

# Subversive fidelity theory A proposition on believing, behaving and paradoxical ways of belonging

Teoría de la Fidelidad Subversiva

Una propuesta sobre creencia, conducta y formas paradójicas de pertenecer

 Saúl Sánchez López\*

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## Abstract

Although often overlooked in the academy, fidelity is a critical notion for any kind of human group, whatever the size, from a simple couple to a geopolitical alliance, as it necessarily depends on it to work properly. In Social Psychology, fidelity or loyalty has mostly been approached indirectly through Social Identity Theory in a rather simplistic way: a person is considered a loyal member of a group as long as they accept all of its mainstream ideals and rules with no exception. In other words, fidelity is thought to be inextricably linked to believing and behaving, understood in an orthodox-conformist way. By contrast, we postulate that it is possible to be faithful to a group while subverting its ideology and norms, or, to put it another way, to integrate fidelity and subversion in a paradoxical yet coherent position: *subversive fidelity*. There have already been similar conceptual propositions both inside and outside Social Psychology, but we delve into its distinctive features, thus laying the foundations of an initial but promising theory.

\* Profesor-investigador de Tiempo Parcial de la Licenciatura en Psicología Clínica de la Universidad de Guanajuato Campus Celaya-Salvatierra. Autor para correspondencia. Correo electrónico: saul.sanchez@ugto.mx.

## Resumen

Aunque descuidada por la academia, la fidelidad es una noción crítica para cualquier tipo de grupo humano, sin importar su tamaño, desde una simple pareja hasta una alianza geopolítica, ya que es indispensable para su funcionamiento. En psicología social, la fidelidad o lealtad se ha estudiado sobre todo indirectamente, a través de la teoría de la identidad social, de una manera más bien simplista: una persona es considerada un miembro leal de un grupo en la medida en que acepta todas y cada una de las ideas y reglas establecidas sin excepción. En otras palabras, la fidelidad se considera intrínsecamente ligada a la creencia y la conducta, entendidas de una manera ortodoxa-conformista. En cambio, nosotros planteamos que es posible ser leal a un grupo mientras se subvierte su ideología y normas. En otras palabras, proponemos que es posible integrar fidelidad y subversión en una posición ciertamente paradójica, pero coherente: *fidelidad subversiva*. Existen propuestas conceptuales similares dentro y fuera de la psicología social, pero nosotros desarrollamos en detalle sus características distintivas al punto de establecer las bases para una teoría incipiente, pero prometedora.

*Fidelity is a project rooted in the past, updated in the present and eternalized in the future.*

Emilio Ruiz Malo

## Neither traitor nor submissive

When Ignacio Allende was judged for leading the independence movement of New Spain, he accepted the sentence altogether without any protest, except for one small thing: the charge should be changed from high treason to “high loyalty”, as his purpose was to liberate his homeland from the oppression exerted by the Spanish Crown, in order to guide it to a glorious destiny (see Jiménez, 2002).

Loyalty or fidelity is certainly a key but complex notion, not exempt from controversy, especially when it comes to issues of power and domination. Both terms derive from Latin, but while the first one, *legalis*, refers simply to being according to the law (Calin, 2012); the second one, *fides*, is comparatively more complex, meaning “reliability” in a broad political sense (cf. Álvarez & Delgado, 1995). It is the latter that really captures the idea behind the two concepts: the commitment of an actor to nourish a relationship of support towards another.

In this sense, we may find an endless array of fidelities, coming from the religious, political, military, commercial, institutional, cultural or romantic scene, as the objects of fidelity are equally diverse. One may be loyal to their church, their party, their country,

their company, their partner, a school of thought or even a soccer team. As long as an enduring partial conduct pervades the relationship between A and B, we can be sure that a bond of fidelity is formed, whether it is driven by affective, strategic or hierarchical reasons (see Fletcher, 1993; Poulsen, 2020).

The critical importance of fidelity for any kind of human group, from a simple couple to a geopolitical alliance —such as NATO—, relies on its imperative need for trust in order to function properly. That is why treason is considered one of the vilest and most despicable acts ever, and has been condemned accordingly anywhere, anytime. Let us think of Judas, Brutus, *La Malinche* or Robert Hanssen. Unforgivable because of the emotional damage it causes, unbearable for the strategic risk it entails, it is not surprising that the traitor remains one of the cursed archetypes par excellence.

