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IZ POVIJESTI OKOLIŠA ISTOČNOG JADRANA

FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE EASTERN ADRIATIC

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY, GOLI OTOK- HUMAN AGENCY AND FAUNA

POVIJEST OKOLIŠA, GOLI OTOK- LJUDSKO DJELOVANJE I FAUNA

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Summary

Human past of Goli Otok (Barren Island) and its political prison years have been touched on by historians, albeit being largely underrepresented. The rich ecosystems and the biodiversity of Dinaric karst, as well as the geology and geomorphology of Croatian Kvarner Bay region, including Goli Otok as its part, have been explored by geologists, ecologists and biologists. Former political prisons, battlefields, military training grounds and concentration camps, the sites of human incarceration and adverse living conditions worldwide have been studied by historians from many perspectives, including that of environmental history. Between these notions emerges the space to explore the rich and dynamic environmental past of Goli Otok. Despite the physiognomy of the dry, barren, weathered karst to which Goli Otok owes its name, the island's biodiversity is impressive. Additionally, the prison years, particularly the political prison era, (1949-56) had brought about dramatic environmental changes to the island: it became inhabited by humans who had built the prison complex; it had been partially afforested, quarried in search of marble and bauxite and introduced to domestic animals. Combining various scholarly accounts with the written and oral testimonies of former political prisoners, this article focuses on the animal life on Goli Otok through its environmental transition towards the present, human abandoned but animal inhabited state. The main objective of this article is to contribute to the more complete picture of the prisoners' everyday experience on Barren Island through exploring which animals, in which order and way came to sight and the mind of these particular people, at this particular time, in this particular place.

Key words: environmental history, fauna, political prison, Goli otok

Ključne riječi: povijest okoliša (ekohistorija), fauna, politički zatvor, Goli otok

INTRODUCTION

Taking a viewpoint of environmental history, with the main focus on corporeal and trans- corporeal experiences of the human political prisoner inhabitants on Goli otok (Barren Island, Croatia), this article aims explore how do various oral testimonies, scholarly accounts and schools of thought join and combine to illuminate the nature of the human and the non- human interrelation on Goli otok. The human inmates were largely Southern Slavs from Yugoslavia, both male and female, dissidents to a governing regime, communists, artists, intelligentsia and the common folk with no political agenda, all stripped to the uniform prisoner status, joined by the prison authorities, all taking part in the events which took place between 1949 and 1956. This article is an attempt to discuss their relationship with the island's environment. It is also a contemplation on the place- specific character of the animate world of Goli otok. What is known to scholars across the disciplines, and what is still concealed and unexplored regarding the nature and animal life of this compelling island? Which animals, in which order and way came to sight and the mind of these particular people, at this particular time, in this particular place?

In the years between 1949 to 1989, which was the total period of the island's prison use, the scholarly research, as well the sailing by local fishermen and the exploration by curious local observers had been largely forbidden by the authorities and deemed threatening and dangerous in the vicinity of the island.¹ The sinister aura which enveloped the island due to its prison past, has resulted in many stories of the locals from the nearby populated island of Rab, such as this:

An old fisherman told me how, in the times when the prison was in function, the entire area around the island was forbidden for sailing, so the guards would literally shoot at anyone who would reach the proximity of the island. From that time I also remember an escape attempt of a group of convicts by swimming (the distance of about 5.5 kilometres). The authorities did not allow us out of our houses for two days at that time, while they were 'combing' the terrain [in search of the runaways].²

