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The concentration camp of Goli Otok: More than or less than a cultural trauma?*

The initial remarks
This text is a work in progress and reports on the performed preliminary research whose purpose was to set up a working hypothesis and determine the scope of further research that will be continued in the next several years, probably after the termination of the SPECTRESS-project.
The text is not historiographic even though the topic – the concentration camp for Stalin-supporters on the island of Goli Otok (1949–1956)1 – is an important part of modern Yugoslav history. Hence, the text is not meant to establish the historical facts about the island but to analyze narratives about it. The number of narrative sources is relatively small, but their canonic representability is quite well defined. The majority of analyzed historiographic texts, documentaries and movies are well-known works in their genre. Reliable answers to controversial questions about historical reality have a direct impact on the nature or the level of credibility of their interpretations because the number of utterances used to describe a historical event may be comprehensive, but is still limited. However, untangling of controversies and providing possible answers can only come from historiographers, which is beyond the scope of this text as it does not include examination of archival/primary sources.

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* This contribution was conceived as a large lecture for my colleagues in the SPECTRESS-project in Sao Paulo. The first and at the same time biggest part (Part 0–5) was written as a “preparatory material” for my lecture held on May 13, 2016 at the University of Sao Paulo. The last two parts (Part 6 and “Private epilogue”) are from that lecture. A week later, on May 20, I gave another, somewhat modified lecture at the Federal University of Paraná in Curitiba.
1 The Croatian toponym “Goli Otok” literally means “bare island”, which corresponds to the island’s lack of vegetation. Goli Otok was not an ordinary prison, but a concentration camp. People were imprisoned there without a trial and punished with so-called “community service labour” (Cro. “društveno koristan rad”, abbreviated as DKR) which in effect meant hard labour. The prison architecture and daily organization of activities also corresponded to the usual operation of concentration camps.
Starting from the assumption that the historical background and interpretations of the so-called Tito-Stalin Split are not well-known among the Brazilian colleagues in the SPECTRESS-project, I suggested to Professor Laura Izzara to give all project-members at the USP an opportunity to watch the most recent and very relevant Croatian documentary on Goli Otok, which is at the same time a part of the research material.² Besides, I have tried in the first chapters of this contribution to combine two tasks: to provide basic information about the topic and to develop a logically structured discussion. The contribution consists of the following:

1. Chronological outline of the Tito-Stalin Split. The aim is to provide a transparent, nonpartisan compromising account, based on irrefutable historical facts and free of any value judgements or ideologically biased interpretations. Such an account cannot provide all answers and is by no means sufficient.

2. Analysis of the historiographic texts on the Tito-Stalin Split focuses on the following questions: a) What are the real reasons of the split?; b) How is the Yugoslav response narrated and evaluated?; b1) What is said about Goli Otok?

3. Analysis of the two documentary films on Goli Otok, with special emphasis on the representation of trauma and portrayal of prisoners.

4. Analysis of three movies dealing with the Tito-Stalin Split, with emphasis on the representation/thematization of: a) Trauma of prisoners.; b) Ideological portrayal of the protagonists; c) Stalinism.

5. Preliminary conclusions and hypotheses on the contemporary cultural narrative of the Tito-Stalin Split and of the sub-narrative about Goli Otok.


1. **Chronological Outline of the Tito-Stalin Split**

The following twelve statements or a cluster of statements constitute a succinct narrative on the Split, which is the most important context for understanding the story about Goli Otok.

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² The documentary *Goli otok* (Dir. D. Bavoljak, 2012) can be downloaded at [https://www.dropbox.com/s/3y3z0mjrq2sdnm8/GOLI%20OTOK%20english1.mov?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/3y3z0mjrq2sdnm8/GOLI%20OTOK%20english1.mov?dl=0)
1. The Yugoslav Army under the leadership of the Communist Party and Josip Broz Tito was an internationally recognized member of the anti-fascist coalition and therefore the winner of WW2 in Yugoslavia.

2. Immediately after WW2, the Yugoslav Communist Party won the struggle against the royal Yugoslav government-in-exile, and took all political power in the county.

3. In the first three years after WW2 the Soviet Union became the strongest ally of Yugoslavia: the two countries developed close political, economic and cultural relations.

4. The Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), as an advisory and coordinating body for cooperation between the communist parties of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Soviet Union, France, Czechoslovakia and Italy, was founded in September 1947.

5. From March to May 1948 Soviet and Yugoslav communist parties exchanged several letters. The Soviets criticized their Yugoslav comrades for dissemination of anti-Soviet attitudes, lack of internal party democracy, tolerance of capitalist forms in the socialist society, and the presence of British spies in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, the latter objected to Yugoslav arrogance claiming that Yugoslav success in the war and revolution would not have been possible without the help of the Red Army. The Yugoslav Communist Party rejected all objections.

6. At the second meeting of the Cominform in June 1948 in Bucharest, the participants without the presence of Yugoslav representatives, adopted the Resolution, according to which the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party were accused of hostile policy toward the Soviet Union, lack of class struggle in the rural areas, weakening of the Communist Party which became immersed in the National Front.

7. The leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party published the Resolution of Cominform, as well as its official response, in which they rejected all accusations. The Yugoslav public was for the first time informed about the split between the two parties and two countries.

8. In the first period of the conflict with Stalin (until about 1950) the Yugoslav communist government tried to demonstrate its commitment to the Soviet model of governance and to deny accusations in the two first letters of The Central Committee of the Communist Party

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3 The order of the countries according to the first official document of Cominform. Cf. Banac 1990: 38.
of the Soviet Union and in the Resolution of Cominform. Accordingly, small private companies were nationalized already in 1948, after the first Soviet letter, at the same time two groups of Slovenian citizens were accused of an alleged collaboration with the Nazis during their imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp. Last but not least, collectivization of agriculture was carried out in 1949. These political moves are in the Yugoslav historiography described as a Stalinist response to Stalin’s attack.

9. In July 1949 the concentration camp of Goli Otok was established to isolate the Resolution supporters; they were sentenced mostly “administratively”, without a judicial process.

10. The Yugoslav state undergoes economic blockade of the socialist countries: economic support is provided by the Western countries, especially the USA.

11. The second phase of the Yugoslav response to the Resolution began in c. 1950 with the introduction of socialist self-management in the national economy, the abandonment of socialist realism in literature and art, and with the Non-Aligned Movement in the foreign policies.

12. After the death of Stalin in 1953 the political and economic relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were restored and political prisoners of Goli Otok were released.

The above statements have a different degree of generality. Some of them refer to historical processes or to a cluster of related events (1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12), others to concrete, single, historical facts. But from the standpoint of the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav historiography, all of them belong to the set of indisputable historical statements that are more or less included in all relevant contributions on the topic. It would be possible, of course, to produce additional and more precise indisputable statements about the Tito-Stalin Split. As it will be argued, some of the standardised or conventional statements could receive additional value or ideological charge, what I have tried to avoid in my account. In any case, the critical points of any narration about the Tito-Stalin Split are: a) the real reasons for the conflict, and b) the credibility of the charges against the Yugoslav communist leadership in the Resolution of the Cominform. Those are the starting questions of a short analysis of historiography which follows.
2. Historiography of the Tito-Stalin Split

The first historiographic text that will be discussed here is part of the book of Croatian historian, politician and contemporary of the Tito-Stalin Split, Dušan Bilandžić (1924–2015), History of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: The main processes (Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije: Glavni procesi, Zagreb 1978). The reasons for the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict are elaborated in the chapter “The attack of the communist parties of the Cominform on the Communist Party of Yugoslavia” (“Napad komunističkih partija Informbiroa na KPJ”), which includes only four pages. Author follows the main events chronologically from February to June 1948, i.e. from Stalin’s meeting with the leading Yugoslav and Bulgarian politicians (with the exception of Tito), through the letters exchanged between the Soviet and Yugoslav communist parties from March to June, to the Resolution of the Cominform from the 28th of June. Bilandžić sees the real reason for the conflict in the Yugoslav rejection of the full political, economic and military subjugation to the Soviet Union that Stalin required from all socialist countries at the beginning of the Cold War. According to that reasoning, the position of Yugoslavia in the East European socialist bloc was unique due to the resistance against the German and Italian occupation and due to the authenticity of the revolution. Namely, from the beginning of WW2 to its end, only Yugoslav communists were fighting against Hitler and Mussolini, on the one hand, and for the political power in the country, on the other. The foreign policy aspect of the Tito-Stalin conflict is reduced to a footnote in Bilandžić’s book and only as the Soviet-Bulgarian-Yugoslav meeting in February 1948. This means that only the problems of Yugoslav political and military presence in Albania and the problem of Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation, which was in the focus of the meeting in Moscow, are discussed in brief. The problem of Yugoslav support to the Greek communists in the Greek Civil War is not even mentioned.

