

Women's Rights Abuses inside the MEK

Cults are terrifying, but they're even worse for women

Women's abilities to control their own reproductive choices are often determined by cult leaders.

By Alexandra Stein

In a cult, the ability to decide if and when to have a child — perhaps the most basic decision in a woman's life — is taken over by the leader as a demonstration of the leader's control and in an attempt to undermine the attachment between mother and child. The goal is to focus all feelings of attachment on the leader or group, and on them alone.

This is one reason why, though women and men both suffer in the iron grip of charismatic and authoritarian cult leaders, women followers face a unique set of life-altering issues — and those unique issues often become the focus of media coverage of cult cases. Women's sexual lives, their lives as mothers and their ability to control their own reproductive choices are all upended within cultic organizations.

For instance, former members from both Scientology and the New York-based political cult the Newman Tendency have reported women being forced to terminate pregnancies so as not to interfere with their duties to the organizations. On the opposite end of the spectrum, though, cults such as the Children of God controlled reproduction by forbidding any form of birth control whatsoever. Another cult leader reportedly decided who was "developed enough" to have children and who was not as a way to individually control, punish or reward women followers.

If and when a child is born a whole new series of controls may be evident. Many groups separate mothers and children for long periods of time, or raise them communally (as in David Koresh's Branch Davidians, where children barely knew who their mothers were). Scientology recruits young teenagers and even pre-teens to the Sea Org, their secretive inner organization, separating them from their parents, sometimes for years.

Not all groups interfere so directly with parent-child attachment, but all will keep members extremely busy so that mothers have little time to give the kind of attention to their children that they otherwise might. And, what parental attention is available to children may have to be played out within the particular structure of the group. Mothers in the Watchtower organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, may have to take their young children out for hours every week to "witness" to the public and, when not witnessing, nearly every evening is devoted to study of JW materials either at home or at the Kingdom Hall.

Recently, thousands of cases are being exposed of child abuse and sexual abuse of women in the JWs, where the organization refused to take judicial action against the accused unless victims could comply with its "two witness rule" — a horrific rule that stated that abuse could not be proven unless the victim could provide two eyewitnesses to the same abusive event. Mothers in these types of closed cultic groups then end up in a position in which they are unable to protect their children.

TERROR, LOVE & BRAINWASHING

ATTACHMENT IN CULTS
AND TOTALITARIAN SYSTEMS

ALEXANDRA STEIN

Women and men's sexuality and relationships are controlled in cults, of course, but in different ways. It is now well known that, in the Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints, young women were married off to older men who already had up to 60 or 80 wives. (The leader of that group, Warren Jeffs, is now doing time for aggravated sexual assault of underage girls.) Meanwhile the "extra" boys left over as a result of these plural marriages were booted out of the cult and left on the edge of the highway in the Arizona desert to fend for themselves.

In my work, I have met women who have come out of a range of cults — yoga-based groups, cults centered around the use of the hallucinogen ayuhuesca and a pentecostal Nigerian cult, where women were groomed for sex with the leader. In the latter case, some women in the cult were kept in a dormitory for months with very little access to the outside and "allowed" to eat the leftovers from the leader's lunch plate as a "privilege" as part of grooming them for sexual activity. The Children of God cult simply pimped women as prostitutes for "the Lord".

This type of sexual abuse is often sold as way to become closer to the spirits or to god; it's represented to adherents as not really "sex" at all, but a form of spiritual practice.

Other groups arrange marriages, sometimes to a partner the woman has never met, as happens with Unification Church (Moonie) mass weddings. The media tends to portray these particular events as oddball and laughable but, in my view, it is simple sexual abuse at worst and exploitation at best. An Iranian terrorist cult, the Mujahedin e Khalq, controlled marriage by forcing all its members to divorce in a kind of ideological purification. ISIS, a terrorist cult, entices female recruits with promises of heroic marriage to fighters.

In short, women's right to control their bodies, their child-bearing, their sexuality and their mothering are all taken away in cults as the leader grabs control of these most intimate parts of their lives. Women don't choose this: They are groomed, brought in slowly and gradually separated from their previous lives and close relationships. Once isolated within the cult, and suffocated within its closed world, it becomes almost impossible for followers to maintain their independence. At a certain point, it becomes easier to simply give in, stop thinking and accept the new norms.

Cult leaders do this as part of a system of control; they engage in many of the same tactics of control as one sees in domestic violence cases. The leader slowly gains control of every element of a woman's life and cuts off her close relationships, portraying him or herself as the sole remaining figure to whom the woman should turn; this frightening abuser confusingly becomes the apparent "safe haven". This results in a "trauma bond" through which everything outside of the group and the relationship with the leader feels threatening, and the woman is no longer able to think clearly about her own survival needs. But, when it is the leader and the group that is the real threat, it creates a dangerous situation in which a woman can no longer trust her own feelings and perceptions.

It would be a mistake to think this only happens to people in physically isolated communes and faraway places: Cults are truly everywhere in modern life, from the neighbor who invites you to join a pyramid scheme selling soap, to the "personal transformation" coaching sessions advertised on Facebook, to the great sales job offered to young graduates or to that new church with the joyful music that has just opened up down the street. But be careful when you step over the threshold. Once in it can be very hard to get out.

Women can protect themselves and their children by learning how to recognize the warning signs and manipulative methods of coercive groups and relationships. Unless we do so, we can all be vulnerable to the appealing outside face that cults present to the world.



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Source: NBC NEWS

Banning Contact with Families in the Mojahedin-e Khalq Cult

Introduction

In cults and totalistic groups, it is necessary to isolate members from loved ones and wholly dominate them in order to maintain the system. These groups use different methods to control members' relations with each other. However, the effect is the same, i.e., to undermine close relationships (even if such a relationship exists only in a person's internal world) aiming to leave the followers dependent on the group. A totalistic ideology alone – without the element of control of relationships – cannot lead to brainwashing, since, these ideologies are based on the ability to justify limitation and control of relations.

It is vitally important therefore to give close attention to how these groups manage and control close relationships – both those to others within the group as well as to people outside of the group. Seemingly opposite policies in different groups result in the same attack on close attachments. For example, some groups, such as the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MeK), might decree celibacy and rupture existing relationships. The UFO cult Heaven's Gate took this to even more of an extreme when several men were castrated.

