

# ‘We build Barren Island, Barren Island builds us’: Of imprisoned humans and mobilized stone in the Yugoslav Cominformist Labor Camp (1949–1956)

Milica Prokić

One Ocean Hub, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

## ABSTRACT

Goli Otok (Barren Island) was a site of the master political prison and forced labor camp of the socialist Yugoslavia between 1949 and 1956. The imprisoned, accused of siding with Stalin in the Tito–Stalin political rift, were sent to undergo ‘self-managed re-education’ through ‘socially beneficial labor’ in the island’s limestone quarries. The inmates were forced to build their own prison out of that very limestone – the first known human dwellings on the previously uninhabited island. They were also often forced to break, crumble and to carry massive stone loads from one place to another and back, with no constructive or productive purpose. However, the labor camp authorities also operated a lucrative business, oriented towards country-wide distribution, and sometimes towards international export of the island’s limestone. The quarried stone of the island therefore travelled more widely than its excavators, whose movements were limited to their island-prison. Set at the intersection of labor history and environmental history and drawing on the archival materials of the Yugoslav State Security Service, oral history interviews with the former prisoners, and their published and unpublished written memoirs, this paper examines the interrelations of the prison-island, its stone material, and the prisoners’ laboring bodies.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 May 2023

Accepted 29 September 2023

## KEYWORDS

Environmental history; prison island; labor camps; forced labour; political prison; Goli Otok; Yugoslavia



**CONTACT** Milica Prokić  [milica.prokic@strath.ac.uk](mailto:milica.prokic@strath.ac.uk)  One Ocean Hub, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Strathclyde, 2/1 17 Stewartville Street, Glasgow G115HR, Scotland, UK

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

## Introduction

I used to learn about flora and fauna; and though there was no flora on Goli Otok, since the stone flower had not been discovered yet, the only fauna were we, the ones they tried to convert into invertebrates. Barren Island – what a fitting name! I thought that it was only a nickname, and that, if I get out of there alive, I should look it up on a map to check if it really existed. It did. But no one dreamed that we would have covered it with our own bodies, that we would have watered it with our sweat. Ženi Lebl, Ljubičica bela (The white violet)<sup>1</sup>

Ženi Lebl and her fellow political prisoners of Goli otok ‘watered’ with their sweat, the flowerless barren rock. Such is the state of islands. They embody contradictions, as those who think about them (and with them) are aware. ‘Above all, their remoteness, enclosure, and containment make islands perfect prisons’ observes Lowenthal (2007, p. 215). At the same time, islands are also always connected: by any body of water that surrounds them; by messages in bottles sent from the stranded; by the trajectories of ships, commodities, prisoners, or their jailers. It is therefore not just the remoteness, enclosure, and isolation that make islands ‘perfect’ prison sites. It is the embodied contradictions which islands foster – the isolation *and* the connection; the prospect of concurrent mobility *and* immobilization of the convicts that has made islands inadvertent ‘natural’ partners to jailers throughout the human past.

The converse, of course, is also true: a prison is *the perfect island* no matter its location- an isolated, yet interlinked part of a carceral system routinely described as an *archipelago* ever since Solzhenitsyn, and then Foucault, used the trope. In a more recent context, carceral archipelago also denotes the field of an established and expanding body of global historical scholarship covering constellations of prisons and former prison sites (on mainlands or islands); convict and slave transports (vessels and trajectories); and their various interrelations (see, for example, Anderson, 2018; De Vito & Lichtenstein, 2013).<sup>2</sup>

However, actual islands remain crucial to carceral lore. As Anne Applebaum notes in her history of the GULAG, ‘[n]ot by accident did Solzhenitsyn choose the metaphor of an “archipelago” to describe the Soviet camp system.’ Solovetsky, the first planned and built Soviet camp, the so-called *mother of the GULAG*, ‘developed on a genuine archipelago, spreading outwards island by island, taking over the churches and old buildings of an ancient monastic community as it grew’ (Applebaum, 2003, p.20). As such prison-islands thus represent a specific category of carceral geographies. Fusing together islands (the discrete corpuscles of environment), and prisons (the insular units of society) they are double-belted ‘islands within an islands’ (Mountz, 2015, p. 642).

True to their contradictory character, it is sometimes the (carceral) islands’ remoteness that brings them into focus. For instance, as discussed by Sophie Fuggle, *Ilet la Mère* of the French Guiana was intended, like Australia, ‘to give men a second chance via working the land’, and the metropole a chance to build and harness the colony through a cheap source of labour of those it sent away. A ‘periphery of a peripheral space’, it became a diseased, torment-ridden site of ‘toxic colonialism’ (Fuggle, 2022, p. 36) alongside its peer, the infamous Devil’s Island. In somewhat similar vein, Judith Pallot discusses the ‘Russian tradition of sending political offenders to the peripheries’ as means to mobilize the resources of the geographical margins (2005, p. 101). Contrastingly, islands like Alcatraz occupy a prominent place in history and the popular culture alike, simultaneously because of its isolation from and vicinity to the bustling San Francisco. Similarly, Robben Island, the ‘low-lying lozenge of rock and sand’, a swimming distance to Cape Town, is hardly a periphery in any sense today: according to historian Harriet Deacon, it represents South Africa’s ‘most significant historical site’ (Deacon, 1996, p. 1). In the history of Yugoslavia, the island of Goli otok- carceral labor site which is the focus of this paper is, as we shall see, its own concoction of these contradictions.

Islands in general, and carceral islands in particular, fit into what Mezzadra and Neilson call the ‘fringe landscapes’ where ‘a complex composition of labor- enabled extractive activities’ take place (2017, p. 191). As such, islands also serve as indispensable laboratories for studying the interrelations of human and non-human environment, labor, coercion, and (im)mobility. Even so, the environmental histories of island prisons and penal colonies are rare pickings. For example, though Lajus and Kraikovski (2021) trace the ‘the gradual “environing”’ of the Solovetsky islands from the 15<sup>th</sup> century

through to today they include but do not specifically focus on the carceral aspect of the islands' environment. Same is true for the environmental histories dealing with the coerced labour on islands – Gregory Samantha Rosenthal's work on Hawaiian guano excavators on the Baker Island (Rosenthal, 2012) is one of the rare examples, though islands can indeed be seen as a distinct and rather populous category of *worksapes*. Coined by Thomas Andrews in his book about the 1914 massacre of striking coal miners in Ludlow, Colorado (2010), *workscape* comes in as an invaluable lens for examining the entanglement of the laboring human bodies, the often violent and even deadly sites where the labor takes place, and the commodities extracted from this entanglement.

Thinking of these potent interrelationships through which work (carceral or otherwise) and environment (on islands and elsewhere) have shaped each other over time, it is somewhat surprising – paradoxical even – that environmental history and labor history have been viewed as 'two realms long consigned to distinct and hostile historical subfields' (Andrews, 2014, p. 426). However, '[hu]man knows nature through work' has increasingly been a refrain threading through the works of environmental historians. To make sense of human interrelations with the nonhuman world through work, environmental history and labor history have thus been overcoming their 'balkanization', as Andrews defined the division between the two disciplines. For example, Gunther Peck addresses 'Faulted Lines and Common Ground Between Environmental and Labor History' (Peck, 2006), while Stefania Barca brings squarely to the fore the connections of labor and environmental history in 'Laboring the Earth' (Barca, 2014). By underpinning the importance of convict labor in a carceral environment, this paper aims to support this tendency. By focusing on the hitherto overlooked aspect of convict labor on islands in particular, this paper calls for not just reconciliation, but also a further fruitful merge of the two sub-fields through the case study of Goli Otok.

