

# PSYCHOTHERAPY IN GEORGIA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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## Abstract

The presented article describes the social, political and economic conditions influencing psychotherapy in post-Soviet Georgia. The author describes the so-called post-Soviet phenomena and defines its following aspects: 1. Master-Slave Relationship between the State and the People ; 2. Nostalgia for the Past and Idealisation of the Soviet Times; 3. Identity Crises; 4. Materialistic World View ; 5. Societal Traumas; 6. Political-economic Conditions. The paper describes the correlation between the post-Soviet phenomena and the challenges of practising psychodynamic psychotherapy.

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**Keywords:** Soviet and post Soviet mentality, idealization, identity crises, psychotherapy

## Introduction:

The purpose of this paper is to give a short overview of the social, political and economic conditions influencing psychotherapy in Georgia. In order to explain the conditions of psychotherapy in Georgia, I will give the reader a brief review of the phenomena that we inherited from the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave birth to 15 independent states and dozens of expected and unexpected challenges that are described as the Post-Soviet Phenomena (Urbanovich, 1999; Watson, 2002 ). Full comprehension of these phenomena, in many cases, requires interdisciplinary approach, which may include psychodynamic one. In my article I will try to define some of the phenomena, in general terms, and provide their brief illustration from the dynamic point of view.

## The Past

**The Soviet Mentality.** The Soviet ideology has had an important influence upon the development of psychiatry in Georgia. The Soviet mentality included: 1. Biological world view; 2. Authoritarianism; 3. Intolerance against dissidence.

**Materialistic world view.** During the Soviet times, psychiatry was based on the materialistic understanding of a human being. Disease was regarded as disordered brain functioning caused by distorted biochemical machinery. Mentally ill people were considered to be unnecessary and useless; they were regarded as broken bolts of the big state economic machine. Psychic disturbances were only considered on a somatic level (Calloway, 1993). Patients were labelled with a diagnosis. At the same time psychogenesis of mental disorders was completely disregarded; psychodynamic approach and psychoanalysis were rejected and even forbidden as being bourgeois ( Miller, 2001).

**Authoritarianism.** The relationship between the State and people can be characterised as the one between a Master and a Slave ( Hegel, 1807). The state power, especially the Leader, has always been identified as a masculine human being - a strong, just, merciless father, who protects, supports and takes care of the people (Urbanovich, 1999). Yet Russia was a closed and isolated political system. It was based on dogmatization of social life and society, with rigid norms to which one had to

conform and obey (Chaadayev, 1970; Kliuchevskii, 1960). In this grey and oppressive atmosphere, people had to conform to survive. Such a system can give birth to a benevolent dictator or a “tyrannical omnipotent father.” The psychotherapy in the former Soviet Union and in the Post Soviet time could be described as authoritarian, hierarchical, psycho-educational, and directive (Calloway, 1993). Predominance of this style in psychotherapy especially in group psychotherapy was clear. Group reflects the political macrocosm as a mirror.

**Intolerance against dissidence.** Snezhnevsky A. (1972) widened the frames of Schizophrenia. People who were against the Soviet regime could be treated as having personality disorders or psychosis with slow-flow Schizophrenia i.e. Psychopathic-like Schizophrenia. Thus, there was theoretical and legal substantiation for using compulsory, involuntary treatment of dissidents in psychiatric hospitals. Sane people were admitted to psychiatric hospitals and treated against their will (Calloway, 1993). The practice began with the revolution. However, it was only from the 1960s onwards, with the growth of civil rights movements within the Soviet Union, that there was awareness of the issue in the West.

### **The events in the Soviet Union which contributed to align the psychotherapy in Georgia with the western approaches**

During the early years, there was a small psychoanalytical movement based in Moscow. In the 1920s, there was a Moscow section of the International Psychoanalytical Association. Russian Psychoanalytical Society was disbanded in 1933.

**Georgian psychiatry differed from the Soviet one.** The founder of the Georgian institute, Mikhail Asatiani, practiced psychoanalytical treatment. In 1908, he met C.G. Jung. After this event, the outline of C.G. Jung's Analytical Psychology was published for the first time in the history of the Russian psychiatry (Asatiani, 1910).

The tradition of psychodynamic approaches was continued by Serge Tsuladze who studied medicine psychiatry and psychoanalysis in Paris at Sorbonne University (Miller 2001). He was analyzed by the famous French psychoanalyst Francoise Dolto. In 1961, he came back to Georgia and started to work in M. Asatiani's Research Institute of Psychiatry in Tbilisi Georgia.

