# SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL: FROM SOVIET PSYCHIATRIC TERROR TO COVID-19

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SUMMARY. The tension between "personal freedom" and "social responsibility" is an eternal one, and should be eternally debated. This self-reflective story reviews the participation of one individual in the face of different societies, times, ideas, and systems. It considers what provides a sense of commitment to such a journey and how it depends on authority and personally perceived and assumed responsibility.

KEYWORDS: soviet psychiatry, peaceful resistance, personal freedom, social responsibility.

## INTRODUCTION

When forty-eight and a half years ago not far from Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas a young student Romas Kalanta lit himself on fire, the Soviet authorities had a huge problem. His act of protest that cost him his life resulted in massive demonstrations with the risk of spilling over to other cities in the country. In order to quell the unrest, Kaunas was sealed off from the rest of the country and a group of psychiatrists was convened and given the task of finding an explanation for Kalanta's gruesome act. They found it in his dairy, where he wrote that he dreamed that one day Lithuania would be free. This was a clear act of insanity – who could have such an unimaginable and dangerous thought? It was clearly a sign of sluggish schizophrenia, and thus, he was posthumously declared mentally ill.[1]

The names of the psychiatrists who signed the diagnosis are well-known, and while some might have signed under KGB pressure knowing that this was utter nonsense, I do not exclude the possibility that some of them might actually have thought that only a mentally ill person could have chosen such a painful death for something that was then considered to be not more than a fata morgana. Indeed, to ordinary Soviet citizens the mind of a dissident might have seemed drastic or even completely outlandish, but the path to achieve what you believe in can be crooked

[1] For more information on Romas Kalanta and his "diagnosis" see Van Voren, Robert. *Cold War in Psychiatry*, Leiden: Rodopi, 2010, 380–382.

and complicated. And, most importantly, that path often calls for sacrifices that can either be considered as a form of "sluggish schizophrenia" or valued as one's social responsibility.

In this article, I will review the participation of one individual in the face of different societies, times, ideas, and systems. I will consider what provides a sense of commitment to such a journey and how it depends on authority and personally perceived and assumed responsibility. As one can probably guess at this point, this is a self-reflective story based on my own experience. I am well aware that a subjective narrative does not claim objectivity, but it allows for commentary on broader events through a lens of specific personal experiences and attitudes. It is important to understand the upbringing and the subsequent trajectory of a dissident mind. Therefore this article will cover not only my personal experience, but also the experiences of others that have drastically changed my life and helped build a moral compass of social responsibility.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF A SMUGGLER

I became involved in Soviet psychiatry 43 years ago, when at a very young age I became interested in the plight of political prisoners in the Soviet Union and decided to concentrate on those who were sent to psychiatric hospital because of their political views or belief in God. I had no understanding of psychiatry, knew very little of life in the Soviet Union and my only knowledge was based on books by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and materials published by Amnesty International. It was former political prisoner Vladimir Bukovsky who fundamentally changed the course of my life by becoming my mentor and setting me on the course of where I am today.

Bukovsky decided I should become a Moscow correspondent after my studies so I could smuggle documents and writings to the West and thus function as a sort of a 'human mailbox' of the dissident movement. The campaign to eradicate the dissident movement, started by KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov in 1979 in preparation of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, messed up the plans, and in early 1980 I decided to stop waiting and booked my first trip to the Soviet Union to meet dissidents and offer my help. Loaded with medicine, vitamins, warm clothes and thermo underwear, as well as ballpoints and lighters that could be used to bribe prison guards, I travelled in the early spring of 1980 twice to Leningrad and Moscow, where I met

many dissidents and families of political prisoners.[2] Most of the people I met were arrested soon after, including the Estonian dissident Mart Niklus, who had come to Moscow to deliver a letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in which he demanded the annulment of the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact. We met twice, before and after delivering the letter, and on his way back to Tartu he was arrested and subsequently sentenced to fifteen years of camp and exile. I was in shock, and decided that I could not develop a normal career as long as he was behind bars. He was released only under Gorbachev in 1988, and by that time I was already so engaged that a normal career was already unimaginable for me, a fata morgana.