But the matter becomes nebulous when dealing with different points of view from opposite sides of the fence, because what could be considered treason for someone at the top, might be seen as subversion for another at the bottom (Pozzi, 1999). That is a movement of deep transformation from below, intended to question and reframe what is instituted, even if it means coming into conflict with the authorities and putting the entire structure upside down (see Carrasco, 2012).

No wonder these two phenomena usually get mixed up, as both traitor and subversive inflict serious damage to their group from the inside: one by jeopardizing its agenda, the other by disrupting the system. While treason involves acting against a formerly embraced cause for personal gain, subversion, in contrast, seeks to move forward with the group's project through the renovation of the *status quo*. In short: treason looks for destruction; subversion, for reconstruction.

Besides Allende, one can find throughout history notable examples of people integrating fidelity and subversion under the same motivated behavior: Luther defies the Pope, not because he rejects Catholicism, but on the contrary, because he defends it against malpractices and abuse. Guy Fawkes participated in the Gunpowder Plot in the hope of restoring a Catholic monarch to the throne of England, far from being an antimonarchist himself. In recent times, Edward Snowden —formally charged with espionage— explained himself by arguing a patriotic duty that led him to reveal numerous mass surveillance programs run by the US government. Considered a traitor by some and a hero by others, his case perfectly illustrates the kind of paradoxical yet coherent position one can put themselves in order to keep peace of mind. A sort of twilight zone, right in the middle of blind obedience and simple treason.

What a strange place to be when one is neither traitor nor submissive, plowing through the gaps amid principles, rules, and conscience. Here, the idea of fidelity is not understood

as limitless unconditional support but rather as a resolute will to do everything possible for the sake of the group, even at its own expense. If caring for what is most valuable implies subverting the hierarchy, norms and standards... so be it. Love can be tough.

## The black sheep parable

I conceptualized the possibility of subversive activities motivated and justified by loyalty under the notion of *fidelité subversive* (subversive fidelity) in my doctoral thesis: “La parable du mouton noir...” (Sánchez, 2017). Here, I argued that members of a given institution —in this case, the Catholic Church— can perfectly profess their ideology at odds with it, for its own good, on the grounds of an alleged misleading teaching or practice, so that “true” faith can be restored: “*Lorsque les élites ont perdu le chemin, la subversion peut être, ironiquement, le seul moyen de rester fidèle à la cause*” [when elites have lost the path, subversion may be, ironically, the only way to remain faithful to the cause] (Sánchez, 2017, p. 159).

I studied the case of several Catholic organizations supporting a progressive position on subjects related to sexual morals, namely sexual diversity, priestly celibacy, female ordination and reproductive rights (such as A Call to Action, *David et Jonathan*, *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir* and so on), concluding that, despite their diversity, all of them share a strong conviction that Catholicism is in need of sexual reform, and that it is their duty to engage in action for that to happen, no matter what the hierarchy says (Sánchez, 2017). By accepting the hard core of faith in terms of principles and values —meaning the dogma— without subscribing the Church’s sexual teaching, these Catholics succeed in dissociating fidelity to Catholicism from conformity to the Church (Sánchez, 2017, p. 108).

In a commonsense view, religious identity always presupposes belonging to a certain institution and, therefore, fidelity to all of its beliefs, morals, traditions and practices, not to mention unreserved obedience vis-à-vis the ruling body. That is to say that professing a given religion entails, *ipso facto*, the acceptance of orthodoxy as a whole, as if there were no alternative but the official one. This is clearly mistaken. What I intended to illustrate is that there are people who embrace the fundamental principles of a particular religion while questioning, even rejecting, specific teachings on secondary aspects of the same.

