
THE POST – SOVIET FREEDOM: BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

ARTUR MKRTICHYAN

Uncertainty in Post-Soviet World

The gradual evolution of the worldwide global cooperation entails that the success of the strategies of autonomous entities increasingly becomes dependent on the success of many other actors. This is a direct result of an evolving integral socio-economic culture in the world and it presupposes coordinating concurrent global events that differ territorially. The culture being established is a global culture synchronized in time as opposed to spatial localization, and from now on this culture does not accommodate such concepts as centre and periphery, while all the events are of equal value, regardless of their location. Everyone steps into this culture with a unique past, but a common future.

Given the simultaneous influence of the past and the future, each is both unique and universal, which allows, in its turn, the entry of people into a new global culture, as well as the preservation of a former cultural identity. This is the foundation that will allow avoiding such threats of totalitarianism as fundamentalism, which basically occurs due to excessive focus on the culture of the past and mistrust of a common future. The changes in values resulting from the unsuccessful attempts of the developing countries to reach the western level of economic development play an important role in this process. Consequently, instead of seeking new values in the common worldwide future, some look for those in their own past, failing to address the issue of creatively synthesizing their individual pasts and a common future.

Naturally, the uncertainty and the purposelessness of such a future and, oftentimes, of the present, very much hinder this kind of synthesis. It should be noted that such an uncertainty has widely materialized in the post-Soviet space.

In the past, the Soviet society was a stable one, as human needs were satisfied relatively simply in totalitarian societies, because individual ambitions were subordinated to the common goal. This goal was limited to the notion of building communism and the principle of egalitarianism. The collective consciousness, being manipulated accordingly, contained those needs at a lower level, it did not allow developing "individualism" and liberating the "individual". Strict limits of what an individual of a certain current status could achieve in the society were established. Consequently, everyone sought the meaning of life in the feeling of sharing in the "great" common cause. However, the gradual decline of the totalitarian system caused an "individualization" and blurred the moral limitations established by the previous ethics of the collectivism and the power of the totalitarian control. The old traditions, patterns and the behaviour stereotypes lost their efficacy and their power over the post-Soviet individual.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a vacuum of meaningful orientation. The present of many people in the post-Soviet social space is faceless; it is uncertain. The loss of the meaning of life in general, as well as the local conflicts, terror and the outburst of criminal conduct, in particular, seek to saturate this vacuum while also alerting us to the need for reassessing the foundations of our social setup. The overall essence of the worldwide historic trends of modern times is very much dependent on how the integration of post-Soviet states into the world society will progress. Consequently, the problems related to integration should not become the private business of each new state, and their solutions should be based on the common human values fostered by the world community.

On another front, however, the world society is undergoing a painful coming-to-be. Common human values come into a conflict with the outdated, yet "unshakable", principles of forced solutions to problems. The world mass media continues to both openly and secretly propagate violence while also embedding patterns of intolerance and animosity resulting in more active weapon sales. The inequality of nations with respect to the distribution of world resources causes mass poverty that becomes a fertile soil for nurturing ethnic differences and hostility resulting in increased aggressiveness in people and inclination to use violence. Any notional (meaning-related) uncertainty becomes global and a civilization based on force/power inevitably results in new manifestations of that power, as it was proved by the events in Iraq.

Meanwhile, all the attempts to do away with the misbalance and establish a new balance in the world according to the previous power/force solutions are fraught with consequences, which, in their turn, need compensating mechanisms. This is why the unity of the universal and the private/individual stemming from the common human values becomes one of the most burning problems of the modern times. Everyone solves this problem differently, which is why the present is unique for everyone.

Armenia's experience

In this respect, the transformational processes transpiring in the Republic of Armenia present an extraordinary analytical material for philosophical comprehension, as the situation that has come about here is unique by nature. The hardships of the transition period were aggravated by the extremely dire life conditions caused by Karabagh war and the country's blockade. On the other hand, the study of the processes happening in Armenia reveals a range of problems typical of all transformation societies, which means that developing mechanisms designed to address those problems is of common interest. Armenia's experience with the formation of a democratic society can be summarized and scientifically analyzed. The results of such analysis could help to examine the recurrent patterns and mechanisms of democratic transformation in small post-totalitarian countries and would allow developing practical recommendations for managing the trends present in transformational processes.