## RESISTANCE AS STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND DEATH

Looking back, I was frightfully romantic and had very little understanding of what I got myself into. I didn't realize it then, at least not consciously, but now I understand that a strong trigger was the story of my uncle, who joined the Dutch resistance at the age of twenty-three right at the beginning of the war. He very much loved his hometown Rotterdam, which was then very beautiful and quite similar to Amsterdam, but was bombed and destroyed by the German Luftwaffe on 14 May, 1940, in order to force the Netherlands to surrender. He was so angry that he decided to join the resistance, obviously not knowing what he was getting himself into. The resistance during the first two years was very amateurish and made lots of mistakes, which resulted in many arrests. The Germans responded ruthlessly, torturing their prisoners and subsequently putting them up against the wall. Gradually, the resistance started to understand that this was not some game – it was a struggle for life or death. My uncle was almost arrested in 1942, changed his identity twice, but was eventually arrested in October 1943 and sent to the notorious prison in Scheveningen, that now houses prisoners like the Serb war criminals Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. He was to be executed, but his father managed to buy out his life with twenty-two bottles of whiskey, and instead he was sent to the camps. His Odyssey through seven camps ended in a camp in the Harz mountains near the Czech border, where he managed to escape. However, he was too emaciated and ill, and at the age of 28 he passed away – two weeks after he saw American troops passing by.[3]

[2] I have described these trips as "courier" to the human rights movement in the USSR in my book "On Dissidents and Madness", Rodopi, 2009.

[3] The life-story of Simon Karel Luitse, alias Robert van Voren, was told in my book "Op Zoek naar Robert van Voren (In Search of Robert van Voren)", Kok, Kampen, 1987.

My whole youth was tainted by "war", and war was on the agenda basically every day. My father read endless amounts of books about the war, and then passed them on to me. When he started reading the three volumes of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago in 1974, he also passed them on to me and that triggered my interest in Soviet dissidents and political prisoners. I am sure my uncle must have been scared time and again when falsifying documents, helping British pilots to get to Portugal from where they returned to England, or finding refuge for Jewish children in order to keep them out of the hands of the Nazis, but he did this because he felt like he had to do it – because it was the only right thing to do. His father was a very frightened man, but his mother quite fearless. When she was arrested by the SS and taken hostage, she made the SS officer carry her suitcase to the prison van. I am sure she was instrumental in his choice that determined the course of his far too short life, just like my mother was to me, pumping Christian values into my head from a very early age. When in the 1980s I asked whether I should try to make my uncle a "Righteous among Nations" and get a tree in his name at Yad Vashem she said "No, no way – he did what he was supposed to do, no need to honor that."

So, when I started my work as a courier to the dissident movement in the Soviet Union I did exactly what my mother had taught me, even though I was terribly scared. I will never forget the fear during flights to Leningrad or Moscow, sitting on the plane knowing that I had to smuggle large quantities of humanitarian aid into the country, collect documents and samizdat during my stay and then see how I could smuggle it all out on the way back. The relief of arriving back in Amsterdam was tempered by the worries about my new-found friends in Moscow, many of whom eventually disappeared in the Gulag; and by the knowledge that three months later I would be back on the plane again, for the next round as a courier.

## THE MENTAL ILLNESS OF DOING THE RIGHT THING

My image of the dissidents then was one of heroes, fearless people who went against an omni powerful State, who risked everything because of their ideas and beliefs. Indeed, they seemed to have a special mindset, the one that Soviet psychiatry considered to be a mental illness, a form of sluggish schizophrenia. Gradually I also started to see their weak sides, their sometimes impossible characters that would have made them dissident in any society, but I also got to see their fears and anxieties, and realized that they were in many ways not so different, just felt that what they did – they had to do, irrespective of the consequences.

In 1988 I met a dissident in Moscow who eventually became one of my best friends, the Ukrainian psychiatrist Semyon Gluzman. He was a hero to me, his image engraved in my head, his biography recorded in my memory in all miniscule detail. At the age of 24, Gluzman, being an early-career psychiatrist, had decided that the famous Moscow dissident General Pyotr Grigorenko has been incarcerated in a Special Psychiatric Hospital for purely political reasons and was in fact of sound mind. He wrote a report, a diagnosis in absentia, which soon wound up on the desk of the KGB in Moscow (Bloch, Reddaway 1977: 234–239). Soon the author was identified and Gluzman was picked up and sentenced to seven years in camp and three years in exile. Basically, his youth was taken away, and the ten years of imprisonment changed his life fundamentally.[4]

His memoirs, published several years ago, are a fantastic read, because not only did he meet prisoners who had been in the camps already since the 1950s, including some Lithuanian Forest Brothers, but also because he very honestly writes about his fears and anxieties, and the way he managed to keep his head up and remain morally intact. The years in camp were the best in his life, he wrote, because he was totally free and in the company of the brightest, most honest and moral members of the intelligentsia. In a way he felt sorry for the guards, because they had to climb down from the watchtower at the end of the day and live in the Soviet Union, while Gluzman and his fellow prisoners had their own free haven. Of course, life was harsh and difficult, and the many hunger strikes he held out of protest against the conditions severely affected his physical health, but mentally he was stronger than ever and the years in the camp were the best possible school to learn to stand by your convictions and not succumb to the pressure by the authorities (Gluzman 2016).

## UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BARRICADES

At that time, in the 1980s, things for me were very much black and white, with dissidents being "white" and heroic, and authorities being "black" and objectionable. In the course of time, I started to see things more sophisticatedly, more realistically, and I saw how some of the dissidents had actually quite objectionable convictions and how some people within the system were seriously trying to do a good job and sometimes even to bring about change from within. One of those is another good friend, Andrei Kovalev, whose father led the Soviet delegation to the negotiations that led to the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 and later became deputy

[4] Semyon Gluzman discusses the effect of his ten year imprisonment in a powerful clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSsDN4MMpG4&t=230s>.

Minister of Foreign Affairs under Eduard Shevardnadze. Andrei himself as a young diplomat worked in the Department of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs and was actively helping to bring about an end to the systematic abuse of psychiatry, very much to the anger of both the KGB and the Ministry of Health who did not want to lose this tool of repression. And it was his boss, Eduard Shevardnadze, who eventually demanded at the Politburo for the psychiatric abuse to stop (Van Voren 2010: 386–387).

It was Semyon Gluzman, whom I mentioned a bit earlier, who helped me to see things in a different light, more holistically or three-dimensionally. His way of dealing with the trauma of ten years of incarceration was to get as close as possible to his former enemy and to befriend some of those who had been on the other side of the barricades. He became friends with the Deputy Director of the Ukrainian secret service SBU, Volodymyr Pristaiko, and through Gluzman I also became acquainted with him. Pristaiko came from a poor peasant family and grew up without a father, and the chance of entering the KGB school was the opportunity of a lifetime for him. He had a legal education, but was also an amateur historian and, having unlimited access to the KGB files in Kyiv, he started publishing articles and documents on the annihilation of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the 1930s and the Holodomor of 1932-1933 that killed at least seven million Ukrainian peasants. Pristaiko was a nice and intelligent man, who tried to do his best to give Ukraine back part of its hidden brutal history, without touching the history of the times when he was an active KGB officer of course. He always maintained that he had nothing to do with dissident cases, but when at one time he tried to clear his conscience a bit by alleging that he did have something to do with them, Gluzman stopped him and told him that he didn't want to know because they then could no longer be friends. There is a beautiful documentary made in the mid-1990s by a Dutch/Russian documentary maker, a double interview with Gluzman and Pristaiko. In one scene Gluzman comes to the Headquarters of the SBU, the first time since his arrest in 1971, and goes to Pristaiko's cabinet. On the table is a carton box that contains Gluzman's personal KGB file. "It is yours" Pristaiko says, and invites Gluzman to take it. But the latter doesn't want it, for the simple reason that he doesn't want to know who gave evidence against him. Too painful, and with unforeseen destructive consequences. Better not to know and accept that some people were not strong enough to withstand the pressure by the KGB (Van der Horst 1998)[5].

[5] See <https://docudays.ua/eng/2015/movies/retrospektiva-aloni-van-der-khorst/disident-i-general/> [accessed 28 March, 2022].

Coming back to the political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union, of course in the 1980s I was convinced that all psychiatrists who had been or were involved were little versions of Josef Mengele or the Nazi doctors who performed experiments on prisoners in the concentration camps. When I had my first meeting with the board of the Ukrainian Psychiatric Association that Gluzman had set up in early 1991, I was convinced that I was confronted with representatives of Soviet abusive psychiatry who probably themselves had been engaged in locking up dissidents. They, on their part, were probably convinced that I was a CIA agent, and it took quite a while before we started to trust each other and eventually developed friendly relationships. One of the psychiatrists in Kyiv volunteered to run the complaints office of the Ukrainian Psychiatric Association, as it turned out because she had been the person who declared Ukrainian dissident Oksana Meshko to be mentally ill and this was her way of paying back to society for what she had done. Her office processed 15,000 cases of complaints, and the archive is now in the holdings of the Andrei Sakharov Research Center here at Vytautas Magnus University.[6]

