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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/zjr/387>

DOI: 10.4000/zjr.387

ISSN: 1862-5886

**Publisher**

Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft

**Electronic reference**

Elizabeth Aileen Young, « The use of the »Brainwashing« Theory by the Anti-cult Movement in the United States of America, pre-1996 », *Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft* [Online], 7 | 2012, Online since 31 December 2012, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/zjr/387> ; DOI : 10.4000/zjr.387

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## Introduction

- 1 The late 1960s saw a dramatic increase in the creation of New Religious Movements (NRMs) in the United States of America, and conversion to these groups by young people. This provoked those outside the NRMs, especially parents whose children were members, to »rescue« them from these »deviant groups« by any means possible. For these parents, there was also an important question that needed answering; why did *my* child join such a group, one with ideologies that directly contradict my own? For many, this question was answered by appealing to the idea of a »brainwashing« theory. The brainwashing theory, when applied to religions, claims that converts to an NRM have been forcefully programmed to believe a set of beliefs that, according to family and friends, are diametrically opposed to what the convert previously believed. The theory of brainwashing has its roots in World War Two military experimentation in both the United States and Germany, and in the 1950s it was used as a propaganda tool to describe American prisoners of war (POWs) in China and their supposed conversion to communism. The theory was then appropriated by the emergent Anti-Cult Movement (ACM) in the 1970s.
- 2 There is no reliable scientific evidence to convincingly prove the brainwashing theory's legitimacy. There is, however, a great deal of research against it, as will become apparent in the following section. Nevertheless, it continues to be used by ACM groups as a derogatory description of the perceived manipulative, sinister and generally unsavoury nature of NRMs, which are commonly given the pejorative label of »cult«. The ACM's

usage of the word »cult« has significantly contributed to the now popular usage of the term, which has stereotyped NRMs as deviant, un-conforming, nonsensical and dangerous pseudo-religious groups that should not have their belief systems taken seriously. This understanding of the term has become the norm for the media and public at large, ensuring that when a religious group is labelled a »cult« they are instantly looked upon with suspicion and distrust, and, regardless of their actions, are generally unable to shake this stigma.<sup>1</sup>

- 3 This discussion will briefly trace the history and development of the brainwashing theory and will then move on to its use by the ACM in the United States, up until the demise of the Cult Awareness Network in 1996. I will examine the way in which brainwashing has been used to explain the actions of two young women, Patricia (Patty) Hearst<sup>2</sup> and Elizabeth Smart<sup>3</sup>, abducted in the USA in 1974 and 2003 respectively by NRM adherents; the refutation of this theory by scholars; and the use of it by well-known »cult« opponent Margaret Singer to profess the innocence of ex-»cult« members. I will conclude that the ACM has caused irreversible damage to the image of NRMs, and that the forceful »deprogramming« techniques it endorsed can be understood as stripping the »victim«, or, the consenting adult, of their freedom to chose and practice their own religion.

## Attempts to Create a theory

- 4 According to Dick Anthony, a leading scholar in research on NRMs, it is believed by the general public that brainwashing is thought to occur as a kind of »psychotechnological manipulation by the unscrupulous agents of the religious group« controlled by an omnipotent and charismatic »cultic« leader (Anthony 1993, 297). It is thought that the way in which one is brainwashed involves technical esoteric practices that may include the use of drugs, sleep deprivation, hypnotism and so on, to »systematically induce high levels of ideological obedience« (Zablocki 2001, 165). Physical coercion is not a feature of brainwashing that has been considered essential, although it is believed that »cult« leaders often use it (Anthony, and Robbins 1994, 457). This extreme »cultic« conversion theory was advanced by psychologist Margaret Singer who has undertaken research into the supposed conversion to communism of American prisoners of war (POWs) during the Korean War (Anthony 1993, 296). Singer based this theory on not only her own research, but also that of renowned psychologist Robert Lifton, who has undertaken significant research into political violence and the psychological effects of war. Lifton, however, has unequivocally renounced the applicability of his research on the conversion of POWs to that of »cultic« brainwashing and conversion, »explicitly disavow[ing his research] for legal testimony on ... cults« (Shinn 1993, 200).
- 5 The initial idea for the concept that would become known as »brainwashing« came about during the Second World War when both Nazi Germany and American intelligence agencies became increasingly preoccupied with the advancement of interrogation practices. The term »brainwashing« was not coined until later, as will be illustrated below. Both nations enthusiastically poured funds into sophisticated research programs to develop and perfect a technique with the hope that they would be able to create an effective method to convert enemy captives into deployable agents who would become converted to the political beliefs of their captors, even if they were diametrically opposed to those of their homeland. They could then be used as secret agents in a much more effective way than usual agents, as their detection was less likely. Other intended uses for

brainwashing included the further development in soldiers of the ability to remain strong in the face of captivity by enemy forces, and as a means to develop more effectual war-time propaganda (Anthony, and Robbins 1994, 458).

