahedin e Khalegh (MeK), it was not because I had reached some level of understanding or self-awareness, or even that I had discovered an irreconcilable contradiction between my beliefs and their teachings. It was because I was forced to the edge of existence, not only psychologically but also physically. I realized that if I were to change myself any further, I would ultimately die, if not as a being, then certainly as an individual. The question I faced was the simple Shakespearean 'To be or not to be'. This may seem like an exaggeration, perhaps even comical; yet it is difficult to find the right adjective to describe myself at that time. Pathetic? Frustrated? Trapped? Lost? In all of these words, something is missing. Maybe we need a new adjective to describe the situation of a person trapped in a destructive cult. The nearest approximation is George Orwell's designation of the 'unperson', and others may understand if I say, 'I was trapped between being a person and an unperson'.

In retrospect, it does indeed seem a little humorous that I believed I was becoming a better person, even a superman, whereas in fact I was becoming a nobody, an ant in a colony of ants, a mere extension of the leader, acting not in response to my own natural instincts for humanity, for survival, but out of absolute obedience and loyalty towards the leader.

Escaping from a destructive cult is neither strange nor unique. Millions of slaves throughout history have escaped from the clutches of slave masters, motivated by their desire to survive as a person, love for their family, if they remember them, and the simple instinct to be free. Once escaped, however, slaves have always had to be vigilant so as not to be trapped and recaptured by their master; they are forced immediately to fight for survival, to seek shelter, food and comfort, and perhaps to find a healer for their injured body and soul. Later too, they seek recognition in society and they may have to search for their family and free them as well. Here, however, the similarities end between victims of historical slavery and those who have been held in a destructive cult.

Those who run away from destructive cults, unlike the slaves of old, do not know how they were captured, how they were separated from their family and friends and livelihood, how their ways of thinking were altered, and how they were forced into slavery. They are confused and puzzled. One moment they blame themselves, thinking how naive, how foolish and stupid they were to follow a madman. The next moment they blame others, perhaps their inadequate parents, the situation they were in at that time, a friend who introduced them to the cult, or perhaps society and the government for perpetrating injustices. But equally, they may congratulate themselves for their wisdom, selflessness, honesty and correctness in choosing and joining the cult and blame the cult and the cult leader for changing it from what it was to what it became. Obviously I am not talking about freed slaves who, for various reasons, prefer or agree or are forced to work for their old master, nor those who feel indebted to their former master or do not wish to recognize the reality of their cult membership and choose to forget it and even deny all that part of their life.

Whereas slaves, in the common meaning of the word, can see the scars on their bodies from their master's lashes or the chains on their wrists and ankles, the new slaves rarely bear physical signs to show how they were captured, imprisoned, tortured and held against their will. In most cases, they cannot explain their invisible psychological lashes, chains and cages, but have to admit that the torturers—the jailers or even the spies who used to spy on them and report back to the master—were none but themselves.

While they are captive in a cult, these new slaves will have learned how to heal their psychological wounds; how to answer their questions and allay their doubts; how to overcome their internal resistance; how to reject their confusion and contradictions—all by blaming themselves instead of the leader and the cult. Self-blame is a magic medicine, invented and prescribed for slaves by their masters, and when the slaves escape their enslavement, they continue to take this medicine and rely on it whenever they are challenged or think about the past.

After my own escape, I journeyed through several different phases. At first, I couldn't see much wrong with MeK or its leaders in ideological terms, though politically and technically, on issues, policies and individuals I had my doubts and even opposition. Somehow I was ashamed of myself for

not being able to carry on as they wanted me to, for not being able to change any further. I blamed myself for being psychologically weak. Fortunately, physical pain took over: I was unable to walk properly and suffered numbness in my feet and legs due to a back problem, and my mind was so focused on the future, how I would survive in the outside world, find work and so on, that I was completely incapable of thinking about the past. I might even have been prepared to work for my old master, not as a slave but as a freed man.¹ By chance I found out that the organization wanted to take me back and were even prepared to use force, perhaps kidnapping me from the street in London. That was a wake-up call; and a few weeks later a phone call from the master, Rajavi himself, woke me up even more. He offered me the opportunity to work not as a Mojahed (a member of the group) but as a representative of NCR (their political wing). He asked me what I wanted and assured me that he was willing to meet my wishes. He went so far as to blame his lieutenants for their mistakes towards me, asking why he should pay the price for their mistakes! He asked me what he should tell others about where I was and why I left. He spoke in measured terms that might have been convincing, had I not known better. But when none of his overtures worked, he told me that he wanted to save me from becoming '*khasara fel donia va akhara*', a Koranic phrase meaning 'losing everything in life and after life'. That was it. I pretended not to hear him anymore and disconnected the phone.