The abrupt arrival of a large number of prisoners has dramatically changed the life on the rocky island, a place previously uninhabited by humans (except from the short period of its use for incarceration war prisoners during WWI) and unadapted to facilitate a large number of prisoners. Between 1949 and 1956 the extensive building and construction works had been undertaken on the island, it had been partially afforested, quarried for marble and bauxite and introduced to domestic animals. In this period of this exuberant human presence, the research of natural world on the island was impossible. Considering the circumstances of the island's isolation, both political and geographical, it could rightfully be said that when looking into the animate world of Goli otok, we must start from the fact that we surely do not know all the secrets it holds: former inmates' oral and written testimonies represent the sources telling on the island's environment from the prison years, whilst the biological, geological and zoological explorations cover the times before and after the prison era. The attempt of this article is therefore far from a definite taxonomy of the animal species on Barren Island. It is rather an inquiry in Goli otok's bestiary combining various ways and circumstances in which humans perceived it: the zoological research reports before and after the Years of Cominform, the contexts under which the animals appeared before humans almost as mirages, Southern Slav cultural heritage, local folklore and myth- all the ways in, as coined by Art Historian Steve Baker, humans 'picture the beast'.³ All this joined with oral testimonies of prisoners and guards could help the insight in how the animals were seen, perceived, imagined and used by humans on Goli otok specifically. This insight is therefore set as the main objective of the following text.

¹ From 1970 to 1989, the Senj Archipelago was a restricted area in which commercial navigation, fishing, and scientific research were not allowed. 'A benthos survey of the Senj Archipelago' M. ARKO- PIJEVAC et al, »A benthos survey of the Senj Archipelago« 5

² Oral testimony by Josko MATUŠAN Sr, Rab, Croatia, July 2011, noted by M. PROKIĆ

³ Steve BAKER, *Picturing the Beast: Animals Identity and Representation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, (1993).

INHABITING THE 'EMPTY' LANDSCAPE

Human reflections on the first encounter with Goli otok almost uniformly start with the observation that it is barren, desolate and uninhabited. Slovenian writer Cveto Zagorski, a former political prisoner, recalls his arrival to the island as follows:

»I remembered the [my] arrival to the island: onto the white and reddish rocks everywhere around, the terrifying bareness of the island; whoever was used to gladly wander through the field and the woods, would be reminded of the island's dead neglect at that time, its desolation and its deadness. Void and ugly indeed would be their soul, dried dead from the divides and doubts, fears and hopelessness- like that island itself from the winds and the waves.«⁴

The founders of Goli otok (Barren Island) prison and labour camp in the Years of Cominform (1949-1956) are said to have chosen to re- use this island as a place of incarceration mainly for the security reasons. Slobodan Krstić, the Assistant to Aleksandar Ranković, (the Minister of Internal Affairs and head of UDBA⁵), concluded that 'only a bird could escape Goli otok' following the report of his two scouts. The scouts reported that apart from the scarce remains of Austro- Hungarian prison camp on the deserted stony shore, they found nothing but a dried well and three goats.⁶The three goats also quickly disappear from the story, which goes on to further pursue the author's interest in disturbing human past. Advocating the choice of place for founding the labour camp for the enemies of the regime, Slobodan Krstić, as 'a continental man' by his own self-description,⁷ logically prioritised the island's potential as a prison facility, not stopping to wonder how did three domestic animals find themselves alone on a barren island in a sea strait with no humans or active human domiciles, in the middle of the *Stormy Senj Archipelago (Burni Senjski Arhipelag)* of Kvarner Bay.

The geographical position of Goli otok, where Istria region ends and Dalmatia region begins, connects its soil with a picture of a goat- through the centuries of goat domestication and as a symbol, on Istrian coat of arms. It was officially revived and returned to use as a part of Republic of Croatia coat of arms in 1990s, after the ruin of SFR Yugoslavia, signifying Istria as one of the five Croat provinces. It was also used as Istrian coat of arms in Venice Republic and Austro- Hungarian Monarchy. This 'modest' animal, as said by Croatian ethnologist Jagoda Vondraček- Mesar, is not very common in heraldry. According to Vondraček- Mesar, its original emergence and its visual presence, as well as the duration of its symbolic use in Istria in this context is also vague and unknown⁸. Other authors connect the symbol and the mythical presence of goat with centuries of goat domestication in the region, with the pagan worship of goat and the theriomorphic deity Silan, imagined in parts of Dalmatia as a young man with goat legs, in connection with Ancient Greek and Roman mythology⁹. However, the consensus on the largely unstudied origins of the goat in Istrian coat of arms is still to be reached. Additionally, this coat of arms was not in use during Istrian communist era, in Yugoslavia, when the two scouts went to investigate the terrain of Goli otok. The goat on the blue field representing Adriatic on the Istrian coat of arms, and the picture of three goats in 1949 on Barren Island is visually akin.