This once barren mass of Adriatic karst off the coast of present-day Croatia was 'watered with [the] sweat' of the political prisoners between 1949 and 1956 when the island was commandeered as the master site of the wider political prison and forced labor camp network of Tito's Yugoslavia. From this conglomeration of the island's harsh, rocky environment and the laboring bodies of the imprisoned humans grew a vast stone prison complex, now quiet and abandoned; a forest patch now covering a portion of the island's terrain (an alternated state from the former prisoners' recollections of a completely barren rock), as well as a signature set of inter-human relationships. The Yugoslav state authorities at the time framed these relationships as the prisoners' 'self-managed political re-education through socially beneficial labor'. The scholars studying Goli Otok today, however, define them as 'a unique culture of violence' (Antić, 2016).

Drawing on the archival materials of the Yugoslav State Security Service kept at the State Archives of Serbia, (Državni Arhiv Srbije, Fond BIA), oral history interviews with the former prisoners and their published and unpublished written memoirs, this essay unpacks the mass labor undertaking that was forced upon the political prisoners of Goli Otok in the first, formative decade of Tito's Yugoslavia. In so doing, it traces the role of (im)mobility of the imprisoned humans on the one hand and limestone as the mobilized part of the island's environment on the other. Moreover, having in mind the crucial notion that 'workers labor in nature as part and parcel of the natural world – as living bodies' (Andrews, 2014, p. 426), I take the interrelation of the human bodies and the non-human environment of the prison-island as the lens through which I observe the *workscape* of Goli Otok. In other words, I will argue that the entanglement of the working body, of the island's peculiar stony environment, and of the extracted commodities – human labor and island stone – constitutes this particular site of coercion and extraction, embedded in the idiosyncratic, site-specific, violent human relationships.

Goli Otok was uninhabited by humans before 1949 when the labor camp was founded. It thus presents a unique opportunity to trace the transformation brought to the island by human carceral inhabitation. Under the slogan 'We build Goli Otok, Goli Otok builds us' the labor of political prisoners triggered extensive changes to the island's nonhuman environment as well as many disquieting, irreversible changes on their own persons and bodies. To examine these transformations however, we must first turn to the Yugoslav mainland, where the idea of carceral inhabitation of Goli

Otok originated and from where the arrested humans were shipped; the legislative tools which enabled their arrests, and the trajectories of forced mobility which facilitated the transition of these arrestees to convicts, and then to forced island laborers.

## Forced mobility

The 1948 Yugo-Soviet political breach came as a shock to many Yugoslav communists. It had also caused a schism within the membership of the Yugoslav Communist Party (KPJ) who were now compelled, quickly and suddenly, to choose their alignment. To even think of this as a choice was seen as heretical by many: on the one hand, Stalin and the Soviet Union – socialist Yugoslavia's ally and ideological provenance: on the other, their own party helm, with Tito now steering a new, West-facing course for Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav State Security Service (*Uprava Državne Bezbednosti* – UDB) soon started mass arrests of the so-called *Cominformists*: those who sided (or were accused of siding) with Stalin in the Cominform dispute. In the first instance, the Cominformist arrestees were men and women, members of the Communist Party, and former antifascist partisan guerrilla fighters – Tito's recent comrades in arms. Many of them were highly regarded by the Party membership as the founding members of the KPJ. Some were high-ranking veterans who earned their stripes in the Spanish Civil War as well as in the Yugoslav People's Army in World War II.<sup>3</sup> If the Cominformist arrestees held any rank in the Yugoslav Army, they were also put on military court trials (Prokić, 2016, 282).

However, as fear of Soviet retaliation by armed force seeped into the Yugoslav public, denunciations among Party members, colleagues, friends and even families increased in number, and the atmosphere of mistrust rose among the Yugoslavs. The UDB therefore soon expanded the perceived field of potentially subversive elements to the intelligentsia, students, and even high-school pupils who, though having no connection with the USSR or Cominform, criticized some aspects of Tito's politics or Tito himself. The military and government officials, old-school communists and veterans were thus joined, and soon outnumbered by civilian and non-Party folk. For example, Ženi Lebl, a Serbian Jewish writer, journalist, and Holocaust survivor whose quote introduced this essay, was arrested for re-telling a joke about Tito's weight, which she heard from a friend. As she disclosed in an interview with writer Danilo Kiš (Nahir, 1989), Lebl later learned that she was reported by this very friend: not for telling the incriminating joke, however, but for not reporting *him* to UDB for telling it to her.<sup>4</sup>

The juridical tool that claimed most prisoners – those like Lebl, *not* tried by military courts – was Clause 6 added to Yugoslavia's Transgression Law in October 1948, 3 months after the Resolution of Cominform was presented by Stalin in Bucharest, and immediately before the mass arrests began. Clause 6 made it possible that for a verbal delict – including re-telling a joke or failing to report someone for telling it – one could serve a sentence of 'socially beneficial labor' in 'a designated place' 'between six months and two years, which could be curtailed or prolonged at the authorities' discretion' (Marković, 1990, p. 453).<sup>5</sup> The cells of various remand facilities on the Yugoslav mainland quickly started filling up. From there 16,101 Cominformists (Državni Arhiv Srbije, Fond BIA, Spisak lica, CII/110 1/6) were sent to undergo the process of 'political re-education', the nominal desired result of which, from UDB's point of view, was revising the dissidents' undesirable political stances through the means of 'socially beneficial labor'.

Despite the political breach, socialist Yugoslavia continued to share some essential ideological postulates with the Soviet Union, particularly in its stance towards physical labor in the initial post-war decades. The super-productive labor, which was promoted through the term *udarnik* (*udar* meaning shock or strike/*udarnik* denoting shock laborer), echoing Soviet terminology for the exemplary socialist worker, had served as the most praised expression of the laborers' patriotism. *Udarnici* (plural) used to build public infrastructure such as roads, railways, and public buildings, as well as industrial infrastructure in the post-war Yugoslavia. After the breach, however, the nature of the Yugoslav mass labor undertakings also took on an aspect of resistance towards the USSR – the

Yugoslavs were to build their own country without this former benefactor whose support was now abruptly cut off. The nature of the administrative punishment of socially beneficial labor served as a reflection of these policies in manifold ways. Through physical labor framed in this way, a Cominformist was to rebuild his or herself and thus prove his or her return to the 'rightful' path of KPJ (Previšić & Prokić, 2016, p. 192; Prokić, 2016, p. 150).

The contours of this embodied rebuilding were drawn on the political mainland of Yugoslavia which spread its tethers to the isolated 'designated places' where the labor was to take place, connecting them into the newly established Cominformist prison network. Most of the Cominformists were sent to Goli Otok – the master forced labor site of the network – some after weeks or months in the remand prisons, others taken from their homes and shipped directly to the island.<sup>6</sup> Without any information about where they were headed and how long for, the convicts were bound with ropes and chains in pairs and put on covered trucks or windowless cattle train wagons which transported them to a secluded part of the Adriatic coast near the town of Bakar. Rushed by the policemen, who beat them with bats, forcing them to bow in order to protect their heads and therefore to not to look around, the convicts were violently thrown into a dark, windowless hold of the *Punat* cargo ship for the last leg of their journey to Goli Otok (Bobinac, 2011).