In 1978, the conference was held in Tbilisi dedicated to the problems of unconsciousness. This conference was attended by: G. H. Pollock from Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis; S. Ariety from New York Medical College; R. Jacobson from Harvard University; D. Anzieu and S. Leclaire from Paris University; G. Ammon from German Academy for Psychoanalysis and others (A Collective Monograph, Tbilisi, 1978).

**Uznadze Theory of Set.** The contribution of the Georgian school of Psychology and its founder D. Uznadze (1887-1950) is worth mentioning. He was the first Soviet psychologist to acknowledge and experimentally prove the ontological existence of the unconscious mind. He elaborated the Theory of Set, according to which the unconscious exists as a set (Uznadze 1966). He emphasized the fact that in classical Depth Psychology, the ontological content of the unconscious is substantiated theoretically but not empirically (the unconscious is a hypothesis but not reality). The ontological nature of the unconscious is a Set that cannot be conceived of in purely physiological or purely mental terms. The general structure of psychic reality implies not only consciousness and the unconscious mind taken together, but Set as a certain protopsychic state of integrity, underlying the realization of consciousness and unconsciousness, including a full realization of the personality. This resembles the Jung's notion of psychoid pole.

**The Leningrad and Moscow Schools of Psychotherapy.** Personality theory based upon the theory of otnoshenia was developed by V.N. Miasishchev (1893-1973). Miasishchev considered that the most important aspect of personality was the system of

relationships/attitudes or otnoshenia (especially the social relationships), but this was not independent of the functioning of the brain or Pavlovian physiological Principles (Miasischev, 1960). Pathogenetic psychotherapy was the only dynamically oriented psychotherapeutic approach within the Soviet Union. The aim of pathogenetic psychotherapy is reconstruction of the disturbed system of relationships/attitudes.

The psychology of relationships/attitudes is becoming increasingly used in the Soviet psychotherapy. The Group Psychotherapy based on this theory was well developed in St Petersburg (Karvasarsky 1975 ). In Moscow Prof. V. E. Rozhnov used the so called emotionally stressed Psychotherapy in individual and group forms. The both theories were taught at the All-Union psychotherapy centre. The All Union psychotherapy centre helped psychotherapists from all over the Soviet Union to learn more about depth psychology and group psychotherapy.

**Rehabilitation** has a special place in the Soviet Psychiatry. Professor M. M. Kabanoff was the Director of St Petersburg Bekterev Psychoneurological Research Institute. He was the Director of the first rehabilitation Psychiatric department in the USSR. He considered Rehabilitation as a dynamic system of measures and activities that included medical, psychological and social ones. The rehabilitation concept developed by him and his associates had wide application in medical practice in USSR (Kabanoff, 1978).

## Current Characteristics

### The Post Soviet Mentality

**Master-slave relationship between the state and people.** This type of relationship still exists in the psyche and mind of some people. They can see the leader as a saviour and project their own responsibility onto the leader. That is why the remnants of directive style still exist in psychotherapy.

**Nostalgia for and Idealization of the Soviet Times.** For some, the Soviet times was a period identified with the archetypal dream of the Golden Age or Paradise, where everything is provided in abundance for everyone, and where a great, just and wise leader rules over a human kindergarten (Jung, 1970). In ideal socialism, it is supposed that society has to be structured as one big family where the majority of the population are children or junior members of the family (Jung, 1970). They do whatever they are told to do and proceeding from the results of the assigned work, they are praised or punished. People feel safe as long as the responsibility for supplying their basic needs is fulfilled by their parents, what means members of the ruling class (Urbanovich, 1999).

Hard economic and politic times prepared the ground for idealisation of the Soviet Past. This, after all, is already a period of economic difficulty which only accentuates the problems of the nearly 40% of Georgia's population that live in poverty (Rayfield, 2009). There is a denial of the harsher realities of the Soviet reign. Unfortunately, it forms the attitude of fear towards everything new that future can offer. The replacement and repair work is ongoing, but what is most difficult to mend is the shattered confidence of foreign investors and of international and local business.

**Identity Crisis.** A trauma for the Georgian State was the loss of its territories and distortion of its territorial integrity. The country got split, causing people to lose links to each other. The harshness of economic realities after the break up also contributed to an identity crisis. Compared to the big European Empires, the Soviet Union was unique. More than 100 nations having different ethnic roots, languages and religious beliefs lived together for centuries, first within the Russian Empire and later within the Soviet Union. Russia never had overseas colonies. Russia did not have an identity independent from its colonies; there was never a clear division between Russia, as a nation, and Russia, as an imperial power. Economy, very hard condition of life caused depreciation of idea of social justice and protection.