Since the late 1980s I have been involved in supporting reformers in psychiatry in the region. We started out with a very small group: Semyon Gluzman, the Moscow-based lawyer Svetlana Polubinskaya and Professor Yuri Nuller in St. Petersburg, the son of a high-ranking Soviet diplomat, who in 1938 was recalled from his post in Paris and was shot in the cellars of the KGB headquarters in Leningrad. Nuller himself was arrested after the war and accused of having been recruited by the French Secret Service at the age of three and survived nine years in Kolyma.[7] Gradually the group became larger and larger, involving more and more countries, and by the mid-1990s the organization I was in charge of, the Global Initiative on Psychiatry, ran a network of over a thousand reformers in 23 countries in the region. During the many meetings we organized we became friends with many, and of course also discussed Soviet times. And what I started to realize was that many sincerely believed that dissidents were mentally ill, for several reasons. First of all, they had no contact with world psychiatry and were trained according to the dogma's of the Moscow School and had no reason to doubt their validity. But also, they could not imagine how a person could go against such a powerful State as the Soviet Union, with a Party that had established total control through a reign of terror. How could one be of a sound mind and accept that you could lose your job and possibly your family, or that your children would be kicked out of the

[6] See *Archival Holdings* section available from: <https://www.sakharovcenter-vdu.eu/archives/archival-holdings/> [accessed 28 March, 2022].

[7] See Van Voren, Robert. Yuri L. Nuller. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, vol. 28, issue 7, July 2004, 269; https://doi.org/10.1192/pb.28.7.269.

university. Surely in that case you had lost all sense of reality and overvalued one's own importance? (Keukens, Van Voren 2015).

One of the psychiatrists we worked with had been the director of a psychiatric hospital in Ukraine, but also the local Party organizer. When the first documents were sent from the first Party Congress after Mikhail Gorbachev had been elected General Secretary of the Communist Party she was in shock because to her, he clearly showed signs of mental illness and was suffering from what Soviet psychiatry called "sluggish schizophrenia". "Sluggish schizophrenia" was the diagnosis most dissidents were given, a serious illness that neither the person nor his surroundings could correctly understand, but which required immediate hospitalization. Symptoms were struggle for the truth, perseverance, reform ideas – the same symptoms that Gorbachev rather quickly started to show. Her view only changed after Ukraine became independent and gradually contact was established with world psychiatry. Then it became clear to what extent Soviet psychiatry had separated itself from the psychiatry that was practiced in most of the world.

In preparation of my teaching here in Kaunas I wrote a dissertation on the issue of Soviet political abuse of psychiatry and how this had affected the World Psychiatric Association, the main body representing psychiatrists from across the globe. During the period 1983–1989 the Vice-President of the association had been from East Germany, and, as I found out during my research, actually an informal agent of the East-German Stasi. We had met once while he was in office, in 1988 during a conference, but that meeting lasted only twenty seconds. He later explained to me that he had been frightened that a photo would be taken of the two of us, which almost certainly would have led to him losing his possibility to travel. Later we started to meet regularly, usually in hotel rooms so he could speak freely, and step by step we developed a trustful relationship that gradually turned into a friendship. Jochen Neumann was a very humble and intelligent person, who had joined the communist youth organization FDJ as an adolescent because he was seeking a safe home. Father had been a petty fascist and spent several years in the Bauzen prison, and came back a broken man. Jochen considered himself a Communist but was in fact more a nineteenth century bourgeois, as he put it himself, and his communism was still that of a romantic kid who was seeking safety somewhere. He worked for the Stasi because he felt he needed to defend his country against the capitalist West, yet in his reporting he became so anti-Soviet and pro-American that the Central Committee of the SED even discussed whether he should still be allowed to go abroad because he seemed totally untrustworthy.[8]

[8] Jochen Neumann became one the of the main characters in my book "Cold War in Psychiatry", and his life story is recounted throughout the book, in particular in chapters 4-6, 8, 17, 21–22, 25 and 31–32.

In fact, from the very first moment he refused to spy on people because he felt that was dirty work, and for two and a half years he himself was under Stasi surveillance. However, among his close friends were some high-ranking officials – all Stasi agents themselves, who, of course, protected him, and thus he was able to meander through the minefield. He turned out to be a very ethical man, in some ways even more ethical than many of the Western psychiatrists that I had met and with whom I had campaigned against the political abuse of psychiatry in the USSR. I found proof of his story in his personal file in the Stasi archives in Berlin, which I was allowed to read but he was not, being a former Stasi agent. So during lunchbreaks we would sit in a restaurant and I would tell him what I had found in his personal file.