The accounts of forced mobility coupled with forced labor echo across contexts, places, and time. Examining convict transportation of the British, French, Spanish, Russian and Japanese empires, Anderson et al. (2015) emphasize the role of convicts' spatial mobility across penal colonies located in specific locations on the mainland and islands alike. Through stories of *contrato* workers in colonial Mozambique, historian Zachary Kagan Guthrie accentuates the 'importance of coerced movement within forced labor' (Kagan Guthrie, 2016, p. 203). Kagan Guthrie notes that the *contratos* 'narrated their transformation into forced workers as a process of movement'. On the other hand, he contends that in the context of the *contratos*, 'the denial of mobility was crucial in reinforcing administrative power'. Likewise, the disorientating way in which the Cominformists were transported to Goli Otok was at once crucial to their carceral experience and instrumental to the prison authorities – adding another layer to the 'natural' security of the site. Away from the mainland and any large towns, it appeared remote enough for putting away this particular group of political prisoners, which included seasoned guerilla fighters and army commanders. Being an island – nature's inadvertent ally to jailers – was another reason. This, coupled with Goli Otok's peculiar environmental traits, including its location in the remarkably stormy sea strait, whipped by the forceful gusts of *bura* wind, made the island virtually impossible to escape by swimming.

Besides prisoners from coastal Croatia or Montenegro, most of the convicts had never seen the sea until their arrival to the island. For example, former prisoner Vladimir Novičić, a 17-year-old high-school student at the time of his imprisonment, was shipped from Belgrade, located in hilly and verdant central Serbia. Novičić recalls:

'My first ever experience of encountering the sea was when they took off the lid of the ship hold. The sun, and the air saturated with the scent of the sea, filled the ship hold, and also filled our lungs. . .Voices could be heard, saying that we had arrived at some smallish island'. (2009, p. 24)

Not only did Novičić have no sense of where he had travelled to in the dark ship hold, he also had no experience that could inform his expectations of this strange place. In his unpublished manuscript, he described his expectations as 'rather naive for contemporary terms, as there was no television nor today's choice of media available' and explained: 'I expected an island with luscious greenery from the novel about Robinson Crusoe. . .and the sea, well, I couldn't imagine the sea to be much different to the Beautiful Blue Danube' (2009, p. 24). For convicts like Novičić, there were no familiar structures to hold onto, save for the temporary camp comprising several wooden barracks, and other humans – the policemen and the fellow prisoners – who were also new to this previously uninhabited island. To all of them, at the first glance, the barren landscape represented a blank slate. Prisoners feeling of displacement from days of travel in almost complete darkness to an unknown destination emphasized the potency of first impressions all the more. Novičić recalls that the policemen threw in several

pairs of pliers for the prisoners to break the chains that bound them and then lowered the ladder, allowing them to climb up onto the ship's deck:

As we were not rushed from the ship deck to the land, I remember well that I had both the time and the immense interest to turn towards the sea first. My first impression was shockingly powerful, exciting, enchanting, divine. Under the blue cupola of the sky, the waves, illuminated by the morning sun sparkled on the vast ink-blue water. I felt overwhelmed by nature, aware of the vastness of the abyss which I did not expect. (2009, p. 24)

Kagan Guthrie notes that the conceptual transition of Mozambican *contratos* into forced labor 'was coterminous with their physical transfer to the site where they undertook that labor' (Kagan Guthrie, 2016, p. 204). Likewise, in the narratives of the former Goli Otok prisoners, the journey from their homes to the island was clearly seen as a point of transition – from the status of a Cominformist arrestee, through that of a transported convict, and finally to that of the Goli Otok forced laborer. This point was also rather distinctive in the Goli Otok prisoner experiences, marked by the change of clothes at the point of disembarking. In our 2011 interview, former prisoner Vladimir Bobinac, a history lecturer, recalled his arrival and his change of clothes on the island as a crucial event:

The moment you have taken your own clothes off and put on the rags thrown your way – those rags, those old torn military uniforms – you have cut the bonds with your own place, your home. You have become a part of a frenzied mass of people". (Bobinac, 2011)

Uniformed and prepared in this way for the place they were about to inhabit, the Cominformists were thus set to encounter the island.

### Not quite like the Marble of Carrara ...

The first group of the Cominformists arrived in July 1949 from Slovenia. Writer Zagorski (1984, p. 382) was among the first convicts to set foot on the island's stone. His first impression of the island was somber:

I remember [my] arrival to the island: onto the white and reddish rocks everywhere around, the terrifying bareness of the island; whoever was used to wandering gladly through the fields and the woods would be all the more aware of the island's dead neglect at that moment, its desolation and its deadness. Void and ugly indeed would be their soul, dried dead from the divides and doubts, fears and hopelessness – like that island itself from the winds and the waves.<sup>7</sup>

The 'terrifying bareness of the island' is an impression echoed also by those who were shipped to it in the subsequent convict groups, including that of Vladimir Novičić (2009, p. 24) who arrived several days after Zagorski, not knowing what to expect of a sea, or of an island:

My powerful encounter with the sea gave me [the] immense excitement and exaltation, but my first impression of the stone island was even less expected – not in my wildest dreams could I imagine that the island where we disembarked be so true to its name – terrifying. Barren stone boulders and sharp limestone gravel, all in the same shades of off-white without a single tree, received the convicts from Croatia and Slovenia a couple of days prior to our arrival.

Goli Otok belongs to a small group of uninhabited islands and islets of the larger Kvarner Gulf archipelago situated between the regions of Istria and Dalmatia, at the foot of the Velebit mountain range. The Kvarner archipelago includes the island of Rab (about 5 km to the southwest), as well as the other large, populated islands of Krk, Cres and Lošinj. West of Goli Otok is the considerably more verdant Sveti Grgur isle, which was also commandeered as part of the Cominformist labor camp network. Goli Otok covers 4.54 square kilometers, and includes 14.3 km of coastline (Lovrić et al., 1998, p. 109). Goli Otok's location, The Gate of Senj – the narrow sea strait of Kvarner Gulf, makes it hazardous for navigation, because of its narrow passage, but more so because of the *bura* wind often making this specific spot particularly tempestuous.

Up until the human carceral inhabitation triggered changes in the island environment, Goli Otok was home to very sparse vegetation (though not non-existent as the newly arrived humans first

thought) consisting mainly of Mediterranean shrubbery that can survive on its sharp, weathered rock. Barely any trees could weather exposure to ferocious *bura* wind gusts that whip the island, save for the scarce reported sightings of smallish common fig trees and the barbary fig cacti in the political prison era. Owing to the cold *bura* gusts, the island's shore often freezes during the winter (Bralić & Krajnik, 2021 p. 33). However, during long, sunny and hot Mediterranean summers, the rock without freshwater sources heats up to extremely high temperatures. Therefore, it is no wonder the stony terrain had rarely hosted humans before the first Yugoslav political inmates arrived to what they perceived as a blank, 'terrifyingly barren' landscape.

