

## The psychodrama came back to the Balkans

### HISTORY OF PSYCHODRAMA IN BULGARIA

*Galabina Tarashoeva, MD, Ph. D*

*"The Psychodrama started from the Balkans and sooner or later it will come back to the Balkans" these words of J. L. Moreno came to me through Zerka Moreno, and I accepted as my mission to contribute this prophecy to be realized.*

In the early 1970s, in the complete absence of any psychotherapy training or literature in Bulgaria, **Dr. Georgi Kamenov** began to lead the first psychotherapeutic groups in the basement of the First psychiatric clinic at the Medical Academy in Sofia and gathered around him a group of young psychologists and psychiatrists – "the underground period" of group psychotherapy in Bulgaria. Dr. Kamenov's followers, after his emigration, continued to lead therapeutic groups and formed a community like the Balint Group, named "**Fridays**". I was introduced to the "Fridays" in 1979, at the end of my medical education, by Dr. Lyubomir Zhivkov, with whom I was practicing psychiatry, and with whom I shared my interest in psychotherapy.

In "Fridays" we worked with groups of inpatient patients of the clinic, in teams of two co-therapists and one recorder, almost secretly, after working time – at the evenings and during weekends. The group therapy was



not part of the official therapeutic program, (group therapy was not allowed at that time), but the Boss of the clinic **Prof. Temkov** non-officially permitted it, friendly joking with "Stupid young enthusiasts". The records were discussed every Friday, as a form of mutual supervision, both direct and indirect. At that time, in the "Fridays" I found Philip Dimitrov, Jeni and Rumen Georgievi, Dr. Alexander Marinov, Dr. Toma Tomov, Dr. Evgeni Genchev, Anita Fercheva, Mariana Gurganova, Bonka Tosheva, Nikola Atanasov. Every Friday afternoon we gathered and until late evening we analysed what was happened in each therapeutic group, the new candidates for inclusion in the therapy, the difficulties, the mistakes, the successes ... The directing of the groups and our participation in the Fridays was entirely voluntary, entirely gratuitous,

free and out of working time, with all the necessary responsibility and a lot of enthusiasm. Accessible literature was then mainly an unofficial translation made by Dr. Alexander Marinov of Yalom's "Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy", which has become a guide to our work. We suffered from a "Hunger for learning and training".

Later on, in the early 1980s, some leading psychotherapists from abroad managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain and conducted single training seminars in Sofia.

Most of the participants in the "Fridays" took part in a number of art therapy workshops conducted by Diana Waller and Dan Lumley of England, and later in Seminars on Family Therapy and Systemic Approach led by George and Vassu Vassilio of Greece.

#### **The first Encounter with Psychodrama**

Several members of the "Fridays", after a serious fight for "exit visas", were able to leave for Zagreb in 1986 to take part in the IX Congress of the International Association of Group Psychotherapy (IAGP).

My encounter with psychodrama was almost random - Dan Lumley observed my wondering where to go, ad-

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vised me to participate in the workshop of Ken Sprague, a friend of him from England, a psychodramatist. In practice, it occurred a sociodramatic workshop, but the experience was a stir. After that I took part only in psychodrama workshops, they were directed by Zerka Moreno, René Marineau, Göran Högberg, Monica Zuretti and others. I found my method!

After Zagreb there were 3 years of correspondence with Zerka Moreno and other psychodramatists, whom I met in Zagreb, in solitary searching for training. Zerka advised me to travel to Hungary in training groups of Judith Teszáry, then she urged Göran Högberg from Sweden to come and teach us.

In 1988, at the conference of psychotherapists from the socialist countries in Sofia, we invited René Marineau and Göran Högberg and they held the first psychodrama workshops in Bulgaria. After them, I was no longer so lonely in my desire to study psychodrama. Dr. Göran Högberg agreed to launch a psychodrama training program in Sofia, led by the Stockholm Psychodrama Academy.

We received a gift from Göran - the book "The essential Moreno", edited by Jonathan Fox, and he instructed us to organize a group of 10 people who want to study psychodrama and to start reading the book together. In April 1989 began the training of the first group, later named "Sofia 1", directed by Göran Högberg and Gabriela Wiesman – Brun. The members of the group at that moment were: Anita Fercheva, Dr. Veselka Hristova, Dr. Galabina Tarashoeva, Dr. Irina Karaivanova, Mariyana Gurganova, Dr. Alexander Marinov, Dr. David Yeroham, Dr. Evgeni Genchev, Dr. Lyubomir Zhivkov, Nikola Atanasov, Dr. Toma Tomov.



During the first working week in April 1989, on the psychodramatic stage appeared the Berlin Wall, which spoke with a human voice and wept with tears. During the second working week the real wall, dividing Berlin and the world, had just fallen.

The second working week began on 17.11.89 - 7 days after beginning of the great political changes in 1989 (November 10th) and one day before the first democratic meeting at a square Alexander Nevsky.