But the same result – preventing the formation of close relationships – is also achieved through enforced polygamy, promiscuity, pedophilia, arrangement of relationships (where not a cultural norm, and conducted by the group rather than by the family), ordering of separations, forced abortions or the opposite: banning of contraception or abortion. The goal is, above all, to prevent alternate safe havens and non-group alliances from developing in personal relationships. Totalistic groups therefore seek to curtail all forms of attachment relationships other than that to the leader or group.

For example, the order of things in the LaRouche organization was: Break with your parents and your past, your jobs and your schools; maintain loveless, "political" relations with your husband or wife, making sure that any heterodoxy is intervened on by the leadership; destroy your own children; avoid contact with the "outside" world. "Lyn is Your Father." It is notable that, like Lyndon LaRouche, many totalistic leaders take on identities that reflect family roles, and followers are then required to use that name when referring to the leader.

For instance, Maryam Rajavi, of the Iranian political cult the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, acted as a kind of front for the leader, Masoud Rajavi, and was known as the group's "Ideological Mother."

Families of origin

New members of cults are predictably pulled away from their families of origin (unless the group can also recruit other family members or exploit their resources) and in fact this is often the first time people become aware of cultic activity – when their son or daughter becomes estranged from the family. Similarly, in totalitarian societies, allegiance to family must come second to allegiance to the leader.

John Garang, leader of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), told his child soldiers: “If your mother is against us, you kill her; if your father is against us, you kill him. The SPLA is your family now.”¹⁴ And we now know that child soldiers in ISIS/Daesh training camps are also being told their “parents were unbelievers and that our first job was to go back to kill them.”

In totalitarian societies then, distrust within families is mandated, with severe punishments on hand if a family member’s suspected disloyalty is not immediately reported. This imposed rejection or distrust of the family of origin removes a fundamental source of support for people.



Romantic relationships

Independent adults are generally expected to find and settle with a sexual partner. The intimacy of such relationships can create trusting “islands of resistance” that threaten the total domination by the cultic system, and so a variety of methods have been created by leaders to interfere with the creation of secure – or at least organized and predictable – adult romantic relationships. As a general rule, people entering cults will eventually be separated from their partners unless that partner can also be recruited. But even if both persons are in the group, the relationship must still be controlled.

Cults may arrange marriages or relationships, require members to seek permission before entering into an intimate relationship and/or simply break up any relationship that threatens to become too close, developing trust within the private realm of the couple greater than that of the group. As with family of origin and romantic relationships, so it goes with close friendships. On entering a cult, the recruit must eventually give up non-cult friendships. Close friendships can also become islands of resistance, where the emotional support and conversation between friends provides both a safe haven and a shared view of the reality of the oppressive situation, thus potentially defeating the deceptive totalistic interpretation of what is going on.

Reproduction and children

The totalistic system controls the bond between parents and their children in multiple ways: through control of conception and pregnancy, discouraging the parent-child bond, control of time spent with the child, actual or threatened removal of the child from the parents, monitoring and judging the parent/child relationship, and generally directing child-rearing practices. Once the child arrives: “parents in essence turn over the custody of their children to a third party, so that the leader or the group becomes the actual custodian of the children.” Similarly, forced abortions have been reported from organizations.

Women were told that children would get in the way of the group’s work. One former Newman Tendency member observed that few of the “lifers” – long-term leadership members – have children. Most of these lifers are women who are now in their 50s and past child-bearing age. Thus they have sacrificed their fertile years to the demands of the group. Within the group this is seen as a noble act, necessary for the success of the revolutionary project.

Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization

Ex-MEK member Eduard Termado who had been a member for 12 years is now living in Germany. He now says joining the MEK was the biggest mistake of his life and he has expressed that feeling in an unusual way. He has married and produced three children. “My family is my protest against the MEK,” he says in a BBC interview. There are many other stories. Children who never forgave their parents for abandoning them. Children who did forgive and are now joyously reunited. Divorcees who have got out of the organization saying they still love their former spouses who are still in.

To further clarify the cult-like nature of the MEK and their policies towards family relationships, experiences of the Nayeb Agha’s are particularly helpful. Mahtab was born in Saint Diego, the US, in 1980. Her father Hassan Nayeb Agha and her mother Mitra Yusefi were sympathizers of the Mujahedin Khalq Organization. Then, the parents took Mahtab and her brother Shahab to Camp Ashraf, Iraq to join the MEK. It was difficult or almost impossible to live a family life in Camp Ashraf. Members of the families lived in separated bases and they were just allowed to meet each other in the weekends. Life in the organization distresses Mahtab with sadness and grieves of other children; she has friends who have lost their parents in the group’s operations. Now, they have “fake mothers” whom they do not love, as Mahtab tells her mother who replaces the term with “ideological mother” in the book. In 1990, Mahtab and her brother were separated from their parents and were sent to Europe together with hundreds of other MEK children. Mahtab and Shahab were adopted by a couple, Soheila and Farhad, who were friends of their parents, in Sweden. After the MEK leaders forced members to divorce, Mitra started conflicting the leaders and asked to leave the group. It took her a year to leave Iraq and join her children in Sweden, in 1991. She began to write the book of her life experience of which a large part is about the complications and the troubles the MEK imposed on her and her family. In page 314 of the diary book, Mitra Yusefi writes about the nightmares that Mahtab suffered from as the consequence of the years of separation from parents and loneliness. “Mahtab sometimes get angry and cries about the stress she suffered during those years,” she writes. In Mahtab’s nightmares, everyone has left Iraq except her who has been left there alone. The mother, Mitra, tried her best to convince her husband, Mahtab’s father, Hassan, to leave the MEK and join his family in Sweden but she failed.

Regarding the prevention of contact with families, there are numerous similar examples. According to The Intercept, Reza Sadeghi had effectively given his life to the MEK. A 26-year veteran of the group, he had not left Camp Ashraf for over a decade. During that time, he’d had no contact with his family or news of them. The MEK leadership had forced him and most of the other cadres living at Camp Ashraf to abandon even their closest relationships. Most painful for Sadeghi were thoughts of his son, Paul, his only child, now 16 years old.

Sadeghi hadn't seen or spoken to Paul since he'd arrived in Iraq. While he was in Iraq, Sadeghi decided to leave Paul, who was then almost 5 years old and had been born in Canada, with Sadeghi's parents in Iran. At the time, Paul had never met his grandparents or been to Iran. . His MEK commander told Sadeghi that Paul would be sent back to Toronto to live with his mother, a Canadian woman whom Sadeghi had divorced not long after their son was born. Sadeghi agreed to stay.