Yet, the UDB authorities chose Goli Otok as the labor camp site mainly, but not only, for security reasons. The second crucial reason for the choice of Goli Otok as the site for the Cominformist labor camp was extractive. At first glance, Goli Otok's rock seemed like a good potential site for marble excavation. The Yugoslav State Security Service was not the first to think they had discovered this. As early as 1774, the Italian abbot, writer, traveler and explorer, Alberto Fortis wrote of 'a marble island in Dalmatia' which 'does not have the snow-white color like that [...] of Carrara, albeit it is likely to deceive a sculptor as well as those who assess his work'. The 'deception' however, was greater than Fortis had assumed, despite being 'educated in geology, petrology, mineralogy, and paleontology by eminent 18<sup>th</sup> century naturalists' (Robert et al., 2007, p. 640). This also became clear in the late 1940s Yugoslavia, when the hope of marble exploitation on Goli Otok was reignited, bundled with the unpaid, forced labor of the Cominformist prisoners. Upon surveying the island's terrain, however, the prospective founders of the prison camp learned that apart from the minor amounts of marble found, the whitish rock of the island was primarily limestone (Nikčević, 2010, p. 137).

Despite this seemingly discouraging discovery, the State Security Service (UDB) proceeded with the establishment of the labor camp. This was firstly because the limestone gravel still had lucrative potential – which was, as we shall see, realized by the UDB in the subsequent years thanks to the forced labor of the Goli Otok political prisoners. Secondly, and crucially for this story, the hope for material gain from the marble extraction was a desired bonus, and not the core purpose of this 're-educational' forced labor enterprise. Indeed, the labor on Goli Otok can be divided into three categories: constructive, where prisoners were forced to build the structures that sustained their own incarceration and forced labor; (nominally) re-educational/punitive, where the purpose of labor was labor itself; and lucrative, the labor which allowed the UDB to turn a profit (Previšić & Prokić, 2016, p. 191). However, these categories were not given equal importance within the site of coercion and extraction that was Goli Otok.

### **'The worksite of socialist construction' – the workscape of violence**

As many commentators on the Goli Otok camp system assert (former inmates and scholars alike), the policies for dealing with the alleged Stalinists were drawn in resoundingly Stalinist contours. However, according to historian Previšić (2014 p. 168), "the term 'camp' [in referring to Goli Otok] was strictly forbidden [...] as one of the [UDB] interrogators stated, the Yugoslav communists had left the 'camps to Nazis and Soviets. Therefore, there were [nominally] no camps in Yugoslavia, only 'worksites of socialist construction'", where the stranded comrades were to labor and, by that token, rebuild their political stances by using their bodies and muscle power. Aptly, 'worksite' was also the name used by the prison camp authorities on Goli Otok, and this is how the prisoners were to refer to their site of incarceration and forced labor, while the camp authorities were to be addressed as the 'worksite commanders' (Bobinac, 2011). Moreover, between 1949 and 1953 in the official UDB documents, the island prison camp was laconically referred to as the *Mermer (Marble) Worksite* (Arhiv BIA, Državni Arhiv Srbije, (State Archive of Serbia), Fond BIA Inventar [BIA collection, Inventory]).<sup>8</sup>

What was called *worksite* in the UDB official language and reinforced by the island prison authorities, had been manifested as *workscape* in the labored experience of the Cominformists: a place 'shaped by the interplay of human labor and natural processes' (Andrews, 2010, p.121). Forcibly inserted into the islandscape as the transformative laboring force, searching for the suitable sites for extraction and opening the quarries, building the roads to facilitate the transport of the stone, pulverizing rocks with dynamite, producing limestone gravel, building docking for ships and boats which brought new convict transports and supplies to the island (Vulović, 2015), they proliferated the trajectories of (im)mobility and connection between the secluded barren rock and the Yugoslav (political) mainland.

The first days of the human stay on the island were filled exclusively by constructive labor, in shifts from 04.00 to 21.00: 'from the last morning stars to the first night stars', or from 'dark to dark' as the inmates recall:

4 am – wakeup call; 30-40 minutes for dressing and breakfast; Escort to the worksite by the armed guards, Work commences at 5 am; lunch break around noon. The end of the workday would be matched with the last ray of sun every evening. Dinner was eaten under the light provided by the camp's electricity generator. After dinner, the prisoner count was undertaken (Novičić, 2009, p.26)

However, shortly following this initial stage and within the first few weeks of the camp's foundation, the *self-management* component was integrated into the regime of political re-education, defining both the human relationships and the labor on Goli Otok. This implementation meant that the inmates were now also required to inform on each other on the island, as well as to denounce those on the mainland who were not yet arrested and who often were their friends, spouses, and family members. Moreover, at a certain point of the inmates' stay in a Cominformist prison camp, the authorities started to require physical demonstrations of political stance revision. In other words, the prisoners were now forced – under corporeal and psychological abuse, pressures and threats to their lives and the lives of their families – to co-operate with the UDB, by inflicting the same pressures and abuse upon their peers through beating, abusing, and humiliating the newcomers and those inmates who refused to renounce their politics.

The self-managed re-education policy in the Yugoslav Cominformist prison network is, indeed, considered an original UDB invention by those who have studied the Goli Otok camp regime. Some scholars such as military psychologist Kostić (2002) even posit that Workers' Self-Management social model in Yugoslavia is a descendant of Goli Otok's self-management re-education system. However, Goli Otok was not the only forced labor camp in which this policy was implemented – the entire Cominformist carceral network shared it. Nevertheless, the intensity of the human experience that the implementation of 'self-managed re-education' brought to this island, the intricacy with which it seeped into the inmate-island interrelationships, and the idiosyncratic scope of the violence within the inmate community on Goli Otok proper, points towards the reasons why this particular site bears notoriety as the symbol of human suffering of the Cominformist carceral network, and the socialist Yugoslavia as a whole.

This signature, 'self-managed' system swiftly rendered any kind of camaraderie among the Goli Otok inmates virtually impossible. On the other hand, the prison authorities presented it as the only chance of redemption. The insular carceral community thus spiraled into a vicious cycle of extreme violence. Within the first 2 weeks, on 22 July and 24 July 1949, the increasingly brutal group beatings took first lives.<sup>9</sup> Within the first month, the beatings became more organized and even more brutal. The practice of 'greeting' the newcomers by forcing them to run a gauntlet between the rows of the island prisoners soon emerged. Novičić described the first gauntlet on Goli Otok as a bizarre and upsetting event:

They came to notify us, at the *worksite* [my emphasis] that the new group is due to arrive, and that we have the opportunity to 'greet them properly'. When the *Punat* ship appeared, we were all withdrawn from the worksite. When it docked, we had already arrived from the worksite, and the two-line row was ready. The atmosphere was euphoric. Shouting became howling. (2009, p. 38)



The gauntlets became a regular practice at the point of receiving any subsequent group. In Novičić's recollection, it was inserted between the stripping prisoners of their own clothes and cladding them in the island uniforms:

The first people appear, completely naked, and they are 'greeted' by the convicts. [...] From the dark and mold of the remand prison cells, starved, in poor bodily shape, barefoot, these people are now about to run the gauntlet. If it was not for the shower of blows from everywhere and the bloody footprints on the sharp rocks, maybe this whole scene would have resembled some kind of hellish vaudeville, because everyone was deliriously joyful, like in some kind of medieval execution (2009, pp. 38–39).