That incident marked the end of my feelings of shame and self-doubt and the beginning of an era of looking towards the future, learning something new, finding a job and dealing with my financial and physical problems. At this stage, I still believed that my decision to join MeK was a right and honourable one. When I joined the group, I had had to choose between my conscience, my love for my people and my desire for democracy and freedom in Iran on the one hand; and my family, my individuality and my material needs on the other. I chose the former. Therefore, I reasoned, it was not I who was in the wrong, but the leader who had changed the organization from a political movement into something else. Still, there remained some elements of self-blame in my perception of what had happened. I continued to think that it was I who had freely made the decision to join and to stay, to leave family and friends, to accept psychological isolation from the wider society, to absorb the daily and sometimes hourly emotional upheavals of the organization, to welcome 'martyrdom' and physical and psychological pain, to divorce my wife and neglect my children for years, to humiliate myself in front of all, to welcome changing into a completely new person; to become, in short, a tool in the hands of the leader. I did not see myself as stupid or naïve, or as one who had made a foolish choice. Whatever wrong was perpetrated was the fault of the leader for choosing the wrong political path. Nevertheless, my political and even ideological attitudes lingered on when I escaped the group; strangely, I manifested a 'group personality' and 'group self-confidence'. Alone, I could see myself as a nobody; but in a group of old friends, all ex-members and supporters of MeK, I was who I was when I was a Mojahed; and I continued to adhere to the ranking hierarchy of the Mojahedin and the respect due to rank, like a retired army officer.

There followed a period of solitude, doubt and intense reflection. Who was I now? A Mojahed? Or the person I was before joining the Mojahedin? Or perhaps a new person? I questioned everything: what I knew, what I believed, what I liked, what I wanted to achieve, where I wished to go, even what clothes I should wear. Importantly, what was right and what was wrong? Unfortunately, there was no one around me who had any answers, nothing and no one on which to lean on for support. It soon became clear that I was not a Mojahed anymore. Neither the organization nor its leader was right, either for myself or for Iran. For some time, I tried to recapture who I had been before joining the group: finding the music and films that I used to like, seeking out old photographs of family and friends, wearing the kinds of clothes that I used to wear when I was in my twenties and eating the old familiar foods. But gradually, as a result of various incidents, illness, weakness and signs of aging, I was forced to accept that I was not in my twenties anymore. It seemed like something out of science fiction: my personality, frozen for twenty years and suddenly, owing to an accident, thawed out, was trapped in the body of a man in his forties. I was not and could not be who I was before joining, nor what I would become, but 'Mr Nobody'. I discovered, with wry amusement, that my

store of knowledge was obsolete, for example about computer programming and the research I had been involved in at university. What I had learned during my membership of MeK, instilled in me in order to serve the interests of the group, was not only irrelevant to my new situation, but mostly completely wrong, the opposite of reality.

Like all members of destructive cults, I believed that we were superior to ordinary people, not only because of our sacrifices and activities but even in terms of our understanding of the world. We thought we knew the answers to all philosophical and political questions, from the beginning of creation to the end of time. How naïve I was, and how little I possessed of the common knowledge that ordinary people take for granted!

Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*, which my daughter gave me, and a meeting with an old friend, the late Professor Fred Halliday of the London School of Economics, both helped me develop an understanding of the past. *Wild Swans* helped me to see Rajavi in a new light, as a mini-Mao, who wanted to be the supreme dictator of Iran. I begin to understand his decisions, actions and behaviour, not as personal failings or political or ideological mistakes, nor as those of someone in a trap, but rather as those of a person nurturing a cult of personality. He was incapable of fulfilling his childish dreams in the real world, as Mao, Stalin or Hitler did, and instead sought to materialize his fantasy in a mini-world of his imagination.² Like a child with his toys, he played with us, and we, like toys, silently allowed ourselves to be manipulated.

