Studying the archives of the Hellenic Society of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy: An outline of its historical course

Konstantinos Talfanidis & Grigoris Maniadakis

Published online: 09 Sep 2013.


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2013.830193

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
Studying the archives of the Hellenic Society of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy: An outline of its historical course

KONSTANTINOS TALFANIDIS & GRIGORIS MANIADAKIS*

Abstract
The authors attempt to outline the historical course of the Hellenic Society of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (HSPP). They put forward several hypotheses concerning the dynamics of its foundation and evolution. The HSPP was founded in 1977 by five Greek psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists trained abroad, after three decades of fruitless attempts at establishing psychoanalysis in Greece. The authors sustain that the foundation of the HSPP addressed the complex problems of Greek society in the 1970s. The request for the founding of an institution for psychoanalytic therapy and training can be linked to a search for new orientations in thought that would enhance the working-through of traumas that had marked Greek society in the previous decades; these traumas played a role in the insurmountable problems in establishing psychoanalysis in Greece and in the difficulties met by the emancipation of Greek psychiatry from asylum-centered practice. The HSPP remained the only psychoanalytic institution in Greece until the foundation of the Hellenic Psychoanalytic Society in 1984. One of the main traits of its historical course has been the effort to shape a psychoanalytic organization directed towards the clinical reality of Greek society.

Key words: resistance to psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis in Greece, collective trauma, mourning

Introduction
This paper is based on research conducted in the Archives of the Hellenic Society of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (HSPP), on interviews with founding and other members of the Society, and on the literature pertaining to the history of the psychoanalytic movement in Greece. It is the fruit of a project implemented by the Archives Committee of the HSPP, which began in the fall of 2007 and is still in progress.

We shall start by addressing a question that we often put to ourselves while working in the archives. What drives two members of a psychoanalytic society to spend a considerable portion of their free time studying its archives? Three reasons stand out. The first is our need to look into our genealogy. Several psychoanalysts have noted the need of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic societies to inscribe themselves in a genealogy beginning with Freud (Gougoulis, 2004). A third reason, closely linked to the first two, may have to do with the examination of our own ideas and experiences of the institution to which we belong, of its relationships with the Greek community, whose offspring and members we are, and with the international psychoanalytic movement, whose ideas have played a decisive role in forming our professional identity. Valsamatzis writes, in the Afterword of a volume on Marie Bonaparte (2006), that research into the history of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic institutions draws the veil of oblivion, bringing to light truths, traumas, and forgotten stories, fragmentary though they may be.

The HSPP was established on December 17, 1977. Its founding members were Athina Alexandris, a member of the Canadian Psychoanalytic Society and the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA); Andreas Giannakoulas, a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society and IPA; Matthew Josaphat, a member of the British Association of Psychotherapists (BAP); Panagiotis Sakellaropoulos, a member of the Société Psychanalytique de Paris and IPA; and Yannis Tsiantis, a member of the BAP. All five founding members were physicians who, after completing their medical studies in Greece,
trained in psychiatry, child psychiatry, and psychoanalysis/psychoanalytic psychotherapy in different countries (Britain, France, and Canada).

**Early attempts at creating psychoanalytic institutions in Greece**

The HSPP is the first psychoanalytic institution created in Greece that has survived to this day. Psychoanalytic ideas, however, had been introduced decades earlier, in the second decade of the 20th century, by Manolis Triantafyllidis, an emblematic figure in the fields of linguistics and education. It seems that these ideas had a considerable impact – not necessarily always a positive one – in intellectual circles. However, until the late 1970s, numerous attempts to introduce psychoanalysis as a clinical and therapeutic practice and to create psychoanalytic institutions ended in failure.

The most well-known and probably the most typical case is the fate of the first psychoanalytic group in Greece. This was formed in 1946 under the auspices and the supervision of the princess of Greece and eminent psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte. Its members were Andreas Embirikos (a poet, analyst of R. Laforgue, friend of Andre Breton, and introducer of Surrealism in Greece), Demetrios Kouretas, and George Zavitzianos (both psychiatrists). The group was dissolved in 1951.