Even an initial consideration of the problems of the transition period allows to group them into three categories: economic problems, institutionalization problems and cultural-psychological problems. Many researchers emphasize the economic problems, while we think that the first two groups are conditional upon the last one. Given the above considerations, this article is an attempt at the philoso-

phical analysis of the cultural-psychological problems with a focus on the transformation of the social consciousness of the Armenian society.

Establishing a democratic rule in the post-Soviet space is closely linked to the formation of a democratic mentality and thinking. The social consciousness in transformation is characterized by the conflict between the old stereotypes and the innovative ideas, between the conservative ideology and the groundless utopias; it is unstable and easily subjected to the extremities of the mass euphoria and a universal frustration. In these conditions, the individual's system of values becomes contradictory, which inevitably influences his/her views and behaviour. This is demonstrated by the research of Russian sociologists, stating "the blurred boundaries of the new value system, its insufficient clarity make the person's behaviour "irrational", "unpredictable"¹. The sociological surveys² conducted in Armenia also provide evidence about serious socio-psychological problems in the transforming Armenian society. First of all, it should be noted that most of the respondents were pessimistic in their expectations for the future. The causes for this pessimism should be sought in their living conditions. Economic and moral decline, unfinished war, and political tension in the country, instability and threat to existence-these factors create massive frustration and disappointment at present too and result in an unallowably large-scale out-migration.

And the cause of all this is not just the psychology of defeatism of individual people, but the fact that we appeared to be socially unprepared for the changes. The Armenian society is not structured to face the problems of the transition period. This unstructured nature coupled with the uncertainty of intra-system social problems has not been overcome yet, thus making the transitioning Armenian society incapable of adequately reducing the complex effects of the systemic environment. Oftentimes this situation results in functional contradictions and different conflicts ranging from family conflicts to the yet unresolved Karabagh conflict, which contributes to spreading pessimistic perceptions, as the threat of war is the most tragic cause of pessimism.

Apparently, in such circumstances the dissatisfaction with the present is manifested in the mistrust toward the future. Another cause of this lies in conflicting expectations. As noted by the Russian sociologist Toshchenko "the consciousness was awakened by the anticipation of positive changes raised by perestroika in the second half of the 1980s. It was later fuelled by the events of the early 90s when there were many who believed that the new development paradigm proposed by the liberal radicals will help people achieve what they always sought and what was not made available by the Soviet rule"³.

However, the realities of life turned out to be quite different. People's hopes shattered once again, which caused not only frustration and disorganization of the public consciousness but more so anomie, i.e. "complete indifference to any public motivation regardless its direction, be it negative or positive". This is exactly the socio-psychological environment of the transition period that became domi-

¹ **Lapin Nikolaj, Beljaeva Lyudmila.** Dinamika cennostej naselenija reformiruemoj Rossii, Moscow, 1996, p. 40.

² **Mkrtichyan Artur.** Chaos kak sistemoobrazujushij mehanizm samoorganizacii sociuma, Yerevan, 2008, pp. 132-135.

³ **Toshchenko Zhan.** Paradoxal'nyj chelovek, Moscow, 2001, p.373.

nant in the Armenian society in the sphere of public consciousness. It is manifested both in everyday life and in the highest trenches of power being also rapidly proliferated by the mass media. As an outcome, the transforming society becomes less and less unified in the political sense and civic activism goes down. "Meanwhile, the political consciousness is inclined to the nostalgic restoration of a strong power, a strong hand. In practice, this results in the formation of "authoritarian democracies"⁴.

Undoubtedly, there exist a number of other factors that provide evidence about the direct relationship between the public attitudes in general and the total pessimism, in particular, coupled with the specific social life conditions of people. However, to reveal the in-depth causes of the transformation of the public being there should be a different level of analysis, which is much deeper and more essential.

Anomie as a normative conflict

It should be noted, though, that our public life is characterized by a high degree of disorganization of the regulation of public processes by officially established norms and it demonstrates apparent signs of anomie, as people are unable to achieve universally accepted goals through legal, institutional means. In today's transformational society that has emerged as a result of the spontaneous transformation of cultural goals and institutional means of their accomplishment, certain goals are extremely strongly emphasized without a respective emphasis on the institutional means of behaviour.