Sadeghi got only rare updates about Paul during the 10 years he spent in Ashraf. Members were forbidden from discussing family or friends who were not MEK members. When he did ask about his son, they always told him that the boy was well, living in Toronto with Sadeghi's ex-wife and receiving hundreds of dollars in support every month from the group. Sadeghi's old friend from Toronto who had gone to Camp Ashraf to visit him told him something that seemed impossible. His son, the friend said, was not in Canada at all. He had never left Iran and was being raised by Sadeghi's parents there. Sadeghi's Canadian ex-wife had filed a report with Canadian authorities, believing that Sadeghi had kidnapped the boy. Paul was declared a missing child by the Royal Mounted Canadian Police. His picture had even been printed on milk cartons in Canada in the hope that someone might find him and return him to his mother. Sadeghi abruptly left his friend and marched to his commander's office. He told her that he was leaving the organization to retrieve his son. His commander called a group of other MEK members to detain him. Suddenly, about a dozen of Sadeghi's comrades were grabbing him, trying to push and lift him into the back seat of a nearby Toyota pickup. The MEK members shoved him into the back of the truck, pinning him to the floor with their bodies. The truck started driving. "You're dead," one of Sadeghi's captors told him. "We are going to put you in the ground, and no one will ever know what happened to you." Forced disappearances and solitary confinement were not uncommon at Camp Ashraf, and Sadeghi was sure he would be executed. His only chance, he thought, was to try to kick out the window of the truck hoping the commotion would attract attention. He slammed his foot against the glass as the others fought to restrain him. The windows didn't break, but as the truck slowed to turn onto the camp's main road, it approached two American soldiers patrolling the road in a Humvee.

The soldiers stopped the truck and ordered everyone out. The men in the back got off Sadeghi and he raised himself up. "I want to leave the MEK," he told the Americans in English. "I need your help." The Americans took Sadeghi past the razor wire and armed Humvees and into their own makeshift military compound next door. Once inside, Sadeghi asked to make a phone call. He still had the phone number of his brother who lived in Canada. He called him and asked for their parents' number in Iran. After so much time without a word, they didn't even know whether Sadeghi was alive or dead. "When my mother picked up the phone, all I could say was hello. I didn't know what else to say to her," he recalled recently. "She recognized my voice and just started crying."

The next example is Issa Azadeh, a senior operative who left the group in 2014 after 34 years, who told The Intercept about his experience inside the MEK. He said, "the first time when I got into the internet, I saw the truth. I searched about cults. I realized we were robots. I realized that there was no difference between [Joseph] Stalin and Massoud Rajavi." For MEK members Rajavi was right after God. This is something that they put in our minds. Over the years, minute by minute, month by month, year by year, they put that in our minds. If you doubt Rajavi, it means that you doubt God. "Rajavi told us that you have to divorce your family completely," Azadeh said. The leader told his acolytes that "family is the main poison for you guys" and counseled them that if their siblings or other relatives showed up at Camp Ashraf, the MEK members would be required to kill them. Azadeh was shocked. "At one time, family for MEK was honor," he said. "Then Rajavi announced that family is poison or shame."

"[Rajavi] said: 'Don't think about women. That's not your life,'" Azadeh recalled. "You have only one aim and one target: to obey everything I say and to overthrow the Iranian government."

Despite all these flagrant violations of human and women's rights in the MeK, the leader of this group still tries to inform her imaginary audience about their rights. "Women are free to choose their place of residence, their occupation, and education," she says. "They have a right to freely choose their spouse, to freely travel, to exit the country, to divorce, and to have custody over their children."

The "freedom to choose spouse" is unheard of in Maryam Rajavi's group. According to the group's regulations, celibacy is mandatory. Nobody has married in the MEK since the so-called ideological revolution that was launched by the group's disappeared leader Massoud Rajavi. The revolution required married members to divorce their spouses and single members to vow for long-life celibacy. However, Massoud Rajavi was the only person who later married a group of female members simultaneously.

She also speaks of the rights "to freely travel, to exit the country, to divorce, and to have custody over their children". There are at least 400 children of the MEK members who have been separated from their parents, orphaned in different countries and not allowed to contact their mothers because they are not permitted to enter the camp and mothers are not permitted to travel out of the camp either. These are only part of the contradictions observed in the acts and discourse of the MeK's leader. Maryam Rajavi must be held accountable and explain about these issues where the rights of her female followers are violated.

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Women's Rights Abuses inside the MEK

The Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization is one of the rare terrorist groups whose subjects and victims do not fall into a simple classification and cover a wide range of innocent civilians. The MEK tortures and violates the rights of its own members particularly women's rights.

MEK has confined hundreds of women to its walled compound, once in northeast Iraq and now in southeast Europe, on the pretext of protecting their rights. A number of violations of women's rights have been reported so far by a number of its defected members and international rights groups and institutions.

Human Rights Watch

One of the main reports on the MEK's rights abuses was released in May 2005 by Human Rights Watch, which was quite clear on the MEK's abuses. One of the chapters of the book details the "compulsory divorce" within the MEK camps, where the members were forced to renounce their emotional ties to their spouses through divorce.