Several explanations of the failure of this group to survive have been put forward. Many of them converge on the fact that the princess, who was then omnipotent in the IPA, attempted forcefully to introduce an institution into a society that was much too immature to accept psychoanalysis. Specifically, Anna Potamianou (2006) believes that the Greek psychoanalytic landscape of the time remained negative, as this endeavor was undertaken within the context of maternal omnipotence and domination, and that Marie Bonaparte tried to offer the Greeks something ready-made, instead of allowing them to achieve it by their own efforts and in their own time. Aslanidis (2006) claims that this group was founded by Marie Bonaparte and the IPA in too forceful a manner, in a country lacking the psychoanalytic movement that would enable it to develop into an institution. Furthermore, Ploumbidis (1984) observes that, during that period, psychoanalytic ideas were met with a negative reaction on the part of scientists and intellectuals who were close both to the right-wing establishment and to the Left.

It may be important to note – although it has not been confirmed – that one of the events which marked the dissolution of the group was a police raid on the office of Andreas Embirikos, a man of “noble spirit and rare integrity” (Hartocollis, 2000). It seems that the raid was instigated by an anonymous informant stating, according to some sources, that Embirikos had made false claims of being a doctor or, according to others, that one of his patients had committed suicide. Both Embirikos and Zavitzianos left Greece. Only Kouretas remained, and was later elected professor of psychiatry at the University of Athens.

Finally, we should note that the published or publicized work of the first psychoanalytic group concerned mainly nonclinical issues (e.g., mythology, theatre, and literature; Sakellaropoulos, 2002).

At approximately the same time, in the 1950s, the psychiatric landscape in Greece was particularly bleak; it was dominated by asylums while, according to several testimonies, clinical activity was less than basic. It is characteristic of the spirit prevalent in the psychiatric community and the country in general that a Colony for the Mentally Ill was founded on Leros, a war-ravaged island that had hosted political exiles (Kandylis, 1992; Queen Federica, 1971).

There were only two exceptions to this dual phenomenon that both the absence of psychoanalysis and the extremely lacking clinical activity in the Greek psychiatric community. The first was the founding, by the psychologist and psychoanalyst Anna Potamianou, of the Center for Mental Health and Research (CMHR), a network of community-based mental health units. The CMHR was open to the principles and clinical applications of psychoanalysis. It organized visits by foreign psychoanalysts to Greece for educational purposes and offered, among other services, psychoanalytically oriented therapy, often under the supervision of psychoanalysts from abroad. The operation of the CMHR was often disrupted by the intervention of administrators and, during the 1967–74 dictatorship, by the military. Anna Potamianou resigned; she returned to the CMHR only after the fall of the dictatorship (Potamianou, 1998).

The second exception was the work of psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Panagiotis Sakellaropoulos, first at the Daou Penteli Psychiatric Hospital for Children and the Theotokos Foundation, and later at the Psychiatric Clinic of the Aeginiteion Hospital. Sakellaropoulos, encouraged by D. Kouretas, promoted new treatment and patient rehabilitation programs, inspired by the principles of psychoanalysis and social psychiatry. During that period, Sakellaropoulos was surrounded by a group of young professionals, most of whom were later trained as psychoanalysts. This work was interrupted by the military coup in 1967. Kouretas was forced to retire, while Sakellaropoulos resigned and left for France (P. Sakellaropoulos, personal communication, 2008).
Other attempts at creating psychoanalytic institutions in collaboration with the IPA during the 1960s and 70s were short-lived and rather on the fringes of Greek social conditions at the time, including in the field of mental health. (The last of these attempts took place about 1973–75, when Athina Alexandris had returned from Canada and Panagiotis Sakellaropoulos from Paris; P. Sakellaropoulos, personal communication, 2008).

The above may lead us to ponder the insurmountable difficulties encountered by psychoanalysis in Greece until the late 1970s, both on a clinical and an institutional level. The “coincidence” of these difficulties with the stunted development of psychiatry and the expulsion of mental pain from the social body – behind the walls of the asylum – could be seen as indicative of the inability of the Greek society in that period to allow for and deal with the mere existence of the mentally ill as bearers of mental pain within its body. The extent of this “problem” could be associated with decades of unbearable collective traumas (wars, immense loss of life, uprooting, foreign occupation, a series of dictatorships, and a civil war). Using Bion’s words, we could say that the protection of the Greek social group from its abysmal paranoid and depressive anxieties had been undertaken by the administrative authorities, in the role of a “specialized work group” (Bion, 1961), with the police often playing a key role. A similar role, this time on the ideological level, was played by the majority of intellectuals, both establishment and left-wing.

