

“Watch Us Float” is especially brilliant, in my opinion, as is Priestly’s work in “Prehod/ Passage” (62–63), but the reader will find gems for him- or herself throughout this collection.

In conclusion, *Kaj smo, ko smo/What We Are, When We Are* is a wonderful introduction to a superb poet who deserves a wider readership. Finally, special thanks to the AU (Athabasca University) Press for including this unique work in their special Mingling Voices series.

*Raymond Miller, Bowdoin College*

**Matej Šurc.** *Patriotism for Sale: How Independent Slovenia Fell Foul of Crooked Arms Dealers.* Translated by Vasili Volarič. Ljubljana: Sanje Publishing, 2018. +441 pp., \$7.50 (e-book) ISBN: 978-961-274-521-9

It starts with a whodunit murder mystery. A former officer of the Slovenian Territorial Defense is killed in what looks like an accident, his body found at the bottom of a ravine, having fallen from a steep bluff above it. But further investigation suggests that he had no business being at the precipice to begin with and that this could not have been an accident. Further, his body appears to have been dragged to the place where it was found. This is one of a series of mysteries that *Patriotism for Sale*, by Slovenian investigative journalist Matej Šurc,<sup>7</sup> seeks to address. The book reads like a police procedural, covering the story of illegal arms dealing during the Yugoslav Wars, with a focus on Slovenia’s ten-day war of independence in 1991. While the book goes into great depth about how the illicit arms trade functions throughout Europe, following several key players instrumental to this illegal activity, the core of the book is an hour-by-hour (in some cases minute-by-minute) account of that ten-day war.

As an American professor living for many years in Slovenia, I’ve tried to read as much as I can, to educate myself about my adopted homeland. Never have I found such impressive historical detail as I have in *Patriotism for Sale*. I learned a tremendous amount about the illegal arms trade in Europe, which encompasses both individuals and nations. A handful of actors were responsible for a large percentage of illicit arms trade worldwide, profiting from conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and beyond, not just in the former Yugoslavia. The means to acquire military equipment on a large scale and smuggle it anywhere they liked was hugely lucrative. But the story goes

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<sup>7</sup> Šurc was the RTV correspondent in Belgrade for many years, then in Washington, D.C., and he now works for Radio Slovenija.

beyond the mechanics of the black-market arms trade. The story of *Patriotism for Sale* is really about how a select few Slovenian politicians manipulated their own war for independence to profit privately, using the government to launder their earnings. They also shamelessly over-charged their “brother” nations, such as Croatia and Bosnia, both under attack from the Yugoslav Army, essentially extorting them to pay for weapons that were partly legally acquired by the Slovenian government for its own territorial defense, and partly illegally acquired or stolen from the government’s armories and resold at prices three-to-ten times their market value.

The prime suspects in *Patriotism for Sale* are a small group of politicians, including the then Minister of Defense, Janez Janša, and Minister of the Interior, Igor Bavčar. To be fair, this book and its author are very much left-wing opponents of Janša and his center-right party, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), so the author is not shy about calling Janša “the prince of darkness,” as he was once dubbed. But while the author may have begun with an anti-Janša attitude, the text is written as objectively as one might hope in building a case for Janša’s leadership of this profiteering activity. Let it be said that I have no interest in politics. I even helped Janša with a project once and have no particular opinion on Slovenian governing, one way or another. I approached this book not as I expect most of its readers would—having an anti-Janša stance. The Slovenian readership for this book is almost certainly left-wing, and therefore “preaching to the converted,” whereas right-wingers would be unlikely to go near it, knowing the author’s leftist reputation. Foreign readers like me, who do not really have an opinion on Slovenian politics (if we can follow its labyrinthine machinations at all), represent a preferred audience, since we approach the situation as objectively as possible. This is where Šurc’s immense talents as an investigator come through.

He compellingly argues, with rigorous research and copious and detailed citations, that Janša and Bavčar (before they argued and tried to undermine each other), along with a tight cadre of associates, arranged that arms purchased by the Slovenian government for its own territorial defense were then sold off primarily to Croatia, which was mounting its own territorial defense against the Yugoslav Army (which was primarily a Serbian force.) Croatia endured a much longer and bloodier battle for independence than did Slovenia, and the arms that Slovenia acquired to protect itself were siphoned off in extravagant numbers for sale to Croatia and Bosnia, at hideously inflated prices, sometimes to localities that were in such a crisis that they were literally under siege. Ordering the emergency supplies under these circumstances, therefore, the sellers could crank up the price as much as they liked. The profits from these state-owned weapons and supplies disappeared and one can only assume that they were pocketed by those orchestrating these sales. So, we have the complicated situation of the government buying weapons—sometimes legally, sometimes under-the-

table—and some of these weapons being stolen by private individuals who worked for the government and sold to other nations at an inflated price, pocketing the money. And some of the weapons being sold to the Croatians and Bosnians did not even work properly. Nothing is straightforward in the world of illegal arms dealing.