It is worth asking if the same principle could be applied out of the religious domain as collective disputes and heterodoxy are not restricted to spiritual issues. Accordingly, in a subsequent article, I extended my original notion into the secular sphere, describing *subversive fidelity* as a movement of internal opposition inside any institution or social

group, actively working to change the *status quo*, which, in turn, puts them at odds with the ruling class (Sánchez, 2020). The trademark of such a dynamic consists of using the group's own subjective resources to fuel the insurrection. And because it is the very same criticized ideology, which is invoked to justify the uprising, it would result in a “paradoxical form of coherence” (Sánchez, 2020, p. 155), meaning a sort of *counterideology* that goes against the flow, breaking the assumed coupling of belonging and conformity.

Besides this cognitive aspect, the most significant feature of subversive fidelity would be its social dimension as the focus of my research was not specific individuals but organized groups of people. In other words, the fact that dissent can evolve into a collective project, that “there are ways of being, believing and practicing, diametrically opposed to the mainstream, which may become real counter-hegemonic programs” (Sánchez, 2020, p. 156). It is precisely this social approach that, I think, shows great promise to elucidate a wide range of emergent ruptures within all kinds of organizations formerly solid in appearance.

## Fighting from the inside out

The conjunction of subversion and fidelity may not be a new phenomenon, but its study has been overlooked until recent times. As said before, one of the main reasons for this is an inappropriate conceptualization tending to confuse it with treason, apostasy, or simple dissidence. In consequence, a precise yet flexible concept is imperative as a first step towards a proper theory.

I define subversive fidelity as the manifest behavior of a *subgroup* inside a given organization, vindicating a certain form of ideology, identity or cause in sharp contrast with the official one, represented and supported by a ruling group. The reason behind such way of conduct, and its real hallmark, would be an alleged fidelity to the membership group —whatever this may be—, its beliefs, values and purpose.<sup>1</sup> This creates an outstanding paradox, very hard to discern both by scholars and laypeople alike, who may mistake it for a glaring contradiction, nothing but nonsense.

That said, it is necessary to clarify important distinctions regarding similar terms already proposed. In her 2001 article, Sunder comes up with the notion of “cultural dissent” in order to give an account of the increasing diversity pervading all kinds of cultures, whether religious, ethnic, linguistic, etc., where “cultural orthodoxies” are constantly challenged from within through innovations and heterodoxies of all sorts.

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<sup>1</sup> This behavior might be expressed in the form of protest, disobedience, dissenting voices or heretical practices, and can take place in all sorts of social groups such as political parties, religious institutions, schools of thought, etc. A phenomenon way beyond simple intragroup conflicts, which may cover all sorts of non-essential issues such as activities, roles, leadership styles, relationships, and so on, while subversive fidelity deals with fundamental aspects of group life defining its *raison d'être*.

In this respect, we could say that cultural dissent is a kind of subversive fidelity in a broad sense, as it implies countercultural practices in a social group, but Sunder's suggestion does neither consider the creation of subgroups nor an open conflict with the ruling elite over its respect for collective principles and, therefore, the validity of *status quo*.

Another evocative concept has been coined by Kretschmer (2009) in a curious research project about two opposite organizations: one defending a progressive stand from a conservative institution; the other, taking a traditionalist point of view while still remaining liberal. This "contested loyalty" – as she names it – consists basically in a strategic move looking to increase membership by compensating ideological positions, making the organization appealing to a wider public. It contemplates the creation of internal groups confronting their parent organization out of loyalty to it, which resembles subversive fidelity. The difference would be essentially theoretical, for the author's perspective denotes a strong rationalist approach, seeing only political calculation in their actions, devoid of any sincerity whatsoever, instead of a real struggle about the interpretation of fundamental principles.

For their part, Packer and Chasteen (2010) present not only a suggestive term but also a theoretical formulation with a solid empirical basis. Contrary to traditional theories on social identity, they developed a model according to which strongly identified members of a group can dissent whenever they perceive a certain norm being harmful for the group's sake. That is so because real engaged members are, in fact, more worried about the group's success and well-being than preserving obedience, image or social status; so, in order to ensure the common interest, they apply a "loyal deviance", rising their voice and risking their membership by holding a dissenting opinion.