Fred Halliday, having listened to me talk of my concern for my children and my deep regret at not being there for them, especially for my son, who was born when we were deep in our so-called political activities, suggested that I write my story. It would, he said, be both illuminating and healing for me and my children. As a present, he gave me a favourite book, *I Believed*, the autobiography of Douglas Hyde, a member of the British communist party, whose story was very similar to those of all the other cult members that I read afterwards.

I started on a journey of self-exploration. Thanks to two friends, I received, out of the blue, most of the MeK books, magazines and even video tapes that we had read and seen during the previous twenty years. I re-read everything, trying not to be judgmental or adding the benefit of hindsight. I decided I would tell my story stage by stage, describing what was going on in my mind at the time. I wanted to represent what I believed in 1978 or 1986 and let the reader follow my progress and transformation from a liberal, middle-class semi-intellectual into a dogmatic cultic zealot, ready to die for the leader. I was not, however, ready to kill, a characteristic that was regarded as a weakness in the organization. Certainly, Rajavi, seeing that I was incapable of hate or harming or killing anyone, teased me relentlessly, calling me 'yoghurt' (an Iranian expression for someone who lacks zeal).

When I had almost come to the end of writing the book, a dear friend gave me a copy of *Feet of Clay*, by Anthony Storr. This book was a revelation to me. Suddenly I understood that MeK was not a political party, not a revolutionary organization, not a Marxist or Muslim group, not a family or club of like-minded friends, but a cult, with all the typical features of a cult, and that Rajavi was not a 'brother' nor a father figure nor a political or revolutionary leader, but a guru with a strong cult of personality.

At that time, I used to work on my memoirs every day. On 6th June 1999, I wrote: 'Today I searched my whole flat to find my notes. It is strange: how could I lose them? Where have I left them? I am not used to losing things or putting them where they don't belong! I am tired, angry, sad and happy, strange how I can be sad and happy at the same time. I am finishing the last chapter of my book; all right, in a few days or weeks it will be finished and yet I still feel I have not been able to tell my story as it was. I don't think I could portray the ups and downs, the feelings and emotions, my thoughts and the way we changed.

'I started writing this book for my children, against such time as they want to know why and how they lost their normal life, their normal childhood, their parents and in particular their father. This is why, despite the difficulties I still have with the language, I decided to write it in English. It has highlighted for me that I lost everything, including seeing my parents before they died, watching my

children grow up, being able to support and protect them, the love of my life (my wife), my friends, my country, my youth, my health ... all because I went along with the organization and Rajavi, and followed their every dictate. **But how and why it happened were still not clear, even to myself.**'

This mystery remained unsolved, not only me but by everyone who read or heard my story.

Professor Abrahamian, who read my original manuscript, marked it with many observations and questions, such as, 'Why didn't you leave?' or 'Why did you carry on?'

In answer, I could say MeK was a cult and the Rajavis, both Masoud and his wife Maryam, were the cult leaders, but those are descriptions rather than explanations. Nevertheless, I had to move on, to rebuild myself from scratch. In the postscript of the book I wrote: 'This has been my life story, from "zero" when I was born to "zero" when I left the Mojahedin. Yes, I arrived at another zero, and perhaps I must congratulate them for that, as it was always their wish to reduce us to "nobody" and "nothing". Zero: you are disconnected from any sense of belonging, your past, your memories, your friends and relatives and loved ones. Zero: you lose your identity, your individuality, your likes and dislikes, your principles and beliefs. Zero: you feel you know nothing; whatever you once knew is one big question mark. And again, zero: you have nothing; all your material possessions, plus your health and your youth, are lost. You start over, born again, but without the help given to a newborn child.'³

The rebuilding began from zero. Though I had been stripped of my prior knowledge and sense of reality, what I did know was that I was neither my former young self, nor my 'Mojahed' self. I had to rebuild myself on the ruins of my old personality. I had to learn, read, think and even do the exercises that I hated in order to deal with my permanently painful back.

The questions remained, however, whenever I saw an old friend or a family member. Many who knew me before joining MeK would ask, 'Why you?' Even my older brothers and sisters protested, 'But you were clever and educated; how could you be so naïve and stupid as to destroy your life and your family's?' Saying it was a cult or even that I had been 'brainwashed' was an unsatisfactory answer, both for them and for myself.

In fact, I could not properly define a cult or distinguish it from a party or organization, on the one hand, or their doctrine from religion, faith, ideology or philosophy on the other. I could say, like others trying to disguise their naivety, that Rajavi was a genius, so we were not deceived by an ordinary person but by one of the most brilliant minds of our time. I could say that he and MeK were not like that at the beginning, at least not when we joined them, but owing to unfortunate events, both changed, and so did we. But why did Rajavi insist on forcing us to divorce our spouses, on isolating us psychologically or, more often, physically from society?