- 6 In Germany, brainwashing research was conducted by the Schutzstaffel (SS) and the Gestapo; in America it was undertaken by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and then continued by the CIA when the OSS was dissolved. Previous Nazi research using Mescaline influenced the use of potent drugs such as lysergic acid diethylamide, more commonly known as LSD, by the American researchers. A central motivation behind the theory was that, before a person could be brainwashed, they must first go through a deconditioning process to »eradicate ... prior mental patterns« (ibid.). Once these prior patterns were gone, »new political attitudes and a new sense of self could then be easily implanted« (ibid.). This same train of thought was the motivation behind the use of electroshock therapy and sensory deprivation in research subjects. The Nazi research program had a much higher death rate in its subjects than its American counterpart, as it was less inhibited by ethical considerations and consequently its methods were more extreme. Both countries continued with this research for many years. Although the end of World War Two drew the Nazi research program to a close, the Americans employed the nation's most highly regarded scientists and psychologists to work on it for a further twenty-five years. The extensive research produced entirely inconclusive results, providing no evidence at all for the success of the initial goals of improved coercive indoctrination techniques or interrogation tactics, and researchers ultimately declared their work a complete failure (ibid., 459).

## Disinformation Tactics

- 7 In the 1950s, the term »brainwashing« became popularised as a way to explain some of the experiences of the aforementioned American POWs during the Korean War (ibid.). It was a convenient description of their indoctrination and the modes of influence utilised by their communist captors, who supposedly undermined the subjects' previous beliefs and altered them to the point of total and unquestioning belief in a new set of ideas (ibid., 457). Some of the POWs were so influenced by alleged brainwashing techniques that they claimed to believe in the principles of communism, and made critical assertions against America, agreeing with communist accusations that the Americans were using germ warfare (ibid.). This remains a contentious issue, as only eleven out of three thousand American POWs who apparently converted to communism retained these beliefs once freed, with the rest recanting beliefs they had professed during their captivity. The CIA-supported research on these eleven people was undertaken independently by Lawrence Hinkle and Harold Wolff, both Cornell University psychologists. They concluded that, taking into account the personal histories of the former POWs, all eleven were »sympathetic to ... communism and antipathetic to American values *before* their imprisonment« and the values expressed when they were finally released were not especially different from those held prior to their supposed brainwashing experience (ibid., 461).
- 8 As a result of their years of research, American researchers knew the communists were not using any sophisticated scientific techniques, and consequently their research was not influenced significantly by the POW situation. However, the anti-American

sentiments and the idea of America's use of germ warfare professed by POWs were considered threatening to the mind-frame of the wider society, leading the CIA to undertake a »disinformation campaign« in which they exploited the brainwashing theory to the public. That the brainwashing theory was promulgated by the CIA for no other reason than as a propaganda tool has been confirmed through scholarly research and it is now generally accepted by leading scholars including John Hall, Anson Shupe, Massimo Introvigne and David Bromley (Anthony 2008, 3). The campaign was aimed at assuring Americans that the allegations made by POWs were completely unsubstantiated and that the communists were employing techniques such as brainwashing, because no un-brainwashed or rational person would ever attest to either communist ideologies or germ warfare accusations. This meant that the credibility of the soldiers making such statements was also ensured, as they were considered the victims of experimental and vicious communist thought control (Anthony, and Robbins 1994, 459).

- 9 Not only was the theory of brainwashing a scientifically unfounded propaganda tool, but so too, was the actual name for this theory. In his *Brainwashing in Red China*, Edward Hunter, an undercover CIA propaganda and psychological warfare specialist, fallaciously claims the term to be a translation of a Chinese word for »thought reform« (ibid., 459-460). George Orwell's 1949 novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, significantly influenced Hunter and it is now believed that he coined the term »brainwashing« in reference to Orwell's idea of »washing clean« the minds of the populace (Introvigne 2006, 67). Hunter wrote many books and articles under the guise of a journalist and it was mainly through these works that the brainwashing theory became a public concern (Anthony 2008, 3).