## **Socio-economic traumas**

### **Catastrophic Events.**

**April 9, 1989.** This mass meeting promoting independence was attacked by military forces of the Soviet Empire; 21 people were killed. April 9 has become a symbol of the innocent heroes sacrificed for independence of their motherland. A year later, on April 9, 1990, the Parliament adopted and signed the Declaration of Independence of Georgia and thus mourning was transformed into celebration. April 9 became the symbol of National Independence (Baltic Assembly, 1989; Sarjveladze, 1999).

**1991-1992.** This was the period of ethno-conflict in South Ossetia. More than 25,000 Georgians were expelled from Tskhinvali, and many Ossetian families were forced to abandon their homes in the Borjomi region and move to Russia. Although the ethnic clashes are over and there seems to be a certain progress achieved in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict regulations, the problem is an unhealed wound representing distorted territorial integrity (Cousens, 1997).

**Civil War.** In December of 1991 and January of 1992, there was a civil war in Tbilisi. This was the war between brothers just in the very heart of Tbilisi, in front of the Governmental House. The President of Georgia Z.Gamsakhurdia fled from the country.

**War in Abkhazia.** In 1992-1993 there was a war in Abkhazia. In this war, both Georgians and Abkhazs were cruelly victimised and heavy casualties were reported. Supported by Russia (HRWAP, HRWH, 1995), Abkhazia achieved and maintained de facto independence from Georgia. More than 250,000 Georgians were ethnically cleansed from Abkhazia by Abkhaz separatists and North Caucasians volunteers (Dale, 1996). In 1992-1993, the Georgian party lost the war, and as a result, there are thousands of Georgian IDP (Internally Displaced People) living in very hard conditions within the territory of Georgia and also out of its borders. Having abandoned their property and much of their belongings, some refugee families from Abkhazia are homeless. Abkhaz side compensated its losses and healed its trauma through the Victory Syndrome (Sarjveladze, 1999) and by the de-facto gained independence (Dale, 1996; Sarjveladze, 1999). But the trauma on the Georgian side is still felt by many who are aggravated by the Syndrome of Defeat and heartache for the lost territory (Sarjveladze, 1999). Hostilities, hostage-taking, criminal and terrorist acts are frequent in the region of Gali. As a result, the neurotic traumatic reactions associated with post-traumatic stress disorders persist. Time passes and no progress seems to be achieved in negotiations and Uncertainty Syndrome (Sarjveladze, 1999) makes the situation worse.

**War with Russia.** After the war with Russia, approximately 20,000 Georgians were displaced who - in addition to the many thousands more forced into flight by the conflicts of the early 1990s - need to be rehoused and provided with the means of access to food and healthcare. The damage to Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, economically and politically, was severe. There was severe destruction of roads, installations and army bases, and housing of approximately 20,000 ethnic Georgians. The more definitive loss of the two territories was less easily quantifiable or repairable (Rayfield 2009).

### **Political Events**

The State of Georgia was in an embryonic state. Numerous political parties were furiously struggling for the power. The corruption rate was/is high and spreading. It was not and is not easy to struggle against corruption when most of the population is unemployed. People live in fear but their main goal is to survive. Deep existential crisis is manifested. The rates of lethality and depopulation are high. The suicide rate is high. The stress of uncertainty penetrated most layers of the population (HRIDC, 2002).

**Rose Revolution.** Massive political demonstrations (the so-called "Rose Revolution") were held in Tbilisi between November 20 and November 23, 2003. Many called the change of government a popular coup. Opinion polls suggest the President M. Saakashvili had been

the country's most popular politician, but critics describe him as a demagogue and a populist with a strong lust for power.

After the Rose Revolution, bold measures to fight corruption were taken. However, afterward, antidemocratic tendencies emerged and human rights violations flourished. The judiciary was seen as the government's "appendix" (Amnesty International Georgia 2005; Humans Rights Watch 2005). There are mass dismissals of civil servants caused by reorganisations in governmental structures and no unemployment benefits. According to "Reporters without Frontiers" (HRIDC Reports 2005), the media freedom index of Georgia continues to drop catastrophically and moved back 26 steps. The current government has become the object of criticism of several national and international human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, British Helsinki Human Right Group and etc. These organizations have become increasingly concerned about the pressure on the judiciary by the procuracy and other government authorities. There also have been concerns about the freedom of the media. Georgia is still more authoritarian than it was in 2003: people are careful about what they say on cell phones or write on the internet, and researchers for foreign firms are now hard to find (Rayfield 2009). There is a tendency toward fragmentation of society and to Dysutopian anarchism, a contentious "us - over -them" culture (Ettin& Cohen 2003). There is danger of a return to an authoritarian and totalitarian structure. One can imagine how difficult it would be to provide psychotherapy under these conditions.