Why, indeed, do cult leaders do what they do – manipulating the minds of their disciples, turning people into ant-like followers instead of real individuals with free will? I can honestly say that we were brainwashed. I could feel it; sometimes it was even so real for me that I could touch it, touch a word, a procedure. It seems totally unreal, but then it was as real for me as this keyboard that I am using at this moment.⁴ That said, what were the procedures they used for 'brainwashing'? How did they do it? People often want to know what the relationships were within the cult. Was it like children and parents? Sometimes the leaders wanted us to believe that we had been reborn from Maryam. Were we brothers and sisters with a big brother in charge?⁵ Were we members of a party? Or were we the employees or, worse, slaves of a leader? Finally, did we have freedom of choice? Were we responsible for what we did or not? And then there were, and remain, the broader questions: 'What threat does a cult pose for wider society? Why should other societies and governments bother about it or do anything to meet that threat? And what do they have the power to do?

In this book, I have tried to answer these questions and more, not for my own sake but to offer understanding and hope to all who have suffered at the hands of cults, whose lives or whose loved ones' lives were lost or ruined by a cult's violence and terrorism, those who remember the death and destruction of millions owing to the personality cults of people such as Hitler, Stalin and Mao, and those who dream of a day when such cults and their leaders will never again prevail. It may also speak to those who see the threat of the new phenomenon of terrorist organizations such as Al-

Qaeda and those who have witnessed the distortion and destruction of their beliefs and values by such cult leaders as Osama Bin Laden and Rajavi.

As you may expect, given that I was a disciple of MeK and Rajavi for nearly twenty years, my main examples throughout the book will be from MeK, which I describe in more detail than any other cult. Moreover, MeK has all the characteristics of a destructive cult, and as such is representative of the phenomenon. Also, readers may find of interest the way in which MeK gradually metamorphosed from a guerrilla revolutionary organization into a semi-popular one and then into a terrorist organization, eventually becoming an extreme destructive cult, and how, like other terrorist organizations, it distorted popular beliefs and exploited social injustice to radicalize its members, give the semblance of legitimacy to their inhumane actions, such as using them as living bombs to kill innocent people, and ultimately to enslave them from within and without.

Like Zealots, MeK believed that, in the context of increasing violence on both sides and by forcing the enemy to suppress its sympathizers, the organization could demonize the enemy and portray itself as oppressed and thereby force its own people into a revolution against the government. In their stealth, their deception of friends and enemies alike, their murderous infiltration into the enemy camp, their killings and maiming, and in flouting all the decent norms and traditions of their culture, they were well ahead of other cults such as the Zealots and Assassins. Moreover, by their betrayal of their own people and their collaboration with the enemy for their own ends, they could teach the Assassins a lesson or two. Their strange doctrine, a mixture of religion and socialism, is reminiscent of Jim Jones's teachings, and Rajavi's marriage to the wife of one of his closest friends is similar to what David Koresh did. Likewise, his order to members to divorce their spouses, leave their children and accept celibacy for life and after life recalls the edicts of Hassan Sabbah, who ordered members of the Assassins to be castrated, or Marshall Applewhite, founder of the Heaven's Gate group, whose male members underwent voluntary castration in order to maintain their extreme ascetic lifestyle.

In an article entitled 'Terrorist Organisations Are Cults'⁶, I defined a terrorist organization as one whose '*only* tactic, or at least its *main* tactic, for reaching its goal is an act of terrorism'. In the same article, I argued that a terrorist organization is either a destructive cult or that it has no choice but to become one in order to survive. I concluded that, to combat terrorism, we have to tackle the problem of destructive cults. Individual and fragmented acts of terrorism sponsored by political or even revolutionary groups and governments should be dealt with differently, rarely by the use of force but through understanding their cause and use of political instruments.

By contrast, terrorism and terrorist organizations are arguably the main political and social problem of our era, and of these organizations, Al-Qaeda is perhaps the best known and the most feared. Its characteristics include fragmentation, franchization, a particular kind of organizational structure, the physical isolation of its main cadre, its clandestine and secret nature and rarely published internal documentation. As a result of these features, it is impossible for those outside the organization to know or understand its nature and the system of manipulation that it operates. In my view, MeK would seem to be the closest organization to Al-Qaeda, and examining its methods and practices give us insight into the way that terrorist and destructive cults work. Further, thanks to a short period of semi-openness in MeK during 1979–1985, there is a rich corpus of its published material available that can be studied and interrogated.