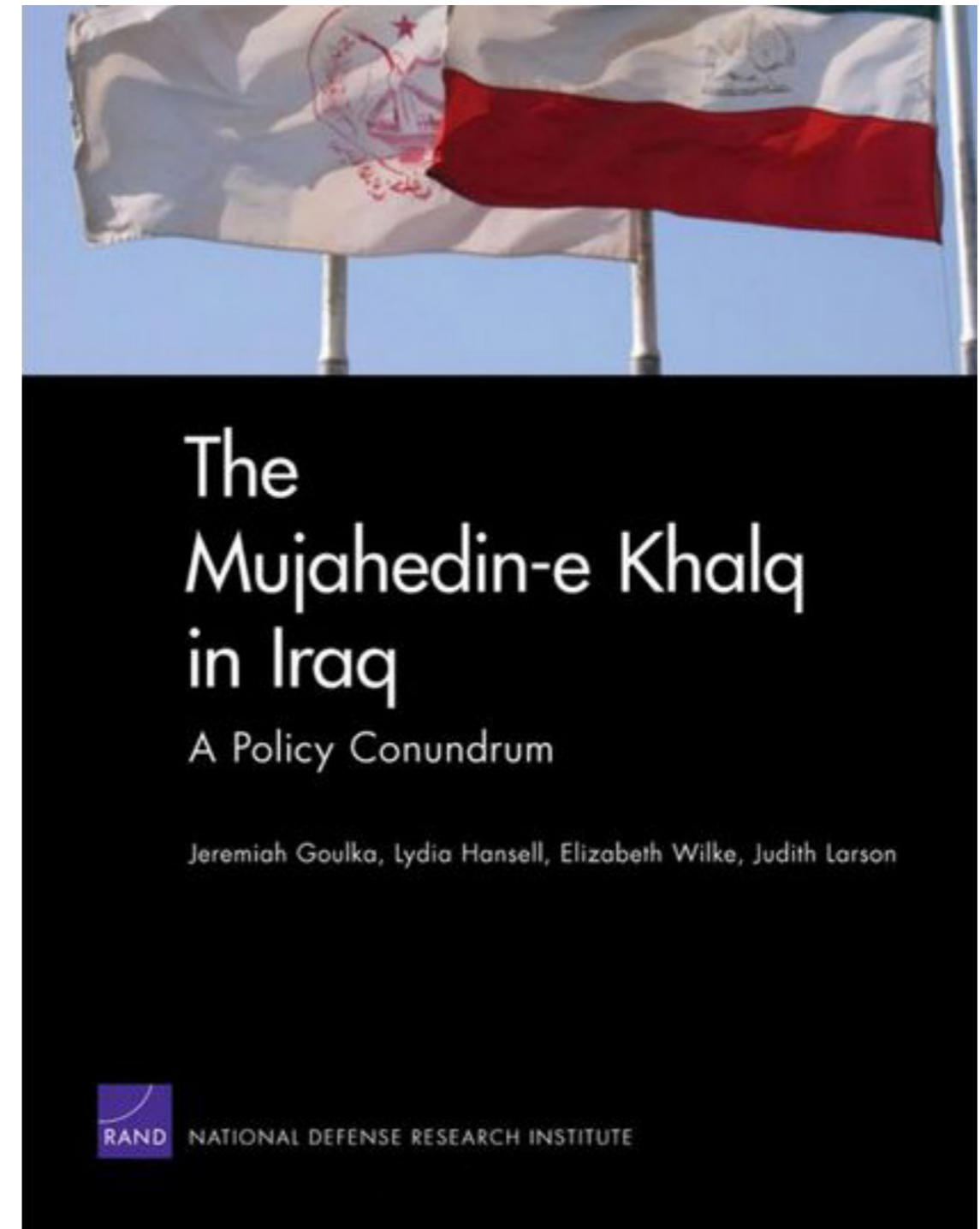
The report quotes one of these members as saying how this process unfolded following the group's humiliating defeat in its last offensive within the Iranian borders in late 1980s:

"The first thing I was required to do in Baghdad was watch a videotape of an ideological meeting for "executive and high-ranking members." The meeting, called "Imam Zaman," started with a simple question: "To whom do we owe all our achievements and everything that we have?" ... Rajavi did not claim, as I thought he might, to be the Imam of our times, but merely said we owed everything to Imam Zaman... The object was to show that we could reach Tehran if we were more united with our leader, as he was with Imam Zaman and God. He was ready to sacrifice everything he had (which in fact meant all of us!) for God, asserting that the only thing on his mind was doing the will of God.... We were expected to draw the conclusion that no "buffer" existed between Rajavi and Imam Zaman; yet there was a buffer between ourselves and him [Rajavi] ... which prevented us from seeing him clearly. This "buffer" was our weakness. If we could recognize that, we would see why and how we had failed in Operation Forogh [Eternal Light] and elsewhere. Masoud and Maryam [Rajavi] had no doubt that the buffer was in all our cases our existing spouse."

The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq; A Policy Conundrum

The second report is a 2009 report from the nonpartisan Rand Corporation. Titled as The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum, the report revealed that MEK members were strictly segregated by gender and they were "severely socially and emotionally isolated, even within their communal living arrangements. Relatives and former spouses are placed in different compounds and are not allowed to see each other."

In another part of the report, the gender segregation in MEK camps is highlighted, disputing the group's claims of sexual equality and so forth: "Housing is segregated by gender, and in other buildings, lines are painted down the middle of hallways, separating them into men's and women's sides. Men and women below the leadership level are prohibited from contact with one another unless they have obtained official case-by-case permission. Shaking hands is prohibited across genders. Even the gas station at Camp Ashraf has separate hours for men and women."



US Court of Appeal

The third report citing violations of women's rights by MEK is one of documents obtained by the US Court of Appeals in 2010. In January 2010, MEK challenged its FTO status before the US Court of Appeals for the fourth time. During the briefing in this case, the US Secretary of State provided unclassified record with formerly classified materials to the court in order to sustain the MKO listing.

"Among the disclosures in the declassified material: the MEK trained females at Camp Ashraf in Iraq to perform suicide attacks in Karbala."

From the above reports and dozens of other defected members' accounts, it can be concluded that MEK, despite its outrageous claims, does not hesitate to use women as a tool and it also deprives them of their most basic rights, i.e. being free to have marital relations.

Sterilization of women in the Mujahedin-e-Khalq

Testimony of members who managed to escape from the organization

About two decades after the Mujahedin-e-Khalq forced all member couples to divorce during the “forced divorce” operation, in another operation called “Ideal Peak” or “Peak of Pride”, they sterilized women in the organization so that they would never think about the future in which they want to become mothers. These anti-human rights actions of the MEK were met with a reaction from the Human Rights Watch and condemned the Rajavi sect for carrying out these anti-human rights actions. The theorist of this operation was Massoud Rajavi and has been done by one of the doctors of the organization, Nafiseh Badamchi. It was also conducted under the direct supervision of Maryam Rajavi and under the management of two women of the organization named “Kobra Tahmasebi” and “Zohreh Bani Jamal”.

Operation “Ideal Peak” is the stage that each of the women members of the organization has to do in order to establish a relationship with Maryam and Massoud Rajavi. Nasrin Ebrahimi, who was herself a member of the leadership council of the MEK and the National Council of Resistance, refused to do so and eventually managed to escape from the organization.