It has been very appositely said that psychoanalysis was unwelcome in Greece, not only because of its “scandalous” theories (child sexuality, etc.), but also because it situates the problem of mental conflict and mental pain within the person and not between the person and external reality (Tzavara, 1984). Writing in 1984, Liakopoulos attributes “Greek” resistance to psychoanalysis to a socio-historical neurosis that made Greek society react defensively to anything that would jeopardize its identification with traditional values.

But let us return to the HSPP. We can distinguish three periods in its development, from its foundation to this day, defined by the drafting of three different Articles of Association describing the orientation, the organization, and the functioning of the Society. The first period extends from the foundation of the Society in 1977 until 1986, the second period from 1986 to 1995, and the third from 1995 to the present.

Foundation of the HSPP: First period (1977–1986)

The HSPP was founded by notarial act on December 17, 1977 as a Limited Liability Company and with the five above-mentioned founding members as partners. This legal form was chosen because the number of members was not sufficient for the foundation of a Scientific Society. The HSPP made its first public appearance in December 1977, at a symposium that took place in the British Council premises, where each founding member presented a paper. The event was a success, and the Society was enthusiastically welcomed by those who were interested in promoting psychoanalytical therapy and education. Among the participants was D. Kouretas, who voiced his support for this new attempt at creating a psychoanalytic institution in Greece (P. Sakellaropoulos, personal communication, 2008). Three of the founding members were permanent residents in Greece; Matthew Josaphat also moved back in 1980, while A. Giannakoulas remained abroad. From 1980, the educational committee consisted for about ten years of the four founding members, who resided in Greece, and Elias Liakopoulos.

The educational program of the HSPP began soon after that. The first to take part in the first training cycle were D. Anastasopoulos, E. Aslanidis, D. Kyriazi, E. Tsanira, K. Tsolis, and V. Falaras. These were young psychiatrists who had been interested in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic education even before the HSPP was founded. The HSPP followed, to a great extent, the theoretical educational program of the BAP and the British Psychoanalytical Society, while training was organized according to Eatingon’s tripartite structure (training analysis, supervisions, and theoretical courses).

As for the name of the Society, it seems that it was chosen in order to accommodate the fact that some of its founding members belonged to the BAP, while others belonged to the IPA. Moreover, the name placed the HSPP in the psychoanalytical realm, while at the same time allowing for the future creation of a psychoanalytical society affiliated to the IPA. We should not forget that two of the founding members of the HSPP, the psychoanalysts and members of the IPA Athina Alexandris and Panagiotis Sakellaropoulos, had taken part in an attempt, in the early 1970s, to create an IPA Study Group in Greece. Their participation in the foundation of the HSPP can be viewed as a way out of the impasse created by the failure to institute this Study Group.

At the time the HSPP was founded, psychoanalysts working in Greece were few in number and they were all situated in Athens; we have already mentioned that there was no organized psychoanalytic institution. However, there was a powerful demand for psychoanalytic knowledge, education,
and therapy, which seemed to coincide, to a great extent, with a demand for reform and for the introduction of the principles of social psychiatry in the country's psychiatric structures. The activities of those of the HSPP's founding members who were residents of Greece were initially oriented towards addressing these demands.

Yet what was it that prompted this demand? What led to such a substantial transformation of the landscape, compared with the situation that had prevailed a few years earlier, as described above?

In an attempt to account for this phenomenon, we could claim that it was the result of a series of factors. First among these were the economic, social, and cultural developments in Greek society. Another critical factor was the toppling of the military dictatorship in 1974 and the radical liberalization brought about by this political change. The violent repression of freedom of thought by the dictatorship and the search for new ways of thinking as a vehicle of resistance had already oriented many young Greek intellectuals towards European ideological trends (Gougoulis, 2002). We can also argue that the trauma of dictatorship created a need for a new reading of Greek reality, beyond the meaningless clichés mouthed by the administrators of the post-war state, whose limits were exhausted by the dictatorial regime, and beyond the paranoid misanthropic image that was the legacy of the civil war. In this venture, psychoanalysis could be a useful tool. Moreover, political change brought to light an immense body of material that had been hidden out of sight for decades; this enabled a process of mourning and the integration of the “lost” years (Maniadakis, 2004).

