

Can What Happen to Turgut Alp in Diriliş Ertuğrul Really Happen? Brainwashing: The Myths and Truths

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Brainwashing is considered a controversial concept that was used first by Edward Hunter - a journalist- in 1950s to explain the corporation of some of the American war prisoners with their Chinese captors [1]. The term brainwashing is often used to describe changes in individual's beliefs, behavior and personality secondary to torture and other coercive techniques [2]. As a result, the individual becomes obedient to those in power and idealizes his captors [3].

Turgut Alp in Diriliş Ertuğrul TV series was captured by his enemy and exposed to various types of torture. He was prisoned in a solitary confinement and deprived from any sensory stimulation. Repetitive verbal threats to die by his captors had inflicted confusion in regard with his fate and maintained overwhelming vulnerability. In addition, he was forced to drink a blue liquid that triggered immediate perceptual distortions, mainly visual hallucinations. Finally, his captors attempted to change his identity and attitudes by calling him a different name and instructing him to adopt new beliefs. As a result, Turgut Alp displayed significant change in his beliefs and behaviors. He complied to the orders of his captors to murder Ertuğrul, his previous commander.

The techniques employed for brainwashing -as exemplified above-rely on coercive processes to create identity confusion and induce a dissociative state. Subsequently, the person idealizes his captors and identifies with his aggressors, therefore the victim responds with submission and appeasement. This state is called traumatic infantilism or paralysis of will [3].

Despite the fact that the techniques used for brainwashing are extensively discussed in literatures, the evidence of their direct association with brainwashing is scarce. The proposed techniques ranges from simple methods such peer pressure to a more coercive and life threatening ones like torture and sensory deprivation. The studies are very few due to various ethical and political reasons. For example, the results of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in using substances such as lysergic acid (LSD) in brainwashing are still secrets [4].

Notwithstanding that brainwashing raises considerable controversy among experts, the term is gaining more scientific acceptance. For instance, American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5, 2013) regarded brainwashing as a dissociative disorder and described it under "identity disturbance due to prolonged and intense coercive persuasion" [5]. Of note, APA had rejected brainwashing as a scientific entity in 1987 because of insufficient information and lack of a convincing evidence in this regards (ESNUR Center for Studies on New Religion. 1987).

In conclusion, brainwashing emerged from political context and remained ill-defined as a scientific term. Nevertheless, brainwashing was included in the classification system of the APA due to the traumatic and dissociative manifestation of its victims. Future researches may uncover the ambiguity of brainwashing and reveal the associated historical secrets.

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