According to the American sociologist Robert Merton⁵, who interprets anomie as a normative conflict in the society's cultural setup, the dominant culture embraces the universally acknowledged and interrelated goals that consist of specific cultural goals, intentions and interests, which appear to be the legitimate goals of the society. These goals differ in their significance, they form diverse attitudes toward them causing people to aspire accomplish them in different ways. This culture also comprises a set of acceptable means to achieve those goals that are meant to regulate and control the people's behaviour. These two differing components of the cultural structure are interrelated and in case of a high degree of disconnection between the two a situation of a cultural dissent occurs, which means that people define and emphasize the goals and the means to achieve them differently. The conflict between the culturally prescribed universal goals and the means of their accomplishment results in anomie. Another major socio-historical cause of anomie is concealed in the changing role of the groups and institutes that formerly served as intermediaries between the state and the individual-citizen. The formerly fixed structure of public goals, universally accepted norms and behaviour models has been shattered, people lack the sense of group solidarity, social relations forming the foundations of their personality identification weaken and the efficacy of public control is in disorder, all of which leads to different types of deviating behaviour. Such behaviour occurs when social integration is low, when the imperfect human socialization is apparent, which allows people to disregard the institutional means of achieving goals.

The behaviour of many members of the post-Soviet societies, which is quite often subjected to the technical expediency considerations, is explained by the above. The

⁴ **Poghosyan Gevorg.** Armjanskoe obshestvo v transformacii, Yerevan, 2003, p. 450.

⁵ **Merton Robert.** Social theory and social structure, III, Clencoe, 1957.

most effective technical means, which are either legitimized or not legitimized in the culture, are oftentimes given preference over the institutionally prescribed behaviour. Willingly or unwillingly the post-Soviet individual is engaged into a system of new social relations in which the institutions and groups that formerly acted as a go-between the individual and the society have lost their regulating functions. Financial-material success has become the generally accepted principle goal, an indicator of individual well-being. Increasing individualism puts people outside the frames of collective moral control and as such undermines the regulating role of the old social norms, stereotypes, and traditions. To sum up, the old norms and values are no more relevant to the reality, while the new ones are in formation and have not yet been embedded in the public consciousness of the transforming society. Consequently, the individual is socially disoriented and the strategy of his/her behaviour is principally undefined.

Anomie and out-migration

At present, many members of the post-Soviet society have also appeared in a similar undefined situation and they have a negative attitude, or are indifferent toward the norms and legal rules intended to regulate the public life. The disturbed stability of social positions, the disintegration of the previous hierarchy (for instance, the rapid downgrading of the reputation of teacher's profession and increased respect for commercial professions) conditioned the structural uncertainty of the public system. The loss of collective solidarity and personal identification with the whole directly influence the increase of deviant behaviour, which is more vividly reflected in the socio-economic sphere, where personal interest, universal privatization and market relations have almost fully removed the old constraints. While the war and the immediate common threat somewhat united the nation, the relief of this threat resulted in the intensified social tension in the society. The principally invariant behaviour increased considerably resulting in increased structural and normative uncertainty in the society, which causes a regular reproduction of anomie. The basic anomie conditions are regularly reproduced and they include the conflict between the needs and the interests of citizens, on the one hand, and possibilities for satisfying them, on the other. The situation is such that pursuing personal goals oftentimes means non-accomplishment of goals by others. This is why the principle of personal benefit and lack of confidence of an individual in another individual is becoming predominant in the public life at times of overall tension. This principle insistently requires the refusal of old moral patterns, while the new individual morale, which will be responsive to the new capitalist society, has not taken roots yet. This morale, while propagating individual freedom, also requires that people become responsible for their choices.

All societies differ significantly by the degree of the integration of national traditions, customs and institutional requirements. The same is also true for the individual spheres of the society. Anomie is reflected particularly profoundly in the economic aspects of the post-Soviet society, a sphere which has been affected more by cardinal structural changes, which have removed the traditional restrictions. Anomie has almost become a "normal" phenomenon in that sphere. And the cause of this is that the economic setup of our life changes rapidly, while its moral-legal regulation lags behind. Because of the conflict between the existing needs, interests and the real possibilities for their satisfaction, anomie is reproduced over and over in this sphere.