## The ACM and the appropriation of »cult« and »brainwashing«

- 10 Popular, scholarly, and to some extent scientific interest in brainwashing subsided after the Korean War, only to resurface in the mid-1970s. This was initially due to the alleged brainwashing of Patty Hearst in 1974 by the Symbionese Liberation Front and the use of the term by the ACM (ibid., 1; Anthony, and Robbins 1994, 466). The emergent stage of the ACM took place during the mid-to-late-1960s, virtually alongside the establishment of various NRMs such as the Unification Church (often called the Moonies), The Family International (also known as The Family, The Family of Love, and the Children of God), and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (also known as ISKCON or the Hare Krishna's) (Shupe, Bromley, and Darnell 2004, 187). The ACM initially consisted of small, localised groups of distressed family members who found their relative's choice of joining a NRM difficult to understand. There were dozens of small and informal groups, operating mainly as non-profit organisations centred on information, education and support (ibid., 188). These groups gradually grew into larger organisations concerned with specific NRMs such as Free our Sons and Daughters from the Children of God (FREECOG) and Citizens Engaged in Reuniting Families (CERF) associated with the Unification Church (Arweck 2006, 31-32). There were many attempts to create a confederated national organisation, though these attempts failed largely due to disputes over local autonomy and funding issues (Shupe, Bromley, and Darnell 2004, 188). 1979 finally saw the unification of several ACM leaders and the establishment of the first national ACM organisation, the Citizens Freedom Foundation (CFF), which would become America's largest ACM group (ibid.; Shupe, and Darnell 2008, 3). In the mid-1980s CFF

became the Cult Awareness Network which had begun as an offshoot group of CFF (ibid., 4).

- 11 Brainwashing quickly became the central doctrine of the ACM. But before they could associate the use of the term »brainwashing« with NRMs, the problem they were facing needed to be given a name that could function as a legitimating tool for their interference in the religious freedom of young adults. Thus, the word »cult« was appropriated. The Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition defines »cult« as »a particular form or system of religious worship; especially in reference to its external rites and ceremonies« (Simpson, Weiner, and Henry 1989, »cult«). Within the field of sociology it is taken to mean a religion that is held together by the devotion of its followers to a living charismatic leader, more than the group's adherence to a set of doctrines or beliefs. Following this understanding of the word, most world religions extant today, for example Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, can be described as being a cult at some point in their formative histories (Zablocki, and Robbins 2001, 5). Neither the dictionary definition nor the sociological understanding is the way in which the term is used in either popular culture or the media. In these areas, »cult« is, according to Massimo Introvigne in his article »Cults and Sects« in the Encyclopedia of Religion, a »stereotype-loaded term that [is] associated with new or unpopular religious movements« (Introvigne 2005, 2085). It has derogatory connotations, is inherently negative, and stigmatises those that adhere to such groups. The common media differentiation between »genuine religions« and »cults« suggests the belief that there is something inauthentic about »cults«: thus their right to exist can be easily questioned (Zablocki, and Robbins 2001, 5). Although responsible for popularising this now widespread understanding of the word, the ACM are not *entirely* to blame for this misinterpretation. »Cult« had been used as a criticism by conservative Christians to »identify theologically heretical churches« for many years prior (Shupe, Bromley, and Darnell 2004, 187). The ACM simply took this interpretation further.
- 12 Though armed with the now inherently negative term »cult«, the ACM still had to be careful to avoid accusations against the actual religious beliefs of »cults« as a basis for the attempted removal of practitioners, so as not to violate people's right to freedom of religion (ibid.). It was here that the brainwashing theory proved so useful. To begin with, the ACM accused »cults« of utilising a number of techniques such as administering drugs, deliberate and enforced malnutrition, and hypnotic techniques to explain why new converts suddenly professed beliefs that were apparently contradictory to those held prior. At some stage early on in the ACM's life, the movement became aware of the brainwashing research that was being undertaken by American psychologists and its association with the CIA disinformation campaign of the 1950s, though exactly who provided this crucial information is not clear (ibid., 188). This paradigm of unusual behaviour provided the group with much-needed justifications for their extreme reaction to »cults«. Just as the American government had used brainwashing as a propaganda tool, so too, did the ACM, claiming that »cult« members were victims. Thus, victims and their families would be free from the negative stigma associated with so-called deviant, »cultic« beliefs. The brainwashing theory also provided the ACM with a veneer of scientific legitimacy that would serve as the basis for the recovery of »cult« members (ibid.).