My main concern in this book is not with cults in general but specifically with destructive and terrorist cults, which I define in relation to their leader, first and foremost, and then to their doctrine or cause and, most important of all, their method of mind manipulation.

Unlike some experts who define cults and categorize them according to their ideology or doctrine, my definition of cults starts with its leader, rather than its doctrine. In my definition, the leader has a childish, narcissistic ego and is unable to fulfil his unrealistic needs and realize his gigantic ambitions in the real world. Hence, he creates his toy-like mini-world, in psychological or physical isolation from wider society. In chapter two, I try to explain the leader's main characteristics: his charisma and

charm, his sense of utter superiority, his totalitarian behaviour, his need for worshippers and his loneliness.

In order to attract and recruit disciples, the leader needs to have a cause, a doctrine or an ideology. For cult leaders, this is a means to an end, rather than the end in itself. They choose a doctrine that seems to meet a public belief or need, so that they can recruit. The objective is to find worshippers to create their dream world and unite their internal ego with the external one. What they choose as a 'cause' or 'doctrine' is not as important as one might think and no cult leader feels obliged to be loyal towards his primarily expressed commitment to them. A destructive cult is distinguished from followers of a faith or a religion, in other words, an idea or ideology, in that it is, from beginning to end, leader-based. For followers of faith or political groups, for example, it is the idea that is important above all, an idea such as the uniqueness of God, Resurrection, socialism or capitalism, a belief in metempsychosis or the struggle for social justice and an egalitarian society. They have dogmas, but their dogmas stem from fundamental principles or beliefs. Followers of destructive cults, by contrast, must be loyal, until death, to the cause of survival of the cult and must display absolute loyalty and obedience towards the leader of the cult.

According to my definition of destructive cults, therefore, what they call their doctrine and the steadfastness with which they appear to honour it are simply masks for the true purpose, which is to perpetuate a world of black and white, of totalitarianism and exclusivity.

In order to build their dream world, destructive cult leaders have no choice but to isolate themselves psychologically and physically (if they can) in order to change free men and women snatched from ordinary society into toy-like objects, who will toe a narrow and absolute line, never asking questions or expressing any doubts, never entertaining any restraints or contradictions, never indulging in any private or personal beliefs, desires, thoughts or emotions. To ensure that their disciples are malleable, the cult leaders must employ some sort of method of mind manipulation. In this context, we encounter two extremes: on the one hand, those who deny the existence of mind manipulation and, on the other, those who label every simple technique of influence used for recruiting as 'brainwashing' and members of all cults, even non-destructive ones, as 'zombies' or 'machines'. I personally don't believe that any method exists for brainwashing a person *totally*; this would require overriding genetic characteristics and the nurturing influences of parents and early educators in shaping character and personality. The only way that personality may be changed for good is by surgery that somehow removes all memories of the past. Even then, the inborn characteristics remain deep within and, although a person may seem to change into 'Mr Nobody'⁷, he can never ultimately become the slave that cult leaders wish to have or the obedient spy or soldier that governments might cultivate.

That said, I have seen changes in my own personality and that of hundreds if not thousands of other members of MeK as a result of mind manipulation, which pushes a person from the driving seat of his or her life into a submissive and passive role in the passenger seat. Thus, I have to say that it is incorrect to deny the existence of mind manipulation methods, and even I have sometimes, during the writing of this book, used words such as 'ant', 'zombie' or 'machine' to describe the loyal and obedient members of a destructive cult.

In my analysis of mind manipulation, I have divided it into three different categories or phases. The first is the use of rational techniques to engender a change of beliefs among new recruits and as a tool for recruitment (see chapter five). The next phase is to instil and stabilize the new beliefs and prevent the new recruit from returning to his previous belief system under the pressure of his pre-existing personality and his feelings towards his old way of life, family and friends. This is done mainly via isolation and forcing a change of behaviour, which I call mind control (see chapter six). Finally, a destructive cult leader has to change a disciple's personality into a collective cult personality; this is done mainly by the use of emotion, which may be called brainwashing (see chapter seven).