A strong emphasis on wealth emerged and became embedded in the post-Soviet society. Wealth is considered as the main symbol of success without an equal significance attached to the legitimate means of gaining it, though. This is not surprising as the principal guarantee of personal well being - honest work, has been disgraced and decreased in value in our society. Obvious and latent unemployment has become the most crucial issue of our life. The low incomes of the population significantly lower consumer demand, thus impeding the formation of a full-fledged internal market, which, in its turn, limits the country's productive capacity and the creation of new jobs, resulting in a vicious circle.

While innovative behaviour becomes more and more widespread in post-Soviet society, "flight from society" is equally dominant. In the first case, the lack of legitimate means for achieving goals coupled with huge gap between the opportunities of different social groups has resulted in the formation of non-official structures and mafia clans, which pursue their goals by illegal means, thus creating a big misbalance between the formal and shadow economy. The existing official institutions of the society do not ensure that different social groups are given principally equal opportunities to legally achieve generally acknowledged goals. Consequently, the emergence of unofficial groups aimed at the attainment of such goals result in the functional disruption of the social system. The innovative form of the adaptation materializes in the utilization of non-institutionalized forms of attaining wealth and power. It should be noted that the possibilities of such utilization increase parallel to the increasing level of social hierarchy, and they differ essentially by spheres of human activity. Hence, it is the resolute aspiration of the deviants to access the public and state structures that provide such opportunities by all possible and impossible means. Consequently, the public life becomes more criminalized, the state officials artificially bureaucratize the public administration system, instilling and enhancing the previous authoritarian-commanding style of totalitarian management, which impedes the transformation of the post-Soviet.

In the second case, mass out-migration of population occurs with all the ensuing consequences that affect all the spheres of public life. It is obvious that this process also negatively affects the resolution of transformation-related issues; it causes disastrous changes within the social structure of the post-Soviet society and shatters the basis of the economy and the scientific-productive potential of the country. In these conditions of a deep social crisis experienced by our society many people consider out-migration as the only way out. The unemployed workers, public servants, teachers, and engineers appeared on the verge of poverty. This is how a "brain-drain" occurs, when the country's intellectual and scientific resources leak out. The reputation of creative intellectual occupations has dropped; they do not provide any motivation and rank low in the labour market. All of these results in the loss of qualified specialists for our society, its scientific potential shrinks, the country gradually loses opportunities for scientific-technical progress and social development. This situation occurs because it is impossible to build a sound democratic society without the cultural and scientific resources and we are doomed to poverty and dependence without those resources.

From negative to positive freedom

However, the identification and substantiation of this need does not exhaust the essence of the issue. Our analysis will be lacking without a pure philosophical analysis, which is the final point of the methodological chain leading to the abstract from the concrete. Such a methodological approach underlies this article

and consequently, its closing parts contain the philosophical insights of the individual's problems in the post-Soviet period.

The main issue in this respect is that in the past the Soviet individual perceived himself/herself as part of the system, in a certain sense a small screw of a whole mechanism targeted to accurately performing the function of that screw. The system ensured the minimum required for such an activity and gave it a certain sense, a sense of the activity by a part contributing to the almighty whole. The collapse of the former totalitarian links accompanied by the socio-economic crisis caused a paradoxical situation, when having finally gained the freedom the people do not know how to handle it. An individual feels more protected and free in a harsh close system with a limited choice for occupation and social promotion than in the conditions of uncertainty, in a mobile open system with universal norms, which formally seem to be equal for all. Having suddenly occurred outside the restrictions that denied his/her personal freedom, the post-Soviet individual appeared all alone and helpless vis-à-vis his/her own problems, lacking the feeling of security. The links connecting him/her to the society have been destroyed while the new ones are yet to be created. The meaninglessness of the past and the hopelessness of the future cause a feeling of isolation, helplessness and concern that oftentimes are not even perceived. And this is when Fromm's "escape from freedom"⁶ happens, when the individual, in an attempt to overcome this isolation, denies the freedom, becomes willingly acceptant of authoritative power, adopting conformist behaviour and escaping the reality. A unique return to being dissolved in the whole occurs, as the whole may give meaning to the present, even if at the expense of refusing freedom.