In his description of the Yugoslav politics after the Resolution of the Cominform Bilandžić distinguishes between two phases that I have highlighted previously as the standardized parts of the narrative about the Tito-Stalin Split: the first one from 1948 to 1950, starting with the Resolution and the Fifth Congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party in June and July, which is characterized by the strong communist stasis in economy; and the second one from 1950 to Stalin’s death in 1953, which Bilandžić labels as “a new concept of the social
development of the country” (“nova koncepcija društvenog razvoja zemlje”) with socialist self-management (samoupravni socijalizam) as a new, specific Yugoslav mode of economy.

But the most important fact about this book for our discussion is its total silencing of the camp of Goli Otok. There are, admittedly, some numerical data: Bilandžić mentions 54,000 supporter of the Resolution and 12–13,000 imprisoned individuals. In the concluding part of the analyzed chapter he sums up the problem as follows: “Some Party members resisted a new course. Those who supported the Cominform dropped out during this period. There were no dilemmas as to how they should be treated. The smallest disagreement or even a critical remark on the policies of resistance of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to the Cominform, was enough for expulsion from the Party.” (p. 178)

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Twenty one years later the same author published another book on a similar topic, albeit of a narrower scope which reflects the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the establishment of new independent states. The title of the second study is Croatian Modern History (Hrvatska moderna povijest, Zagreb 1999). What are the most important differences between the two studies in relation to our topic? In the later book the complete story about the Tito-Stalin Split, i.e. about its political and economic implications for the development of the country, is two and a half times longer than in the previous one. The author preserves two important theses for the interpretation of the conflict from the first book: the thesis about Soviet hegemony and Yugoslav resistance thereto, and the thesis about two phases in Yugoslav politics between the Resolution and Stalin’s death. However, additional text provides not only more detailed and profound arguments for the main theses, but it also contains some information that can implicitly undermine the coherence of the very narrative. By this I mean first of all the inclusion of a far more extensive description of the external political context. Not only is the chronology of the idea of the Balkan Federation which should have initially united Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania, here better presented than in the first book, but also the dispute over border areas between Yugoslavia and its western neighbours Austria and Italy, and, most importantly, the Yugoslav interference in the Greek Civil War are here at least briefly mentioned. Since at the beginning of the Cold War the problem of the Balkan Federation could have been interpreted as an internal matter of the socialist
bloc, the problems that were at the core of the Cold War were the following: a) which country should get Trieste, Istria and Carinthia?; and b) would Greece belong to the Eastern socialist or Western capitalist bloc? It is a well-known fact that Stalin in 1948 tried to avoid a real war with the Western countries and that he, according to the “Percentage Agreement” with Churchill from October 1944, considered Greece as part of the dominant Western sphere of influence (in the ratio of 90:10 for Britain). In that sense, Yugoslav politics in the Balkans seemed to be relatively independent from the Soviet Union and even more aggressive. This challenged the idea that Yugoslav politics at the end of 1940s was a mere resistance to Soviet hegemony. Rather, the Tito-Stalin Split could be described as a conflict between the two unequally strong imperialist/hegemonic centres.

The second novelty in comparison to the first study refers to a couple of paragraphs dedicated to the state policy towards the “inner enemy”, including the concentration camp of Goli Otok. After the numerical data on the national and social profile of the so-called Cominform supporters, which reveals a high proportion of members of the social elite among the prisoners (for example: 6 generals of the Yugoslav Army, 23 ministers and their 99 deputies), the author refers to “the other side” of the struggle against the Cominform supporters: their family members were forced to sever ties with them; some people denounced their friends to demonstrate loyalty to the regime in order to avoid imprisonment; the inmates in the camp of Goli Otok were humiliated and morally destroyed. The author concludes the chapter with his evaluation of Goli Otok, which I quote in full: “From the humanist point of view it is perhaps possible to understand the isolation of the Stalin supporters because, as the ‘fifth column’, they threatened the independence of the country. Their victory could have brought about Stalinist darkness which would have lasted for decades. However, they could have been isolated without any use of physical and psychological torture, and returned back to the community when the external threat was over. But the nature of the regime, its ideology and a deadly threat to the survival of the country led to punishing the Stalinist with the very Stalinist methods. Only later would the Communist Party of Yugoslavia issue a mild self-criticism of its own inhumane acts and delusions.” (p. 309)

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5 Ibid. 41–55.
But even after this critical conclusion there remains an uneasy question: Why did Goli Otok remain a Stalinist concentration camp even when the real danger passed and when the country chose the “third” way and embarked on the path towards self-management and not towards the etatist model of socialism?6

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Hrvoje Matković (1923–2010), another Croatian historian and a colleague of Dušan Bilandžić at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb published his survey of the modern Yugoslav history entitled History of Yugoslavia (1918–1991): the Croatian view (Povijest Jugoslavije (1918–1991): hrvatski pogled, Zagreb 1988). The study was published a year before the second edition of Bilandžić’s book. The fact that only six pages of this over 400 pages long book cover the Tito-Stalin Split in the chapter “The Conflict with the Cominform” (“Sukob s Informbiroom”), is enough to indicate the status this historical event has in the author’s synthetic narrative. From the general (standardized) narrative Matković keeps the crucial interpretative points of Soviet hegemony and Yugoslav resistance. The problem of Yugoslav presence in the Greek Civil War, which could undermine that thesis, is excluded from the foreign policy context. The concentration camp of Goli Otok is mention in only two sentences with explicit mention of torture. The author sums it up: “a considerable part of them [‘the so-called Cominform supporters’] was interned on Goli Otok where they were subject to inhuman treatment and torture” (p. 303).

What is distinctively Croatian in this short account of the Tito-Stalin Split? The answers can be found in the second subchapter entitled “The echoes of the conflict” (“Odjeci sukoba”). In two paragraphs author briefly describes the Serbian uprising against the government in the central parts of Croatia in May 1950, and a conflict between the three ministers of Serbian nationality in the Croatian government and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia that happened at the same time. The driving force behind both events was certainly Serbian nationalism, but only the second conflict is partly related to the Resolution of the Cominform: one of the three ministers was arrested on Goli Otok. They are also not related to the events described in the following paragraph, except in their

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6 The Yugoslav representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council requested in 1951 an amendment of the Charter on Human Rights, which would allow the establishment of concentration camps: “Each state has the right, in an emergency, in the interest of keeping law and order, to confine by administrative procedures and for indefinite period of time all citizens who threaten its independence by incitement of some foreign power.” (Petranović 1988: 269–270)
thematic similarity, i.e. in their emphasis of the nationalistic drive behind political action. This paragraph is dedicated to the destiny of Andrija Hebrang (1899–1949), one of the most influential and powerful Croatian communists in the first years after WW2. He was arrested in May 1948 and died during the investigation procedure, pursuant to official records by committing suicide on June 11, 1949, whereas according to contemporary historiography, he was assassinated.\(^7\) Hebrang was accused of collaboration with the Ustašas and Gestapo during his seven-month imprisonment in 1942. But the date of his arrest coincides with the last phase of the conflict between the Soviet and Yugoslav communist parties before the Resolution of the Cominform. Hence, the probable date of his death coincides with the culmination of tension between Yugoslavia and the Eastern Bloc. It could be regarded as a fact that Stalin sympathized with Hebrang and counted on him in his plan to replace the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party. This is a common hypothesis in the historiography on this subject, but not in Matković’s book. The picture of Andrija Hebrang is the only illustration in the chapter on the Tito-Stalin Split, but the destiny of Hebrang is not interpreted as related directly to the Resolution of the Cominform. Matković explicitly states that “The conflict with the Cominform was used for a showdown with Andrija Hebrang”. Matković maintains that Hebrang was assassinated primarily because of his Croatian nationalism that the supporters of centralism and the “Greater Serbia” ideology who were in the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party found unacceptable.