I should stress that these phases do not necessarily follow chronologically. A cult leader may use emotion from the first stage of recruitment; similarly, even in the final stages of mind manipulation,

he or she may still use some rational techniques of influence to change a pre-existing belief in a disciple or to wipe out a belief that has already been cultivated in the disciple but which has outlived its purpose.

To understand how mind manipulation and brainwashing are possible (chapter four), I have collected facts and the views of experts about how the brain works and its shortcomings, which can be manipulated by those who know how to do so. I discuss what a brain is made of, how brain cells or neurons communicate with one another; how repetition makes an idea stronger so that a lie can be accepted as reality; how the brain economizes its resources for the most important aspects of life; and how our memory and our beliefs shape our personality and character. And I introduce my simple mathematical model of how beliefs can be altered, and try to show how rational methods of influence, mind control and brainwashing work. In the following chapters, I use this model to describe different phases of mind manipulation.

Are those who join cults 'stupid', 'naïve', 'full of complexes' or 'on the margins of society'? Or is it ideological or political reasons or just chance that makes them vulnerable to being recruited by a cult leader? The chapter three attempts to identify the various reasons why one might be attracted to a cult or a terrorist organization.

Before that, however, in chapter one, I discuss what may be meant by membership of a destructive cult and try to define the relationship between disciples and leaders in this kind of grouping. As may be seen from the title of the chapter, I attempt to demonstrate that this relationship is closest to the old slavery to than any other kind of membership or allegiance, such as among followers of a faith, members of a political party, members of a club or the workforce of a factory. Still, the old slaves were lucky insofar as they at least knew and could doubtless remember how they were forced into slavery and therefore were able to desire their freedom and use any available means and opportunity to achieve it. Although their physical conditions and lives were harsher than those of the new slaves, their kind of slavery was much simpler and more visible than the new type of slavery. They could feel the painful lashes of their masters' whips and show their scars as visible proof of their maltreatment, whereas the injuries to the new slaves are invisible and mostly take the form of criticism, making them hard to explain or help others to understand. Also, slaves in former times were freer in the sense that they could privately hold on to their dreams, their thoughts and their feelings. The new slaves, by contrast, are even required to report their dreams, feelings and thoughts and accept punishment if these deviate in any way from the path of the cult leader. It is difficult to describe the relationship between a destructive cult leader and his/her disciples. I have taken refuge in fantasy, turning to 'Stargate' and defining the relationship as that of symbiotes and their hosts. Cult leaders as symbiotes infiltrate the minds of their hosts (their disciples), take control of their minds and use them to fulfil their desires, in exchange for which they give food and shelter and, perhaps, the hope of becoming immortal as 'martyrs' or followers of a 'godlike person on earth' or to be saved on the day of resurrection.

In this chapter too, I deal with the existence or non-existence of 'freedom' and 'free will' in the actions and decision-making of destructive cult members. I argue that, although in destructive cults the will power of disciples tends to strengthen (as the constraints of ordinary life, such as fears for the future and concern for personal and family safety and security, vanish), nevertheless, the 'free' part of 'free will' becomes negligible or disappears. Though elements of individuality may remain, they will have been suppressed to the point where they play no role in the victim's will power. Freedom of choice is not freedom if there is no choice, when destructive cult leaders create phobia, paranoia, hate and disgust towards the outside world and close all exit doors for the new slaves imprisoned within. (Some go further and close exit doors not only psychologically but also physically.) It becomes impossible for the victim to gain information or to enjoy 'free' time in which to acquire the information necessary for decision-making. Freedom of choice does not exist if you reject the Nuremberg code of ethics, which requires letting new recruits know what they are signing up to or agreeing to, and ensuring that they know the whole procedure and what they have to do during their journey. If the captor is going to boil the captive alive in a pot, one degree at a time, the

process is gradual and the victim doesn't realize what is happening to him or her and escape becomes impossible. Freedom of choice does not exist if you sap all the self-confidence and self-esteem out of a person, on the pretext that such qualities are ugly or selfish.

In final chapter of the book I try to answer those who ask why they should bother to do anything about destructive cults and what indeed can be done.