According to Adorno's⁷ (2000) famous citation, the concept of freedom is a tangle of unresolved issues. The reasons for this should be explored in the essence of freedom itself, as it is a multi-level process comprising a variety of different appearances. The willpower, which identifies itself with the whole and is void of private certainty, is charged with a negative freedom of the identification with the total, something lacking any creative impulses⁸. The "Ego" of the totalitarian individual together with the tension characteristic of it seems to be doped, and the person appears to be calm and satisfied. This "Ego" is derived from the function performed within the systemic whole, it is standardized and is impersonalized. The ensuing conclusion is that there are "no irreplaceable people", it is only the system and the individuals associated with it that are insuperable. The freedom of the post-Soviet individual is a negative one, it is not a full freedom. The individual is freed from the ties of the whole, of the uncertain-universal and acts as a relatively autonomous private certainty, individually solving all his/her problems. However, he/she is not able to carry all alone the heavy burden of the negative "freedom from", as the process of individualization is not perceivable outside the social context, and as such it presupposes two development alternatives: back to being dissolved in the totalitarian whole or forward in the direction of solidarity and cooperation of autonomous individuals, which in itself is a precondition for taking another step to the next level of freedom.

The individual is regularly involved in the system of new social relations typical of the new and positive levels of freedom, when the emphasis is on the creative indi-

⁶ **Fromm Erich.** *Escape from Freedom*, New York, 1941.

⁷ **Adorno Teodor.** *Problems of moral philosophy*, Oxford, 1996.

⁸ **Berlin Isaiah.** *Dva ponimanija svobody*, Moscow, 2001, p. 183.

vidual who actively self-actualizes in the free construction of non-uniform whole together with the likes of himself/herself. The whole is not formed in a totalitarian way, it rather materializes because of self-certainty/determination and autonomy of its parts, and its formation is decentralized through the direct coordination of the horizontal structures based on a free choice. As noted by Abramyan (2004, 6) "freedom in its positive sense includes the ability to act spontaneously"⁹. Freedom does not imply a break away from dependency (negative freedom), it rather means the creation of those dependencies. This type of freedom is the creative freedom, and instead of emphasizing the function of the individual, this freedom values his/her creative talent, the attraction of love, the faithfulness of friendship. Each individual is irreplaceable, and insoluble in the whole. He/she is socially protected and individually free.

The path from negative to positive freedom constitutes a transitional process. Because of its accomplishments, the West is further advanced on this path, while the post-Soviet segment of the world community is only taking the first steps. Based on his multiyear sociological studies of the transforming Armenian society, Poghosyan states: "The public consciousness is perceptive to both the ideology of egalitarianism and the new ideology of liberalism. The value of freedom enters into a conflict with the values of social justice and universal well being"¹⁰. While overcoming this contradiction, people should get rid of both the total disappointment in their past and the goal-related anomie of the future. They should remember what is their own and be oriented toward the universal human values/goals. Only by remembering the past is it possible to set goals for the future. Only through fulfilling goals is it possible to gain freedom and create a prosperous and stable present.

The issue here is not in freeing the past and the future from each other, but rather in linking the two together in a new and creative way while keeping in mind the ongoing globalization processes and the formation of the world society. It should be understood that creating conditions for overcoming the difficulties of the era of negative freedom and transitioning to the era of positive freedom should not be done through annihilation and oblivion, but rather through transforming the legacy of the totalitarian culture from the standpoint of universal human values of the world society and through subordinating the past to the essentials of the future of that society.

The individual is free in existence if he understands the challenges of time and withstands them. The past and the future become intertwined into a guiding thread of the eternally transient present. To untwine those threads would imply being deprived of a life guide and appear in the position of an animal tied to the situation. The historical memory is the foundation directed to the future of the creative imagination. It is the memory and the imagination that jointly create the present. This is why the above discussed uncertainty of the post-Soviet individual's present results either in the oblivion of the past or the meaninglessness/purposelessness of the future, or oftentimes in the first and the second at the same time. The totalitarian past was often dreadful, but without regularly questioning it, without a historical acceptance and understanding of the past wrong doings it is impossible to avoid similar mistakes in the present. The myth of the communism was a utopia, but people cannot survive without any direction for the fu-

⁹ **Abramyan Levon.** O kantovskom ponjatii prakticheskogo razuma, in: Oganesyanyan Suren (Hrsg.): *Filosofskie refleksii*, Yerevan 2004, YSU Press, p. 6.