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Andrija Hebrang remains the main hero of the chapter about the Resolution of the Cominform in the book *Croatian History* (*Hrvatska povijest*, Zagreb 2013, 3\(^{rd}\) ed.) by professor of modern history at the University of Zagreb and diplomat Ivo Goldstein (1958). Moreover, the case of Hebrang is not incorporated with one paragraph in a brief account of the Tito-Stalin Split; rather, a whole supplement to the chapter, which covers almost a third of the entire text, is dedicated to him. Contrary to Matković’s view, Ivo Goldstein puts Hebrang’s destiny in the context of the Resolution, albeit not forgetting to point out that Hebrang’s Croatian nationalism brought him into conflict with Tito and the Central

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\(^7\) The exact date of Hebrang's death is still unknown. Cf. Banac 1990: 123–124. There are assumptions that he was killed in the first half of the 1950s (Cf. Kalinić 2008: 28).
Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia already in 1944. The relationship between Stalin and Hebrang are described in two sentences that sound strange when one considers the status of the two historical figures in Croatian historiography and public opinion: “Hebrang’s relationship with Stalin was not a spy/chief relationship. It seems that they were just two men who shared similar views on the development of communism and on foreign policies.” (p. 361)

The paragraph about Goli Otok contains the expected data and attitudes: about the nationality of prisoners and about the Stalinist torture used against them. Goldstein does not mention the Greek Civil War and interprets the Tito-Stalin Split with the usual hegemony and resistance paradigm.

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I will finish this analytical overview of historiographic texts on the Tito-Stalin Split with several comments on the two chapters in Volume 3 of History of Yugoslavia 1918–1988 (Belgrade 1988) by Serbian historian Branko Petranović (1927–1994). The chapter “Yugoslav Foreign policy orientation and the problem of the north-western borders” (“Spoljnopolička orijentacija Jugoslavije i problem severozapadnih granica”) contains extensive information about all important aspects of Yugoslav foreign policy before the Resolution. There are references to the disputed regions along the border with Austria and Italy, to the plan to establish confederation/federation with Bulgaria, to policy towards Albania and, what is most important for this discussion, to Yugoslav support to general Markos Vafiadis and the DAG (Democratic Army of Greece). Petranović argues that Yugoslavia’s main activity in the region was to export its revolutionary ideas, which, according to the scholar, is a normal occurrence when an authentic revolution takes place. Stalin, however, did not accept the authenticity of the Yugoslav revolution, and it was one of the reasons for his conflict with Tito and the Yugoslav Communists. This is elaborated in the next chapter entitled “Defence of independence” (“Odbrana nezavisnosti”), which includes 84 pages accompanied with illustrations. The chapter contains a detailed description of the course of events related to the Resolution, and refers to the completion of Yugoslav foreign policy, which is also discussed in the previous chapter. The chapter dedicates two pages to the destiny of the Resolution/Stalin supporters, and even describes two most famous forms of torture on Goli Otok: “gauntlet” or “warm rabbit” and
“boycott”. The main interpretative paradigms in the historical narrative on the Tito-Stalin Split in Petranović’s book remain the same: the authenticity of the Yugoslav revolution which explains special position of Yugoslavia in the Eastern Bloc; the concept of Soviet hegemony and Yugoslav resistance; and state independence taken at face value. But his text contains other voices, abundance of facts and different views on the topic. For instance, he mentions historiographic conspiracy theory, i.e. a thesis that the whole clash was fake (p. 241). Croatian historians who published their accounts of the Tito-Stalin Split after Petranović’s book did not sufficiently explore its potential.

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The importance of the comprehensive overviews of national/state history for the creation, dissemination and preservation of cultural narratives, and that means also for their critical analysis, cannot be overestimated. To use a mathematical metaphor, we could say that facts plus interpretative value-charged statements in a cultural narrative equals a subset of facts and statements contained in the related historiographical overviews. It is logical to assume that the general explanatory concepts of the historiographical overviews in one culture will be also included in its cultural narrative and/or public opinion. In the above discussed historiographical surveys of the 20th-century Yugoslav/Croatian history we can, for the sake of further analysis, single out four general explanatory concepts and theses about the Tito-Stalin Split and the camp of Goli Otok: 1) the concept of hegemony and resistance; 2) the concept (an assumption) of the value of national independence; 9) the thesis on Stalinist response of the Yugoslav authorities in the first stage of resistance to Stalin; 4) the thesis on Goli Otok as a place for administering a Stalinist-type torture against the Stalinists, potential enemies of the state and innocent people.

Taking these concepts and theses as premises, it can be concluded that the Stalin/Resolution supporters should have been suppressed, but not necessarily with such drastic measures.

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8 “Gauntlet” meant that each newly arrived detainee had to walk between two rows of detainees who would flog, spit, punch or throw rocks at a new arrival in order to avoid being forced to run the gauntlet themselves. “Boycotting” implied the hardest labour, smaller food portions, sleep deprivation and communicational isolation. Cf. Previšić 2014: 102–108, 186–190.

9 Despite contemporary globalism of economic and political processes—with the European Union as a blatant example—the issue of national independence still seems to feature high. But was this a necessary state of mind of every Communist in the 1940s? For example, Sreten Žujović, the only member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia who openly supported the Resolution of the Cominform, is still in the Yugoslav/Croatian historiography labeled as Serbian nationalist. But in the same historiographical texts one can read that he saw the future Yugoslavia as one of the Soviet republics. (Petranović, 1988: 14)
3. Goli Otok in two documentary films

Documentary films dealing with recent history have some advantages over historiography. Besides the self-evident benefits of using audiovisual material which can better attract attention and trigger emotions of recipients than the text, they can easier achieve multiperspectivity. An authoritative narrator is an inevitable part of the definition of historiographic genres, especially in case of general overviews. He can admit other voices in footnotes or even in the main text, but the hierarchy of voices remains unquestioned. On the other hand, a larger number of speakers is a common poetical procedure in historical documentaries. That, of course, does not mean that documentaries have no dominant perspective or that they are immune to ideological manipulation of polyphony and audiovisual materials.

Goli Otok (2012), a very ambitious Croatian documentary written and directed by Darko Bavoljak, can be considered as a relevant source of contemporary discourse on the Tito-Stalin Split and the famous Yugoslav concentration camp. The following brief analysis will focus on these three issues: 1) contextualized historical facts that are taken into account; 2) the relationship between different perspectives/voices; and 3) general explanatory concepts which are included in or excluded from the narrative in the documentary.