## A secular healing practice? The rise and fall of deprogramming

- 13 It was thought by the ACM that those who had been brainwashed into joining »cults«, and possibly even living in a totalistic community<sup>4</sup> with their »cult«, had not really developed an entirely new religious self. Rather, they were now experiencing life in a state of limbo; they had been stripped of their freedom of thought and had been transformed into something without true agency. They had been abnormally »depersonalised, dissociated and regressed to psychological infancy« (Anthony, and Robbins 2008, 1). It was this idea that led to the practice of what became known as »coercive deprogramming«. Because it was thought, by ACM members, that the supposedly brainwashed convert had acquired their new beliefs involuntarily, the ACM believed that counter-indoctrination was necessary; this did not have to be voluntary as the »victim« no longer had the capacity to make their own rational decisions. Deprogramming undertaken by so-called »specialists« fell into three categories. The first was »Voluntary Deprogramming« in which the deprogrammees agreed to non-coercively talk with a therapist or ex-member of their particular »cult« who attempted to mitigate the beliefs of the subject. »Extra-Legal Deprogramming« involved forceful abduction or kidnapping of the »cult« member by parents or a professional deprogrammer. These actions had no legal sanction; however, as officials usually considered such things as private family matters, very few deprogrammers were ever successfully prosecuted. The final type, which was the last to arise, was »Legal Deprogramming«, in which a court custody order was sought in an *ex parte* hearing by the family of the member in question (Robbins 1981, 212).
- 14 The forceful removal of »victims« from »cults« (Extra-Legal Deprogramming) was initially treated by the authorities as nothing more than a family problem involving unruly juveniles, though within a few short years both civil liberties groups and the NRMs themselves began legally contesting these abductions. It was at this time that the ACM saw the need for some kind of legitimate, legal way of gaining state-sanctioned custody of allegedly brainwashed adults. They found this in court-ordered conservatorships (Legal Deprogramming). Conservatorships were usually only used by families wishing to gain legal authority over infirm and elderly family members no longer capable of looking after their own legal affairs. Conservatorships by family members affiliated with, and taking the advice of, the ACM were acquired through use of the brainwashing theory which they claimed »diminished [the mental] capacity« of victims due to their »cultic« mind-control (Shupe, Bromley, and Darnell 2004, 190). Very quickly however, NRMs began contesting these conservatorships. A turning point for the practice was reached in 1977 with the *Katz v. Superior Court* case in which five Unification Church members disputed the legality of conservatorship orders sought by their families – who were associated with the ACM, the Freedom of Thought Foundation (Robbins 1981, 212) – that would have enabled their parents to commit them to a deprogramming centre (Shupe, Bromley, and Darnell 2004, 190). An appeals court overturned the ruling for the conservatorships. The court ruled that the conservatorships undermined sections of the California Probate Code, allowing temporary conservatorships under circumstances in which the subject was considered »likely to be deceived or imposed upon by artful and designing persons« (Robbins 1981, 212). The court ruled it unconstitutional; stipulating that only severely disabled persons



could be legally and forcefully removed from groups to which they voluntarily adhere (ibid.).

- 15 Generally those who experienced deprogramming remained apostates to their former »cults«, providing the ACM with evidence for the legitimacy of their ideologies and proving the efficacy of the service they were providing to »victim's« families. The service offered by the ACM was not necessarily the actual deprogramming; rather, they provided referrals for families to entrepreneurial, independent deprogrammers. This contributed to the creation of the network of ACM groups founded around an »information-referral exchange« with regard to »cultic« practices and available deprogrammers (Shupe, Bromley, and Darnell 2004, 189). Ultimately, though only valid in the state of California, the ruling in the *Katz v. Superior Court* controversy was detrimental to the ACM's advocacy of deprogramming and eventually they were forced to publicly reject it; however they clandestinely continued to refer families to deprogrammers (ibid., 191). The secret continuation of this practice was made public in 1996 when a civil suit was lodged against both the Cult Awareness Network (CAN) and three coercive deprogrammers in which a United Pentecostal Church member was violently removed from his congregation and was held against his will for a week, during which time he was physically abused by his deprogrammers. The subsequent court case was the definitive factor in a chain of events leading to the bankruptcy and demise of CAN in 1996 (Shupe, and Darnell 2008, 1). Ironically, CAN's files, name and logo were sold at auction to an association of religious liberty campaigners led by members of the Church of Scientology; one of the very groups CAN fought against (Introvigne 2006, 69).

