

A word of thanks- by John Blad

I am very grateful for receiving this Award, which is a great surprise to me. This is a wonderful week because yesterday I have become a grandfather!

I would like to accept the Award as a recognition of all the editorial teams of the Dutch-Flemish Tijdschrift voor Herstelrecht (Journal for Restorative Justice) who I have worked with since the year 2001 when it was founded.

Making this journal with them has been something so stimulating and I learned so much from all my co-editors – and from the contributing authors - that I can say that my intellectual career has been a wonderful journey so far and it still continues to be. So thank you all.....

I just finished reading a collection of essays by Vasili Grossman, the Russian author who became famous by his great novel Life and Fate. The translated title of the collection of essays in Dutch is 'Een klein leven' (In English probably 'A Little life'/A small life') and the book holds a very moving essay entitled 'The Hell of Treblinka'. From the end of this essay I translated (from the Dutch) a passage that strikes me as very topical for the themes of our conference here. At the end of his description of Treblinka Grossman writes:

'The heart shrinks together and seems to stop beating: so much suffering, so much grief, so much sadness a man cannot endure....

Scholars, sociologists, criminologists, psychiatrists and philosophers have studied the reasons for what happened. Was it a matter of natural, inborn qualities, of education, environment, external circumstances, of historical destination or of criminal intentions of German leadership? How could this have happened?

'The rudimentary racist traits, which seemed comical in the expressions of second-rate professor-like charlatans and the miserable provincial theoreticians of Germany's 19th century – the contempt of the petty bourgeois for the 'Russian Pigs', Polish Cattle', 'Jews stinking of garlic', 'Perverted French', 'English Grocers' , 'Greek Poseurs', and 'Czech Rattle-brains', all this small-minded talk, all that cheap bragging about superiority (...) above other people (...), kind-heartedly mocked by journalists and humoristic writers – all that suddenly, in the course of a few years, changed from childish non-sense into a deadly threat to humanity, to life and liberty, and became a source of unimaginable and so far unknown suffering, bloodshed and evil. Enough food for thought/reflection'.

(p. 161/12 in the Dutch translation).

I can only agree with the implicit warning that Vasily Grossman has given here and that is so up-to-our times. In the Netherlands there is a social medium called 'No

Style', which actually means 'no need to be polite, it is okay to be rude, no arguments are needed' and racism, and even fascism seem to be back in many European countries.

Therefore I hope that Restorative Justice – with its fundamental values of respect and personal encounter - will be able to contribute to a stronger culture of peace, reciprocal understanding, humanity and civilisation. RJ is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

Thank you (John Blad, Leiden, 22-6-2016).