⁴ Cveto ZAGORSKI 'Moje leto osemištirideseto', *Nova revija* 24: 25 Ljubljana, Summer (1984), 3282-3283

⁵ The State Security Service, more commonly known by its original name as the State Security Administration (UDBA or UDSA), the secret police of SFR Yugoslavia.

⁶ Božidar JEZERNIK: Eseji o Golom Otoku (2): 'S druge strane smrti' (Essays on Goli Otok (2): 'From the Other Side of Death') E- Newspaper feuilleton, Part II, <http://www.e-novine.com/feljton/87085-druge-strane-smrti.html>, published on 03.07.2013; last accessed on 15.09.2014

⁷ B. JEZERNIK: 'S druge strane smrti'

⁸ Jagoda VONDRAČEK- MESAR, 'Koza u grbu Istre. Prilog poznavanju povijesne pozadine grba Istarskog kozarstva' *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 10:11 Zagreb (1998/1999), 7-28

⁹ Ljubica PERINIĆ- MURATOVIĆ, *Podrijetlo i narav kulta boga Silvana u rimskim provincijama Dalmaciji i Panoniji (Origins and nature of god Silvanu in Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia)* Doktorska Disertacija (Phd Thesis) Filozofski fakultet Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Zagreb (2008)

See also Marijan GRAKALIĆ, O grbu Istre (Predavanje održano u Gradskoj čitaonici u Puli 23.09.2010.) On Istrian Coat of Arms (Public Lecture in City Library, Pula 23.09.2010)

Were the three animals present physically at the first place is thus a separate inquiry. Their mention in the human story merely paints a picture of emptiness of the landscape to human eyes, it does so more effectively than simply saying 'there was nothing and no one', and it does it in order to underline how barren was the rock which was anticipating the unlikely human inhabitants in 1949.

The journey of human prisoners to the island was commencing in cattle wagons, with no windows.¹⁰ Therefore most of the inmates were oblivious of where they were being sent to from their homes, from all over Yugoslavia. Being transferred from the animal transport wagons, they would follow the commands to keep their heads down whilst running towards the ship, anchored in Bakar bay and ready to depart to Goli otok, loaded with human cargo within its windowless hold¹¹. So the prisoners were also unable to see the stone island or the sea it was sticking out from while approaching. Apart from the first group of prisoners who did not experience the introduction to their life on Barren Island through the Blood Row- the ritual initial beating of the new comers by prisoners, all of the groups which followed had little chance to see anything else but other humans upon disembarking. The occurring prisoners would align in two rows, facing each other and would beat the newcomers passing between them, blocking the view on the surroundings. More importantly, the newcomers would, again with their heads down, instinctively prioritise to make it through the row alive and with as little injuries as possible, over trying to observe the place they found themselves at.¹²

Underlining their desperate position and bitter fate, one of the female former inmates recalls:

I used to learn about flora and fauna; and although there was no flora at Goli otok, since the stone flower¹³ had not been invented yet, the only fauna were we, the ones they tried to convert into invertebrates. Goli otok (Barren Island) – what a convenient name! I thought that it was only a nick name, and that, if I get out of it alive, I should look it up in map to check if it really existed. It did. However, no one doomed that we had covered it with our own bodies, that we had watered it with our sweat.¹⁴



Tab 1. Grb Istre (Istrian Coat of Arms)

Image: Istarska Enciklopedija (Istrian Encyclopedia), The Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography <http://istra.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=1060>