There are three main focalizers in the documentary Goli Otok. The first one corresponds to the traditional omniscient narrator (or to the implied author) in the novel. It is a voice-over narrator who controls the entire archival audiovisual materials with the voices of historical figures, such as Tito, and the entire setting, especially film effects. The other two instances belong to characters, i.e. historical witnesses, but because of their antagonistic juxtaposition they must be analytically distinguished as two separate entities. On one side there is Jovo Kapičić (1919–2013), a former director of the secret police UDBA, who represents the voice of the Yugoslav executive power and advocate of Tito’s policy towards Stalin supporters, who is filmed at his home in Belgrade; and on the other side there is Alfred Pal (1920–2010), a designer and painter, a partisan war veteran of Jewish descent, who is the voice of prisoners/victims, and who is filmed in the authentic surroundings of Goli Otok. The last instance belongs also the text from dossier of Milovan Zec, a journalist and friend

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10 Serbian acronym for “Uprava državne bezbednosti” which means State Security Administration.
of Alfred Pal and a two times prisoner at Goli Otok (the dossier of Alfred Pal has not been preserved).\textsuperscript{11}

The first two sentences in the documentary, spoken by the narrator, and the accompanying scenes are symptomatic for the historical contextualization of the traumatic story of Goli Otok: “The Red Army, with great losses, helps Tito’s partisans to free the country. After the end of the war, a series of agreements are signed on friendship and cooperation between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.” Namely, the whole potential international context of the Tito-Stalin Split is reduced to the direct Soviet-Yugoslav relationship. The first sentence about the help of the Red Army could correspond to the thesis from the second letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from May 4, 1948 that the Red Army helps Yugoslav communists in the critical, decisive moment of war and revolution. In the next couple of scenes, this connotation is rendered relative and the authority of Tito winning the war is saved. However, this is not achieved by the voice-over narrator but by the statements of Kapičić and the corresponding archival material. The information about the establishing of the Cominform given by the voice-over narrator includes the sentence which refers to the hegemony-resistance explanatory concept: “Stalin expected complete submission from all communist parties.” The immediate causes of the conflict and the basic content of the Resolution are presented from the perspective of Kapičić. His statement about the essential differences between the Soviet and Yugoslav societies before the Resolution (non-acceptance of the Soviet models of forced collectivization of agriculture and of political monopoly of the Communist Party) is of crucial importance for our further discussion.

Anyway, the story of Goli Otok and its inmates from 1949 to 1956 starts after only about five minutes of a broader contextualization. At the very beginning of that central part of the narration, in the segment in which Kapičić talks, Yugoslav supporters of the Resolution are defined as traitors to the country, which refers to the second explanatory concept about the Tito-Stalin Split and Goli Otok, i.e. to the concept of the value of national independence. The further narration in the documentary could theoretically challenge these two

\textsuperscript{11} The song at the end of the documentary, written and performed by Šaban Bajramović, a Serbian-Romani musician who was a prisoner at Goli Otok, could be also considered as the victim’s voice. But Bajramović was imprisoned from 1955 to 1958, as an army deserter and not as a Stalin supporter. The text of his Romani-song does not correspond with the life in the camp in the early 1950s. Therefore it is more appropriate to considered it as an aesthetic, well-chosen addition.
interpretive/evaluative starting points, namely the Resolution as an act of Soviet hegemony and the threat of war against Yugoslavia, but that does not happen, which is why the whole story about Goli Otok remains in the frames of individual human rights, because the political standpoints of the Yugoslav Resolution supporters were unacceptable as such. First, let’s sum up the main statements of Jovo Kapičić about the camp of Goli Otok and its inmates. A good portion of them were Stalin supporters, potentially dangerous enemies of the state. Therefore their imprisonment was justifiable and politically necessary. They were not sentenced in court, what Kapičić understands as the benevolence of the government towards them. There were no state-ordered murders on Goli Otok, and the number of deaths is within expectable limits, given the number of inmates. The prisoners were not tortured, but their human dignity was destroyed. Finally, the secret police used the camp to expand the network of informers.

The last two points are highlighted in the description of the camp from the prisoners’ perspective (in the voices of Pal and Zec) as well. But the humiliation of prisoners and forcing them to join the network of informers are here directly connected with the torture in the camp. The narration of Alfred Pal for the most part consists of descriptions of the forms of torture, which have already become commonplaces in the discourse on Goli Otok, such as “warm rabbit” or “gauntlet”/“corridor”, boycott, solitary confinement, hard work in the quarry, etc. The consequences of torture were physical and mental diseases mentioned in the two voices of prisoners. From the same perspective the prisoners are seen as innocent victims: neither Pal nor Zec are speaking about the real Stalin supporters, and this is another important difference between their and Kapičić’s testimonies.

In the critical analysis of this documentary the occurrence of contradictions should not be overlooked. First, some contradictions are consciously staged as juxtaposition of opposite statements given from different perspectives about the same problem: the ex-inmate describes the torture (gauntlet), while the ex-director of the Yugoslav secret police recounts how he said to the inmates: “No one will touch you here”; the former describes the work in the quarry, the latter speaks about the artisanal work; the ex-director mentions two violent deaths in the camp, the documents debunk it by exposing a far greater number, etc. More interesting are the slight contradictions within the same voice, because they partly undermine the credibility of the speaker. Kapičić first defines inmates as “traitors to the
country”, than as “fine people and heroes”; Pal first describes the bestial relationship and atmosphere of general mistrust among the inmates and then speaks of himself as a teller of jokes, admittedly pointing out that it was dangerous to listen to him.

In the last scenes of documentary the camera scans the register of the names of all recorded inmates of Goli Otok with the song of Šaban Bajramović in the background, the ex-director of the secret police walks the streets of Belgrade in the rainy summer day with a woman’s umbrella over his head. Can this be interpreted as a calming down of tensions, as at least a partial consensus on suffering of the so-called Resolution supporters? The text on the memorial from Goli Otok in the very last scene is a kind of ideological epilogue: “In memory of the victims of the communist regime on Goli Otok, on August 23, the Remembrance Day for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, in the year 2011, The Government of the Republic of Croatia.” It reveals the meaning of the documentary: the prisoners of Goli Otok were victims, unnecessary victims of a totalitarian regime: the circumstances in which they became victims are of secondary importance; what is important is that such a torture is only possible in totalitarian regimes.

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Only two years after the documentary of Darko Bavoljak another one, equally ambitious documentary on Goli Otok was made, this time in Serbia, in the production of the Radio Television of Serbia (RTS). Actually, these are two episodes under the title “The Island of Fear” (“Ostrvo straha”, 2014) of the series *Tito’s Room of Secrets (Titova soba tajni)*, written and directed by Petar Ristovski. The narrative instances are very similar to the ones in the previous documentary. The side of the Yugoslav communist government, more specifically, the side of the secret police and intelligence service is also represented only by Jovo Kapičić, as in Bavoljak’s documentary. The instance of the victims/inmates is represented with three voices: two speakers (Božidar Vulović, a lawyer from Belgrade, and Eva Nahir Panić (1918–2015), a correspondent for German language, of Jewish descent) and fragments from the memoirs by Vladimir Bobinac (1923–2014), an ex-inmate as well.

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12 Eva Nahir Panić spent 19 months (1952–1953) in the concentration camp for women on the island of Saint Gregory (Croat. Sveti Grgur), close to the island of Goli Otok. She was imprisoned because she did not want to publicly renounce her man who allegedly committed suicide during the investigation in 1951, on charges of being a Russian spy. From 1966 until her death she lived in Israel, and in the late 1980s she gave her testimony about her experiences in the camp to Serbian writer Danilo Kiš for the television documentary *A Bare Life (Goli život, 1990).*
The most important difference between the two documentaries concerns the voices that are superior to those of witnesses. In this documentary there is no narrator, but there are two young experts: a historian (Martin Previšić, University of Zagreb) who explains the political context of the Resolution of the Cominform and the establishment of the camp on Goli Otok, and a psychologist (Biljana Jaredić, University of Priština) who makes comments on some statements of the two witnesses and explains the psychological consequences of torture.

The viewer of this documentary can find out more about the early history of the camp. It was opened a bit over a year after the Resolution, at the peak of tensions between Yugoslavia and the Eastern Bloc. The Resolution supporter were until then imprisoned in different prisons all over the country. In the first couple of months the regime on Goli Otok was relatively mild. Then the secret police brought to the island convicts from a prison in Sarajevo. They were not Resolution supporters, but collaborators of the secret police; they established the hierarchy and the system of torture. The colloquial name for them was Bosnians, which is mentioned in Bavoljak’s film as well.

Kapičić repeats his most important arguments from the previous documentary: there were many Resolution supporters among high-ranking people in the army, state administration and economy; they were traitors to their country; they were punished only with community service labour; there were many innocent people in the camp of Goli Otok; there was no real physical torture in the camp – the procedures such as “warm rabbit” were only intended to frighten the newcomers to the camp.

The forms of torture on Goli Otok are described by all three voices of the victims with more details than in the Croatian documentary, but it can be explained by a longer duration of this documentary. It is more important to notice that not only Kapičić but also the two witnesses in the Serbian documentary affirm the presence of the convinced Stalin supporters in the camp. But the most important insight is that in the Serbian documentary, just as in the Croatian, the individual suffering and individual trauma stand in the forefront.