Dr. Göran Högberg from Stockholm Psychodrama Academy was committed to the overall program, coordinating trainers and securing funding for the first meetings, but coming less frequently.

Gabriele Wiesmann - Brun from Psychodrama - Bern came with different co-leaders, or alone, 3-4 times a year for 5 days training each visit. One of the co-leaders was Helmut Beloch from Psychodrama Institute for Europe.

Other leading psychodramatists including René Marineau from Canada (Moreno's biographer), and Monica Zuretti from Argentina joined our training.

The first level of training in Sofia lasted 550 hours (50 minutes), distributed in 11 working weeks and ended in September 1991. The second level of education was completed in 1993.



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#### Psychodrama training during the transition period

It happened that every working week at the first level training coincide with an important social event, that excited the participants and entered in the work of the group.

For example, when we landed with Monica Zuretti at Sofia Airport, we learned that the Party House is currently burning. The next day Monica directed the sociodrama - what was happening in the square came into the group.

Recognition to all our trainers who directed our training free of charge, without paying for their work! Göran and Gabrielle not only did not get paid for their work, but made an effort to provide funding for their own travel expenses - Göran found a sponsor, Gabrielle organized a charity concert in Bern.



Gabrielle Wiesmann - Brun, every time she came for a working week with our group, she also made an open session for everyone interested. There was a relatively constant group of participants in these meetings who clearly and categorically declared their willingness to learn the psychodrama method. This group was separated in 2 new training groups, and they started training with 2 other training institutes.

With the training of Sofia 2 group since 1991, is committed Überlingen Institute in Germany, led by Grete Leutz. Several visiting trainers were changed, and finally Dr. Jörg Burmeister conducted and completed the training of Sofia 2 in 1998.

With the training of Sofia 3 committed the institute of Ella Mae Shearon, and personally Bernhard Achterberg. The group began its training in 1991, completed first level of training for psychodrama assistants on March 12, 1995, and second level, for psychodrama directors - 17.05.1998.

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#### Specifics of the first training groups in Bulgaria

- \* In the most of other countries, psychodrama developed after the psychoanalysis and group analysis have been institutionalized. And after some native psychotherapist has mastered psychodrama somewhere abroad, they came back to their homeland and trained the first generations of psychodramatists in their own language.
- \* In Bulgaria, the first generation of psychodramatists - the members of the Sofia 1, Sofia 2 and Sofia 3 groups were trained by guest trainers from 3 different psychodrama institutes, from 2 different countries.
- \* The training was in English, fully translated.
- \* It was based on 5-day blocks, several a years, during the other part of the year the trainers were far away from.



#### Support for training by IAGP members

The support we received mostly through Adam Blatner, who:



- \* Organizes a cross-border fund at IAGP to support the participation of Bulgarian psychodramatists at the IAGP congress in Montreal by donations from members of this organization.
- \* Collected and send a set of books and articles on psychodrama and group therapy

For the development of psychodrama in Bulgaria contributed many other guest trainers, who visited Psychodrama Center Orpheus, and directed cross-seminars for participants from different institutes: Prof. David Kipper, Sue Daniel, Bernhard Achterberg, Roberto de Inocencio, Dr. Monica Zuretti, Marcia Karp,

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Chantal Nève-Hanquet, Pierre Fontaine, Yaacov, Naor, Elane Sashnof, Eva Fahlström, Dena Baumgartner, Manuela Maciel, Gabriela Moita, Ralitza Mendova, Fabian Blobel.

#### **Psychodrama Institute for Europe - PIFE**

PIFE was established on 27.08.89 at the IAGP Congress in Amsterdam to promote psychodrama. Alexander Marinov, Galabina Tarashoeva and Drumi Dimchev were invited and participated in the establishment of the PIFE, we established as a Bulgarian branch of this institute. PIFE held its second conference in September 1993 in Sofia with the active participation of the Bulgarian Society for Psychodrama and Group Therapy. At the General Assembly of PIFE in Sofia Galabina Tarashoeva was elected as a board member.



#### **Bulgarian Society for Psychodrama and Group Therapy**

- \* It was meant to be a PIFE branch. Founded on 05.07.1990. from the members of the Group Sofia 1 and was registered on 14.11.90 as a non-profit legal entity and with management board: Chairwoman - Galabina Tarashoeva, vice chairwoman - Veselka Hristova, and treasurer - Alexander Angelov. Under Bulgarian law at that time it could not be a branch of an organization that was not registered in Bulgaria.
- \* On 08.12.1990 BSPGT was accepted as a full member of PIFE. Despite its engagement with PIFE at the beginning, the BSPGT later made its choice - to be autonomous, to issue Bulgarian diplomas by Bulgarian trainers, instead of accepting the PIFE proposal, to train and graduate the Bulgarian psychodramatists.
- \* BSPGT for 2 years - 1991 and 1992 issues and distributes in Bulgarian and English language, its own newsletter.
- \* BSPGT had a library of books donated by Adam Blatner. Unfortunately, it turned out that Dr. L. Zhivkov did not preserve them.
- \* For the first several years with varying intensity, operated a psychodramatists club.
- \* BSPGT established its training standards and approved training programs for Bulgarian trainers
- \* Like the sleeping beauty, BSPGT 3 times asleep deep sleep, last time 2010 – 2016. Actual president, Elena Evstatieva, in the role of the prince, weakens up it very tender and successful.
- \* Organized 4 national conferences, reading seminars, groups for intervision.