¹⁰ Dragoslav MIHAILOVIĆ *Goli otok, Knjiga IV (Goli Otok, Book IV)* Beograd, Sluzbeni Glasnik (2011); Interview, Smilja FILIPČEV August 2011, Belgrade, Serbia; Interview Vladimir BOBINAC, August 2011, Krk, Croatia, Interview, Ivo RADULOVIĆ August 2011, Crvenka, Srbija, Interviewed by Milica PROKIĆ;

¹¹ M. PROKIĆ, Interviews: Jovan ŠEVALJEVIĆ, August 2011 Belgrade, Serbia; also in interviews: I. RADULOVIĆ, V. BOBINAC; S. FILIPČEV Serbia/ Croatia 2011;

¹² M. PROKIĆ Interviews: Mirjana LOPIČIĆ- PERPAR September 2011, Belgrade, Serbia; Also, Interviews: S. FILIPČEV, V. BOBINAC, I. RADULOVIĆ, Serbia/ Croatia 2011, See also D. MIHAILOVIĆ, *Goli otok IV*, Ivan KOSIĆ, *Goli Otok: Najveci Titov Konclogor (Goli Otok: The Largest Tito's Concentration Camp)* Zagreb: Mikrorad d.o.o. (2009)

¹³ *The Stone Flower (Сказ о каменном цветке)* is also the title of a folk tale from Ural region, and the inspiration for Sergey Prokofyev's ballet with the same title. Interestingly, it was written between 1948 (the year of Cominform Resolution) and 1953 (the year of Stalin's death).

¹⁴ Gennie LEBL, *Ljubičica Bela- vic dug dve i- po godine (The White Violet- A two and a half year long joke)* Gornji Milanovac: Dečije Novine (1990), 105-6

Another indicative testimony on the emptiness of the island's landscape was made by the camp commander and UDBA superintendent General Jovo Kapičić, who stated that before the prison era, »Barren island was a just small stony island, full of snakes.¹⁵« Again, the island was presented as a barren rock with 'nothing but' snakes, without questioning how would only reptiles survive on the barren rock. On the other hand, the prisoners felt as if they were the only fauna on the island they were new to, and which was new to them. But the animal presence, albeit ad hoc mentioned, and despite the anthropocentric context, proves to appear rather quickly in human testimonies.

Did the three goats eventually join the menagerie of domestic animals which were brought by humans down the timeline of human settling to the prison island, or did they die from the lack of water, old age, or the snake bites? Were they really there to be physically, corporeally seen at the first place? If we agree to leave the three mysterious goats by the dried well, we shall depart noting that they have opened the inquiry into this human- animal- prison island history. They emerged as an image similar to the Istrian coat of arms before human eyes and their presence remained in a police report, perhaps as a symbol which preceded, succeeded and outlived the Red Star on the flag of Social Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. For centuries Goli otok had not been a place of a particular human interest. However, the human perspective on the island has changed dramatically after the political prison period in the Years of Cominform (between 1949, during Tito- Stalin conflict and 1956, when the relations between Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were re- stabilised). It took a large number of humans to take part in humanly disturbing events to change island's past to human history, and inspire researches to explore how had the political prisoners perceived their new environment.

As observed by Joan B. Landes, Lord Buffon and the 18th century sensualist philosophers, 'take a man as a starting point, as the animal who stands at centre of the nature'. This is 'a man devoid of all the concepts and all the knowledge':

»Let us imagine a man«, Buffon muses, »who indeed had forgotten everything, or who awakens to completely strange surrounding. Placed alone 'in a field where animals, birds, fishes, appear successively to his eyes«, this man first perceives nothing, confuses everything, but then begins to distinguish animate and inanimate matter...and proceeding further 'to judge the objects of natural history by the connections which they have with his own life. Those which are the most necessary to him will hold the first rank- for example, he will give preference in that order of animals to the horse, the dog the oxen etc., and he will always know more about those which are more familiar to him.' Next come those that are not so familiar but that »nevertheless inhabit the same places and climates as he does, such as deer, hares, all the wild animals«¹⁶.