The collapse of the DDR in 1989 had left Jochen a broken man. He lost his family and profession, and eventually emigrated to Saudi Arabia to work as a psychiatrist for one of the sheiks. His diary had one predominant theme: suicide. His life had lost all meaning, and every entry in the diary is focused on whether to end it all or not. The worst came when the sheik, impressed by Jochen's hard working attitude, praised him and added: "You are so efficient! You are like… eh… like Hitler!"

Befriending a former adversary, and seeing history through his eyes, greatly improved my deeper understanding that black and white does not exist and that it is in fact a matter of "shades of grey". As a result, I also revisited my university years in Amsterdam, when one of my professors was actively engaged in changing the narrative of the Second World War. In his public lecture as professor at the University of Amsterdam in 1983, titled "Under the spell of right and wrong," he challenged the notion that except for a small group of collaborators most Dutch had been "right" or "good", and all Germans had been "wrong" or "bad" (Blom, 2007). The older generation of historians fulminated against this, he challenged all the holy houses and triggered an at times furious debate, but it resulted in revisiting the behavior of the Dutch during the Second World War which turned out to be far less heroic than it had been presented. The overwhelming majority of the Dutch had actually been very complacent, and collaboration with the occupying Nazis had been much stronger than hitherto exposed. I used the avalanche of literature that had been produced on this in my book "Undigested Past – the Holocaust in Lithuania" that was published in 2011 and compared what happened here with what happened in The Netherlands (van Voren, 2011). In both cases the overwhelming majority of the Jewish compatriots were killed during the Holocaust, with the main difference being the fact that here they were killed in the country itself with active participation of Lithuanian police battalions, while the Dutch put them on the train to the extermination camps and let others do the killing – but

the end result was the same. The Dutch police, the railway company, the civil servants, all took part in this horrific killing spree, and all washed their hands in innocence afterwards. Still now books are published on a regular basis that expose this terrible crime.[9]

The German politician Wolfgang Thierse once wrote about the DDR, in which he lived and worked:

> There are real perpetrators and real victims, guilty ones and innocent ones and then in between the many others, we – who lived there, busy getting by, more or less decent, more or less clever, more or less cowardly or brave.

Indeed, the overwhelming part of the population in any country prefers to be compliant and not risk lives or livelihoods, and looks the other way when life becomes too dangerous. The decision not to look the other way takes courage, yet fear is not a reason not to stop looking the other way. Semyon Gluzman decided to stay truthful to the ethics of his profession and speak up when he saw "his" psychiatry abused, even though fear and anxiety ran through his veins. In the same way Andrei Sakharov decided to follow his conscience and speak up the moment he saw that the Hydrogen Bomb he helped create was a horribly powerful weapon, and became one of the most influential campaigners for non-proliferation and arms reduction. They did what they thought was necessary to do, irrespective of the consequences, and so did the Dutch diplomat Jan Zwartendijk who, as an honorary consul in Kaunas, handed out visas to Jews to help them escape certain death. He too didn't consider himself a hero – he just did what he thought was the only right thing to do and until a decade or so ago his story was basically unknown outside his own family.[10] He did what Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once said: "Always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor never the tormented" (Wiesel 2004).

## MORAL CONFLICT THROUGHOUT HISTORY

But what is right is also a concept that changes with time. Looking back, it is always easy to say what was the right decision, but at the moment itself things are often less clear and the only thing one can go by is one's moral compass. Yet that compass is also affected by the socio-political and cultural climate of the time.

[9] Among the books that were published on the role of the Dutch police are Meershoek, G.: Dienaren van het Gezag (Van Gennep 1999) and Van Liempt, A. en Kompagnie, J.H. (ed.): Jodenjacht, Balans, 2011. Another shocking example of collaboration is the book Schuetz, R.: Kille Mist, Boom, 2016, on the role of the Dutch notary in the sale of real estate left behind by deported and murdered Jews.

[10] For the role of Jan Zwartendijk see Brokken, Jan. *De Rechtvaardigen*. Contact, 2018

Between 1945 and 1949 the Dutch army fought a war in the Netherlands Indies against what they considered rebels, and they tried with all means to keep this part of the world Dutch, part of the Kingdom of The Netherlands. My father, who was in his early twenties during the war and spent most of the war period hiding at home with a sign on the door "Cholera – Contagious!" which prevented Nazi's from entering the house and sending him to Germany as a forced laborer. When the military operations started in the Dutch Indies, he registered himself as a volunteer, hoping to become a pilot, yet he was refused because of his eyesight. He was very upset because the possibility of finally taking part actively was denied.

