

Report on the Frank Ochberg's and Coline Covington's visit in Georgia

By Jana Javakhishvili

Background

One year ago we had an email exchange with Dr. Frank Ochberg, our dear colleague and friend, during which he discussed his work on the Castro case and elaborated a new term, *ironic attachment*, in relation to the interesting topic of "Voluntary slavery".

We started to talk about arranging a possible visit to Georgia for Dr. Ochberg to share his findings on ironic attachment and voluntary slavery with our audience. I thought this would be very interesting and timely for our country, as it was before the Sochi Olympic Games and I believed that the Georgian sportsmen should not go there under the flag of Georgia. I believed this not only because Russia occupies one fifth of our territories but at the time Russia was also moving the iron fence that had been established between the occupied territories and the rest of Georgia deeper and deeper into the rest of the country. There was a clear message that in spite of the fact that our new government was hoping "to normalize" relations with Russia, Russia was not going to give up her imperial ambitions towards us, as with others from the former Soviet space, including Ukraine, where we worked since March 2014 providing training in psycho-trauma care for the Ukrainian mental health professionals. In the same period the Georgian National State Ballet Band went to Moscow and danced in the Kremlin (seemingly in the spirit of the new policies "normalizing" relations with Russia); for me this looked very much like voluntary slavery. Inspired by Dr. Ochberg's "Ironic Attachment & Voluntary Slavery" concepts, I wrote a blog where I described Georgian-Russian relations in terms of Russia acting as a bully while Georgia suffers from ironic attachment and voluntary slavery syndrome. The blog was published at the electronic journal liberali (liberali.ge) where my blogs are usually published. In the same blog I wrote about Dr. Ochberg, using his concepts, and informed the audience of the possibility that he would come to Georgia and deliver a lecture on this subject. The blog became very popular – more than 1000 "likes" and fivefold as much internet penetrations.

We continued looking for possible ways of bringing Dr. Ochberg to Georgia. Meanwhile he introduced Dr. Coline Covington, who was working on a case of voluntary slavery in England, and the three of us were keen to organize some workshop/conference/seminar together. Luckily, at the end of the spring I, along with my colleague, Dr. Nino Makhashvili, succeeded in raising funds - the money was given to The Foundation for Global Initiative on Psychiatry – Tbilisi (GIP – Tbilisi), an organization that promotes mental health reforms and provides regional training for Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian participants. This gave us an opportunity to invite Dr. Ochberg and Dr. Covington.

Description of Training in Kvareli (a little town in Eastern Georgia)

Together with the team of my colleagues from Global Initiative on Psychiatry we organized a 5 day regional training in the Eastern Georgian region, Kvareli, with participation of up to 20 colleagues from the different countries. Dr. Nino Makhashvili and I facilitated the training starting from 29th of October, covering basic aspects of psycho-trauma: PTSD definition and diagnoses, changes brought by DSM5 and ICD 11, neurobiology of trauma, individual, family, community and societal/large group trauma and its intergenerational transmission (based on Dr. Vamik Volkan's concept of Chosen Trauma), crises management, evidence based methods and best practice of trauma care and crises intervention. On November 1st Dr. Ochberg and Dr. Covington joined us. Dr. Ochberg spoke about the history and development of PTSD diagnoses and about Stockholm Syndrome. In relation to treatment methods, Dr. Ochberg introduced his counting method and colored wheel technique of working with traumatized individuals. Dr. Covington shared her experience of working with a woman who had been held hostage and violently abused for a year and a half. The audience very much enjoyed both excellent inputs; there was lively discussion following each presentation and the feedback after the event was very positive. On both evenings (1st and 2nd of November, as well as the 3rd) the whole group (participants plus facilitators and guest speakers) enjoyed informal exchanges as well as singing and dancing which was helpful in breaking the ice between the participants and establishing a trusting and creative atmosphere within the group.

Lecture on “Voluntary Slavery and Ironic Attachment” at Ilia State University

Near the time of Dr. Ochberg and Dr. Covington's visit, we announced two lectures to be given by our visitors: a joint lecture by Dr. Ochberg and Dr. Covington at Ilia State University on 3rd of November, on “Ironic Attachment and Voluntary Slavery”, and a lecture given by Dr. Ochberg on “How to Cover Suicide, Femicide and Homicide” on 4th of November.

The 3rd of November lecture was announced via the university network, for the university community, as well as via Facebook where a special page, “Frank Ochberg's and Coline Covington's Lecture,” was created. I also announced it via a popular monthly TV program discussing societal developments in the country. More than 800 people signed up for the lecture and approximately 200 attended; the conference hall was full and those who did not find places to sit stood throughout the two hours. A month before, at Ilia State University, a young woman lecturer was killed by her ex-husband in front of her students in the university building. The lecture was helpful in dealing with this trauma of the university community.

During the lecture Dr. Ochberg spoke about Post Traumatic Stress Injury, causes of violence, Stockholm Syndrome, Ironic Attachment and Voluntary Slavery. Dr. Covington spoke from a psychoanalytic view about the dynamics of abusive relationships ranging from political tyranny to domestic violence. In the context of the murder of the woman lecturer, Dr. Covington suggested some possible psychological and social causes of violence against women. There were many questions; the discussion was lively and rich in content. After the lecture Dr. Frank Ochberg, Dr. Coline Covington, Dr. Nino Makhashvili and I held a

four-way lateral discussion on the problems of Georgian society and possible solutions. Journalists and professors from the Georgian School of Public Affairs, Dr. Tiko Tsomaia and Dr. Nino Japiashvili, asked questions and the discussion was recorded. The joint lecture was also recorded; both videos will be posted on the internet.

On 4th of November Dr. Covington left.

Lecture at Frontline Georgia Club on 4th of November

We announced the Front Line Club Georgia event, “Frank Ochberg’s Lecture on how to cover suicide, femicide and homicide,” on Facebook. More than 600 people signed up and over 100 people came, mainly journalists and mental health professionals. Once again, those who did not find places stood throughout the lecture. Dr. Frank Ochberg spoke about how to cover violence, the value of cooperation between journalists and mental health professionals, and the mechanisms assuring the quality of media coverage. The Dart Centre’s materials on the coverage of suicide, femicide and homicide were translated into Georgian by Dr. Tiko Tsomaia and Dr. Nino Japiashvili and disseminated amongst the audience. The materials as well as the recorded lecture of Dr. Ochberg are posted on the website of the Frontline Club as well as GIPA.

At the end of the day Dr Ochberg was recorded by different TV companies and his lecture was covered as one of the key news items that evening.

On the Facebook pages created for the 3d and 4th of November events participants wrote very appreciative and positive feedback on both lectures.

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