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13 Martin Previšić is the author of the still unpublished doctoral thesis *The History of Goli Otok Cominform Prison Camp 1949–1956* (Povijest informbiroovskog logora na Golom otoku 1949–1956, Zagreb, 2014). The manuscript provides a historical overview of the most important aspects of the “Goli Otok” phenomenon: its foreign policy context, the process of arrest and investigation, establishment of the camp, its internal organization, forms of torture, everyday life, profitability of labour and social reintegration of ex-inmates. The testimonies of the last surviving prisoners, collected by the author, are of particular value for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.
It is symptomatic that comments of a psychologist take up a larger space in the documentary than the comments of a historian.\(^\text{14}\)

4. Stalinism in three movies

The movie *Evening Bells* (*Večernja zvona*, 1986), based on the novel *The Doors of My Mother’s Womb* (*Vrata od utrobe*, 1978) of Yugoslav writer Mirko Kovač,\(^\text{15}\) that will be briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter does not take place on Goli Otok at all. But the last 30 minutes of its story provide some interesting details on the fictional representation of the Tito-Stalin Split. It is worth mentioning that the novel was published in Tito’s lifetime and that the film was made before the 40\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary of the Resolution of the Cominform which was in 1988. Namely, due to the anniversary, this was a period of a growing interest in the Cominform which resulted in a considerable number of various studies from a myriad of disciplines, and cultural events.

The main character of the movie/novel, Tomislav K. Burbonski, is a young communist of vigorous temperament and unusual destiny: as an orphan he spent his boyhood in a Catholic monastery in north Croatia; he grew up with his older brother in their family home in a village in Herzegovina; then studied archaeology in Zagreb and Munich. There he meets his future wife, a girl from a rich family in Zagreb, whose father will become a high-ranking officer in the Croatian Nazi-State during WW2. At the beginning of the war Tomislav experiences frustration because of the impossibility to join the Partisans, and at the end of the war, he goes through a real personal trauma: his wife, imprisoned for collaborating with the Nazis, which she did to save her husband, commits suicide in prison. After that Tomislav goes to the Soviet Union to pursue professional development, but actually tries to recover himself. After the Resolution of the Cominform he returns to his homeland and goes to visit his brother. In the village Tomislav meets his former comrades, now the representatives of the new communist authorities. The crucial scene in the film for our analysis is the unpleasant conversation between them and Tomislav, some kind of

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\(^{14}\) A radically individualistic approach to the topic of Goli Otok has been realized in *Goli* (*Naked Island*, written and directed by Tiha K. Gudac, 2014), the latest Croatian documentary on the camp. It is made from the second-generation autobiographical point of view: the author narrates about a gradual discovery of the family trauma, i.e. about the discovery of the secret of her grandfather, the former inmate.

\(^{15}\) Mirko Kovač (1938–2013) was born in Montenegro, studied in Serbia, published in Serbia and Croatia, lived in Croatia from 1991 until his death. He wrote novels and stories; the award-winning novel *The Doors of My Mother’s Womb* is considered his best work.
investigation in which the local authorities try to reveal Tomislav’s views on Stalin, the Resolution and their Yugoslav supporters. Tomislav said that some Yugoslavs have remained in the Soviet Union and labels them as “vacillators” (“kolebljivci”). He suggests his interlocutors to turn the picture of Stalin to face the wall, but not to prosecute those who have put it there (besides the pictures of Lenin and Tito). On the other hand he says that the Russians are stronger than the Yugoslavs, that Stalin requires submission of all because he is “the boss” (“gazda”), and finally that “there is only one Stalin” (“samo je jedan Staljin”). That statement incriminates him, but it remains indeterminate if the conversation is a real investigation or just a performance with a predetermined ending. The only declared Stalinists, in the entire film and not just in its last half hour, is the prisoner, a somewhat grotesque character of a neurotic ascetic, who accidentally kills Tomislav in a fight.

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*Long Dark Night* (*Duga mračna noć*, 2004), a movie written and directed by Antun Vrdoljak, has many compositional, narrative and even ideological similarities with Lordan Zafranović’s film, despite the common view that the two directors, recognized in Croatian culture as great film artists, stand on opposite sides of the political spectrum, namely Vrdoljak on the right and Zafranović on the left. Both films deal with more or less the same historical time and space, their heroes are intellectually and ethically superior to the group they belong to, their wives are tragic figures who commit suicide, and especially in the last part of the two films there are several parallel scenes and motifs (violent investigation, double funeral, Stalin’s picture on the wall, etc.). *Long Dark Night*—the title refers to the period from 1940 to 1953, i.e. from the beginning of WW2 to the end of Stalinism—was supposed to be a national film epic, dealing with the controversial ideas and values in the Croatian society.16 I will focus here only on the topic of the Tito-Stalin Split. The main character named Iva, a young ex-Partisan from a village in north Croatia, spent four years in the camp of Goli Otok because of his statement “Tito is an egocentric charlatan”, spoken at a private dinner, in the company of his wife and her brother, an officer of the secret police who denounced him to his superiors. During the investigation Iva emphasized that he “has never been a Stalinist or a Bolshevik.” Unlike in Zafranović’s film, in *Long Dark*

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Night there is no character that can be perceived as a declared Stalinist, but on the other hand, even the high-ranking officers of the secret police are not the convinced Titoists, but only loyal servants to the regime. The general fear in the postwar Yugoslavia/Croatia, caused by activities of the secret police is the topic of the final parts of both films. The motif of Goli Otok is in Vrdoljak’s film reduced to a single scene of arrival of Iva and the ex-general of the secret police in the camp, with the welcoming torture of “warm rabbit”.17 The historical context of the Resolution of the Cominform, even the Resolution, is completely neglected in Vrdoljak’s film. It is in accordance with the character of the protagonist, who is more of an accidental than a convinced communist. The film tends to suggest that Stalinism in Croatian history was something like a foreign body. This would indeed constitute a real historical revisionism. However, this is not mentioned by Croatian film critics who often accuse Vrdoljak for historical revisionism in this film.

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In the Croatian cinematography there is only one movie dealing with the theme of Goli Otok as a main topic: The Seventh Chronicle (Sedma kronika, 1996), directed and written by Bruno Gamulin and based on the unpublished novel The Seventh Book of the Annals (Sedma knjiga ljetopisa) by his father, Grga Gamulin (1910–1997), a Croatian art historian and writer. It is actually a film about the escape from prison with some features of detective film and romance. Therefore, the island of Goli Otok is the setting of the film only in its first and last parts, whereas the central part takes place on the nearby island of Rab, where the hero manages to escape and finds a shelter in a nunnery. The life in the camp is represented with almost all forms of torture, with the explicit scenes of the gauntlet, hard work in the quarry, thirst-torture, solitary confinement and brainwashing through so-called political lessons. The historical time of the film’s story covers a couple of weeks around the Easter of 1953, immediately after Stalin’s death. The prison warden in the camp called “captain” and his assistants call the inmates “Cominform supporters” and “bandits” (“banda”), but none of them is presented in the film as a Stalinist. On the other hand, the captain confesses in a conversation with the main character that his job in the camp is a kind of punishment for a joke he once said that “Stalin is greater than God”. He also says

17 Apart from this film, there is a 13-episode TV series, which was broadcast on Croatian Television in 2005. In that extended version the presentation of torture on Goli Otok was expanded with a couple of scenes, including the work in the quarry.
that he has been denounced by his friend and repeats in the next scene “Stalin is greater than God” with a forced grin. The reason for the arrest of the main character remains unrevealed until the end of the film: neither he nor his denouncer and persecutor, an officer of the secret police UDBA, could answer the question. The terror of the secret police, general insecurity and fear are the main features of the world represented in the film. Political themes are avoided, including the Resolution of the Cominform. The source of social evil is not specified, it is only partially embodied in the figure of Marshal Tito on the pictures on the office walls and in the background documentary scenes. The film focuses on individual suffering and tragic fate of a family, which will be revealed during the story. The main character, a prison breaker Stjepan gets arrested in 1950. After that, the father of his wife, a doctor and former prisoner of Goli Otok, forces his daughter to divorce her imprisoned husband, in order to save his own medical career. The doctor and his daughter, a local teacher Vedrana, live alone on the island of Rab. The doctor’s wife does not appear in the film. She left the family, according to what he says to his daughter, because it was impossible to live with a former prisoner. That is how he justifies, albeit belatedly, why he forced his daughter to get a divorce. At the same time he knows that the anonymous prison breaker is his former son-in-law and hides this from his daughter. Instead, he secretly sends a shot of penicillin to the monastery and thus saves Stjepan’s life. This abstract, although historically located condemnation of totalitarianism ends with a kind of reconciliation. First the abbot of the monastery puts the “curse of forgiveness” on the communist regime. And finally, in the last scene Stjepan—who finally decides to return to the camp to stop the blockade of the island of Rab because of his escape—his persecutor and another inmate end in the underground prison cell. The inmate asks Stjepan: “Who is he?”, pointing to the persecutor, and Stjepan answers: “A nobody, one of us.”