## The return of a theory and its scholarly dismissal

- 16 The early 1990s saw a reduction in the popularity and immediacy of the ACM and its ideologies – primarily brainwashing and deprogramming – further compounded by the demise of CAN in 1996. However, the brainwashing argument reared its head again in 2003 when Elizabeth Smart, then only 14 years old, was abducted by Brian Mitchell and Wanda Barzee. Mitchell was a self-professed prophet explicating ideologies similar to fundamentalist Mormon groups, analogous to those Smart had been raised amongst. Barzee was his only follower. Smart was very clearly kidnapped, but her father claimed that her kidnappers »brainwashed« her, as it became apparent once she was returned to her parents that she could have easily escaped on many occasions throughout her nine-month captivity. This idea was supported by the fact that when she was initially found by police, she denied her identity. Others, including Smart's own uncle, deny that she was brainwashed, claiming that she was simply an impressionable young girl influenced by the »constant vigilance and physical coercion of her kidnappers« (Anthony 2008, 1). These factors are also important to Professor James T. Richardson, a critic of the »cultic brainwashing« theory, who believes that Smart's abduction had nothing to do with brainwashing and that her compliance with her captors was simply a way of surviving her captivity.
- 17 Smart's situation has been likened to that of Patty Hearst's. Hearst herself believes that Smart could not have escaped from Mitchell and Barzee even if she had had the opportunity as, similarly to the way she claims she was manipulated during her time with the Symbionese Liberation Front in 1974, Smart's freewill had been »psychologically overborne by ... her kidnapping and ideological indoctrination« (ibid.). However, Hearst's



claim that Smart's situation is the same as hers is not as straightforward as it may seem. Not only was Patty Hearst significantly older and more mature than Elizabeth Smart when she was abducted by the Symbionese Liberation Front (Hearst was 19, while Smart was only 14), and therefore much more equipped to resist the ideas and information presented to her by her captors, but from extensive research into the Hearst case it has been found that, similar to the eleven converts to communism after the Korean War, Hearst had expressed an attraction to totalistic worldviews before her kidnapping. In 1979 Shana Alexander published a book on Hearst in which she explained that Hearst also had previous behavioural problems, experienced increased alienation from her family, and had experimented with mind-altering drugs that led her to view the world in an increasingly dualistic manner (the corrupt mainstream vs. the counter-culture and »down-trodden« minorities) (ibid., 4). She shared such characteristics with other Symbionese Liberation Front members that had converted willingly to the group and were apparently not victims of brainwashing. From these facts it can be inferred that Hearst was a prime candidate for conversion to a NRM such as the Symbionese Liberation Front.

- 18 Due to these and other technical-legal factors it was ruled that Hearst had not been brainwashed and was deemed responsible for crimes committed while affiliated with the Symbionese Liberation Front, and was sentenced to prison for these actions (ibid.). Hearst has recanted her conversion to Symbionese Liberation Front ideologies and doctrines, and still maintains that she was brainwashed. During her trial, her defence was aided by the testimony of Margaret Singer, an influential proponent of the brainwashing theory. Singer called the brainwashing theory she outlined during legal testimony the »Systematic Manipulation of Social and Psychological Influence«. Though, as Dick Anthony points out in his essay, »Religious Movements and Brainwashing Litigation«, this theory »has never been published and thus has not been available for scholarly evaluation and critique« (Anthony 1993, 297), meaning that the only way in which one could evaluate her theory is by analysis of records of her trial and deposition testimonies. She has claimed that the views she has testified represented a »synthesis of the views of leading authorities« (ibid.), but this synthesis has never been critically reviewed by scholars, and could be the reason behind why the views to which she testified were often different to those that she published (ibid.).
- 19 Several highly regarded scholars including Thomas Robbins, Eileen Barker, John Hall, David Bromley, Gordon Melton, Marc Galanter and Dick Anthony among many others, have conducted research and critiques on various NRMs. They have satisfactorily convinced courts that there is no viable theory for »brainwashing« that is based on methodologically sound scientific research, and have convincingly refuted the ideas of brainwashing advocates like Singer (Anthony 2008, 2-3). Unfortunately however, survey evidence has indicated that the supposed accuracy of a »cultic brainwashing« method, and probably the ACM's usage of the term »cult«, is now so thoroughly ingrained in the general public's minds that attempts to rectify its interpretation and popular meaning would be virtually impossible (Anthony, and Robbins 1994, 467). This is evident in the fact that Hearst has been able to influence and convince a significant portion of the educated public that she was »brainwashed« and therefore not responsible for the crimes she committed. The jury appointed to her case was presented with much more evidence and had a far more comprehensive knowledge of the facts surrounding her case than the