The circumstances were therefore favorable towards the introduction of psychoanalysis in Greece. Psychoanalysis could contribute to the process of mourning and the integration and legitimization of the accompanying emotional pain. In this sense, it was hardly surprising that the demand for psychoanalytical education coincided with the demand for psychiatric reform that would introduce and treat emotional pain within the community instead of exiling it behind asylum walls. We should not forget that the only exceptions in the desolate psychoanalytic and psychiatric landscape of the post-war years were the attempts of Potamianou and Sakellaropoulos to use psychoanalytic ideas within the framework of an elementary social psychiatry.

The activities of the HSPP, therefore, seemed to be in tune with dual need and its dynamics. One of the first psychiatrists trained by the HSPP poignantly mentions that at the time he felt part of something not simply new, but revolutionary (D. Anastasopoulos, personal communication, 2010).

We could say that one of the fundamental features of the HSPP is that it was created through the contribution of both psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists. The title of the Society includes the term “Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy,” and its educational program follows a psychoanalytic model, although this is not explicitly stated in its Articles of Association. Aslanidis (2006) holds that the HSPP began operating on the basis of its nonaffiliation to the IPA, concentrating instead on addressing the urgent business of creating an institution rather than dwelling on formalities.

A key part of the Society's first Articles of Association was its emphasis on consolidating the professional rights of the psychotherapists that were its members. In this sense, the Society also saw itself as a professional organization. Also apparent in the Articles is the founding members' intention to have an impact on the mental health sector in general, by expressing their opinions, collaborating with other mental health professionals and institutions, and training mental health officials. We therefore believe that its Articles gave the Society a clearly extroverted and social direction, which was certainly in tune with the demand for introducing psychoanalytic principles and elements of social psychiatry into the mental health sector.

In fact, most of the Society's founding members soon afterwards played a crucial role in founding the Institute of Social Psychiatry in Athens. Moreover, Athina Alexandris, through teaching, supervision, and writing, introduced an entire generation of mental health professionals to psychoanalytical thinking, focusing on the psychoanalytic therapy of the native “difficult patient.” Matthew Josaphat was particularly active in the field of group analysis and psychoanalytic family therapy. Panagiotis Sakellaropoulos organized a pioneering network of social psychiatry units inspired by the psychoanalytic approach (or, as he himself calls it, the psychoanalytic prism), not only in Athens, but also in the provinces (Phokis and Thrace). G. Tsiantis carried out pioneering work in the field of child psychiatry and psychotherapy for children and adolescents, a field that had until then been nonexistent in Greece. Aslanidis founded the department of short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy in the psychiatric university clinic of the Aeginetion Hospital (which laid the foundation for the department of psychoanalytic psychotherapy later established by G. Vaslamatzis), and D. Kyriazis, in his position as a military medic, contributed to the operation of the open psychiatric clinic at the Air Force Hospital. Moreover, every two years, and sometimes more often, the Society organizes a psychoanalytic symposium, often with invited speakers from...
abroad; this symposium is clinically oriented and very well attended.

Obviously, the founding of the HSPP did not exhaust the demand for psychoanalytic education in Greece. However, it served as a catalyst and initiated a public discussion on the issue of psychoanalysis in our country. An indicator of the zeitgeist is Psychoanalysis and Greece, a study published in 1984 that dealt mainly with the difficulties facing those attempting to establish psychoanalysis in the country.

In 1982, the IPA initiated an attempt to create a psychoanalytic society in Greece by creating a Study Group, whose founding members were Athina Alexandris, Avra Berati, Petros Hartokollis, Anna Potamianou, and Panagiotis Sakellaropoulos.

With the creation of an IPA-affiliated institution in Greece, the HSPP ceased to be the only institution active in the field of psychoanalysis and was, moreover, obliged to define its own identity more clearly. In addition, there appeared to be, within the Society, a new dynamic created by the presence of several new members, who were able to participate in the Society's administrative and educational structures. Thus, we could say, the HSPP entered the second period of its development.