On September 9, 2008, a meeting at the European Parliament was held by the European Parliament’s Delegation for relations with Iran. The purpose and focus of this meeting were to discuss about the “Mujahedin-e-Khalq and National Council of Resistance and their activities”. Among those invited was Nasrin Ebrahimi, who has been living in Camp Ashraf since the age of 16 and was able to escape after 10 years. She said about the forced sterilization of women in Camp Ashraf by the MEK: “Another thing that is done to kill any hope in women is forcing women to have a hysterectomy. This is done under various pretexts on women, and so far, more than ten percent of women have had their wombs removed.” She explained that they intended to do such a thing to her, but they did not succeed. She asked the parliamentary delegation to send specialists and doctors to Camp Ashraf to investigate the matter.

Following the revelation of Nasrin Ebrahimi about the implementation of the operation “Ideal Peak” during which they sterilize women members of this organization, in an interview with MPR, Batool Soltani, another former member of the organization’s leadership council based at Camp Ashraf in Iraq, revealed other aspects of the incident and the names of the perpetrators. So far, Soltani has talked to 20 international publications and mass media about the dimensions of “Ideal peak” operation and described Nafiseh Badamchi’s method of surgery and removal of the wombs of women members of the organization: “In this regard, the person who has made a revolution must reach the peak that the conquest of this peak in the organization becomes objective for women through sterilization. this operation, actually destroys the last feminine emotions, the evolved element of the ideological apparatus of the Rajavi reach to the point of utter despair, and as a result, it stays in the organization forever.”

Recalling one of the meetings of the leadership council of the MEK, she said: “In this meeting, Nafiseh Badamchi was informed by Massoud Rajavi that her first and most important responsibility is to remove the women’s wombs and she was getting concessions from Massoud himself for increasing the number of women who had a hysterectomy, and of course, she was also responsible for justifying the relief staff or nurses. Sterilization would be a means of focusing the women’s minds. They said that this organ of the body, the womb, has made women want to be mothers someday and return to normal life,” Sultani said. “And so, visits with women began, to get them to go in groups of 20 or 30 to have a hysterectomy.”

Women were scheduled for appointments at the MEK hospital in Camp Ashraf. The procedures would be carried out by a female MEK member who had been trained as a doctor, assisted by a local Iraqi physician. At first, Sultani resisted, but finally “the pressure was so great that it broke my resistance, and I agreed that I, too, should make an appointment,” she said. “In other words, they gave so many and varied arguments for me to go to the hospital that I had no choice.”

Sultani said she finally defected from the MEK in 2006 after she was scheduled for the surgery but before it could be carried out.

“How many women have reached the castle?” Rajavi later asked in a meeting Sultani attended, referring to what she called the “women who had abandoned the last vestiges of their sexual world and were operated on.” The doctor answered that there had been 50 so far. By the time I was in the Rajavi sect, I knew that more than 150 women had been operated on.

Zahra Sadat Bagheri also revealed the names of 95 women who had been sterilized in the organization, including Kobra Tahmasebi (Hajar), Sedigheh Khodaei Sefat, Habibeh Tavoli, Houri Seyyedi, Houri Charandabi, Shahrbanoo Sangari, Tahereh Zaranji, Ensieh Dolatshahi, Maryam Nizam-ol-Molki, Farah Emami, Ensieh Gholizadeh, Fatemeh Hamedani, Ashraf Taghvaei and etc.

Reza Sadeghi, another member who managed to escape from the organization, said in an interview with The Intercept: “Yet despite the harm it has caused to Iranians and others, the MEK’s most numerous victims may have been its own members. Interviews with six defectors in Europe reveal that the MEK has isolated, disappeared, and tortured many of its cadres into submission, including forcing dozens of female members to have sex with Rajavi and undergo medical sterilization so they could devote themselves more fully to the leader and his cause.”

Another female member of the High Council at Camp Ashraf, whom The Intercept agreed to identify only as Sima, said she joined the MEK in the 1980s and left it in 2014. Sima was confined to one section of Camp Ashraf, unable to move freely on her own. Like Batool Sultani, Sima described an intense form of psychosexual manipulation by Rajavi that she said became an integral tool for controlling female cadres. Years earlier, in 1995, “Rajavi gave every single woman in the organization a pendant and told us that we are all connected to him and to no other man,” Sima said. She was forced to divorce her husband and, like Sultani, eventually became sexually involved with Rajavi.

Around 1998, an even more chilling directive came down from Rajavi to the female members of the organization. “I see some obstacles which have prevented us from reaching our goals and achieving victory,” Rajavi told members of the group, Sultani recalled. “That obstacle is hope for the future. We want to eliminate any kind of hope for the future from your mind. You are either with us or not!”

After much urging from MEK leaders, Sima said she finally agreed to have her ovaries surgically removed in 2011. “When you are under brainwashing, you would do anything and everything,” she told The Intercept. “You would do any military operation, you would go and have sexual relations with your leader, you would sell information and intelligence. We were under constant control by the leader.”

Excerpt from Zahra Sadat Mirbagheri’s note on the occasion of March 8, International Women’s Day (another woman who was succeed to escape from MEK): “The women of the organization are deprived of their basic human rights, namely the right to marry and become mothers and to contact their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and relatives, a right that is not forbidden anywhere in the world except in the dangerous sectarian organization of Mujahedin-e-Khalq. The exploitation and oppression of these women are far beyond imagination, on the orders of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, surgery is performed on their bodies and their wombs and ovaries are removed. Why? Because they must be completely disappointed and separated from escaping and hoping for a future life in the free world. “Congratulations to the women who underwent this surgery,” Massoud Rajavi ruthlessly told the women who underwent the operation.



Sterilization of women, an act of genocide

Forced sterilization is a human rights violation and can constitute an act of genocide, gender-based violence, discrimination, and torture.

Based on article 16 (e) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of UN, “Having the same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number of children and the time interval of pregnancy and access to information, education and the means to enable them to exercise these rights” All are the recognized rights of women.

It follows from the above law that, firstly, pregnancy and having a child are the primary right of every woman. Secondly, no one can impose any restrictions or compulsions on pregnancy for women. Women’s freedom in this area also includes the number of children and the intervals of pregnancy.

The forcible removal of wombs can bring a disability for women who are trying to have children. A type of organ defect that cannot be treated or compensated. There are many human rights laws that place special emphasis on the physical and mental health of women.

Sterilizing women is in violation of human rights laws that emphasize women’s health. Article 12, paragraph 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of UN states: “States Parties recognize the right of every individual to the enjoyment of the highest attainable of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”

The ban on marriage and sterilization of women is practically an attempt to cut off the generation of MEK members. In fact, this is a genocide. In international law, any deliberate attempt to prevent the birth of a group, tribe, or ethnicity constitutes genocide. According to The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, “the imposition of standards to prevent the birth of members of the group” is a clear example of genocide.