The latter is, for sure, the closest proposition to subversive fidelity, the distinction being rather subtle. In essence, there are no significant differences between the two terms, as both *subversive fidelity* and *loyal deviance* aim at highlighting the fact that, in theory and practice, it is possible to rebel against their own social group through loyalty to the same. But while the first one is intended from the beginning for collective subversion, meaning the creation of subgroups, Packer and Chasteen's model points mainly to individual behavior.<sup>2</sup> In addition, their theory only considers discrepancies over norms but no other institutional or ideological crucial elements such as beliefs, values, traditions and so on, making it a more focalized but also reductive approach.

After this conceptual distinction, it is worth elaborating on the main features defining subversive fidelity as a social phenomenon, so its peculiarity becomes clear enough. It

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<sup>2</sup> Packer (2008) writes about the possibility of collective loyal dissidence, but he does not go deep into it. He merely establishes that a dissatisfied individual may find solace in a subgroup they identify with and where they feel understood, which ultimately could become revolutionary.

is our contention that there are, at least, five constitutive elements that clearly identify our object of study.

- 1) First of all, the presence of an *alternative view* to the mainstream, challenging group-think (Janis, 1972). In other words, a competing ideology developed right from within, postulating heterodox positions either about beliefs, rules, specific issues or general values, which clearly deviate from the creed imposed from above and accepted by the majority.

We already know the incredible force of social influence inside groups, preventing the expression of divergent opinions from being heard, due to the pressure of having a unique vision as members of the same body (Henriques, 2020; Levitan & Verhulst, 2016). That is what makes it so exceptional in the light of classical theories of social psychology. Indeed, the emergence of minority views in group conditions has already been studied in depth since Moscovici's experiments (see Moscovici, 1979/1996),<sup>3</sup> but still, it is surprising to observe the presence of alternative thinking at the core of institutions supposed to be monolithic, such as churches and parties.

- 2) Second, and closely related, the manifest expression of *nonconformity* on behalf of members who may embrace the main principles of the group to a great extent but disagree on certain specific issues considered to be secondary or misinterpreted. We are talking about an ideological divergence of most importance: not only do these people think different with regard to an already established doctrine but, more surprisingly, they contest it in an explicit way, even if it means entering into conflict with their authorities.

Though classic studies on conformity — such as those conducted by Sherif (1935) and Asch (1951) — demonstrated the power of group pressure, they also showed its limitations and the inherent resistance of people, especially when they come together as one; something that was overlooked for decades (Jetten & Hornsey, 2015). Contemporary research on social psychology has rediscovered in some way the endurance of deviance and dissidence in group dynamics, now considered completely normal if not positive (Hornsey, 2016). According to Jetten and Hornsey (2014), loyal members of social organizations may put into question the validity of norms as long as they perceive them as no longer appropriate for a variety of reasons, and this happens more than expected, the rebel being sometimes recognized, even celebrated for his bravery and contribution(!). So, far from staying in the shadows, these people make actual efforts to be heard and achieve major changes in the organization's thought and culture through a permanent work of constructive criticism.

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<sup>3</sup> Subversive fidelity is related to Moscovici's Active Minorities Theory in terms of holding a minority position compared to a bigger group, but Moscovici's (1996) perspective is focused on the confrontation between a given group and society at large, while I am interested in the conflict inside a group with a subgroup.

- 3) Both minority view and voice are based on the same *paradoxical justification*: an adduced fidelity to the ideological principles as well as to the group itself. The subversive faithful engage themselves in a deep work of reinterpretation that challenges the doctrinal framework in place, while rebellion is legitimized as a moral duty given the false premises leading the organization.

From a philosophical point of view, Gadamer (1960/2005) has backed up such an argument by replacing the whole idea of a “correct interpretation” of tradition —or in this case, ideology— with the assumption that every interpretation is always and necessarily recreation: “old and new are always combining into something of living value” (p. 305), he went on to say in his *magnum opus*. This means that group beliefs are constantly evolving out of a situated appropriation on behalf of particular actors, giving new and original meaning to an otherwise dead dogma. In another vein, Hirschman (1970) argued how it is that loyalty to one’s organization can eventually manifest itself in the form of “voice”, that is, an act of complaint against the current set of practices, policies, results... with a view to correct the course. In his classic “Exit, voice, and loyalty”, the author suggests an original solution to the decline of organizations through the involvement of conscious members worried about the future and willing to make a sacrifice by staying in them no matter what. A behavior that may seem absurd from the outside but has its own rationale as these people feel compelled to play a major role in preventing their group from falling into the abyss.

