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Matza, Tomas. 2018. *Shock Therapy: Psychology, Precarity, and Well-Being in Postsocialist Russia*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. 328 pp. Pb.: $26.95. ISBN: 9780822370765.

Book review by

Suzana Ignjatović

Institute of Social Sciences (Serbia)

As the author announced in the introduction, the title of the book was meant to be provocative. Just as the model of economic transformation in post-Soviet Russia was 'too much shock, and too little therapy' (Ledeneva, in Matza, p. 229), so the new psychotherapeutic modalities were strongly path-dependent: "The variety of therapeutic practices that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s escape simple labelling; they were dynamic, eclectic practices that took shape in the context of equally dynamic political conditions…" (p. xix). This multi-sited ethnography, based on the fieldwork conducted in Saint Petersburg in 2005–2006 (including follow-up visits from 2007 to 2013), reveals the meanders of post-Soviet psychotherapy (and similar forms of coaching, counselling, etc.) in Russia.

The content of the book is arranged into three parts: Biopoliticus interruptus (a history of psychotherapy in Russia placed in the political context); (In)commensurability (different models of psychological intervention for children/teenagers); In search of politics (different models of psychotherapy for adults). Chapter One explores the origins of modern psychotherapy in Russia through an elaborate and very informative history of psychotherapy in Russia from 1917 to the post-Soviet era. Chapter Two describes various psychological programmes and services for children and parents through the lens of the new post-Soviet, commercialised and individualised model of parenthood. Chapter Three presents counselling sessions organised for young, upper-class Russians (mostly

"nouveau riche"). The children were sent to a camp to learn new skills (self-investigation, self-regulation, interpersonal skills) and "build" a post-communist, marketable Self. Chapter Four presents a completely different, state-based model of psychological and social interventions for vulnerable, at-risk young people. The model has been transformed into a combination of a bureaucratic approach from the Soviet system and Putin's model based on "audits, standardization, and systematization" (p. 136). Chapter Five discusses the psychological and philosophical background of the selected therapeutic modalities for adults (psychodrama-oriented Systemic Constellation and Freudian Vectors-psychotherapy). Chapter Six is a case study of a popular radio talk show that offered instant psychological counselling to its listeners. The chapters are interwoven with vignettes conveying the atmosphere from public spaces and random encounters.

The methodology is based on multiple sources and methods: participant observation and interviewing (the researcher attended different modalities: a parenting seminar, sessions for "elite young people", "vector therapy"), visual representation (posters from the expo for family products and services, including education and counselling), and radio talk show conversations (discourse analysis). The transcripts of the conversations between the host and the listeners of the popular talk show were selected as an excellent anthropological source for discourse analysis. This show offered psychological advice to the listeners following the ideology of self-responsibilisation of psychological change, and the listeners made their arguments based on the old ethical principles of duty, family obligations, and similar.

Psychotherapists/practitioners are the main informants (the clients' perspective was presented mostly in an indirect way). There are some valuable auto-ethnographic reflections about "ethnographic encounters" that occurred during the counselling/psychotherapy sessions attended by the researcher (especially at the camp organised for the "elite youth"), but also during occasional encounters with "common people" and local professionals. Informal discussions about parenting raised many issues beyond the main topic of the study ("the East vs the West", "male vs female anthropologist", "professional vs lay knowledge").

The author draws on the concepts of *incommensurability* and *precarious care* to explain psychological care/intervention in post-Soviet Russia. Being placed at the intersection of the two opposed worldviews, modern Russian psychotherapy has been shaped by ideological transformation, cultural patterns, and the intrinsic principles of different psychotherapeutic modalities. New post-socialist models of personality and personal development are inseparable from a "Frankenstein-like social body" (p. 29), a social

patchwork showing discrepancies between the Russian "neoliberalism without liberals" (p. 235) and the remnants of the ex-socialist worldview. Western schools of psychotherapy had announced individualism and the new *Weltanschauung* as the contrast to the "dry and theoretical Soviet approach to psychology" (p. 38). On the one hand, some improvements were introduced: "...the humanization of patient-doctor relations, the demedicalization of therapeutic care ..., a democratization of psychological knowledge, the creation of new work opportunities for women, the belief that the care one offers should not be ideologically constrained ..." (p. 230).

On the other hand, the old bureaucratic institution-centred approach was more accessible, even if it was based on the one-size-fits-all, rather medicalised and ideologically burdened doctrine. However, some current issues of access to psychological support within the state-based system are (informally) addressed by devoted practitioners ready to disregard "red tape" and provide needed help to adolescents with mental and social problems. This finding attenuates the identified differences between the two opposed programmes for young people. Notwithstanding the evident class differences between these "clients", the described public health programme provides support to children with psychiatric diagnoses and/or serious social problems. The "elite children" with similar mental issues probably undergo some more serious interventions instead of the "light" programme aimed to improve "self-investigation and self-regulation".

Perhaps the book's greatest contribution is a fine-grained culturally embedded analysis of the concepts of *dusha* ("soul"), harmony, energy, and similar, and their idiosyncratic meanings in different therapeutic modalities. For example, dusha is an interrelational or interpersonal concept with many layers (spiritual, religious, cultural, and psychological) with a peculiar socialised notion of *psychosociality*. In the introduction, the author mentioned that mystical tradition and parapsychology had great popularity in Russia (even in science), which could be linked to esoteric schools of psychotherapy today (for example, the Freudian-oriented Vector analysis of different parts of the body). This provides some interesting anthropological insights on alternative forms of personal guidance/change that could be used for further research on the origin of psychotherapeutic eclecticism in Russia (including the role of religion). This book provides a great starting point in understanding the position of the Western mainstream modalities (CBT, psychodynamic therapy) and "esoteric" psychotherapies in Russia.