In the women's camp, it was similar. Having arrived on the island, as she recalled, in the 'fresh early morning', Serbian writer Vera Cenić, who was arrested in Belgrade as a 20-year old university student for watching a Russian film, noted: 'we beat each other [that] summer day until noon' (Cenić, 1994, p. 100). When she fell out of the other end of the espalier, she saw a grim scene:

The unconscious, motionless women lay scattered around. They look like incredible figurines, the works of some sculptor-maniac[...] They all look horrific. The most horrific one is the one with no feet[...] She is motionless. I am checking if she is breathing. The rest of them make strange gargling noises[...] around them, tiny little ponds of blood. It lasts. The new ones fall out [...] I lift my left eyelid, with difficulty. I feel it with my hand, and above my eye there is a bulging fist sized lump growing, closing my eye. (Cenić, pp. 100-104)

Mutual abuse quickly became a major part of the inmates' everyday life on the island. Various other forms of torture were orchestrated, including torture by hunger, exacerbated by the increasing number of prisoners which thinned out the food supply on the one hand, and by the deliberate extreme limiting of food portions as part of the re-educational duress on the other. The illnesses and diseases that arose from the physical debilitation and the crowded, unhygienic conditions at the labor camp took an additional toll on the laborers' bodies. Frequent cases of avitaminosis, jaundice, pellagra, dysentery, cases of scrotum tuberculosis among men (Kostić, 2002, p. 61), and endocrinological problems in females which led to infertility and breast atrophies, were combined with a skeletal weight of severely undernourished prisoners (Jambrešić-Kirin, 2007, pp. 10–11). Under these combined pressures, the inmates were, of course, still forced to fulfil their daily labor quotas of stone crumbling, carrying, and building. The nature of the workscape itself brought additional labor-related injuries as the emaciated workers' bodies. Often suffering from avitaminosis A which impaired their vision and ability to watch where they step, the prisoners frequently collapsed under their stone loads onto the sharp rocky terrain (Bobinac, 2011).

Violence and suffering were thus integral to forced labor on Goli Otok. Indeed, as Michael Taussig notes in his harrowing essay 'Culture of terror – space of death' (Taussig, 1984), about the unsettling acts of brutality of the British rubber extractors towards the native indentured laborers in the Putamayo area of the Amazon, the stories of extraction, forced labor and extreme violence often go hand in hand. This disturbing conglomeration provides a platform from which we can view the manifold aspects of forced labor in the specific environment of the prison island of Goli Otok. As Kagan Guthrie notes: 'Investigating the role of coerced movement in creating forced labor not only pushes us to reconsider the question of how forced labor occurs. It also pushes us to reconsider the question of *where* [my emphasis] forced labor occurs' (p. 209). Conceptually, therefore, Goli Otok is *where* labor and environmental histories meet. Tangibly, materially and physically, it is in this specific environment where this specific whitish limestone was extracted and from which, 'planted' by the camp authorities, grew the site-specific violence in human relationships.

### **"We build Goli Otok, Goli Otok build us"**

The inmates were forced to build their own prison out of the rock of the island to replace the improvised wooden barracks which served as their initial camp, as well as workshops and the residencies of the labor camp authorities. The work in the quarry and building the stone prison complete with the residences for the jailers, an array of specialized workshops for stone masonry and

woodwork, and even a movie theatre and a football pitch for the jailers' entertainment were perpetual activities throughout the years of the Cominformists' stay on the island. However, the crucial purpose of labor was nominally 're-educational'. Namely, the inmates were often forced to break and crumble the stone using primitive tools, or with no tools at all; and to carry massive stone loads from one place to another and back with no constructive or productive purpose, to the point of exhaustion. 'From the empty to the hollow' ('iz šupljeg u prazno') is how former inmates define the 're-educational' strand of the island labor (Pavić, 2015). The strain on the beaten, hunger-stricken, and diseased worker's bodies was also aggravated by frequent cases of sunstroke in summer. Another element added to this concoction of suffering was the perpetual, agonizing thirst, as the island itself has no sources of drinking water suitable for human consumption, which made the lack of water supplies a constant problem. On the other hand, ferocious winds frequently whipped the island in winter, accompanied by snow and the icing of the island's shores. In either of the weather extremes in the Goli Otok workscape, laboring did not cease.

The stone loads were carried on wooden barrows, so-called *tragači* (plural). *Galeb* – the seagull – was a subtype of *tragač* designed for load-carrying in pairs, whilst *labud* – the swan – was designed for carrying in groups. Anthropologist Jezernik (2012, p. 76) posits that the 'poetic' naming of *tragači* after bird species had its symbolic value, embedded in the derivatives of the Yugoslav communist ideology that were specific to Goli Otok. According to the prison authorities' narrative, the *banda* (the bandits, a pejorative name for those considered not yet 're-educated') 'had to "fly" over the rock whilst building socialism', implying the prescribed *udarnik* (shock worker, exemplary worker) tempo of the labor tasks. When using the term *tragač* in their testimonies, the former inmates normally refer to the *galeb* (seagull): the *tragač* designed for carrying in twos.

In the long shifts of this 're-educational' labor, the inmates with *banda* status were paired up with the *activists* – those who did revise their political stances and thus agreed, under considerable pressures and abuse they themselves endured, to abuse fellow prisoners. The *activists* that would pair up with the *banda* in the stone-carrying tasks were referred to as the pursuers (or drivers) of the *banda*. Moreover, in this 're-educational' aspect of the labor, at some point the design of the *tragač* underwent changes to become, alongside the scorching Mediterranean sun, 'the tormentors' ally' (Dragović-Gašpar, 1990 p. 127). Namely, the new design of the 'seagull' now incorporated handles of different lengths at the front and back which distributed the weight of the stone load unevenly to better suit the re-educational (punitive) labor purposes, reflected in another testimony by Bobinac (2011):

It's physics, two men are carrying. The convicts. Both are desperate. But there is something keeping them apart. The length of the handles keeps them apart. The one at the front, the pursued (on the shorter handles), carries almost all the load, all day. The pursuers take shifts. But on Goli Otok everything goes in circles. For the pursuer was once the pursued – the *banda*. And now he is the revised one, a pursuer.

The stone of the island in this story was thus also used as a tool by the tormentors of the imprisoned humans. Yet, in the rare and risky acts of rebellion and defiance, the stone was not only the tormentors but also, the prisoners' ally, as recorded in the recollection of former inmate Gabriel Perpar, lecturer in physics, major in the Yugoslav People's Army and a former partisan guerilla fighter, shared with his daughter, Nada:

I was standing at the very top of the stone abyss. My arms were stretched from the barrow full of stones. The weather was gorgeous, hot, couldn't be hotter, sunny, and couldn't be sunnier. I hadn't been thinking about anything for a long time. For a long time I had been listening to the rude, brainless laughter of my jailers. I thought to myself: Who are they? What are we doing in this hole? Who am I? Why am I dragging these stones, while these idiots are beating something, they themselves don't know what, out of my head? I think that, in that split of a second, my sense of logic, in its infernal kind of way, came back to me. The only solution at that point was to throw the stones from the barrow into the stone pit. It was marvelous. I looked at the sun: it was amazing. The stones falling sounded like the most beautiful music. ... (Perpar- Prokić, 2009, p. 112)

By tumbling into the pit, the stone thus sounded Perpar's rejection of the re-education that stone-carrying activity was designed to yield. The sound of stones rolling down the slope in this joint act of defiance between stone and inmate, however, soon turned into the 'pounding of kicks and punches'. 'I woke up at the prison ambulance room a week after', recalled Perpar. 'I had been hearing the "Rolling Stones" long after that. And from that time there was a threat around the prison: "You'll end up like Perpar"' (Perpar-Prokić, p. 112).