- 4) Sooner or later, all of the above lead to the *formation of a subgroup*; a clearly distinctive entity which resembles as well as differs from its parent organization, with whom a strained relationship prevails (see Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Wagoner et al., 2018). What starts off as a few silent dissenters, brought together out of shared ideological concerns, turns eventually into a collective project of great impact, aiming at the redirection of the group away from the wrong path.

Subversive fidelity subgroups are closely related to other forms of organizing such as tribalism and schism. Whereas Maffesoli (1988/2000) refers to the former as micro-groups of all sorts characterized by informality, the latter would be restricted to an official split within a big group because of inner conflict (Sani, 2008). Yet, none of these concepts reflect the in-between position in which these subversive faithful find themselves once they get organized in a serious way with no intention to leave. A more puzzling resemblance would be the one concerning the term “sect”, as religious scholars of all time have pointed out the deviation of beliefs —compared to the church— as its main feature, making it a distinctive and well-defined grouping. And while classic sociologists depict it as an independent organization (Troeltsch, 1923/1992; Weber, 1905/1967), it is also true that present studies refer to sectarianism as a broad general term concerning an institution with two or more disputing



factions (Hameed & Jubair, 2021; Sánchez, 2019). In any case, it is clear that subversive fidelity entails a special kind of subgroups devoted to a challenge as dissonant as critical for the future of their parent organizations.

- 5) Last but not least, in the light of the above-mentioned principles, the ultimate point would be *a project of internal transformation* as final goal. In other words, the reshaping of the whole group as it is now in line with the subversive faithful's vision for it.

Contrary to the typical way of dissenters, which basically implies the departure from the current organization and the reenrollment in a new -substitutive- one, the idea here is not so much changing *of* group as changing *the* group itself. Assuming that subversive faithful are -in principle- a disadvantaged minority, this may seem rather idealistic, if not naïve, but let us not forget that even the most conservative groups are dynamic, evolving on an ongoing basis. They are living social entities that nevertheless endure in time, or to put it in Lewinian terms, a quasi-stationary process.

Following precisely Lewin's theory of change (Lewin, 1947; Lewin, 1947/1999; see also Burnes, 2020), the first step towards a major revolution in any organization whatsoever is the disruption of the *status quo* ("unfreeze"), something that the subversive faithful achieve by querying what until then was dogma. The difference between the planned change model postulated by the so-called "practical theorist" and the transformation set in motion by subversive fidelity subgroups lies in their counter-hegemonic program, which not only depends on the participation of members but represents a real endogenous, bottom-up change, where the subalterns bring about a radical transformation of group life.

Outside social psychology, recent studies in organizational development may be more than appropriate for understanding such a process. For instance, according to Mata (2015), "collective leadership" is a growing phenomenon marked by a daring proposal coming from the grassroots, whereas literature in organizational change points out to the key role that marginal members can actually play as agents of change inside organizations (Romero et al., 2013). By the same token, "revolutionary change" -a fast and deep alteration- has been linked to disruptive thought and the will to challenge prevailing norms and ideas (Maes & Van Hootegem, 2011); once the system gets broken, it leaves the field open for new rules of the game. One can even find a parallel term to subversive fidelity in this area of knowledge: "constructive deviance". Meaning behaviors that deviate from collective present norms for the benefit of the reference group, pursuing continual improvement and, ultimately, the achievement of shared objectives (Tziner et al., 2010; Vadera et al., 2013).

But however insightful, the conjunction of the aforementioned terms is still far from composing a unified body of knowledge, not to mention that its application would be

restricted to organizational studies. By contrast, “subversive fidelity” is a wide yet accurate concept, whose meaning may be clarifying for a variety of social realities (including those of organizations). While it is true that every proposition so far is a long way from being unprecedented, no less true is that, together, they form a consistent and innovative theoretical concept worth exploring. As Parmenides said, nothing comes from nothing.