general public that has been so influenced by her claims, and consequently found her guilty of her crimes (Anthony 2008, 6).

- 20 There is far less evidence available on the circumstances surrounding the Elizabeth Smart abduction than there is for the Patty Hearst case. This means that from the point of view of a scientific theory, it is unlikely that objective scholarly analysis will be able to make real conclusive arguments about Smart's experience. Although, there are so-called brainwashing experts that claim to have extensive knowledge of her captivity and have used these »facts« to argue that Smart was brainwashed, the way in which they have deduced such arguments is not consistent with a genuine scientific approach and must therefore be looked upon with a great deal of caution (ibid.)

## Conclusions

- 21 The »brainwashing theory« has been proved false by a number of highly-regarded scholars, although there are still a small number that attest to the legitimacy of the theory. The theory was initially a war-time research project devised in order to create more effectively deployable secret agents. This aim was never achieved and after more than two decades of extensive research by the CIA, the theory was renounced as a failure and it was agreed that there is no scientifically legitimate way to coercively indoctrinate someone against his or her will. Nevertheless, the CIA used the unproven theory as a propaganda tool to explain the conversion of American POWs to communism in the 1950s. It was this disinformation campaign that ultimately led to the appropriation of the theory by the emergent ACM in the USA and their subsequent development of a deprogramming technique.
- 22 The methods employed during deprogramming could be perceived as just as coercive, and in some case more so, than the methods that the ACM claim were used by so-called »cults« to allegedly indoctrinate their devotees. The extremity and illegality of this practice, with regard to the rejection of the subjects' personal right to religious freedom, ensured that one of the ACM's main national organisations, CAN, was forced to recant its support for it, although in 1996 it was caught red-handed, surreptitiously endorsing it. This was the last in a series of events that led to the demise of CAN and its purchase by representatives of one of the very groups it was trying to protect people from: the Church of Scientology. The demise of CAN forced an overhaul of the ACM, and significant re-thinking into the way they »fight« the perceived threat of »cults«.
- 23 The wider ACM in general, not just CAN, has done such damage with their message of the danger of »cults« and their alleged use of »brainwashing«, that those NRMs accused of the practice – and indeed those that are not, but are merely a misunderstood new religion – are unlikely to recover from the stigma of these terms, and it seems they will be perpetually looked upon with suspicion and ridicule by the general public. Thus, it is possible to see an irony in the fact that CAN was bought by members of the Church of Scientology.
- 24 The ACM professed a theory that many of its members knew had no scientific legitimacy, and proceeded with attempts to forcefully indoctrinate unwilling adults, trying to convert them to their own set of beliefs, thus stripping the subject of their free will. It could be argued that this behaviour was, in the least, equal, and at the most extreme, far worse, than the behaviours NRMs were being accused of; particularly when one considers

the fact that most of the people being »saved« from these »cults« were willing adults that joined the NRMs freely.

- 25 When faced with the facts of this discussion, I ask the reader to consider this question: were the ideologies and practices of the pre-1996 ACM really that different from the ideologies and practices they believed were held by the so-called »cults« they were trying to »save« people from? I believe that the distinction is a difficult one to make indeed.