This is exactly what was done to the women members of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq terrorist group.

Separating Children from Parents in the Cult of Rajavi

In the history of religious and destructive cults, children have always been the first victims. Whereas, among militant political groups around the world, there are few cases whose stories are as tied to children as the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MeK).

In 1990 and 1991, the MeK separated about seven hundred children from their parents and sent them to European countries via the Jordanian border. Rajavi did this without the heartfelt consent of the children’s parents.

During the war with Kuwait, Massoud Rajavi separated these children from their parents and sent them to European countries under the pretext of creating a safe environment for them.

Why Rajavi separated children from families?

In the second ideological revolution, which included forced divorce, Massoud did not have much success in the lower echelons of the organization. The inferior members opposed this order, using their children as an excuse to reject separation from their emotional partners. Therefore, Massoud who saw children as a great threat for his so-called ideological revolution, thought of removing them.

The winter of 1990 coincided with the First Persian Gulf War. While Saddam was severely weakened, Massoud Rajavi used the dangerous conditions of war to achieve his sinister goals.

In fact, he was trying to carry out his sinister plan to remove the children, the enemies of the ideological revolution, from the territory of Iraq in order to guarantee his intended revolution.

Therefore, in the first step, the schools, recreation centers and other nests of the members’ children, who numbered more than 700, were closed under the pretext war condition. Then, they were transported to the anti-missile barracks inside the camp in fear and panic, with minimal means of survival and psychologically vulnerable conditions.

After a few weeks, the children became accustomed to the new situation, and the organization’s trick to forcibly relocate the children failed, and the parents still refused to separate them.

This time, the organization’s officials took cruel action and transferred the innocent children to Baghdad, the center of the airstrikes. Numerous bombings and the endangerment of children’s lives made it easier for the organization’s officials to obtain parental consent. So many of parents were content to move their children wherever the organization deemed expedient.

The first refuge for children after leaving Iraq was Amman, the capital of Jordan. There, the children, who had been in love with each other for years, were sent in groups to various European countries especially

Scandinavian countries, Australia, Canada and the United States. Of those, more than 200 children entered Germany illegally under the pretext of leaving the Persian Gulf war. Germany was the second largest children's destination after Jordan.

During the presence of children in Germany, the MeK received millions of marks annually from child support associations. Children were returned to Iraq at the age of 16 after receiving organizational and ideological training.

Why did Rajavi return young children to Iraq?

After sending the kids to European countries, the organization did not allow any contact between the parents and their children. Rajavi pursued some goals for returning them, such as infusing a new blood into the organization which was faced with a manpower crisis. On a deeper level, in Rajavi's eyes, it was the last chance to return those children who had their parents killed in previous operations since all of them were transferred under pseudonyms and fake identities, and as soon as they reached the legal age, they refused to return or in case of return, they could apply to leave because they had the original card and identity. Therefore, Rajavi was able to transfer many of children who had been transferred abroad.



Mandatory Uniform and Cultish Behavior in the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization

If you look at cults from the outside, they look attractive, but when exploring them, there will be unseen angles that the cults do not want to be known. Seeking deceptive attraction, cult leaders want obedience, time, and, in a word, the lives of members. Cults use sophisticated mind control and recruitment techniques that have evolved over time.

To get rid of the cult's appeal, you need to know how they work and what techniques they use. In most cases, the belief system of a religion is used as a tool for the use of techniques. In free societies, people can believe in anything they want, say whatever they think, and dress and wear whatever they want, but this is not the case in cults.

Mandatory Uniform

One of the cults which is known to the Iranian people is the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organizati (MeK), a terrorist group which presents itself as a political opposition and in terms of organizing and employing individuals has all features of a cult. Originated in a Shiite country, this terrorist cult uses the cover of Islam and the tools of the Shiite religion to maintain the framework and structure of its organization. An important rule of Islamic sharia is hijab of women, but the MeK uses this as a technique to control members.

“Rajavi said that your sisters' headscarf is the border between the Revolutionary Mujahideen and the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie,” said Ali Shirzad, former member of the MeK. [1]

“The red color of the scarf in the uniform of the Mojahedin Khalq has been borrowed from Marxism. The green overcoats belong to the Castro and Che Guevara wars in Cuba. although covering the Shari'a, the hijab of women in the uniforms, is merely a declaration of allegiance to the religion of the masses. Fewer photos of MEK women have been published with a variety of colors and clothing. Of course, this restriction has not been imposed on non-members who attend MEK gatherings.” Said Majid Mohammadi; a current member of MeK. [2]

“Women who entered the cult were told very openly: The headscarf is the official (i.e., mandatory) form of this organization,” said Zahra Sadat Mirbagheri; a dissident member of the MeK. [3]

Character assassination to create a sense of guilt

“In Rajavi's establishment all women should wear headscarf. Even if the headscarves were a little behind and a little of the woman's hair was visible, they initially were warned and then then became slandered. Yes, Maryam Rajavi used to spread repression in a new and creepy way, and this oppression is still present in the relations of the Rajavi's cult,” Zahra Sadat Mirbagheri said. [4]

Hijab; a means of control

The women present at the headquarters of this group must wear a certain type of uniform with a certain color.

This is while leaders of this group, who control a so-called political opposition, in their statements about the government in Iran condemn the obligatory hijab in the country.

Maryam Rajavi's "Ten Point Plan for Future Iran" states: "We believe in complete gender equality in political, social and economic arenas. We are also committed to equal participation of women in political leadership. Any form of discrimination against women will be abolished. They will enjoy the right to freely choose their clothing. They are free in marriage, divorce, education and employment." [5]

Following the MeK's escape and transfer to France, Iraq (Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty and parallel camps) and finally to Albania (Camp Mans) and setting up organizational camps to maintain and deepen relations, we see that no female member of the organization is allowed to cover or uncover the hijab, even in women's dormitories and restaurants.

"Within the cult, hijab is limited to scarves and women are not allowed to use other types of clothing such as shawls or hats, etc. The only color that they could choose for their scarves were green, red, and khaki. Women could wear red and khaki scarves only in certain places, and if someone wanted to wear a red or khaki scarf outside the Mojahedin propaganda ceremonies, she would be reprimanded," said Zahra Sadat Mirbagheri. [6]

All that has been said, along with other cultish tactics, such as fear and intimidation, mind control, information control, long work hours and sleep deprivation, and forced public confessions has turned this organization into a cult with a terrorist approach that is far more dangerous than an ordinary terrorist group.