## **Heretical identities: subversive fidelities**

What does it mean to be part of a group? Is it to be content with whatever the majority says? to think, to feel and behave as other members do? to follow, without question, rules and orders from above? Or is it to share a common set of values, broad enough to deal with subtle differences and major disputes?

Social identity is a concept as central as misleading. It implies the extension of the self from the individual to the collective sphere, that is, the integration of me and us into a single entity. Without it, we would not be able to understand —leave aside explain— a wide range of phenomena, such as supremacism, discrimination, polarization, prejudices and so on, as all of them depend, somehow or other, on an ethnocentric bias referring to groups and categories one feels part of. At the same time, it is unclear how exactly it is possible to adopt a social identity without losing oneself in the process, or if this is just the price to pay for the right to belong.

That is basically the thesis of social identity theory, whose core principle, better known as “depersonalization”, postulates that in a group situation the person would define themselves as member of the group rather than an individual, and behave accordingly (Turner, 1982; see also Haslam et al., 2012; Scandroglio et al., 2008). Actually, the more someone identifies themselves with a given group, the more they act as a prototypical member of it, becoming a sort of incarnated stereotype whose conduct never breaks the mold. The underlying idea is that, to a certain extent, the subject is “absorbed” or “possessed” by the group to the point where it turns into a pure expression of it. In a nutshell: conformity.<sup>4</sup>

Now, social identity is not a theory of loyalty *per se*, however, because of the emphasis placed on conformity, most research to date have tacitly assumed a direct connection between these two as something self-evident: in so far as someone belongs to a group, they conform to it, and this is taken as a sign of loyalty (see Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Packer & Chasteen, 2010). That is because, in the imaginary,

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to clarify that this view belongs rather to the self-categorization approach developed by Turner (1991; 2010) and his colleagues (Turner et al., 1987). In Tajfel's seminal work, by contrast, social identity is studied in a wider and more critical way beyond reductionism, giving significant weight to context against the backdrop of social conflict (Tajfel, 1981).

fidelity and conformity are basically synonyms, since it is widely accepted that someone loyal respects norms and authorities at all cost without flinching. An idea that most groups certainly have: you are either in or out; no grey areas.

On the other hand, subversive fidelity is not intended either to be a theory on social identity, but it necessarily implies a certain vision of it. First and foremost, I presume that social identity is always plural. There is not a single identity for every group, that is simply a myth. What appears to be *the* social identity is nothing but a facade masking a bunch of different identities, some of which may be underground.

Human organizations are never homogeneous, nor involvement in them is the same for everybody as attitudes and positions vary widely, from credulity and dogmatism to a more conscious relation based on critical thinking. Even when it comes to beliefs, there is a gap between the official doctrine and the true opinion of members. Accordingly, different ways of belonging coexist alongside the mainstream, no matter how divergent or conflicting they are. This is what Hispanic scholars have called *identización*: the fact that social identities are not fixed once and for all but flexible and diverse, many sub-identities being constructed inside the same group without sacrificing its unity (Baeza, 2000; Giménez, 1997). A possibility that has been overlooked by most of the literature in English. Whenever the concept of “multiple identities” is addressed, it is only about the different social identities that a single person can have at the same time but not the internal plurality existing in any given group (see Burke, 2003; Gaither, 2018; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015).

We must assume that for every single group there is at least one dominant and one subaltern social identity. While the former is publicly recognized and accepted — whether or not imposed by force —, the latter is often invisible and discriminated against. Oppression is permanently exerted by the leading class in order to prevent any deviation from the *status quo* as any hint of a new identity in the making is a potential threat for both the stability of the group and the current elites who rule it (Sánchez, 2022). However, no matter the level of control, subaltern identities never die out but persist, nurtured by freethinkers, so it will always be possible to have a strong social identity and a dissenting view at once.

For subversive fidelity to exist, there has to be an alternative to the hegemonic form of social identity perceived as “normal”, including the main group features, such as ideals, norms, values, goals... All of these are in principle the same for every single member, nonetheless, they are not assimilated in the same passive way but rather subject to (re) interpretation.

