

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.⁸ 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

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

to try to kill Tito, and all failed. A whiff of sympathy for the Soviets was taken to mean treachery to Tito's Yugoslavia, even if the "traitor" in question was a lifelong Tito enthusiast and had fought with the Partisans.

In practice, Goli Otok was a place of horrors that was the destination for anyone who crossed someone the wrong way, and who could be accused of not abiding by the expectations of the socialist Yugoslav state and, in particular, the secret police. The inmates were all Yugoslavs and it seems safe to assume that most of them were wrongfully accused. That is to say, that they did not plot against Tito, but were either inappropriately accused of doing so by someone who simply didn't like the cut of their jib, or they did something that seems, in retrospect, laughably mild, such as saying a comment along the lines of "not all of Stalin's ideas are bad," and finding themselves arrested.

A large percentage of those imprisoned on Goli Otok had not actually committed a crime, but simply were denounced by someone who did not like them. Others who refused to cooperate as informants with the secret police were likewise subject to interment. Those arrested were often imprisoned without a trial, or after a simple show trial, and sentenced to what could be translated as "community service." This hardly sounds serious, until we learn that "community service" meant at least a year of hard labor on this prison island.

What made Goli Otok so Kafka-esque, was the nature of the rituals that took place there. These are detailed at a human level in *Stripped of My Time* by Radovan Hrast. Hrast fought as a Partisan during World War II and was an enthusiastic follower of Tito. But he was also young, headstrong and loyal and did not want to rat out his fellow students, when told that he must do so, while studying in Rijeka. He made a fairly innocuous comment about Stalin not being all bad and found himself informed upon by a jealous fellow student and packed off to Goli Otok. He endured and barely survived his interment and was released early if he would promise to cooperate with the secret police as an informant. He refused and was sent back for another period, and those sent back were subject to harsher punishments. Hrast writes of all this horror in a matter-of-fact, honest and open way. Nothing fancy, no philosophizing, and with an admission that he did what was not allowed, therefore he did not feel that he was unjustly punished (though readers will surely consider the punishment for his "misdeeds" to be ridiculously lopsided). Hrast's book was much-discussed in the 1990s, when a Slovenian version was first published (Mladinska Knjiga, 1991), and now there is finally an English-language edition, ably translated by Roman Vučajnk. The read is bearable through all the tortures because Hrast is endlessly positive, even to this day as a nonagenarian. I had the chance to meet him, and after hearing his story and reading his book, I offered to pen the Introduction to it. The book is a valuable first-hand account of daily existence in this remarkable

prison. These are hard to come by because during the existence of communist Yugoslavia no one dared to say what happened on the island, while few individuals in the post-Yugoslav era want to “stir up old soup” and revisit negative chapters in their own history.

The prison island was not just a place of detention and labor under the sweltering sun, where provisions and water were in short supply. It was also an ingenious place of psychological and physical tortures. The structure was deviously devised so that the prisoners acted as their own wardens and guards. Deserving of a chapter in Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975), an atmosphere of mistrust was intentionally cultivated among the prisoners, and it began with new arrivals. New inmates coming by boat would be forced to walk a gauntlet of veteran inmates, who were expected to punch or kick the new arrivals. Veteran inmates who failed to attack with sufficient vigor would be punished. At the end of exhausting work days, inmates would gather in their shared barracks and, one by one, would have to stand up and admit to the sins for which they were imprisoned. Many inmates did not feel they had actually committed a sin and, as mentioned, many of them were stalwart Partisans who were great admirers of Tito. But failure to admit your crimes meant another beating. However, admission of your crimes also led to a beating. So what was ostensibly the time to recuperate after a hard day of labor under the sun was actually another form of psychological torture coupled with physical suffering. With inmates like this, who needed guards?

Yugoslavia rightly has the reputation of having been the best experiment in socialism, the most successful with the least social turmoil and the best experience of day-to-day life for its population. There are, of course, some stains on even the finest reputations, and Goli Otok is one of them.

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Lujiza Pesjakova and Urška Perenič. *Beatin dnevnik: Roman. Prvi slovenski družinski roman v obliki dnevnika.* Critical introduction by Urška Perenič. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2019. 235 pp., 19.90 euro. ISBN: 978-961-06-0178-4. (e-book) 978-961-06-0178-4.

First about the novel: Regardless of the genre markers that might prejudice a reader and the standard motifs and plotting, one has to be impressed by the novel’s forceful narrative voice and the narrator’s sense of self. She is a young orphaned woman just arrived at a manor house to become twin girls’ governess (non-Slovenes might perceive in this an opportunity to display the dual number!). A facsimile copy of the 1887 novel appears on p. 51–164. Reproducing the original lends a certain charm to the text. There are sixty-six annotations to help the reader with possible difficulties—from the name