This man was unlikely in the position of a Yugoslav political prisoner in the 20th century. However, some circumstances of the Goli otok prisoners overlap with those of Buffon's animal/ man who suddenly and mysteriously wakes up as a tabula rasa in a completely new place. The inmates were shipped away from their homes in the animal transport wagons and found themselves on Goli otok- a completely new surroundings, which to them at the first glance seemed completely vacant. The new place was dictating the order and the hierarchy in which the animals appeared before the humans.

The combined factors of the decades of silence and advanced age of the former inmates, their living conditions at the time of incarceration, their notion of displacement on the vacant stony island and their corporeal, emotional and psychological distress at the time of incarceration, also emerge as an omni-

¹⁵ Tamara NIKČEVIĆ, *Goli otoci Jova Kapičića (Barren Islands of Jovo Kapičić)* Beograd: Blic (2010), 138

¹⁶ Joan B LANDES, 'Nature and Invention in Buffon's Natural History Illustrations' in *Gorgeous Beasts: Animal Bodies in Historical Perspective* ed Joan B LANDES.; Paula YOUNG LEE.; Paul YOUNGQUIST, University Park, Pen State University Press (2012), 29

present problem in studies of Goli otok which the authors of the Goli otok Literatur,^{e17} as well as the historians and biologists, encounter in various places:

»Personal testimonies, although valuable for an extensive investigation, are always burdened with bias, superficiality, even with errors:

»It seemed to me, for example, that there were birds at the Island, little scops owls, and that I could hear them by night. I still remember the unpleasant sounding of the birds, although one of my former inmates has been always claiming that this is not true. I have asked two other inmates about the little scops owls at the Island, but neither of them could remember such a thing. Now, were there owls at the Island, or not? But I heard them.«¹⁸

However, this voiced dilemma on the presence of owls, combines with another ad hoc remark on animal life made by UDBA officer Krstić, - that only a bird could move freely to and from the island, brings another animal kind into the picture. Indeed the birds were the only species which mobile enough to make the island their home.

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE NON- HUMAN INHABITANTS OF GOLI OTOK

Biologists and zoologists have also made attempts to study the natural life on the island as a part of Dalmatian, Croatian, Adriatic and Yugoslav biodiversity¹⁹ before, after and even during the prison period.²⁰ One of the scholars who has researched extensively on the natural life of Goli otok, is a Croatian biologist Andrija Želimir Lovrić. He actively explored this area from the 1970s to the very end of the 20th century.²¹ Lovrić authored and participated in authoring numerous academic articles²² on the topic and participated in authoring a book²³ about the natural life of Kvarner bay area, including Goli otok as its part.

The research by biologists and zoologists offers a view into a rich and lively avifauna in the desolate picture of island's physiognomy. A. Ž. Lovrić's, Tonči Hrabrić's and Oleg Antonić's research for example, shows the abundant presence of nesting birds: Goli otok is a home to common ravens, griffon vultures, cormorants and lesser kestrels (*Falco naumanni*). The presence of Eurasian eagle owl (*bubo bubo*) is also noted by Lovrić and Hrabrić, so the prisoner who thought that he heard the scops owls might have not

¹⁷ Also referred to as Yugoslav Camp Literature, (See Oscar GRUNEWALD, 'Yugoslav Camp Literature: Rediscovering the Ghost of a Nation's Past- Present-Future' *Slavic Review*, 3:4 (1987) 513-528, 514) it is the body of work mainly produced by former Barren Island inmates, which informs about the prison labour camp mainly through personal testimonies. This term is also used when referring to the literary work of Yugoslav writers such as Antonije Isaković and Abdulah Sidran, which gained popularity on publication in the early 1980s. (See Ivo BANAC, *With Stalin against Tito- Conminformists Splits in Yugoslav Communism* New York: Cornell University Press (1988) 12)