Some time ago I saw a movie called 'Last Supper', directed by Stacy Title and written by Dan Rosen. It is the story of five young American liberals who have decided to invite fascist extremists to their home in order to rid society of them by poisoning them. They reach this decision while arguing about Hitler; if they could travel back in time to the era before Second World War and meet Hitler, would they have the right to kill him or not? If they could spare the world from the destruction of the war and save millions of lives simply by murdering a single person, would this not be a worthy act? Clearly, in their view, it would. However, do we really want to create a world such as is portrayed in Steven Spielberg's 'Minority Report', where it is acceptable, in the name of fighting terrorism, to trace, find, arrest and even punish criminals before they commit a crime? Do we want to discard such values as freedom of speech, freedom of information, freedom from surveillance, random search and arrest and the notion of 'innocent until proven guilty'? Are we prepared to commit torture in the name of 'security' and safeguarding our 'values'? My answer to all these questions is no. We have no right to kill people like Hitler before they become Hitler, any more than we would have, in some future world, the right to kill babies who are born with the gene for 'violence and a tendency for murder'. Instead, I wish that before both world wars we had done what the Germans and many other democratic societies have done since, namely to ban gatherings and associations based on hatred towards certain people or minorities, racism or fascism. Such a ban should, in my view, extend to the promotion of stark black and white distinctions, and to those who define others as 'either with them or against them', even if the proponent is President George W. Bush.⁸ Rendering such gatherings illegal would have prevented Hitler from widely disseminating his extreme violent ideas and from creating and collecting adherents to his cult of Aryan supremacy. Not only would this have saved millions of people from the terrible fate they suffered but also Germans would have been spared military defeat and the humiliation and hardships they suffered as a consequence.

We abolished slavery because it was inhuman, because it was based on discrimination, exploitation and the idea of the superiority of a master race. We need, in my view, to have laws that prevent people exercising a cult of personality, people like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Bin Laden, Jim Jones, David Koresh and Rajavi, from recruiting and brainwashing their disciples. We have to take a stand against destructive cults and their leaders because they are immoral: new slaves cannot save themselves as they don't even know that they are slaves; many think that they are following their master of their own free will. But even if you are among those who blame the victim rather than the perpetrator, who don't trouble themselves about what is 'wrong' as long as the wrong is not directed against them, who think that it will never happen to them or their dearest ones, then consider the threat from terrorist organizations that have advocates on both sides and want to disturb peace and security, to deny the rights of the majority, their freedom of movement and communication, sometimes, ostensibly, in the name of security. If you do, then you may realize that something has to be done to prevent the creation and rise of destructive and terrorist cults.

For some time I was a representative of MeK at the United Nations, based in Geneva. We had a domestic problem: ants in our base were attacking our limited supplies of food. We tried everything to get rid of them, but still they came back. I later found out that Swiss ants are famous for their persistence and are even portrayed on one of the country's large denomination bank notes. One day, watching a queue of ants preparing to carry a piece of dead spider to their nest, I noticed that they had to cross a narrow strip of water. Suddenly I understood the reason for their success, why they are among the oldest creatures on the planet and why they might survive even after mankind has ceased to exist. Without any apparent concern for their lives, the ants simply jumped into the water and with their bodies soon created a bridge for other ants to walk over in order to take food

to their nest. It is very difficult to stop such selfless creatures, who have no sense of self-preservation or self-reproduction, and who lack individuality, from unquestioningly, unhesitatingly and obediently following their leader. No wonder that Maryam Rajavi's prescription for members of MeK was to turn themselves into human ants.

How should we stop suicide bombers or punish them? By arresting them before they act? Or after their act, when they are in their own paradise? The first option goes against our values and principles, and risks fatal errors and the victimization of innocent people; the second is a joke and an impossibility. However, we can and must stop people from becoming human ants. Therefore, in my conclusion I suggest that we need, urgently and seriously, to conduct more research in order to understand the phenomena of destructive cults and mind manipulation. We need to inform and educate society and especially young people about these phenomena and the dangers they pose. We must criminalize the brainwashing and enslavement of people, just as we banned the old slavery. We need to help people who are on the road to killing their personality, just as we try to prevent would-be suicides. We have to help the families and friends of those who are enslaved in cults to rescue their loved ones, and encourage and give moral and financial support to those who want to escape cults. In this way, we will save many thousands of individuals from the new slavery and protect our modern way of life from the terrorism perpetrated by organizations that can only survive by changing into destructive cults.