The military operations in the Dutch Indies were quite ruthless, further stimulated by the dangerous surroundings, the impermeable jungle and the ability of the enemy to hide and suddenly appear out of nowhere. The so-called "police actions", during which many innocent civilians were killed and many freedom fighters were summarily executed, were then seen by most as fully justified and legendary figures like Raymond Westerveld, who through terror managed to subdue the uprising in Celebes, were seen as heroes. According to current standards and knowledge, however, he would have been considered a war criminal.[11] Likewise, those who considered the "police actions" as war crimes in those days were often seen as traitors, while now the understanding is that they were perfectly right. The Dutch psychologist Joop Hueting, who as a military draftee witnessed summary executions during his time in the Dutch Indies, tried to have his story published in the 1950s but no publication wanted to print it. When in 1968 he described the war crimes in his dissertation, he received countless threats and attempts to establish a parliamentary commission to investigate the claims proved to be unsuccessful.[12]

Lithuania has its own disputed case, which time and again resulted in bitter discussions and political fights and still hasn't been resolved. What I am referring to is the case of Jonas Noreika, whose plaque is still hanging on the façade of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. Or rather: hanging again, because in 2019 the plaque was demolished by a sledgehammer by an unknown protester, then put back glued together only to be removed by the Mayor of Vilnius during the night. A few months later a new plaque was put up, even bigger than the previous one, and so the case has again reached a stalemate.

[11] The case of Westerveld still results in emotional debates in The Netherlands. Accusations of being a war criminal (https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2021/06/01/uproar-about-de-oost-westerling-is-a-war-criminal-that-is-my-truth/) are refused by others, a. o. his daughter (https://www.ad.nl/show/dochter-kapitein-westerling-roept-op-tot-boycot-film-de-oost-extreem-voorbeeld-van-geschiedvervalsing~affebac6/). Westerveld has been the subject of the film "De Oost" (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8639136/ ). Currently extensive research on what truly happened during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1049) is carried out at the request of the Dutch government: <https://www.ind45-50.org>.

[12] See among others: <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/ik-zeg-u-dat-deze-meneer-liegt>.

The issue with Noreika is that his life trajectory is one of a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. When the Second World War started, Noreika ordered the establishment of a Jewish ghetto in Šiauliai and the expropriation of Jewish possessions. He subsequently took part in the anti-Nazi resistance and, as a result, was incarcerated in the Stutthoff concentration camp. After the war he joined the anti-Soviet resistance as General Storm – Generolas Vėtra, – was caught, sentenced to death and hanged.[13]

Victim and perpetrator – he is definitely not the only one, but having been instrumental in the Holocaust his plaque should not be hanging on a wall in the streets of Vilnius, nor should there be a monument in his birthplace. Both belong in a museum, with both stories told, just like the national Military Museum in Soesterberg, The Netherlands, tells both stories of Raymond Westerveld and Joop Hueting. Noreika is a perfect "kaleidoscope" to tell the complex story of Lithuania during the 1940s, in which people did heroic deeds but also made terrible mistakes and wrong choices. These stories should be told, and a nation that wants to look truthful to the past and confident to the future should digest these issues rather than try to sweep them under the carpet. In my view, Mayor Remigijus Šimašius made one mistake by removing the plaque at night, hoping to prevent a controversy (Kisielius, Skėrytė 2019). The controversy should not be prevented, it should be carefully channeled and the removal should take place in broad daylight, just like last year the body of the Spanish dictator Francesco Franco was removed from his mausoleum in broad day light and reburied in a family grave (BBC News 2019).

These issues of moral conflict, shades of grey and how people are able to commit mass murder or participate in torture have kept me busy for the past two decades and I continue to explore in the futile hope of finding answers to my questions. As Solzhenitsyn once wrote: "The line that separates good and evil does not go through classes or groups, but right through every human heart. The line is movable, it fluctuates over the years. A bridgehead of good will remain even in a heart occupied by evil, and likewise even in the most merciful heart there will be an impregnable hiding place for evil" (Solzhenitsyn 1973).

A perfect example of this is the case of Eugene de Kock, a South-African police colonel who was so notorious as a torturer and assassin that he was named "Prime Evil" by the South-African press. De Kock weas involved in the guerilla warfare against anti-Apartheid groups like ANC and SWAPO, fought in what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), in Namibia and Angola, and eventually became head of the counter-insurgency unit of the South African Police that kidnapped,

[13] See for instance: <https://www.politico.eu/article/wwii-lithuania-history-soviet-occupation-confrontation-wartime-past/>.

tortured, and murdered numerous anti-apartheid activists from the 1980s to the early 1990s. He was also head of the main torture center at Vlakplaas and personally responsible for the torture and death of at least one hundred anti-apartheid activists (Jansen 2015).