Another material manifestation of the 'socialist construction' – both of the island and of the prisoners 'revised' political stance – was afforesting the barren rock. As mentioned above, before human carceral inhabitation, rarely had any trees been able to survive on the island's karst terrain. However, former inmates testify that, during their 're-education' program as Cominformists, they had been forced to remove the stones until they reach small patches of clay soil underneath the rock, to plant the scion, and to then protect it (each prisoner would be delegated one scion) with the shade of their own body (Bobinac, 2011). A number of trees took root between the harsh island stones, leaving the terrain partially afforested. The image of humans shading the nascent trees on the sun-bleached, hot, barren rock shows that regardless of the hope for financial gain, the treatment of the fatigued, tormented, sun-stricken bodies of the laborers did not indicate an interest in preserving their muscle power for more productive labor. It rather revealed the intention to force the prisoners to revise their politics by any means necessary. As Taussig discusses, 'behind the search for profits, the need to control labor, the need to assuage frustration, and so on, lie intricately construed long-standing cultural logics of meaning-structures of feeling – whose basis lies in a symbolic world and not in one of rationalism' (Taussig, 1984, p. 469). This, however, is not to say that the UDB and the Yugoslav government did not also count on gaining profit from the 're-educational' labor, the scope of which enterprise is the topic of the next section.

### **The marble enterprise: mobility of Goli Otok's stone**

Like every island, Goli Otok emanated the concurrent properties of isolation *and* connectedness even during its political prison era, despite the covertness of its function in the years of the Yugo-Soviet breach. Of course, Goli Otok became inextricably connected to the KPJ helm and the Yugoslav government on the mainland the moment the island was chosen for the site of Cominformist labor camp. Part of the Kvarner Archipelago, Goli Otok is also connected to other islands in the vicinity, particularly the nearby populated island of Rab. However, the most striking manifestation of Goli Otok's connectedness is that its material core, the stone, was the product that enabled UDB to pursue a relatively lucrative intra-Yugoslav and even international trade. While the prisoners' mobility was limited to their island – prison, the stone of Goli Otok thus 'experienced' an extraordinary mobility.

Namely, in the first years of the labor camp's function, the above-mentioned Mermer Worksite had a sister company called the Mermer Combinate, which suggests it was a business, not a labor camp. In 1953, the stone trade was reorganized and transferred to the nearby coastal town of Rijeka (*Fiume*) with the new name of the Velebit-Rijeka Combinate. The Goli Otok facilities were then formally reorganized as the Velebit Economy Unit, and the whole firm was simply called the Velebit Enterprise (Previšić, 2014, p. 221). This 'enterprise' even had a head office in Rijeka and operations were officially run from there. An exhibition corner was also installed there for potential buyers who knew nothing about the origin of the displayed items: mainly chairs, tables, small stone objects and tiles. The UDB oversaw the organization as well as the income of the Goli Otok economy, with its high officials coordinating the operation from Belgrade. Former inmates Boško Vulović and Miša Pifat testified to Previšić (p. 221) about the arrivals of Italian ships to the island, gathering cargo of stone blocks, gravel, and stone plates, all produced on Goli Otok.

However, seemingly paradoxical for the (then) treeless island, the highest known income of the Velebit Enterprise was realized by raw firewood trade. The trees fell on and the timber was shipped from the nearby Velebit mountain range to the Goli Otok sawmill where they were cut into high-

quality planks – one of the main Yugoslav export products at the time. Therefore, the forced labor on Goli Otok did not only transform the island itself but also the environment of the wider Velebit area (Previšić & Prokić, 2016, p. 195). As Previšić further points out (Previšić, 2014, p. 221), within only 9 months in 1957 (a year after the political prison camp became the regular prison for common felons, while its production facilities remained in function) the wood export to *Italy only* yielded a profit of more than \$80,000. According to the CPI Inflation Calculator, on 12 September 2022, this sum amounted to \$843,191.46 inflation included (CPI, 2022).

In addition to the timber sales, the most important income provider was, of course, the stone. In 1953, the production of *terrazzo* tiles, made of finely crumbled limestone gravel and used to tile most of the public buildings in Yugoslavia, began on Goli Otok, making the Velebit Enterprise the only supplier of these tiles in Yugoslavia. Apart from *terrazzo* tiles, other small stone objects were produced in the stone-cutting workshops, such as ashtrays, plant pots, various reliefs, and ornaments. Former prisoner Nikola Micanović, who later became the director of the Velebit Enterprise, testified to shipments of the *terrazzo* tiles, chairs and tables taken aboard the Italian ship ‘Satma’.

Moreover, within the stone-cutting workshop on Goli Otok was a specialized unit where the inmates who were sculptors or sculpture students produced plinths for communist party leaders’ monuments on the mainland, as well as smaller stone memorials and even cemetery headstones (Previšić, p. 221). A compelling detail regarding the stone memorials produced by the Goli Otok inmates lies in the fact that one of them was the monument to the victims of the Kapor concentration camp on the island of Rab from World War II. Faithfully, among the Cominformist prisoners on Goli Otok were people like the Croatian painter Alfred Pal – a Jewish partisan – who was an internee of the notorious Kapor during the Italian fascist occupation and one of the people who organized a breakout from the camp in 1943 (Mihailović, 2011, p. 209). As a political prisoner, this time on Goli Otok, under constant beatings and abuse, tormented by thirst and the burning sun, Alfred Pal was in effect forced by his antifascist comrades to excavate the stone allocated for the monument erected to *himself* and his Kapor camp peers. This bitter irony is a crowning example of Goli Otok’s material, corporeal relationship with its political prisoners, of its connectedness, and of cyclic mobility of its stone.

## Epilogue

After the camp’s dissolution and the Yugo-Soviet rapprochement in 1956, the prison complex on the island was handed over from the federal jurisdiction to the Socialist Republic of Croatia, when it was repurposed as a regular prison for the inmates charged with felonies. All the carceral activities on the island ceased in 1988, when the prison was discontinued, abandoned by the humans, and left to ruin. Locals claim that the massive prison complex has been gradually looted since it was put out of function: that people were taking locks and bars home as souvenirs and ripping out heavy wooden doors out of hinges to use them as building material on the surrounding populated islands, another manifestation of the mobility of the Goli Otok prison site.

Upon release, the former prisoners were forced to sign an agreement with the UDB which banned them from speaking about their experience under the threat of being sent back to the island (Lebl, p.149). The silence of the former prisoners and for the partial censorship of the topic in public lasted until Tito’s death in 1980, after which the substantial body of former prisoner’s accounts surfaced, only to be submerged by the wave of the tragic, civil war-ridden 1990s dissolution of Yugoslavia. The Goli Otok Cominformist labor camp remained largely overlooked by historians until mid-2010s when three doctoral dissertations: in socio-political history, literature, and environmental history, respectively, were completed following the partial opening of the UDB archives to researchers (Previšić, 2014; Prokić, 2016; Taczynska, 2015). The founders of the labor camp never had to answer to the allegations of brutality and human suffering on the island.

Today, locals from Rab use the former prison island and the prison ruins for keeping their sheep flocks, for the islandness of this ‘natural’ pen guarantees that no sheep will wander off too far.

Through the years, the locals have also developed semi-wild tourism, taxiing in their own boats the adventurers, urban explorers and those with a penchant for dystopian, 'dark tourism' to the island, organizing tours to what they call 'Croatian Alcatraz'. However, many of the tourists are often put off by the state of the crumbling site. Most of the floors in the prison buildings are covered with a thick layer of sheep dung. There is rubbish of all sorts everywhere, there are rusty bits of metal on the floors. The walls are now covered mainly with teenager love messages, nationalist and football fan graffiti.