¹⁸ Dragan KALAJDŽIĆ, *Otok Gole Istine*, Zagreb: Globus (1985), 119-20

¹⁹ See Friedrich MORTON, *Pflanzengeographische Monographie der Inselgruppe Arbe*. Botanisches Jahrbucher, Beiheft 53 (116): 67 - 273. (1915); Lj ROSSI: 'Florula školjeva duž hrvatske obale' *Glasnik Hrvatskog prirodoslovnog društva*, 35: 78 - 86 (1923); G. CUBICH, : *Notizie naturali sull' isola di Veglia I*. (Fauna). Trieste (1875)

M. MAREK: 'Ornithologisches aus Zengg I' *Glasnik Hrvatskog prirodoslovnog društva*, 1:4 (1901-1905) 13-16

²⁰ »By 1964, A. LOVRIĆ had undertaken extensive algological and zoological research by skin diving around all the islands and islets of the archipelago and along the adjacent Krk and Rab Islands.« Milvana ARKO- PIJEVAC, Andrej JAKLIN, Marcelo KOVAČIĆ, Armin PALLAORO & Dušan ZAVODNIK, »A benthos survey of the Senj Archipelago (North Adriatic Sea, Croatia)', *Acta Adriatica* 46:2 Split (2005) 5

²¹ 'I am familiar with (studied) Barren Island 1970s and at the end of the 20th when my research was most detailed, after the konz- lager, was discontinued, and also because Goli (Barren) is relatively close to my birthplace (Baska on Krk).' A.Z. LOVRIĆ, Online Interview, Interviewed by Milica PROKIĆ, Baška, Krk, Croatia/ Bristol, United Kingdom May 23rd/24th 2014

²² See A. Ž LOVRIĆ, 1971: *Ornitogene biocenoze u kvarneru* (Magisterium Thesis). Zagreb, *Larus* 23: 39 (1971); A.- Ž LOVRIĆ, I. VOLARIĆ- MRSIĆ: 'Flora i fauna jugoistočnog Krka i Prvića. *Krčki zbornik*, 8 :2 (1976) 34 - 40

²³ M. ARKO-PIJEVAC, M. KOVAČIĆ and D. CRNKOVIĆ (Ed), *Prirodoslovna istraživanja Riječkog područja (Natural history researches of Rijeka region)*. Prirodoslovni muzej Rijeka (Natural History Museum) (1998)

been imagining²⁴. It is the northernmost and the only Kvarner Bay nesting place of the endemic Adriatic pallid swift (*Apus pallidus illyricus*). Seagulls, those cosmopolitan carnivores, also common and exuberant at the Croatian seaside, were also present in research of the area, in the local slang in the local songs and stories,²⁵ and among humans on Goli otok. Their corporeal presence on Goli otok, more precisely their eggs, were used for food, thus supplementing the lacking nutrients of the starved, malnourished humans, whose physical strength and health condition deteriorated as the time of their prisoner settling on the island went by. At the same time, their familiarity with the island terrain improved:

»That was mainly that highest side of Goli otok, the one which the sailors, if I'm not mistaken, also call 'The Other Gibraltar'....Those are steep rocks, as if cut off vertically... there you had seagulls' nests. We use to go to that part to get those eggs.«²⁶

This is one of the ways in which humans used the corporeal animal presence, and it is one of the ways in which humans commonly use animal corporeality. It also offers an answer to the previous questions of the source of food for snakes on a barren rock.