The book also looks at whether the profiteering might also be considered treason. Since some of the government-owned arms were stolen and sold while Slovenia was still at war, it could be argued that Slovenia's ability to defend itself was harmed through these actions. Further, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the key players in the government were trying to encourage more bloodshed than was either necessary or desired by the soldiers involved, in order to amp up the sense of urgency, to get foreign governments to recognize Slovenia more quickly, and to enhance the need for more weapons.

For a book such as this, most editors would recommend copious use of the word “allegedly” and, in fact, it is always wise to do so, because the allegations in this book have never been confirmed in court, despite the fact that those involved have frequently been served summons. Slovenia, in particular, is so small and full of alleged nepotistic insider connections that those accused of involvement have been able to sweep things under the rug, or get people to “lose” documents, or have key judges dismiss cases that objectively seem to warrant hearing. The tangle of delays and personal connections resulted in statutes of limitations running out for cases dealing with the 1991 war of independence, and so no justice has been served for these alleged crimes. There is also an atmosphere that seems to have benefited the perpetrators. Slovenia won its independence almost completely unscathed, in comparison to other former Yugoslav republics. So, some might argue that it was a relatively “victimless” crime. Because the war of independence had a “happy” ending, others suggest that we should leave that historical time period alone and not dig up the past. But crimes were committed, nonetheless, and tens of millions of euros disappeared, if not more. Unscrupulous international arms traders *did* serve jail time for their involvement in this affair—they just weren't the Slovenian participants.

Any yet, the book does not shield itself with the word “allegedly” and time has proven that it does not need to. The level of detail is so immaculate that it appears incontrovertible. Citations note scores of eyewitness interviews, some of which have been publicly published in books, memoirs and articles, alongside many undertaken by the author. These interviews are from all sides, not just the Slovenian one. This combination feels genuinely honest and undoctored. With so many voices brought in, it is almost a crowd-sourced account, all of which agree on the “allegations,” even down to minute details like the number of bullets that disappeared from an armory.

Thus, the main question is, are the allegations true? Reading this book leaves the reader with the impression that they are true beyond reasonable doubt. It is the meticulous research involved, the level of microscopic detail coupled with the macroscopic scale of the number of works cited, archives accessed, and people interviewed on-the-record. It is a truly stunning masterclass in investigative journalism. Almost miraculously, Šurc weaves together these hundreds of accounts into a single, coherent, gripping narrative—no easy feat, because this is an enormously complicated multipart puzzle.

Perhaps the most damning evidence to prove that everything in the book is true is that while Šurc received numerous death threats after publication of the Slovenian edition, he was never sued. Because if he were sued, then the truth would come out and, one imagines, confirm what he'd already written. That he has not been touched for libel suggests that there is nothing libelous in his account.

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**Radovan Hrast.** *Stripped of My Time: A Survivor of the Communist Political Prison on Goli Otok.* Translated by Roman Vučajnk. United States: Independently Published, 2018. xiv + 242 pp., \$19.72 (paper). ISBN: 172383002X.

Most people go to the Croatian islands for summer holidays, but there was one island on nobody's wish list. Goli Otok (which translates as Bald Island or perhaps Naked Island) was the most notorious prison of former Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup> It is often called a "gulag," but this is not strictly correct. Gulags were designed to gradually work inmates to death. Goli Otok was never intended as a slow means of execution, and very few inmates actually died there. It was, however, designed as an elaborate torture device that is eerily reminiscent of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony."

This desert island was the place to which non-military male prisoners were sent, ostensibly under suspicion of having been pro-Stalin and anti-Tito. While Tito and Stalin were allied against the Fascists during World War II, to mutual benefit, when the war ended Stalin expected Tito's Yugoslavia to function as a Soviet satellite state. Tito would have none of this and had the courage to stand up to Stalin. Stalin sent numerous assassins

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<sup>8</sup> There are tourists that visit the island and Hrast has occasionally led tours (and also appeared in some documentaries about the island).