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It is in the nature of fiction that the topics of great historical events and ideas are represented through individual destinies. Movies and novels are not the right places for the elaboration of complicated international political relations. In that sense it would be grotesque to notice the absence of Yugoslav foreign politics in the above analyzed movies. But the absence of a “common” convinced Stalinist in them, not to mention any empathy for such a character, and presentation of the hero’s imprisonment as a consequence of
misunderstandings, personal hatred, irrational logic of the secret police in a totalitarian regime and an atmosphere of fear, are, of course, neither ideologically neutral nor completely detached from political interpretations of the Tito-Stalin Split.  

5. Preliminary conclusions and hypotheses

One of the biggest problems in the analysis of images and narratives on Goli Otok today is their cultural/national specificity. To whom does the camp of Goli Otok belong? Goli Otok is certainly part of the Yugoslav history, its prisoners came from all over the country. However, early investigations focused on the ethnic makeup of the prison population of Goli Otok. One of the stereotypes of the Goli Otok is that it was primarily a camp for the Montenegrins. The smallest Yugoslav nation was in relative terms really the most represented among prison populations, the Serbs were at the national average, the Croats slightly lower, and the Slovenes were relatively poorly represented. These data are certainly important for the current status of Goli Otok in specific Yugoslav national cultures. However, my contribution does not taken into account this comparative dimension, although I discuss Croatian as well as some Serbian sources. Hence, hypotheses and preliminary conclusions that follow concern mainly the Croatian culture.

Besides the spatial/regional aspect of the analysis of the cultural representations on Goli Otok, the diachronic dimension also remains almost completely neglected, although the analyzed sources come from the last five decades. The following discussion refers primarily to the present moment.

A general preliminary conclusion is that the arguments of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from the time of the conflict with the Soviets and Stalin are still acceptable in the Croatian public opinion. That means that the general perception of Stalin and the Soviet Union at the time of his rule, which was constructed in Yugoslavia in the 1950s, has not changed in the meantime.

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18 All of the above mentioned features of films about the Tito-Stalin Split and Goli Otok also apply to arguably the most famous Yugoslav film on the topic, When Father Was Away on Business (Otac na službenom putu, 1985), written by Abdulah Sidran, and directed by Emir Kusturica. The film received the Golden Palm in Cannes in 1985. The main character, a communist functionary Meša, denounced by his brother-in-law because of a casual remark about a satirical cartoon on Stalin in a newspaper, receives a two-year community service labour sentence at a mine and a hydroelectric power plant in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Therefore, the combination of the two first general explanatory concepts, derived from the
analysis of the historiographical sources, still functions as the starting point in the
discussion on the Tito-Stalin Split and the camp of Goli Otok. There is still no doubt in the
Croatian public opinion that Stalin’s policy towards the new socialist states at the end of the
1940s was hegemonic, that Yugoslavia was a victim of that policy and that the decision of
the Yugoslav communist leadership to defend national/state independence was the only
right decision. The monograph *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav
Communism* (New York 1988) of the American-Croatian historian Ivo Banac contains
arguments that challenge the thesis of Soviet hegemonic, aggressive foreign policy and of
Yugoslavia as its victim. Moreover, even the image of Stalin as a defensive politician in
foreign policy and as a sort of communist “rightist” in Banac’s monograph is significantly
different from the corresponding Yugoslav image. But it seems that the polemics in
Banac’s study has not affected the prevailing perception of the Tito-Stalin Split in the
contemporary Croatian culture. Perhaps the cause should be found in the unfavourable
timing of the Croatian edition (*Sa Staljinom protiv Tita: Informbirovski rascjepi u
jugoslavenskom komunističkom pokretu*, 1990), shortly before the start of the Homeland
War.
The other two explanatory concepts—on Stalinist response to Stalin until 1950 and on the
camp of Goli Otok as the (most important) part of that response—have survived until today
as well. Admittedly, the only voice of the “perpetrator” in the two here analyzed
documentaries, that of the ex-director of the Yugoslav secret police (J. Kapičić), tries to
prove otherwise, namely that the Yugoslav society was not Stalinist (communist) even
before the conflict, that the cause of the conflict was an ideological disagreement, and that
the treatment of the inmates in the camp of Goli Otok was not so inhuman at all. But this
seems to be a very lonely voice, at least in the public sphere.
If one accepts the concept of Soviet hegemony, the possibility of the outbreak of war with
the Soviet Union and the self-evidence of the right to defend national independence, then
the narration on Goli Otok necessarily comes down to the problems of human rights,
treatment of prisoners and to similar problems of liberal ideology. The justification of the
fight against supporters of Stalin and the Resolution is not brought into question. The
already quoted statement of the Croatian historian Dušan Bilandžić “Their victory [of
Stalin’s supporters] could have brought about Stalinist darkness which would have lasted for decades” seems to be unanimously acceptable. There is also a consensus view that the regime in the camp on Goli Otok was indeed inhumane, but that it was necessary to neutralize the “enemies of the state”.

The general hypothesis on the status of the Tito-Stalin Split and of the concentration camp of Goli Otok in the contemporary Croatian culture is that these topics are relatively irrelevant, at least on the level of a more general historical discourse. The conflict between two communist parties and states is regarded as a conflict within the communist (totalitarian) East-European block, and it is difficult to imagine that anyone would identify with that political tradition today. But the island of Goli Otok is located in Croatia and the ruins of the camp are still there. Moreover, there is a legend that the idea to construct a camp on the island of Goli Otok came from the eminent Croatian artists: writer Miroslav Krleža and sculptor Antun Augustinčić, with the alleged reasoning that the island was perfect for a high-quality stone quarry Augustinčić was interested in for his sculptures. However, Goli Otok found its place in Croatian cultural memory as an example of human rights violations in totalitarian regimes, as a place of individual sufferings and traumas. This explanation seems logical and coherent. What follows below is a brief discussion about the coherence of cultural narrative on Goli Otok and the methodology of its investigation.

6. Epilogue
The labour concentration camp of Goli Otok was established in July 1949 as a corresponding insular facility for imprisonment of the “real” or potential enemies of the state, i.e. for ardent or latent supporters of the Resolution of the Cominform. In that sense every narration about Goli Otok is inseparable from the general narration on the Tito-Stalin Split. The reasons for the conflict are still controversial from the point of view of historiography. In the Soviet historiography the conflict is presented as an ideological dispute, in the Yugoslav historiography/historiographies as a resistance to Soviet economic and political hegemony. It seems that both sides were concealing the most important reason
for the conflict, namely the disagreements in foreign policy. That argument completely undermines the explanatory concept of hegemony and resistance. Moreover, a comparison of Soviet and Yugoslav foreign policy in the years 1947-1948 clearly indicates the defensive strategy of the Soviets and an active and even aggressive policy of Yugoslavia in the Balkans, especially if one considers the Yugoslav interference in the Greek Civil War. If Yugoslav foreign policy is a decisive part of the story about the Tito-Stalin conflict, then the suffering of the inmates on Goli Otok becomes far less justified than in the case of hegemonic threat to independence of the country.