Meanwhile, the green forest patches planted almost 80 years ago in the protective shade of the inmates' bodies have grown, now covering over one-eighth of the island's terrain (Previšić & Prokić, 2016, p. 194). With the flocks of sheep freely roaming among them, they offer a stark contrast to the inmates' memories of the island as a 'terrifying', lifeless, barren rock without a single tree. In its present state of opaque, peculiar, placid desolation, the place is, quite on the contrary, almost idyllic. However, the flaking paint of the slogan "We Build Goli Otok Goli Otok Builds Us – Long Live Comrade Tito" written in the 1950s and still partially visible on the walls of the now abandoned ruins, testifies of the human-triggered changes of the island, as well as the suffering of its prisoners. They were forcibly moved to a location far from their homes, for their movements to be limited- not to the circumference of the island itself, but more narrowly so to the 'island within an island': to their prison camp site and the worksites where they labored, bound by multiple tethers of island's concurrent isolation from and connectedness to the Yugoslav (political) mainland.

## Conclusion

The notion of labor on Goli Otok had manifold implications, yet one common (material) denominator, inextricable from the violence and the human corporeal suffering – the stone. On the heated, bare rock, the forced labor that was at once constructive, destructive, lucrative, and 're-educational' had transformed the island, the surrounding Velebit area, and the lives of the incarcerated humans. The materiality of the labor site also framed the disturbing system of intra-human violence. Stone figure 1 as the main extracted commodity distributed by the ghost 'enterprise', and as the tool of the disturbing 're-educational' method. Whipped by winds, surrounded by the tempestuous sea, the island itself was the collective ball and chain which bound and (im)mobilised the bodies of the prisoners to the place of their labor. Ripped out of the karst material of the island and placed in the role of the 'tormentor's ally', crumbled and carried from one point to the other and back in the grueling shifts of 're-educational' labor, the stone mobilized within the island followed the strained movements of its forced carriers upon the paths they were forced to build. As an extracted commodity on the other hand, the stone was shipped across mainland of Yugoslavia and Europe, travelling further and arguably more freely than its forced laborer excavators.

Goli Otok is where environment, laboring body, violence and extraction created an undividable whole: an island-specific workscape, which fostered the 'unique culture of violence' endemic in its scope and its intensity to this island. Its story strikingly blurs the 'faulted lines', as Peck (2006) names the divisions between the subdisciplines of labor history and environmental history. The analysis of the interrelation of Goli Otok and Yugoslav political prisoners between 1949 and 1956 through forced labor contributes to overcoming the once rigid divisions between the subfields of labor history and environmental history by placing into focus their 'common ground' - the human body. It shows that the human body as a unit of the environment and as a carrier of laboring force, is in itself the site of labor coercion, inextricable from the places and spaces of commodity and labor extraction.

## Notes

1. This quote is from the memoir of Ženi Lebl, a female former political prisoner of the Goli otok labor camp (See Lebl, 1990, pp. 105–106). All quotes in Yugoslavian languages were translated by the author.

2. While *carceral archipelago* is a term which emerged in the 1970s coined by Foucault to describe the modern penal system and leaning on Solzhenitsyn's use of the metaphor to describe the GULAG carceral and forced labor network, scholars of carcerality have been re-engaging with the term more recently to denote a particular cluster of historical research. 'The Carceral Archipelago: Transnational Circulations in Global Perspective, 1415–1960' for example, was a research project based at the University of Leicester (2015–18), that gathered scholars from around the world. Its wide geographical scope incorporated all the global powers engaged in transportation for the purpose of expansion and colonization. Its chronology stretches from Portugal's first use of convicts in North Africa in 1415 to the dissolution of the Soviet GULAG system in the 1960s.
3. Among them was, for example, the Spanish Civil War veteran Mirko Marković commandeered the International Lincoln Brigade, where he met and befriended writer Ernest Hemingway.
4. The joke was a pun on a popular Yugoslav song 'Comrade Tito, our White Violet The Whole Fatherland loves you' about Yugoslavia being an agricultural prodigy for breeding a 120 kg heavy violet, referring to Tito's post-revolutionary, presidential 'hedonistic' eating habits.
5. 'Prosecuted under the Clause 6, Transgression Law (passed on October 13th 1948) were those who "invent or spread false news and disinformation which disturb the peace and tranquility of the citizens" and "those found guilty or who are found likely to continue conducting such transgressions shall be sent to socially beneficial work and stay in a designated place in duration of six months to two years" [..] 'During the administrative punitive process the authorities assess the evidence according to their own free evaluation and the sentence could be suspended or prolonged to a further notice according to the progress of the subject's re- education'
6. Six islands in the Croatian and Montenegrin Adriatic were appropriated as places of detention and remand in Yugoslavia during the Cominform years (1948–56); five of locations on islands and on mainland (Goli Otok, Sveti Grgur, Stolac and Ramski Rit) were the most prominent places of forced labor- mainly stone excavation) whilst in the 20-five prisons, located on the mainland throughout the former Yugoslav republics sections were designated for the Cominformists in remand (See Prokić, 2016, pp. 39–40).
7. Archival materials of UDB confirm that the writer Cveto Zagorski was indeed one of the first convicts to set foot on the island, having been in remand for six months beforehand. He spent a year on Goli Otok, and appears in the BIA Archives Under: Zagorski Viktora Cvetko born '16 (no date), arrested 16 02 1949, released on 19 07 1950. See: Državni arhiv Srbije (Archives of Serbia) BIA Spisak lica (List of persons) CII/ 110 1/6.
8. After 1953, the camp and the stone trading business by the UDB were renamed, as explained below in the final section of the paper 'The Marble Enterprise'.
9. The first two inmates who were beaten to death on Goli otok appear in the archival documents, and thus stand as a painful indicator in the island's timeline, marking the full implementation of the 'self-managed re-education' on Goli Otok: the registered date of death of Petar (Nika) Andrijašević is 22 July 1949, whilst the death of Blažo Raičević is dated 24 July 1949. See: Registar kažnjenika prošlih kroz Mermer [Registry book of the convicts who passed through 'Marble'] Arhiv Srbije Fond BIA I/16/II, Dosije 110 fascikla CII).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

*Milica Prokić* is an environmental historian and knowledge exchange scholar with the background in visual arts. She obtained holds Ph.D. in history from the University of Bristol, has held fellowships at the European University Institute, the Rachel Carson Center (LMU Munich), and the Kunsthistorisches Institut Max Planck. She currently works at the One Ocean Hub (University of Strathclyde), and has previously worked at the School of Humanities, University of Glasgow.