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## NOTES

1. When presented in quotation marks in this paper, »cult« signifies the pejorative, emic use of the term by the anti-cult movement. NRM, without quotation marks, will be used as the etic descriptor of new religious movements.
2. Patty Hearst, born in 1954, is an heiress to her Great-Grandfathers millions. In 1974, the socialite was abducted by the NRM, the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA). During her time with the SLA, Hearst was involved in an armed bank robbery, carried out by the group. She was imprisoned for two years for her crimes. However, partly due to her claims that she had been brainwashed, her sentence was later commuted. Hearst's claims of brainwashing remain a highly debated issue.
3. Elizabeth Smart, born in 1987, was abducted by Brian Mitchell and Wanda Barzee in 2004. Mitchell was a self-proclaimed prophet that aligned himself with Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints teachings on polygamy. He forced Smart to marry him, making her his second wife (Barzee was his first). The issue of »brainwashing« relates to the Smart case in that, when she was found, nine months after her abduction, just eighteen miles from her home, Smart initially denied her identity to authorities, and it later became clear that she could have returned home on many occasions. However, for whatever reason, she chose not to. Her father alleges she was brainwashed into following Mitchells teachings. Others, including her uncle, do not believe she was brainwashed, rather, she was simply a scared young girl, held against her will by her captors.
4. Robert Lifton defines a totalistic community as a group exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: 1) milieu control or control of all communication within a group; 2) mystical manipulation or the legitimization of deception in terms of a higher truth; 3) a demand for purity; 4) an ethos of confession; 5) the development of a sacred science to explain everything; 6) a loading or control of language; 7) the valuing of doctrine over the person; 8) a belief in the ability to determine who has the right to exist. See: Lifton 1999, 25-26.

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## ABSTRACTS

The »problem« of cults, or new religious movements (NRMs), has been a polarising issue for centuries. The massive culture shift that took place in the 1960s saw the »problem« of cults coupled with the emergent »brainwashing« theory. This article sheds light on exactly what this so-called brainwashing theory is, providing ample evidence for its illegitimacy as an explanation as to why people join new religious movements. Tracing the history of the theory back to its inception by secret arms of both the US government and Nazi Germany, the article provides evidence for the falsity of the theory. The two concepts – brainwashing and cults – were brought together by the »anti-cult movement« (ACM) in the United States in the 1960s. After detailing these initial concepts, the article moves on to the history and development of the ACM, which accused many NRMs of using »cultic brainwashing« techniques in order to gain converts. In order to rid »victims« of these beliefs, the ACM often used violent and dangerous »deprogramming« techniques leading to the eventual downfall of the movement in 1996. Moreover, the author invites the reader to see the parallels between the actions of the alleged »cults« and those of the ACM, highlighting that the two are not so different.

Das Thema »Sekten« (engl.: »cults«) oder »Neue Religiöse Bewegungen« (NRMs) wird in der Öffentlichkeit seit Jahrzehnten kontrovers diskutiert. Im Kontext der massiven kulturellen Transformationsprozesse der 1960er Jahre erschien die Debatte um das »Sektenproblem« häufig im Lichte einer Theorie der »Gehirnwäsche«. Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich zunächst mit dem Inhalt und der zentralen These dieser Theorie. Dann zeigt er auf, dass sie nicht dafür geeignet ist zu erklären, warum Menschen sich »Neuen Religiösen Bewegungen« anschließen. Ihre Geschichte bis zu ihrer Entstehung im Kontext von Ermittlungsmethoden von Geheimdiensten in den USA und Nazi-Deutschland zurückverfolgend, wird die Theorie in diesem Artikel falsifiziert. Die »Anti-Sekten-Bewegung« (engl. »anti-cult movement«; ACM) in den USA koppelte die Konzepte »Sekte« und »Gehirnwäsche« in den 1960er Jahren aneinander. Sie werden zu Beginn des Artikels erläutert. Sodann wird die Geschichte der »Anti-Sekten-Bewegung« nachgezeichnet. Die Bewegung warf den »Neuen Religiösen Bewegungen« in Amerika den Gebrauch von »Gehirnwäsche«-Techniken vor, um Anhänger/-innen zu gewinnen. Zudem entwickelte sie rabiate und gefährliche Techniken zur »Deprogrammierung« vermeintlicher Sekten-Opfer, die 1996 schließlich zu einem Verbot der Bewegung führten. Die Autorin zeigt Parallelen auf zwischen den Techniken, welche die »Anti-Sekten-Bewegung« den »Neuen Religiösen Bewegungen« unterstellte, und den Techniken, die sie zur »Deprogrammierung« selbst anwendete.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Brainwashing, Cult, New Religious Movements, United States of America, Deprogramming

**Schlüsselwörter:** Gehirnwäsche, Kult, Neue Religiöse Bewegungen, Vereinigte Staaten von Amerika, Entprogrammierung

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