Following South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, De Kock disclosed the full scope of C10's crimes while testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. His testimony forced others to come forward too, as he decided to go clean and disclose everything he knew, including who had been his superiors and had given orders, naming even the President as having been responsible. In 1996, he was tried and convicted on eighty-nine charges and sentenced to 212 years in prison. After serving twenty years he was paroled, and continued helping the authorities to recover the remains of a number of his victims.

De Kock was not the only person who showed remorse and altered his position fundamentally, but his case stands out because of the enormity of the crimes he committed, the pleasure he seemed to have in making his victims suffer and then this almost irreconcilable combination of pure evil with the manners of a gentleman, a soft voice and belief in Christian values. He is an example of what the British historian Christopher Browning called "ordinary man", the title of his book on one of the SS Einzatsgruppen that participated in the Holocaust, or the "Banality of Evil" that Hannah Ahrendt wrote about Adolf Eichmann while she watched this innocuous man in his glass cage during his trial in Jerusalem (Browning 1992; Ahrendt 1963). Eichmann seemed like simply a pencil pusher, an image that he himself catered as much as possible. But what Ahrendt did not know – and the court did – was that Eichmann had been interviewed by the Dutch SS-officer Wim van Sassen during his time in Argentina, and that the interviews showed him a rabid anti-Semite who was only sorry he killed only 6 million Jews and not all 10 million on the European continent. The court, however, could not use the interviews because they only had the transcripts and therefore could not prove they were his exact words.

## THE SCIENCE OF EVIL

Indeed, every person has a dark side, the question is however by what it is triggered and what makes it become so overbearing and violent. The British psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, relative of the well-known Borat who recently reappeared on the movie screen, wrote a fantastic book on the subject, in which he argued which genetic and social factors play a role in "Becoming Evil". In his book, titled "The Science of Evil", Baron-Cohen explains that there is no scientific value in the term

'evil' but there is scientific value in using the term 'empathy erosion'. The key claim in his book is, he writes, "that when people commit acts of cruelty, a specific circuit in the brain ("the empathy circuit") goes down. This might happen temporarily (for example, when we are stressed) or in a more enduring way. For some people, this empathy circuit never developed in the first place, for reasons of environmental neglect and/or for genetic reasons." He then continues by asserting that the functioning of the empathy circuit determines how much empathy a person has, from zero degrees at the low end through to six degrees at the high end. Most people are somewhere in the middle, but some people have zero degrees of empathy or even Zero Negative, which may be caused by medical/psychiatric conditions such as personality disorders. For instance, psychopaths and people with Borderline Personality Disorder (Baron-Cohen 2011).

We usually tend to think that those who commit mass murder are not only bad but also mad, but the truth is actually quite opposite. In fact, as Christopher Browning pointed out in his book "Ordinary Men", most of them are actually quite normal. Even the twenty-two Nazi leaders who were put on trial in Nuremberg were not mentally ill, including Rudolf Hess who had flown to Scotland in 1941 to try to broker peace with the United Kingdom and unsuccessfully pretended to be suffering from amnesia. Actually, they were quite intelligent, with IQ's ranging from 122 to 148. Those who carried out the killings were not psychopaths, which is quite logical because what commanders needed were people who followed orders, not psychopaths who tend to go berserk and are uncontrollable.

## ETERNAL TENSION BETWEEN *PERSONAL FREEDOM* AND *SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY*

We still continue to have this perception that violence and mental illness is connected, and usually think that people with mental illness are dangerous and violent. Research shows, however, that the opposite is actually true: people with mental illness are more prone to be victims of violence than those who are considered "normal".

It is this stigma that is one of the reasons that I have dedicated so many years of my life to the issue of mental health, working and living in a region where less than thirty-five years ago out of a population of 270 million more than ten million people were on the psychiatric register and more than half a million people were locked up in psychoneurological internats for the rest of their life (Van Voren 2010: 322). In fact, at this moment there are still more than 35,000 children and adults incarcerated in such institutions, that are euphemistically called "social care homes", although they are neither social, nor homely and care is often very limited.

In Russia the number of persons in such institutions is well over 150,000, and similar numbers can be found incarcerated in Central Asia. People locked up without any future, spending their days in emptiness, cut off from society and often abandoned by their relatives.[14]

We complain about the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, when our social traffic is restricted and we are forced to wear masks and keep physical distance. But can you imagine what consequences this pandemic has for those who spend their whole life in lockdown, and are now confined to their rooms because of fear that the virus will spread like wildfire through the institution?