## Research ethics, consent, and integrity statement

Oral histories used in this manuscript were collected between 2011 and 2015 for the purposes of producing the following PhD thesis: Prokić, M. (2017). *Barren Island (Goli Otok): A Trans-Corporeal History of the Former Yugoslav Political Prison Camp and Its Inmates, from the Cominform Period (1949–1956) to the Present*, University of Bristol Department of History, Bristol United Kingdom. The University of Bristol Head of Research Governance with input from the Faculty

Research Ethics Officer have issued the statement that the due diligence was undertaken for the due consideration to the ethical issues in producing the thesis. In addition to this, the author ensured that written consent was collected from each of the participants or their family members where appropriate, stating that the oral history interviews can be used and published in author's further research

## References

- Anderson, C. (Ed.). (2018). *A global history of convicts and penal colonies*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Anderson, C., Crockett, M. C., De Vito, C. G., Miyamoto, T., Moss, K., Roscoe, K., & Sakata, M. (2015). Locating penal transportation: Punishment, space and place c. 1750-1910. In K. Morin & D. Moran (Eds.), *Historical geographies of prisons: Unlocking the usable carceral past* (pp. 147–167). Routledge.
- Andrews, T. (2010). *Killing for coal: America's deadliest labor War*. Harvard University Press.
- Andrews, T. (2014). Work, nature and history: A single question, that once moved like light. In A. C. Isenberg (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of environmental history* (pp. 425–466). Oxford University Press.
- Antić, A. (2016). Therapeutic violence psychoanalysis and the reeducation of political prisoners in Cold War Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe. In M. Ffytche & D. Pick (Eds.), *Psychoanalysis in the age of totalitarianism* (pp. 163–177). Routledge.
- Appelbaum, A. (2003). *GULAG. A history of the Soviet camps*. Penguin.
- Barca, S. (2014). Laboring the earth: Transnational reflections on the environmental history of work. *Environmental History*, 19(1), 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emt099>
- Bobinac, V. (2011, August 23). Interview by M Prokić, [video recording] Krk, Croatia. *Author's Archive*.
- Bralić, V., & Krajinik, D. (2021). Anthropogenic elements of the cultural landscape of the island Goli Otok in Croatia. *Prostor, A Scholarly Journal for Architecture and Urban Planning*, 29(1), 32–41. [https://doi.org/10.31522/p.29.1\(61\).3](https://doi.org/10.31522/p.29.1(61).3)
- Cenić, V. (1994). *Kanjec filjma. Povest*. Književna zajednica 'Borisav Stanković'.
- Corrado, S. (2010) *The "End of the Earth": Sakhalin Island in the Russian imperial imagination, 1849-1906* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Illinois.
- CPI Inflation calculator. Retrieved September 12, 2022, from [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)
- Deacon, H. (Ed.). (1996). *The island: A history of Robben island, 1488-1990*. New Africa Books.
- De Vito, C. G., & Lichtenstein, A. (2013). Writing a global history of convict labour. *International Review of Social History*, 58(2), 285–325. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859012000818>
- Dragović-Gašpar, R. (1990). *Let Iznad Golog Otoka*. Akvarijus.
- Državni Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia], Fond BIA Inventar [BIA collection, Inventory]
- Državni Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia] Fond BIA, Registar kažnjenika prošlih kroz Mermer [Registry book of the convicts who passed through 'Marble'] Dosije 110 fascikla CII, I/16/II.
- Državni Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia] Fond BIA, Spisak lica [The BIA Collection, List of persons] CII/110 1/6.
- Fuggle, S. (2022). Toxic colonialism: Between sickness and sanctuary on Ilet La Mère. *French Guiana Island Studies Journal*. 17(1),26–43.
- Jambrešić-Kirin, R. (2007). Šalje Tito svoje na ljetovanje!": ženska trauma i arhipelag Goli [Tito Sends You on Vacation!: Archipelago Goli otok and Female Political Trauma]. *Treća: časopis Centra za ženske studije*, 9(1), 9–38.
- Jezernik, B. (2012). *Non Cogito Ergo Sum - eseji o Golom otoku*. Mediterran Publishing.
- Kagan Guthrie, Z. (2016). Forced volunteers: The complexities of coercion in central Mozambique 1942-1961. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 49(2), 195–212.
- Kostić, P. (2002). *Psiholoska Anatomija Golog Otoka*. Mašić.
- Lajus, J., & Kraikovski, A. (2021). The apace of blue and gold': The nature and environment of solovki in history and heritage. In D. Moon (Ed.), *Place and nature: Essays in Russian environmental history* (pp. 37–68). White Horse Press.
- Lebl, Ž. (1990). *Ljubičica bela-vic dug dve ipo godine* [The White Violet- a two and-a-half year long joke]. Dečje novine.
- Lovrić, A., Antonić, O., & Hrabrić, T. (1998). Povijest istraživanja i biogeografske osobitosti otočja Prvič, Grgur i Goli' [History of studies and biogeographic peculiarities of Prvič, Grgur and Goli Islands. In M. Arko-Pijevac, M. Kovacić, & D. Crnković (Eds.), *Prirodoslovna istraživanja Riječkog područja* [Natural history researches of Rijeka region] (pp. 109–119). Prirodoslovni muzej [Natural History Museum].
- Lowenthal, D. (2007). 'islands, lovers, and others'. *Geographical Review*, 97(2), 202–229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2007.tb00399.x>
- Marković, D. (1990). *Josip Broz i Goli otok*. Beseda.
- Mezzadra, S., & Neilson, B. (2017). On the multiple frontiers of extraction: Excavating contemporary capitalism. *Cultural Studies*, 31(2–3), 185–204.
- Mihailović, D. (2011). *Goli otok IV*. Službeni glasnik.
- Mountz, A. (2015). Political geography II: Islands and archipelagos. *Progress in Human Geography*, 39(5), 636–646. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132514560958>
- Nahir, E. (1989). Interview with Danilo Kiš. In *Goli Zivot*. Dir. Aleksandar Mandić & Danilo Kiš, Prod. Avala Film.
- Nikčević, T. (2010). *Goli otoci Jova Kapičića*. Blic.

- Novičić- Trocki, V. Unpublished manuscript, completed 2009 in Belgrade, Serbia.
- Pallot, J. (2005). Russia's penal peripheries: Space, place and penalty in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30(1), 98–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2005.00154.x>
- Pavic, D. (25 May 2015). Interview by M Prokić, [Audio recording] Author's archive.
- Peck, G. (2006). The nature of labor: Faulted lines and common ground between environmental and labor history. *Environmental History*, 11(2), 212–238. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/11.2.212>
- Perpar- Prokić, N. (2009). *Ceh*. Zagor.
- Previšić, M. (2014). *Povijest informbirovskog logora na Golom otoku 1949-1956* [History of the Cominformists Goli otok camp 1949-1956] [Doctoral dissertation]. Semantic Scholar, Corpus ID: 132184269.
- Previšić, M., & Prokić, M. (2016). Ekohistorijski aspekti proučavanja logora na Golom otoku 1949.-1956. *Ekonomika i Ekohistorija*, 12(12), 186–196.
- Prokić, M. (2016). *Barren Island (Goli Otok): A Trans-corporeal history of the former Yugoslav political prison camp and its inmates, from the cominform period (1949-1956) to the present* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Bristol Department of History.
- Robert, S., Lončarić, M., Čuka, A., & Faričić, J. (2007). Excursions géologiques extraites du *Viaggio in Dalmazia* d'AlbertoFortis (1774). *Comptes Rendus Géoscience*, 339(9), 640–650. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crte.2007.07.006>
- Rosenthal, G. (2012). Life and labor in a seabird colony: Hawaiian Guano workers, 1857–70. *Environmental History*, 17(1), 744–782. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/ems079>
- Taczynska, K. (2015). *Obraz Goli otok w serbskim dyskursie literackim i historycznym końca XX i początku XXI wieku* [The portrait of Goli otok prison camp in Serbian literary and historical discourse at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.
- Taussig, M. (1984). Culture of terror – space of death: Roger Casement's Putumayo report and the explanation of torture. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26(3), 467–497. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500011105>
- Vulović, B. (24 May. 2015). Interview by M Prokić, [Video recording] Belgrade, Serbia, Author's archive.
- Zagorski, C. (1984). Moje leto osemindesetdeseto [My year of nineteen eighty-four]. *Nova revija*, 24(25), 3282–3283.