Anyway, the suffering of inmates is not a controversial topic since there is a broad consensus visible in different types of writing (historiography, memoirs, fiction) in all ex-Yugoslav cultures. In the very beginning the regime on Goli Otok was not particularly harsh. The official goal of the camp was to isolate potentially dangerous persons—in large part the members of the political elite—in order to re-educate and return them to the society as minions of the system, and as future collaborators of the secret police. But very soon these goals were achieved by the system of torture, which was maintained by the inmates themselves. The main forms of torture—such as “gauntlet”, boycott, solitary confinement, hard labour in the quarry—are well-known from numerous descriptions in fiction, memoirs and documentaries. Due to the destruction of a large number of archival documents it is not possible to accurately determine the number of inmates and deaths in the camp. The most common estimate is about 16,000 prisoners and 400 deaths from 1949 to 1956. Recently, a document from the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb containing the list of inmates, admittedly not exhaustive, has been published on the Internet19.

The concentration camp of Goli Otok figures from the 1980s to the present as a symbol of torture in a totalitarian regime. (It is interesting that Goli Otok has completely overshadowed the neighbouring concentration camp for women on the island of St. Gregory.)

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Let me briefly discuss the traumatic potential of Goli Otok and of the Tito-Stalin Split.

The concentration camp of Goli Otok in the period from 1949 to 1956, as an institution, and by that I mean the whole repressive apparatus that enables circulation of inmates, can be considered as a typical example of a cultural trauma. Goli Otok fits all definitions of that phenomenon, i.e. it includes all or almost all features or social aspects of trauma. Moreover, it would be possible to provide a comprehensive account of the camp using only respective elements of theoretical conceptualization of cultural trauma. Considering Goli Otok as a concentration camp but at the same time also as a synecdoche of the whole Yugoslav society, it would be possible to talk about three forms of trauma.

First, at the level of individual destiny there are many events and corresponding emotional reactions that belong to direct or indirect experience of each average inmate, which can be considered as at least potentially traumatic. These include fear of investigation, torture during imprisonment, separation from family and friends, a sense of injustice because of the undeserved punishment, and the like. These events and feelings are seen as effects of a repressive apparatus in the strict sense of the word: in the case of Goli Otok that apparatus concerns the Yugoslav secret police UDBA (State Security Administration).

The personal or psychological trauma of Goli Otok can be comprehended as a collective trauma only in the quasi-mathematical sense, as the sum of the individual traumas on the same, relatively small location. But, the inmates of Goli Otok were not a solidary group: the entire system of torture had the aim, among other things, to prevent their solidarity. That aim of the camp is explicitly acknowledged even by the former director of the secret police in the Croatian documentary Goli Otok. Testimonies of the inmates, on the other hand, reveal only specific examples of solidarity and empathy. The mention of traumas in the camp of Goli Otok in historiography, as well as their representation in documentaries, fiction and movies, remain at the level of personal suffering. (And that is the case for all texts, documentaries and movies analysed in my paper.) To put it ironically, it seems that a real representation of the collective suffering in the camp of Goli Otok is possible only by the poetics of socialist realism, which is perceived as a totalitarian conception of art.

Second, at the higher social level there was a collective trauma in the strict sense of the word, namely among the convinced communists who confidently accepted the new government and the ruling ideology in the period from 1945 to 1948, which implies the acceptance of Stalin’s authority. One part of that group consisted most certainly of the
Stalin/Resolution-supporters, but it would be wrong to connect this form of trauma exclusively with them. The Resolution of the Cominform and the Tito-Stalin Split must have constituted a trauma for each Yugoslav communist intellectual or sincere communist. It was a trauma of vacillation, a trauma of the political/ideological split, which was sudden and incomprehensible to all but a few of the most powerful elite in the country. Unlike the personal/psychological trauma of Goli Otok, this was indeed a trauma of collective identity. Of course, these two forms of trauma were inseparable in many individual cases, in the cases of all those communists who had undergone tortures of investigation and imprisonment. But precisely this trauma of collective ideological identity could be suitable for artistic, intellectually charged representations, and it seems that that was not the case in Croatian fiction and movies, especially in the last 25 years. This raises the following questions: Is perhaps Goli Otok a trauma that has ceased to be current, that itself belongs to history? Is that “overcoming of trauma” actually self-explanatory in a culture, in a society, in which there is no group that would be identified with the ruling ideology in Yugoslavia in the period from 1945 to 1948, or to 1950? The questions are as real, as they are rhetorical. I will try to demonstrate that Goli Otok still carries a traumatic potential anon.

The third form of trauma connected with the period of the Tito-Stalin Split is a collective trauma in the broadest sense of the word, a trauma of the whole society, not only of the political elite. It is a trauma caused by a complex social crisis: an economic crisis because of the blockade of the Eastern countries; a political crisis with the fear of the outbreak of war; a moral crisis with the fear for personal safety because of the witch hunt against Resolution-supporters; and finally a social crisis in the rural areas with fear of and resistance to the forced collectivization of agriculture. All those aspects of a traumatic social crisis are generally emphasized in historiography; some of them are represented in fiction and movies, especially a fear for personal safety.

As I have already mentioned, the narration about the trauma of Goli Otok has its history, which is not in the focus of this presentation. But here I will refer only briefly to the most important phases of that history. The first phase was a long silence about the camp. But this was not the usual symptomatic silence of traumatized victims caused by shame or humiliation. The camp of Goli Otok was in its time a secret institution. All released inmates had to sign a statement that they would remain silent about Goli Otok. A “vow of silence”
was an obligation for guards, investigators and other officers of the camp as well. This silence lasted for almost twenty years, until the second half of the 1960s. Needless to say during this period any historical discussion or artistic representation of Goli Otok was impossible.

The second phase began after 1966, i.e. after the dismissal of Aleksandar Ranković, a founder of the Yugoslav secret police and the minister of the interior. In the Croatian historiography and in public opinion, i.e. in the national historical master narrative, this event marked the beginning of the democratization in Yugoslavia. Serbian writer and former inmate of Goli Otok Dragoslav Mihailović published in 1968 the novel When Pumpkins Blossomed (Kad su cvetale tikve), which is usually considered as the beginning of literature about Goli Otok. Admittedly, the novel is about life of young people in a suburb of Belgrade, and the motif of Goli Otok appears only as a place of imprisonment of the main character’s brother. However, the theatrical adaptation of the novel staged a year later (1969) was banned after only one performance. In the late 1960s the literary corpus about Goli Otok was slowly growing with the novels of Serbian writer Slobodan Selenić (The Memoirs of Peter the Cripple – Memoari Pere Bogalja, 1968) and Slovenian writer Jože Javoršek (How Is It Possible – Kako je mogoče, 1969). After relatively infertile 1970s and after the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, the 1980s brought a boom of literature on Goli Otok, which can be considered as a third phase. In this period more than ten novels about Goli Otok were published by eminent Yugoslav writers. And finally, the fourth phase lasts since the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and is characterized by the dominance of memoirs written by the former inmates of Goli Otok (Eva Grlić, Josip Ercegović Miloš, Slavko Spadoni, Vladimir Bobinac, et al.).

The first speakers or voices which initiated the constitution of the cultural trauma of Goli Otok were some of the most prominent Yugoslav writers at the time, such as Dragoslav Mihailović, Antonije Isaković, Slobodan Selenić, Jože Javoršek, Mihajlo Lalić and others. The leading name in the literary production about Goli Otok is a Serbian writer Dragoslav Mihailović, a sort of trademark of that literature, the author of the first novel and six other books dealing with the same topic (Goli Otok, I–III, 1990–1995; Kratka historija satiranja [A Brief History of Crushing], 1999; Goli Otok, IV, 2011; Goli Otok, V, 2012). Even the

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movies with Goli Otok as the main theme or as a secondary motif are in most cases adaptations of novels. Anyway, it seems that for a long time artistic or fictional discourse was the only communicative means for constructing narratives about Goli Otok.