COVID-19 will be with us a long time to come, and I mean not as a virus but as a massive, life-changing event that has shaken the foundations of our societies, has resulted in heightened levels of stress, anxiety and depression, has challenged our authorities and also shown that in times of deep crisis presumed solidarity and unity is fragile and severely challenged. Within an amazingly short period of time countries closed their borders and blocked foreigners from crossing their borders. The most absurd situation occurred in the small Belgian enclave Baarle Nassau in the southern part of the Netherlands, where one side of the road was Dutch and the other Belgian. Crossing the road was forbidden. A shop that was located right on the border saw half of the shop closed: the Dutch part was allowed to remain open but the Belgian part was closed.

The pandemic also highlighted the omnipresent tension between personal freedom and social responsibility. In Lithuania, instructions from above, albeit quite severe, were generally immediately followed without any discussion, whereas in The Netherlands the authorities claimed to have imposed only an "intelligent lockdown" and constantly referred to the "personal responsibility" of the citizens and refused to impose strict orders on social contact, wearing masks and the like. In the end, the debate within Dutch society became so diverse and inconclusive that people gave up on rules altogether, claiming that their "personal freedom" was at stake. The end-result was that The Netherlands quickly had one of the highest infection rates in Europe and had to go into a 'Lockdown Light", as the previous lockdown turned out not to have been so "intelligent" after all.

## SUMMING UP...

This tension between "personal freedom" and "social responsibility" is an eternal one, and should in fact be eternally debated. Because it is not only your freedom to

[14] Transforming social care homes in Ukraine; Proposals regarding the Slavyansk and Svyatoshinsky social care homes. FGIP, Hilversum, May-September 2018.

choose to become infected or not, but also your social responsibility not to infect others. Likewise, it is your "personal freedom" to look the other way when people are unjustly arrested, deported or killed, but it is in my view your social responsibility to speak out, even if this means endangering your own livelihood.

But again, I know that is easily said. When I was a courier to the dissident movement in the Soviet Union, I had no children, and in particular my mother supported what I did. If I had children, I might not have done the same, or at least had been more careful and stopped traveling when all the indicators were that I had a very good chance of being arrested and used for a show trial. When in the winter of 2013-2014 I was at Maidan and things turned violent, I had to take the conscious decision to stay even if I would risk my health or life. My children were grown up, and my sense of social responsibility was stronger than my anxieties and fear.

In conclusion, I applaud the bravery of the many Belarussian citizens who have understood that unless they take their social responsibility, and by doing so endanger their own personal freedom, nothing will ever change. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put it in his 1974 essay "Live not by Lies":

> <…> Let each of us make a choice: Whether consciously, to remain a servant of falsehood <…> or to shrug off the lies and become an honest man worthy of respect both by one's children and contemporaries. <…> It will not be an easy choice for a body, but it is the only one for a soul. Not, it is not an easy path. But there are already people, even dozens of them, who over the years have maintained all these points and live by the truth. (Solzhenitsyn 1974)

Retrospectively, while reviewing my activities and the specific ideas that accompanied me, I tried to show one of the paths I chose to take between personal freedom and social responsibility. I believe this is important to everyone. I am not saying that my experience is exceptional or easy to follow, I just wanted to demonstrate that whichever path one chooses, certain dilemmas are inevitable. One will always meet people with different worldviews and values, even opposing ones, one will often find oneself in situations where one will need advice and help; or vice versa – where everything will seem too simple. My advice would be not to get lost in the advice of strangers. Reflect on your choices not only in terms of personal well-being, but also in the public interest, try to find your own way, but do not forget others. Expand your gaze, empathize with others, take responsibility for the injustices of the world, and do not become partakers of injustice.

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## VISUOMENĖ IR INDIVIDAS: NUO SOVIETINĖS PSICHIATRIJOS TERORO IKI COVID-19

SANTRAUKA. Įtampa tarp *asmeninės laisvės* ir *socialinės atsakomybės* yra amžina ir turėtų būti nuolat diskutuojama. Šioje autorefleksinėje istorijoje apžvelgiama individo kelionė skirtingų visuomenių, laikų, idėjų ir sistemų kontekstuose. Svarstoma, kas suteikia įsipareigojimo tokiai kelionei jausmą ir kaip tai priklauso nuo autoriteto ir asmeniškai suvoktos bei prisiimamos atsakomybės.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: sovietinė psichiatrija, taikus pasipriešinimas, asmeninė laisvė, socialinė atsakomybė.