Resources:

[1] Ali Shirzad, Vatanam Iran Blog, January 8, 2019

[2] Majid Mohammadi, Independent Persian, September 4, 2016

[3], [4], [6] Zahra Sadat Mirbagheri, Facebook page, January 3, 2014

[5] Website of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran

Forced Divorce, a cult-like behaviour

In today's world, forced marriage may seem like a time-worn phenomenon, but it still threatens few societies. Forced marriages are not specific to backward and underdeveloped societies, but may occur anywhere in the world. Many cults forcibly marry men and women in developing and developed countries. Organizational marriage is a type of forced marriage that was common in the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) and in a way showed the commitment of members to the goal of the organization and adherence to the cause of its leaders.

Although MEK achieved considerable notoriety for its cultish regulations in compelling members to divorce their spouses, it should be noted that forced marriage was part of the MEK's organizational relationship before the mandatory divorce and for so long many forced marriages took place as stipulated by the MEK leadership. In this regard, Ahmad Reza Karimi writes in his book entitled A Description of the History of Mujahedin-e Khalq of Iran and Its Stand Point:

"Since its inception till 1973, the MEK was a male-dominated organization and had no female members. The necessity for covering their hubs has led the organization to use women and girls. The first female recruits were the relatives of the executed or killed members and prisoners of the organization ... At that time, Reza Rezaei had two marriages within the organization, which was in fact the cornerstone of moral corruption: The first marriage was with Leila Zomordian (Sharif Vaqefi's next wife) and his second marriage was with Simin Salehi, who after hiding in early 1973 was not even legally separated from her former husband. Some women and girls did not even have the least political or organizational capabilities and were kept in the organization only to justify the hubs as well as sexual exploitation. A telling example of this is a member like Leila Zomordian, who after Reza Rezaei and Sharif Vaqefi, married to Taghi Shahram for a short period of time, and then changed her husband several times in different houses."

MEM members' suicides as a result of moral and sexual failures and frustrations

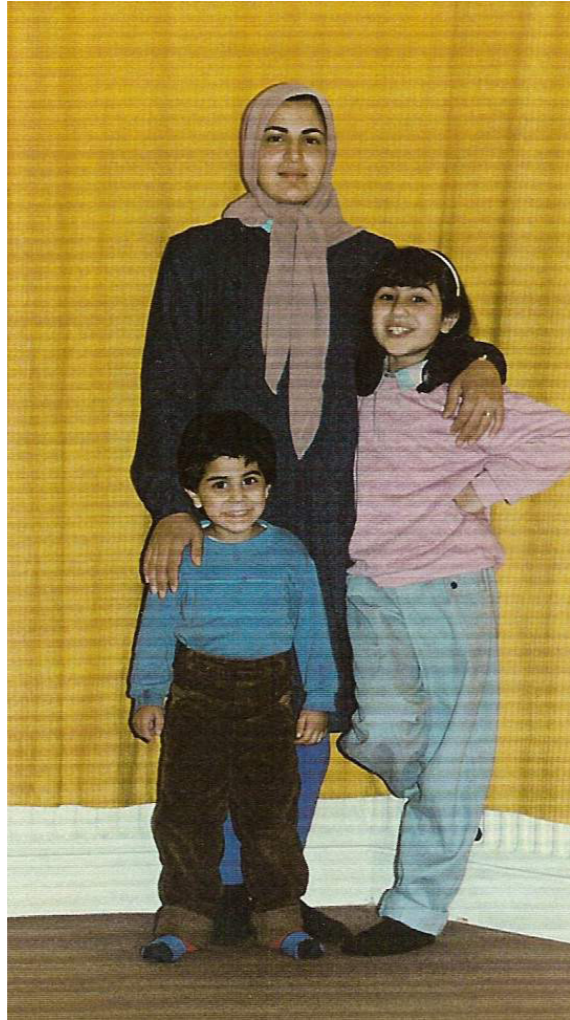
... The MEK leaders' monopoly in sexual matters is also one of the important consequences of such corruption. Taqi Shahram, one of the ideologues of the MEK, married to five wives during his activity ... Another implication of moral corruptions in the organization is sexual suicides, which were caused by moral and sexual failures and frustrations.

Misguided beliefs justify sexual exploitations

Jafar Shojooni says in his memoirs: The MEK's interpretation of Quran was weird. How is it that two or three hijabi pious girls live and sleep with ten or twenty young boys for six months? They recited this verse to those girls: "...Do not reveal their adornments except to their husbands" (Quran, 24:31). The verse says that positions of adornment that are above the neck and above the hands should not be shown except to women's husbands, but within the MEK it is being interpreted in a different way, saying that the parts of adornment are "from the knees to the abdomen" that should be hidden from anybody except from their comrades in arms.

The theory of the ideological revolution was completed in 1986, when Maryam Azodanlu (Rajavi) divorced her husband Mehdi Abrishamchi and married to Massoud Rajavi before the expiration of the waiting period.

They used the same strategy to sexually exploit young women and girls and termed it as a sacred act as “marriage”. For example, Mehdi Abrishamchi was presented with Mousa Khiabani’s 18-year-old sister as a gift from the leadership!



Forced divorce and ideological revolution

Right after the Iran-Iraq ceasefire in mid-1988, MEK launched thousands of its warriors across the Iranian border, but they suffered a humiliating defeat. Masoud Rajavi announced a plan calling it an ideological revolution and considered the failure as a result of members’ family ties. Hence, he ordered all the members to divorce their spouses. Even the single members made a commitment to forbid marriage. The other side of the coin were divorced women who obeyed Rajavi’s command and married him during a cultish ceremony called “Salvation Dance”. In this regard, female members Batool Soltani, Homeira Mahmoudnejad, Zahra Moeini and Nasrin Ebrahimi are the people who have exposed such behaviours in MEK after defection.

Organizational marriages, forced divorces, hysterectomies, and the like are all rooted in the cultish aspects of the MEK. Those people who had lost their youth in the cult of MEK warn that joining cults is one of the greatest threats of every nation.

This issue is now considered as a threat and has been introduced as the highest social harm and being in a cult is more terrible than addiction. Women are the mainstay of the family in all societies and such cultish behaviours have destructive effects on societies. So, in order to save women, families, and societies, the cults and their cultish thinking and practices must come to an end.