The scholarly interest in the study of the camp of Goli Otok in Croatia is not as strong and systematic as one might expect. Instead of projects and symposiums there are only individual investigations. The interest of the media seems to be much broader; it is sufficient to search the keywords "Goli Otok" on the Internet to reveal a multitude of relatively recently published articles on the subject.

Finally, several associations of the former inmates of Goli Otok have been founded in recent times. In Serbia they have the right to reparation, but the legal rehabilitation of the inmates has not been implemented in the countries of former Yugoslavia. Likewise, national commissions of inquiry have not been established. Moreover, such commissions are difficult to imagine without a comprehensive process of lustration that also has not been initiated.

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In order to answer the question whether the camp of Goli Otok has a potential to constitute a cultural trauma in the present Croatian culture, I will begin with two recent photos of Goli Otok, almost randomly chosen from the internet (there are hundreds of similar ones).
In the first photo you can see a completely devastated interior of a building in the camp, i.e. the prison of Goli Otok. The interior is namely not from the 1950s but from the 1980s, when Goli Otok was a prison for young offenders (until 1986). The second photo with the view on the main street of the prison better represents the original look of the camp. The island is not inhabited; the people on the street are tourists who arrive by boat on a tour of
the former prison. The Republic of Croatia, as the owner of the island, has no plans to build a memorial complex on the island of Goli Otok. Instead, the state has decided to sell or rent the island, provided, however, that the future owner or user have to build a “memorial-tourist complex”.

The second premise which, in my opinion, provides a wrong answer to the above question concerns the current Croatian high school curriculum concerning history course. The national history curriculum does not mention the Tito-Stalin Split, the Cominform and Goli Otok.

Taking this into account, as well as some insights from analysis of the historiographical texts and films in my paper, one might come to the conclusion that Goli Otok has no particular significance in the Croatian cultural memory, let alone a traumatic potential. I nevertheless think that Goli Otok represents a specific repressed cultural trauma.

My argument is not based on research but on the position of a cultural insider. In this text I have mentioned several times the notion of cultural narrative and public opinion. Both are pretty vague terms that refer to the mental world of cultural values, images and judgements, dispersed across different disciplines in different types of cultural discourses. The domains of their existence are media, the national curriculum and textbooks, historiography, literature, film, but they also circulate through private everyday communication. A critical approach to cultural narratives—and in this particular case it would be more appropriate to speak of national historical narrative—requires some cultural competencies that are in the case of relatively small and allegedly globally unimportant cultures restricted to a small circle of insiders and a much smaller circle of foreign experts.

The context in which the concentration camp of Goli Otok reveals its traumatic potential in the contemporary Croatian culture is part of the national historical narrative dealing with World War 2. One prominent version of that narrative is the first part of the first chapter of The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. In that preamble to The Constitution titled “Historical foundations” the most important events in the Croatian history from the Middle Ages to 1995 are chronologically listed and evaluated. The opening sentence in the preamble starts with “[t]he millennial national identity of the Croatian nation and the continuity of its statehood” which “has manifested itself” in a series of important historical events and historical political institutions, one of which is “the establishment of the
foundations of state sovereignty during the course of the Second World War, as expressed in the decision of the Territorial Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Croatia (1943) in opposition to proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia (1941)”. With other words, the contemporary Croatian state accepts, as a part of its own tradition, the anti-fascist as well as communist Croatia (the latter as one of the federal republic of the socialist Yugoslavia) and not the Croatian Nazi-State from WW2. The choice seems logical and only possible in a modern democratic European context. The author(s) of the constitution’s preamble has deliberately avoided two markers of totalitarian regimes: the communist and the fascist/Nazi, but the names of political institutions/states are clearly implied. The symbolic power of this dichotomy is reflected also in the contemporary Croatian political discourse. Because the traditional political divide between the left and right is in Croatia often referred to as a divide between the Partisans and Ustashas, meaning the communists and fascists. Of course, these terms are not used to denote their literal or historical meaning in the contemporary political discourse. Nobody dreams of a communist or fascist society. Moreover, condemnation of all totalitarian regimes can be considered as consensual. But a strong dichotomy indicates a different valuation of the Croatian communist heritage. Simply put, the prevailing view of the political rightwing parties in Croatia is that the Croatian anti-fascism is overlaps with communism and is therefore unacceptable, as well as the entire Croatian communist political legacy until the end of the 1960s. The camp of Goli Otok is for them only a clear example of totalitarian abuse, which can lead to empathy for individual suffering only. On the other hand, the prevailing view of the political leftwing parties in Croatia is that the communist anti-fascist resistance movement is acceptable for two reasons: 1) it enabled Croatia to be on the winning side at the end of WW2; and 2) it preserved a complete national territory and statehood. However, even the Croatian leftwing cannot accept Stalinism as part of its own history. The post-war period until the conflict with the Eastern Bloc in 1948 is understood as a short-term deviation. In the same vein, the Tito-Stalin Split is interpreted as Yugoslav resistance to Soviet economic and political hegemony, as defence of the national independence. According to the same reasoning, the concentration camp of Goli Otok is interpreted as a sort of political deviation or a necessary evil. And if I refer to my earlier remark about Croatia’s disinterest to build a memorial commemorating the camp on Goli Otok, this now seems more logical, albeit not
in the least less ironic, because no state in the world will invest money in a memorial complex dedicated to a necessary evil. The only solution is the commodification of a necessary evil: let’s put it on the market!

I believe that I have managed to explain why the concentration camp of Goli Otok can be considered as a repressed cultural trauma. The answer to the question derived from the title of our SPECTRESS-project—How to gain solid sovereignty over own national history?—is as simple as the question is itself. The answer is: Only by facing and coming to terms with the past. In the case of Goli Otok within Croatian history that means facing the traits of Stalinism in the 1930s and 1940s. And finally, it is perhaps important not to forget that facing the past means only critical recognition of the past, neither a priori rehabilitation, nor a priori shame.

Private epilogue
In a critical investigation of such a topic as Goli Otok it is always important to know who speaks, who is the author of the source, and who interprets the sources. Therefore, at the end of this text, I want to say something about the personal reasons for choosing this topic. My father fought in World War II on the side of Tito’s partisans from 1943 to the end of the War. After the War he served in various police and military state institutions. The Resolution of the Cominform found him in a small town in north-eastern part of Croatia, where he was a policeman. On the night of the so-called individual public statement about the Resolution he was tired, sleepy and wet from the work in the afternoon shift in heavy rain that was pouring that day. According to my family’s account, he overslept the discussion on the Resolution, but despite that he ended up on Goli Otok, admittedly not as a prisoner but, again according to my family’s account, as a clerk in the warehouse of the camp. If this is true, he was “only” a witness of the traumatic events since he was not an inmate. However, he witnessed what was going on there from the position of the regime even though he played a minor role in the camp’s chain of command. I cannot say more than that. Father was reluctant to talk about Goli Otok. And even when he recounted some anecdotes on the everyday life in the camp, it was much more often in conversations with my seven-year older sister than with me, because my father considered me as his
ideological opponent. However, I remember that when he retired, he used to read books about Goli Otok, often complaining about untrue representations of life in the camp. I also remember how Goli Otok became in the 1980s a popular topic in journalism, literature and theatre, but I was not particularly interested at the time. But when in 1990 the Croatian translation of the book by Croatian-American historian Ivo Banac *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* was published, only two years after the original English version, a brief review of that book was one of my first published pieces. The book by Ivo Banac should have been the milestone in the interpretation of the Tito-Stalin Split in Yugoslav historiographies but that did not happen.

A quarter of a century later, this participation in the SPECTRESS-project give me a chance to talk once again about Goli Otok. In the meantime I have not done any specific research on the topic but have occasionally thought about the Cominform and Goli Otok, and discussed the subject with my colleagues. In that sense, arguments which I propose in my lecture are also based on my earlier hypotheses and the way I interpret them is akin to the way I position myself towards other controversies in the national cultural history.

Anyway, this text is dedicated to the memory of my father.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Historiografic**


**Cinematic**


General