

OSCE 2013



INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION OF MINORITY RELIGIONS IN ITALY

Anti-Cult Groups, Institutions and Police

WARSAW September 26, 2013

Raffaella Di Marzio

www.dimarzio.it

PURPOSE

To show how the **social context, press reports, popular prejudices, anti-cult activism, government and authorities** can lead to violations of human rights of minority religious or spiritual groups

RELIGIONS IN ITALY 2013 (CESNUR.org)

Ebrei	36.000	2,5%
Cattolici “di frangia” e dissidenti	25.000	1,8%
Ortodossi	110.000	7,8%
Protestanti	435.000	30,7%
Testimoni di Geova (e assimilati)	415.000	29,3%
Mormoni (e assimilati)	25.000	1,8%
Altri gruppi di origine cristiana	5.000	0,4%
Musulmani	115.000	8,1%
Bahá’í e altri gruppi di matrice islamica	4.000	0,3%
Induisti e neo-induisti	26.000	1,8%
Buddhisti	135.000	9,5%
Gruppi di Osho e derivati	4.000	0,3%
Sikh, radhasoami e derivazioni	6.000	0,4%
Altri gruppi di origine orientale	2.000	0,1%
Nuove religioni giapponesi	3.000	0,2%
Area esoterica e della “antica sapienza”	15.000	1,1%
Movimenti del potenziale umano	30.000	2,1%
Movimenti <i>organizzati</i> New Age e Next Age	20.000	1,4%
Altri	6.000	0,4%
Totale	1.417.000	100,0%

MY EXPERIENCE

Requests for information and help from:

- families, former members of religious groups, journalists, etc...
- people affiliated with religious and spiritual movements

Discrimination: to judge people on the basis of their **group identities**, rather than as **individuals**

THE «CULT» STIGMA

- Using the word “**cult**” (“**setta**”) as a stigma
- The divergence of these groups from the mainstream may lead to tendencies for them to be labeled as “**dangerous**” in the social context
- This **labeling process** can lead to violations of human rights or other harm
- **Increased deviance**

STIGMA: NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- Difficulty in **finding or keeping a job**
- Unnecessary **strains** in family or romantic relationships
- **Antagonism** by neighbors
- Stereotyping people can easily lead to **objectification and demonization**: members of religious groups are *brainwashed people*
- **Derision or isolation of children** at school
- Stigma and anti-cult/media propaganda **cause harm to children**

PROTECT CHILDREN



**«Rather than be born from a sect leader,
I would have never been born!»**

INSTITUTIONAL OFFICIAL REPORTS

- In **February 1998** the Ministry of Internal Affairs published a report, **“Religious sects and new magic movements in Italy”**
- Police intelligence created the report simply collecting **unreliable rumors**
- The report has been converted **in headline news overnight** by sending it to several politicians and journalists
- This infamous Report has been discredited and criticized for years, but **it is still cited and used** as a reliable source
- Meneghetti Case (Ontopsicologia)

REPRESSIVE LAW (MENTAL MANIPULATION)

- Members of Parliament have been proposing, from 2000 to 2013, three different bills for punishing the “mental manipulation” crime

“[...]Anyone who, with violence, or techniques used in order to condition personality, puts someone into a state of subjection that eliminates his/her ability to judge and withstand pressures from others, so that he/she removes the freedom of self-determination, shall be punished with imprisonment from four to eight years”

ART. 613-bis, bill for the re-introduction of the crime of “plagio”.

REPRESSIVE ANTICULT SQUAD*

- The **Italian Constitution** declares that "all the religious confessions are equally free in front of the law"
- In 2006 the Italian State has established the necessity to open a specific **department of Police to fight back the "cults (sette)"**
- Anti-cult Squad has achieved **resounding miscarriages of justice** in Florence, Bari, Assisi
- It is coordinated by representatives and "experts" identifiable as **insiders of anti-sects groups**

*Senatori Perduca e Poretti. Legislatura 16 Atto di Sindacato Ispettivo N. 4-08595

MARCO DIMITRI (SATAN'S CHILDREN)

The result of the anti-cult/media propaganda and instigation is moral panic and, in some cases, also persecution, and the unfair imprisonment of innocent people



SOME CASES (1985-2013)

Scientology 1988-2000 religion and not a criminal association

Damanhur 1991-1992 no drugs, weapons and dead bodies

Children of Satan 1996 non-existence of the fact

Angels of Sodoma 2002 never existed

Ananda Assisi 2004 all defendants acquitted

Osho Campus 2007 Anti cult Squad raid

Arkeon 2007 Arkeon was not a psycho-cult

Re Maya 2010 under investigation

MISA 2012 under investigation

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- Ask for “state neutrality and equal protection before the law as fundamental safeguards against any form of discrimination”
- Stigmatization and demonization of a group because of the behavior of one of its members or leaders must be unequivocally condemned
- “... Independent national or regional information centers on groups of a religious, esoteric or spiritual nature”
- Reliable information ... “neither exclusively **from the sects** themselves nor **from associations** set up to defend the victims of sects”
- Safeguard Free Speech
- Nobody and no religion, whether historical or new, is above the law

References:

Council of Europe - Rac. 1412 (1999)

Freedom of Religion or Belief - Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality. A Case Study: FECRIS