Although one can rarely change the minds of those who have already decided how to look at a phenomenon, I have tried in this book to meet some of the criticisms and arguments of cult supporters and apologists and, in response to the accusation that this is just another book by an ex-cult member⁹, to present the views of experts in the field, many of them never members of a cult, destructive or otherwise, as well as ex-members of other cults. For example, I use MeK's own published literature as evidence of their attitude towards their leader, their doctrines and even their methods of mind manipulation and their justification for it.

All emphasis (bold) and text enclosed in curly brackets ({ }) is mine unless otherwise stated. The spelling of Arabic and Iranian names such as Mojahedin, Shii, Mohamed and Hussein often varies; therefore, to avoid confusion, I have sometimes changed the spelling of such words for consistency. Let me conclude by repeating the words of George Orwell in 1984: 'At the end we're certain to be apart. Do you realize how utterly alone we shall be? When once they get hold of us there will be nothing, literally nothing that either of us can do for the other.'

Endnotes

¹ 'This was the obligation of the freedman to work for the patron, which sprang, not from the status of libertus, but from an oath which the freedman took after manumission.' From Orlando Patterson: *Slavery and Social Death*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1982.

² To understand what I mean, you need to travel to Ashraf, the previous base of MeK in Iraq, and see how, by the order of Rajavi, MeK members have tried to create a mini-Iran for him, complete with miniatures of some famous Iranian buildings, a parliament with members, one for every million Iranians, an army, an air force, even a navy, police and traffic signs ... almost everything that you might find in a child's fantasy of the real world. This is why they used to call it the 'city of Ashraf', a city populated by toy-like creatures, without families and noisy children and real people able to laugh or cry.

³ Masoud Banisadr: *Masoud: Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, London, Saqi, 2004, p. 469.

⁴ An ex-member describes his experience thus: 'I've never been able to explain it to people who weren't there. I don't really understand it myself. But black was white, night was day, whatever they told us to believe, it was like a test. The more outrageous the idea, the greater the victory, when I could wrap my mind around it and really believe it down to my toes. And, most important, be prepared to act on it just like if it was proven fact. That's the really scary part when I look back on it.' From Benjamin Zablocki and Thomas Robbins: *Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001, p. 200.

⁵ 'What hurts most is that I thought these people were my new friends, my new family. It wasn't until after that I realized how I was manipulated little step by little step. Just like in Lifton; it's really amazing when you think of it ... I don't know if you can understand it, but what hurts most is not that they did it but realizing that they

planned it out so carefully from the beginning. That was so cold.' From Zablocki and Robbins: *Misunderstanding Cults*, p. 200.

⁶ *Cultic Studies Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2009, pp. 156-186; can also be viewed at: www.RIDC.info,

⁷ Goronwy Rees, British writer and academic, was described by himself and his daughter as 'a man without qualities, a person without a sense of "self"'. From John Gray: *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*, London, Granta Books, 2003, pp. 74, 76.

⁸ On 20th February 2001, President George W. Bush said: 'Every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.' On 13th September 2001, he called his fight against terrorists a 'crusade'. From Paul L. Williams: *Al-Qaeda: Brotherhood of Terror*, London, Alpha, a Pearson education company, 2002, pp. 51, 58. Both speeches greatly helped Al-Qaeda to portray the American and Western world's action as a Christian war, not against terrorism but against Islam, reinforcing the belief in a world of 'black and white' and the philosophy of 'either with me or against me'. These speeches and many of President Bush's later decisions made him the best and most effective advocate of Al-Qaeda's cause.

⁹ Rejecting the testimony of ex-members is a very convenient way of whitewashing whatever destructive cults do, as they are never going to expose their illegal and inhuman behaviour publicly. If they do, they cannot be called a destructive cult but perhaps a military or boot camp or even a club for sado-masochists. At the beginning, in the recruiting stage, destructive cults do not let new recruits know what they have in mind for them and what the eventual result of their first 'yes' will be. On the other hand, present members of a cult can never criticize or testify against their leader, as 'total obedience and loyalty' are required of them; if a member can criticize his leader, which implies that his loyalty and obedience are not absolute, then we cannot call that group a destructive cult. However, independent researchers are rarely able to penetrate the curtains of deceit and or match the power derived from the lavish spending of destructive cults. In order to understand and report on MeK or any other destructive cult, they would need to be financed and supported by a bigger authority such as RAND's report on MeK, which was financed by the US Department of Defense. Unfortunately, as long as the law fails to crack down on destructive cults and they maintain their methods of mind manipulation, information about them will remain inaccessible to us.