The Pink Personnel Carriers

Terrorist groups are known to repeatedly violate human rights, especially women’s rights. Such groups, under the pretext of struggle for freedom and equality of men and women, violate women’s rights the most. Among them, the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (aka MeK) has a long history in this regard. Various forms of abusing women and not granting them the most basic human rights, such as the right to marriage and motherhood have all turned them into emotionless individuals with no trace of femininity.

Ladies who are typically symbols of love and affection, become a violent and tyrannical element in this terrorist group so much so that they volunteer to commit suicide missions using explosive belts.

For instance, Gohar Adabavaz, who was ostracized by her family and became a member of the MeK and volunteered to commit suicide operations. Eventually on December 11, 1981, dressed as a normal citizen, she approached Ayatollah Dastgheib, the Friday Prayer Leader of Shiraz and assassinated him and committed suicide through detonating her explosive belt.

On January 23, 2001, Aram Goftari, another female member of the MeK, entered Iran for a suicide mission. After being quickly identified by security forces, she went to the public and detonated herself murdering several people. Laden Badiani, Fahimeh Sadeghi and Vitana Jovini are other members of the MeK terrorist group who have caused the death of many people through their suicide operations within the past few decades.

On the other hand, the MeK expects its female members to perform as military force like men. In its so-called Liberation Army, women were engaged in all kinds of military activities ranging from operating tanks and personnel carriers to rocket launchers. In Operation the Eternal Light and the invasion of Iran by the MEK, the corpses left on the Iranian soil indicated that a large number of soldiers were female members of the group. National Geographic correspondent Michael Ware visited Camp Ashraf in Iraq in 2005 and two years after the fall of Saddam. In the camp, he encountered a number of young ladies who, according to his own report, looked utterly exhausted and were deprived of the most basic rights of a woman. Ware asked one of the girls in her early 20s about what she was doing before the invasion of Iraq and disarmament of the MeK, and she replied: “personnel carrier driver”. What came as a complete surprise to him was the fact that other ladies in the camp were engaged in such activities as well. All over the world, a driver’s license is issued at the age of 18 for individuals and a few years later they may apply for a license for heavy vehicles. But in the MeK, a 20-year-old girl becomes the operator of a military vehicle.

This and many other examples indicate that, contrary to MeK leaders’ claims of being defenders of women’s rights, women in this group are simply means for satisfying the leader’s lust for power.

Women in the leadership cadres of the MEK

The MEK has always used women as an effective tool to tarnish the image of the Islamic Republic of Iran while the group itself has tyrannized women in various ways. Pretending to be defending the equal rights of men and women, Massoud Rajavi appointed a large number of female members to senior positions in the central leadership council. These positions only caused the women to feel more powerful than men and led to their exploitation.

The fact that more than 50% of the group women are members of the National Council of Resistance, as well as the election of the first secretary general and his deputies, as well as 18 peers of the secretary general, including seven former secretaries general.

The group uses titles such as “leading women in the resistance movement”, “women, the driving force behind protests”, “women, the force for change” to inspire women to come on the scene.

The reason for naming barracks after women was stated because women have historically been oppressed by men and women have never achieved their true rights in any system or system. So, he put the women’s organization at the head and subordinated the men. At that time, all the commanders of the Mojahedin Khalq Organization were elected from among women at once. In fact, it was a survival strategy, and the organization was abusing women to restore its image.

One of the reasons for giving more responsibility to women in this organization is not to pose a danger to the only male leader of this group. A woman in this organization, even if she has the same responsibilities as Maryam Rajavi, is not considered a rival for the leader, Women have less independence and a greater sense of responsibility than men. In the organizational structure of this organization, a man is intended to lead all the deputies, all of whom are women, so that none of the women consider themselves to be in the same category as this leader.

Due to the intense pessimism and hostility that was propagated in the minds of women towards men, women were more dissolved and abused in the organization than men; Therefore, they were given higher responsibilities.

In organizational affairs, Massoud Rajavi’s treatment of women is formal, and women, as soon as they reach a level, for example, in the first position of responsibility, are dragged down for a while, because Rajavi is even afraid that the same woman will become a figure and later stand in front of him.

The fact that Rajavi has given women empty responsibilities in the affairs of his sect, and especially to his wife, cannot be taken into account in respecting women’s rights. Coincidentally, he abused women by suppressing them in order to suppress and advance his sectarian goals.

Women burned alive to save Rajavi

The Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK, a.k.a. MKO and PMOI) has a dreadful record of using women and girls as a tool to achieve its purposes. As a concrete example, killing of two female members of the group in 2003 in Paris can be noted.

On June 17, 2003, French counter-intelligence forces stormed the MEK’s headquarters in Paris, seizing over \$8 million in cash and detaining 159 people, including Maryam Rajavi, the group’s ringleader.

Following the arrest, a number of brainwashed members of the group were forced to set themselves on fire in public. MEK members mobilized throughout Europe in order to hold demonstrations and then the victims carry out a series of forced self-immolations. The self-immolations had been staged publicly by 16 members of the group one after the other in Paris, Rome, Berne, London, Ottawa, Athens, and Nicosia.

Among the victims of the forced self-immolations, names of three women stand out: Seddiqeh Mojaveri, 40, Neda Hassani, 26, and Marzieh Babakhani. The first two lost their lives and Babakhani was severely burned.

The poor women were used as a tool to pressure the French public opinion and legal system to free Maryam Rajavi. They may have been told that there was no cause to worry and the firemen would intervene to extinguish the fire soon after they set themselves ablaze. But they were duped and burned to death before the TV cameras to influence the court’s ruling. MEK leaders got their wish and the court, concerned that the immolations might be repeated, ordered Maryam Rajavi’s release on bail.

Following the awkward incident and the media reaction to it, the French officials highlighted various aspects and dimensions of the cult-like activities of the MEK. French Government spokesperson, Jean-Francois Cope, considered these self-immolations as “obviously, extremely dramatic”. He added, “Alas! It also tells us a great deal about the mindset of their leadership”.

The self-immolations were so unexpected for the French officials that they barred all the MEK gatherings “until further orders” and police banned the sale, transport and use of all inflammable products in certain parts of central Paris.

These are the women who are to be burned in the cult of MEK to save the live of the group’s leader and be used for further political leverage, and to show their absolute loyalty to the public opinion.

