

Psychotherapy can NOT be out of politics: Gestalttherapy Belarus here-and now

There are countries around the globe where psychological support is persecuted.

I am a gestalt therapist practicing in Belarus. Though I cannot say my name here as I am still among those who have chosen to live in my own place in my native country in the times of persecution any otherness to the ruling governmental regime. Even few years ago I would never imagine myself be so much feared to stay at home, to be in my office with my clients, to speak openly by mobile, to keep pictures I like, to put likes or dislikes, comments under posts in social mass media. I live in the times where I can be stopped any moment by “strangers” with no identification signs, my mobile will be checked and in case I am subscribed to certain media and/or have “unproper” pictures with “unregistered symbolics” I can be arrested for minimal 15 days, then the arrest can be prolonged for several months more, and then the criminal case can be started with a sentence for several years... Have I done something wrong? No, everything corresponds to Constitution, but none can prove it... The more you try to protect yourself, the longer sentence will be... Unfortunately, this is the here-and-now situation in Belarus.

Definitely all our clients are full of anxiety, despair, helplessness. We try to do our best to support them in this difficult moment of their lives. But this article is not about methodological tools how to work in the situations of war (though we've become quite skillful in that as well during almost a year of protesting in Belarus). This is a witness to the international professional community about the reality we are facing right now. This is not an appeal for help. This is a kind of testimony. People around the globe must know the real situation in the center of Europe. And professionals are to share their professional experiences to enrich each other. Within those difficult months since the protest started in Belarus August 2020 we have received many words and things in support from colleagues around the world. This is very valuable, much more than the wording can express. We were offered supervision, funds, training, letters of support... We really felt the WE and we do feel it now! Thank you, our dear gestalt colleagues! Thank you for your sensitivity, for your openness, for your being nearby! It was not easy for us to get “adjusted” to the situation of unbearable pain and anxiety. With your support more or less we've managed. Some of us left the country, others stay, many think everyday to stay or to leave. In order to make any choice like that we need energy and support. But the most important we do practice for Belarusians where ever we are.

My clients get arrested. I visit all their court sessions. I am sending them hearts made of my hands right from the court session rooms to them in the cells and try to say by eye-contact that I am proud of him or her, that I support each word and each movement. Then I go home and cry, I am reminding our sessions, those intimate meetings at the contact boundary... Next day I go to my office and work with other clients and in the end of a session I feel I am anxious we could be unable to meet next time. Either me or she/he can get arrested. But when we see each other next week I get the joy of the meeting I never experienced before the August 2020. The situation, ugly, terrible, often unbearable, made me feel the joy of contact and the value of freedom differently. Definitely I am not free right now, I live in prison together with 9 millions of Belarusians, but the value of freedom becomes so strong and so clear for me now. When the situation get changed I will definitely write an article with my observations in my mind, body, spirit regarding the freedom from GT perspective. Right now I cannot do that, not only because of risks to be persecuted but also because I cannot breath fully when my ground is so full of sufferings and pain. Thank you for the opportunity to share this. I feel this is our way to freedom and real awareness about the freedom. The price is high and none knows how expensive it will be finally and how long the way will be.

Tomorrow I am leading a psychological support group to human rights activists who act as social workers, as legal advisors, as support persons to those in prison on political reasons and their relatives. These offline meetings is the only way for them to get psychological support (online connection is often controlled and they feel anxious). We change localities for our meetings, we try to minimize other risks. Each session I have a fear that any moment can come the uninvited visitors with no signs of identification and get everyone to the police stations. One of the participant got arrested by KGB

last time and everyone is very frightened. Frankly, I feel so bad to be frightened to provide psychological help to people who need it so strongly and who need it because they help to the others. Be scared to help someone is a heavy feeling and I feel as a psychotherapy practitioner it is the heaviest one I have ever experienced in my practice. Definitely I have supervision, I have my own psychotherapy, I also have my own family and this process of finding a balance in a totally unbalanced environment eats all the resources bringing you to the point of movelessness. I rely on my intuition what is located somewhere around the heart or even inside and I think about the values of psychotherapy, about our GT fathers. And then I am trying to breath as full as I can and then I move towards the client. This circle has waves and the surfing is pretty dangerous but it's very much about life pushed by the energy coming up from values. Fears get closer and far away, come back and disappear making the waves stronger and the energy of life deeper... I still can't believe I am surfing in this pretty scary sea and somehow find the balance but I deeply believe I will reach the solid ground some day. I lost the hopes for helicopters or big ships coming up to these waters to save those thousands of people struggling for their values but I really believe with the wind of inspiration, either professional, civil or just relational I can manage not only to survive but also to reach the land.

I will delete this article from my computer because it's risky. I will keep this anonymous because it's risky. And most possibly I will not be able to come to professional international events in the coming months or maybe years because it's risky. But I will continue to provide psychotherapy to those who need it whatever cost I will pay for it. Psychotherapy cannot be out of politics, it is part of the movement for freedom, not only intrapersonal but also interpersonal, in some way it is a tool what inspires people to keep their human dignity and keep going. And I know that my family is proud of me. As well as I am proud of my clients.

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July 2021

Note/ brief info on political situation: In August 9 2020 the results of the presidential elections were announced in Belarus when a large part of population admitted falsifications and started to protest. Since that moment 11 people were killed, 38000 were arrested and imprisoned, many of them severely injured and tortured, 530 imprisoned are recognized as political prisoners. Every day this list is added by new names. A number of countries around the world have not recognized the results of the elections and appealed to stop violence and torture.