## **Current State Of Psychotherapy**

### **Clinical challenges**

**Paternalistic Models.** Within the frame of the paternalistic model of psychotherapy, a psychotherapist is regarded as an Authority. Most patients project the archetype of the Saviour or Inner Healer on to the psychotherapist; they do not take responsibility for his/her cure. A patient cannot accept that a psychotherapist awakens, develops and promotes a person's own self-healing capacities (Goesbeck & Taylor 1977). As a result, any attempt to create an analytical working alliance in the form of individual or group psychotherapy can be experienced by some patients as a lack of therapeutic skill on the part of the psychotherapist.

**Nostalgia for the Past.** Nostalgia for the past causes estrangement and aloofness from the present, strengthens rigidity of life stereotypes, conservative tendencies and leads to fear of novelty (Van Der Kolk,&Van Der Hart, 1991). Psychotherapy is dealing with breaking down of habitual stereotypes; it aims at the formation of a new orientation to the present and the creation of an awareness of the future and its possibilities. This all too often clashes with the patient's too understandable fear of the future and novelty, with his or her idealisation of the past and desire to cling to the security of the familiar.

**Materialistic Worldview.** Georgian patients seem to prefer biological, medicinal treatment and consider it the main form of treatment; psychotherapy is secondary. Most patients do not believe that the psychogenesis of mental disorders plays a role in treatment. This world view presents a challenge for the psychodynamically oriented psychotherapist.

### **Current And Future Challenges**

After the breakdown of totalitarian and authoritarian ideology, the possibility of integrating western psychotherapeutic approaches emerged.

In order to improve psychotherapy services in Georgia and to bring its practice closer to Western standards, the author believes the following steps are necessary: 1. Establishment of a model of scientific psychotherapy based on scientific pluralism which includes both the assurance of multiplicity of methods and the status of scientific discipline; 2. Form the necessary theoretical and practical preconditions for establishing psychotherapy as an independent scientific discipline in Georgia; 3. Bring psychotherapy in Georgia closer to the western standards.

Since the collapse of the USSR, the number of associations have been set up. They closely cooperated with the western associations. Several joint projects were launched in Georgia to bring psychotherapy to the western standards. I would like to mention some of them. These are: 1. The Association of Psychotherapists and Clinical Psychologists of Georgia became an associated member of the European Association for Psychotherapy which was established by a number of European countries. 2. The Georgian Group of Psychotherapy Association was founded in 2003 and it is in close cooperation with American Group Psychotherapy Association. 3. The Georgian Association of Analytical Psychology was founded in 2002 and it works in close association with the International Association of Analytical Psychology to fulfill the Georgian Training Project. This project started in 2002 with the intention to train local mental health workers in depth psychology. They have close contacts with French school of psychoanalysis, Lacanien School "Espace Analytic". LaMaisonVerte has been functioning since 2003 in Tbilisi. 4. Georgian Psychoanalytical Psychotherapeutic Society is an associated member of European Federation of Psychoanalytical Psychotherapy and closely collaborates with it. 5. The Caucasus Institute of Gestalt Therapy and Family Psychotherapy cooperates with the International Gestalt Therapy Associations and it has 4 year certified course of Gestalt Therapy.

These Associations try to establish close scientific contacts with the representatives of different psychotherapeutic schools. For this purposes the members of the Associations try to attend the congress and conferences organised by European Association for Psychotherapy, World Association for Psychotherapy, the IAAP, AGPA and IAGP.

### **Conclusion:**

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave birth to 15 independent states and dozens of expected and unexpected challenges that are described as the Post Soviet Phenomena. The Soviet Mentality included: .materialistic, biological world view, authoritarianism and intolerance of dissidence. The Post Soviet mentality is characterized by master-slave relationship between the state and people, nostalgia for and idealization of the Soviet times, identity crisis, socio-economic traumas and political and economical conditions. Current and future challenges consist of improving psychotherapy services in Georgia and bringing its practice closer to western standards.

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