¹⁰ **Poghosyan Gevorg.** *Armjanskoe obshestvo v transformacii*, Yerevan 2003, p. 451.

ture, as they need a somewhat meaningful and stable consciousness of a purpose, capturing which in the forever-vanishing instants of the present it rather difficult. Otherwise a situation is created when the "quality life" is replaced by quantitative presence, the real freedom of "being"-by its fiction, by the appearance of "having"¹¹. Therefore, it is impossible to free the past of the future and the future of the past as they are linked in the present and for the sake of the present. Without the two, this present would have no meaning for people, which is unallowable, given the definition of the individual as a reasonable (meaning-seeking) being.

Conclusion

This analysis allows us to diagnose the current transitional state of post-Soviet societies. It is undefined structurally, tends to anomie and is pessimistic. The chaos of pessimism does not allow people to take an active civil stance in the transformational processes. To defeat this chaos, the cultural pathology of the transitioning society, which is reflected in the conflict between the set goals and the legitimate means of their attainment, should be overcome. The public structure of role expectations should be aimed at cultural consolidation, for the higher the level of integration between the different components of value-norm system of the society, the more stable is the social setup that is grounded on the behaviour modelled after the appropriate cultural samples.

The path to overcoming anomie is not in return to totalitarianism and restoration of former repressive institutions of social control, but in rapid development of new intermediary levels, new public organizations and associations that are capable of performing the function of moral control over the behaviour of their members and ensuring their protection vis-à-vis the state. The dictate of the time is to get rid of pessimism and instil a new, optimistic cultural perspective of stable development in the society, within which the individual and national values should be closely and harmoniously interrelated.

Thus, the complicated and grievously difficult, far from simple transition from negative to the positive level of human freedom constitutes the intellectual content of our times at the millennium close. En route to this transition and to the attainment of a new development level, mankind is bound by the prerogatives of unification and the establishment of a true system of the world community/society. Each country should contribute to this process of the formation of a new civilization, which is based on the principles of peace and cooperation. This is why anything happening in certain parts of the world universe could not leave others indifferent. Directly or indirectly, our difficulties and problems affect the world events. Only when our activities are globally coordinated with those of others, will it be possible to talk about the emergence of the era of the positive freedom of individual creativity. And this is because creating means contributing the uniqueness of the individual entities to the whole, and uniting the past and the future in the present.

¹¹ **Samokhvalova Valentina.** Masskul't i malen'kij chelovek, in: *Filosofskie nauki*, Nr. 1, 2001, S. 55-66.

ԱՐԹՈՒՐ ՄԿՐՏԻՉՅԱՆ - Հետխորհրդային ազատություն. անցյալի և ապագայի միջև - Բարդ և դժվար անցումը մարդկային ազատության բացասական աստիճանից դեպի դրական աստիճան հազարամյակի սկզբի մեր ժամանակների հոգևոր բովանդակությունն է: Հետխորհրդային անցումային հասարակությունները այս համատեքստում կառուցվածքային որոշակիություն չունեն. դրանց բնորոշ է հոռետեսությունն ու անոմիան:

Ժամանակի թելադրանքն է՝ ազատվել անոմիայից և հոռետեսությունից, տալ հասարակությանը կայուն զարգացման նոր, լավատեսական մշակութային հեռանկար, որի շրջանակներում հնարավոր կլինի խոսել անհատական ստեղծագործության դրական ազատության ժամանակների հաստատման մասին: Չէ՞ որ ազատորեն ստեղծագործել նշանակում է ընդհանուրի մեջ ներդնել յուրահատուկը, միավորել անցյալն ու ապագան ներկայում:

ԱՐԿՄՐԱՆՄԱՆՆԻՅԱՆ – Постсоветская свобода: между прошлым и будущим. – Сложный переход от негативной ступени человеческой свободы к позитивной составляет духовное содержание нашего времени. В этом контексте постсоветские переходные общества в структурном аспекте неопределённые, характеризуются пессимизмом и аномией.

Веление времени – освободиться от аномии и пессимизма, дать обществу новую, оптимистическую культурную перспективу устойчивого развития, в рамках которой можно будет говорить о наступлении эпохи позитивной свободы индивидуального творчества. Ведь свободно творить означает вносить в общее своё, особенное, объединять прошлое и будущее в настоящем.