The second period

On May 16, 1986, an Athens court ratified the Society's new Articles of Association. The HSPP ceased to function as a Limited Liability Company and was instituted as a scientific Society. In the new Articles, we can see that the HSPP appears definitely as a psychoanalytically oriented institution. We could consider this to be a result of an internal process of evolution in the HSPP, and also of the formation of the Hellenic Psychoanalytic Society (and, to a lesser extent, other psychoanalytic groups), which initiated the development of a polyphonic psychoanalytic landscape, thus imposing a clear definition of the HSPP’s position in this space. This clarification came as the result of discussions, internal tensions, and controversy. The baseline of the disagreements boiled down to the professional title that the members of the Society would hold. Eventually, Yannis Tsiantis, founding member of the HSPP, and two other members left the Society.

These internal proceedings did not impede the Society's operation or its educational work. In this context, we should mention the acquisition of part of Masud Khan’s library, arranged by the founding member A. Giannakoulas, the Society's admission to the European Federation for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (EFPP), and a series of lectures on psychoanalytic issues organized by the Society and addressed to the general public.

We should also note that, during this period (1996), the HSPP became a member of the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies (IFPS), thus establishing an administrative link with the international psychoanalytic movement. These moves ushered the Society into its third period.

The third period

The current, third, period cannot yet be historically evaluated, because we ourselves are part of it. We believe, however, that it is possible to describe some of its most salient traits as they rise from the study of the archives. The first of these is an emphasis on clinical psychoanalytic work. This trait is combined with an enrichment of the Society's training program (training analyses of three or four sessions per week, more group supervisions, and thematic seminars). It is also accompanied by the development of the educational activities of the Society in the field of mental health (regular clinical seminars for mental health professionals, which are always very well attended). The second trait is that the Society has become more extroverted, with overtures to both the Greek and the international psychoanalytic communities.

The HSPP now actively participates in international psychoanalytic organizations such as the IFPS, the Association Internationale pour l’Histoire de Psychanalyse, and the EFPP. An important part of this participation is the organization of international meetings (eight in the past fifteen years), which are usually clinically oriented. Its members also publish papers in Greek and international psychoanalytic reviews and edited volumes.

This period is also marked by the Society's remarkable publishing activity, as indicated, for example, by three edited volumes stemming from conferences organized by the HSPP.

Afterword

This paper is part of an ongoing process of studying and classifying the Greek psychoanalytic landscape, which has been constantly shifting for these past 35 years. Our conclusions are subject to the limitations inherent to archival research and, like every research hypothesis, include an element of construction. We believe, however, based on our study of the HSPP archives, that the fact that Greece today does in fact have a psychoanalytic community, and one represented by many different voices, is the result, in part, of the foundation and development of the
HSPP: a psychoanalytic institution that tried to find creative solutions to the various national and international obstacles that crossed its path; an institution that, through the above-mentioned psychological, political, and social processes, was the first to develop a local answer to the long-unsolved problem of establishing psychoanalysis in Greece. Although not exclusively the only factor, the HSPP’s course from 1977 to the present and its commitment to clinical work, which has been a definitive part of its contribution to the Greek psychoanalytic landscape, suggest that its role was pivotal.

Finally, we should note that the challenges currently facing the HSPP are related to particular problems, clinical and therapy related, stemming from the Greek financial and social crisis. We believe that the future of the HSPP will depend largely on the manner in which it responds to these challenges.

References


Authors

Konstantinos Tafanidis, MD, is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and a full member of the Hellenic Society of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (HSPP); he is also a member of the Executive, the Archives and the Library Committee of the HSPP. He works in private practice and in the public sector, and is a supervisor in the psychoanalytic psychotherapy department of the Athens University department of psychiatry. He has also published on the psychoanalytic therapy of children and adolescents.

Grigoris Maniadakis, MD, is an associate member of the Hellenic Society of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and a member of its Archives Committee. He works in private practice and in the public sector, as coordinator of the education department of the Hellenic Centre for Mental Health and Research, and as a supervisor at the personality disorder department of the Athens University department of psychiatry. He has co-edited Marie Bonaparte: A person of history and psychoanalysis (with G. Vaslamatzis and D. Rigas) and the Greek edition of the Dictionary of Kleinian thought (with G. Chalkia). He has also published on the psychoanalytic treatment of borderline and narcissistic patients, and on psychoanalytic approaches to art. In addition, he is film section editor of the journal Oedipus and an associate editor of this journal.