Ideology is of outmost importance in this sense. It represents the socio-cognitive structure, absent in social identity theory, providing both a system of beliefs internally

coherent and a well-defined framework for understanding social reality. According to Melucci (1989; 1996), because of the cohesion it generates, ideology is the foundation of social identity, and as such, it ensures the loyalty of members by defining the limits of what is expected of them to believe or not. The problem is that, as much as social identity itself, ideology is not a ready-made set of beliefs but rather a never-ending process of construction and reconstruction embracing the whole of the group's features. This means that beyond dominant thinking, there is room for minoritarian, counterhegemonic views from where in-group diversity is brewing.

Heterodoxy is what ultimately allows an alternative identity to emerge, while orthodoxy is directly linked to conformity and, therefore, the mainstream identity. The orthodox believer expects, even wants, to be told what to think and how to act by the ideological apparatus (Deconchy, 1971; 1984). By doing so, they fuse together believing, behaving and belonging in an unbreakable triad. The recognition of others as real members of the group depends on their acceptance of the official creed and the submission to the institution and its leaders as the only ones responsible for defining it, what Rokeach (1954) explained in terms of dogmatism-authoritarianism. Those who dare to dissent are then considered outsiders (Van Dijk, 1998) and labeled as traitors, impostors, apostates... nothing less than internal enemies, a fifth column threatening the very existence of the group.

In accordance with this perspective, common to all kinds of groups and institutions, only one form of loyalty has been conceived and thoroughly investigated up to now; that is *conformist fidelity*. Conversely, the possibility of understanding loyalty beyond the limits of orthodoxy and obedience has scarcely been considered, apart from the honorable exceptions of Hirschman (1970) and, more recently, Packer (2008). A major contribution of subversive fidelity theory lies precisely in the idea that identification and commitment with a group does not depend on whether one fully accepts or not its mainstream beliefs, enabling thus the expression of fidelity in a confrontational way.

The particular form that loyalty is going to take at the end depends on the cognitive-hermeneutic process that group referents are submitted to. Canonical interpretations lead to conformist behavior, while subversive fidelity is heretical by definition. Only someone who thinks outside the box could ever consider preaching at odds with the official doctrine, not to mention the moral courage to go against the tide and face their own group. For conformists the way forward is clear; dissenters make the path by walking.

## **Enriching doctrine beyond dogma**

Not all loyal people are conformists, nor are all conformists loyal. This simple statement represents, in fact, an epistemological break dividing an otherwise presumed coupling

still present in today's psychosocial theory. When it comes to group life, there is a way to be faithful without repressing one's voice; an option so ironical that may seem absurd at first but has its own coherence.

Subversive fidelity is certainly a sign of postmodern times as it goes beyond conceptual frontiers erected by long-standing ideologies and institutions. In modern thinking, if one is to be recognized as part of a certain community, it is precisely because they embrace all of its mainstream rules and values, but social thought has a logic that does not follow this rigid mindset. The psychology of groups and their members is not so much about being rational as being reasonable, since real people are far more complex than abstract ideal types, exhibiting flexible, even "contradictory", tailor-made identities without blushing.

Presently, the interconnection of believing, behaving and belonging in organizations, movements and categories of all sorts is no longer given. Being Muslim, liberal or psychoanalyst does not mean adhering to a whole set of ideas, positions and norms preset in a stereotyped way. One can be a Muslim feminist, a conservative liberal, an eclectic analyst and so on, without being less faithful. It is time to accept heresy and dissent not like some kind of system failure but as the quintessence of social change, providing the thought-provoking stimuli required to enrich doctrine beyond dogma.

As long as internal plurality is alive, there will always be a chance to show fidelity without conformity, and subversion without treason, no matter what the official doctrine is, for the critical member knows better than a dogmatic elite. Only time will tell if subversive faithful succeed in resisting the top-down pressure while transforming their group from the inside, or fail, crushed by their own dialectical contradiction. In any case, the struggle will eventually be worth it... In social reality, change may not be predictable, but it is unstoppable.

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