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#### Federation of European Psychodrama Training Organizations - FEPTO



The psychodrama training institutes in Europe, after 4 annual meetings, established FEPTO in 1996 in Leuven, Belgium. Galabina Tarashoeva and Raina Vetzova from Bulgaria took part in this meeting.



FEPTO held its 10-th Annual Meeting in Sofia in 2002, at the invitation and with the active participation of Psychodrama Center Orpheus and Psychotherapy 2000



During the AM took place a meeting of the BSPGT with FEPTO, and honouring Bernhard Achterberg.

The BSPGT adopts the FEPTO minimum training standards and requirements as well as its Code of Ethics. BSPGT was accepted as an institutional member of FEPTO in 2002. FEPTO is accepted as representing the psychodrama in EAP - the European Psychotherapy Association.

BSPGT in 2010-2013, through Psychodrama Center Orpheus, participated in European project EMPAUER, developed in FEPTO Research Committee, together with some other institutes. The project was for the application of psychodrama for working with women victims of violence. Part of the project was an international study led by the University of Padua on the effectiveness of psychodrama in these psychosocial interventions. Through this project, we validate in Bulgarian language the tests SAI R (David Kipper) and CORE OM (Chris Evans).

As a continuation of an internationally designed study, developed in the RC of FEPTO, Galabina Tarashoeva within Varna Medical University, department psychiatry, conducted the first Bulgarian psychodrama research on Effectiveness of psychodrama with patients with panic disorder.

In 2016 in FEPTO started another European project with significant Bulgarian participation -Trauma stabilization for refugee families with psychodrama, innovation project 2017-2019, with the goal to create and implement an Evidence Based Trauma Stabilization (EBTS) training and program that will expand professional expertise of specialists who work with



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refugee, asylum seeking and immigrant families. The Bulgarian partner is Center for child development and psychological consultation *Cognitiva*.

In 2017 was established a FEPTO Student Award for the high quality of the thesis, study and presentation of outcomes/ results. The first Student prize was awarded to Kristina Gotseva-Balgaranova from the Institute for Psychodrama Practices "Chiron", Bulgaria, for the thesis "I'm a snake...", "I'm an elephant..." Different faces of children's aggression." The study measures the effect of individual therapy for children based on the Symbol drama developed by Alfons Aichinger.

**BULGARIAN TRAINING INSTITUTIONS**, with programs, approved by BSPTG and FEPTO:

**Psychodrama Center Orpheus** - founded in 1993, with director Dr. Galabina Tarashoeva, co-founder of FEPTO - 1996, and Orpheus a member of FEPTO.

**Psychotherapy 2000** - founded in 1996 with co-chairs – Dr. David Jeroham and Dr. Evgeni Genchev accepted as a member of FEPTO in 1998.

**Institute of Psychodrama, Individual and Group Psychotherapy "Bernhard Achterberg"** - founded in 2005 with co-chairs Dr. Dimo Stanchev and Georgi Antonov, accepted as a member of FEPTO in 2006.

**Chiron Institute** - Established 2009 with manager Dr. Svetlana Nikolkova, accepted as a member of FEPTO in 2012

**Red House Center for Culture and Debate**, headed by Tsvetelina Yosifova, Master Program Artistic and Psychosocial Practices at the NBU, member of FEPTO since 2012

#### **Application of Psychodrama Method in Bulgaria:**

In Bulgaria, for good or bad, we observe the tendency for the same characteristics in application the method, as in many other countries, namely:

- ◆ A large part of the trainees does not finalize their learning process.
- ◆ A large number of graduate psychodramatists do not practice psychodrama.
- ◆ The vast majority of psychodrama practitioners prefer to train subsequent psychodramatists, but in the last time there is a new tendency for conducting thematic groups for non-professionals.
- ◆ Most psychodrama practitioners apply it in the psychosocial sphere, organizational psychology, pedagogy and theatre.
- ◆ A small number of practitioners of psychodrama work in the sphere of psychotherapy, mainly in "small" psychiatry and psychosomatic.
- ◆ Exceptions are psychodramatists, who apply the therapy method in "big" psychiatry, working with psychosis.
- ◆ Increasingly number of psychodramatists are oriented towards the monodrama and very little work psychodrama in groups and with families.

**Doctor Moreno, rest in peace, Psychodrama came back to the Balkans!**