Snakes are to be found in human accounts on Goli otok in Kapić's statement and in the inmate testimonies, as well as in the biologists' reports and largely in Southern Slav folklore. As John Berger notes, animals, 'both mortal and immortal' were 'subjected and worshiped, bred and sacrificed.'²⁷ This is also very true for snakes in Southern Slavic tradition. The protective home spirits, natural authorities,²⁸ theriomorphic deities²⁹ and malevolent demons in animal forms are a part of a long Slavic tradition as a part of the common Indo-European heritage. Snake, as many other animals has remained as an important cult in the Southern Slav tradition in some parts of former Yugoslavia until at least late 20th century. Protector house snake, mainly described as an albino snake, rarely to be seen, living in or around the foundation or the threshold of a family home is considered a personification of the first male ancestor. The house snake, an animal which signifies kin, in Southern Slav tradition has also the characteristics of a totem.³⁰ On the other hand, according to the South Slav dual perception on most mythological beings, other snakes were believed to be demons from the underworld and were to be killed or rid of.³¹

Snakes reappear in the prisoner's accounts such as this of late former prisoner Alfred Pal, a well-known Croatian painter and caricaturist³²:

»There were two open latrines. Those latrines were really just holes, the stones dug out, with wooden planks thrown over them. Down there [were] five or six snakes, killed. There were terrifyingly many

²⁴ Andrija Želimir LOVRIĆ, Oleg ANTONIĆ & Tonči HRABRIĆ, 'Povijest istraživanja i biogeografske osobitosti otočja Prvić, Grgur i Goli' ('History of studies and biogeographic peculiarities of Prvić, Grgur and Goli Islands') In: ARKO-PIJEVAC, M., M. KOVACIĆ and D. CRNKOVIĆ (Ed), *Prirodoslovna istraživanja Riječkog područja (Natural history researches of Rijeka region)*, Rijeka, Prirodoslovni muzej (Natural History Museum) (1998), 109-119

²⁵ *Galeb (Seagull)* was also the name of Tito's yacht, and is a common name of hotels, boats and ships in Croatian coastal area (one of the ships which transports tourist to Barren Island today is also named *Galeb*). *Galeb* features everything from pop songs to sea shanties, children stories and idioms. *Galeb* is also a brand name of a popular chocolate bar which is still produced by Serbian sweet factory *Pionir* and is a product-remnant from former Yugoslavia times.

²⁶ D. MIHAILOVIĆ, *Goli Otok IV*, 46

²⁷ John BERGER, 'Why Look at Animals' in *About Looking*, Bloomsbury, Indiana University Press (2009), 5

²⁸ Sometimes a large snake, 'the snake emperor' (zmijski car) is mentioned in Serbian fairy tales, and has the ability to grant humans the gift of *nemusti jezik*, 'the silent language', universal to all animals and plants.

²⁹ *Veles*, sometimes imagined in the form of giant snake with bull horns, sometimes partially serpentine, and often depicted as a young man with cow's horns dressed in bear skin and accompanied by a wolf and a snake, is a Slavic god of cattle, autumn, western lands, underworld, earth, waters, fertility, pastures, snakes, wolves, medicine, magic, and material wealth, protector of artists and musicians. See Boris Aleksandrovich RUBYAKOV (Ed), *Slovo o polku Igoreve i ego vremena (The tale of Igor's Campaign and His Time)* Moscow: Nauka (1985); Also, Nenad GAJIĆ, *Slovenska Mitologija* Beograd: Laguna (2011).

³⁰ 'Totemism is firstly the projection outside our own universe, as though by a kind of exorcism, of the mental attitudes incompatible with the nature of Christian thought as held to be essential. It was thus possible to validate this belief by making the inverse exigency an attribute to this 'second nature', which civilised man, in the vain hope of escaping from himself as well as from nature itself, concocts from the 'primitive' or 'archaic' stages of his own development.' Claude LEVI-STRAUSS, *Totemism* (Translated by Rodney Needham) London: Merlin Press (1991) [1964], 3

³¹ Joseph L. CONRAD: 'Male Mythological Beings Among the South Slavs' University of Kansas *SEFEA Journal* 6:1 (2001), 1-8, 2-3

³² A former president of Udruga Ante Zemljarij (Croatian Barren Island Inmate Association), Alfred Pal died in 2009.

snakes. Venomous snakes at that. There were venomous snakes, understand? We had to be very careful. You lift a stone and you would have to be cautious if there is a snake under it.«³³

The wider region of Dalmatia, as a part of Dinaric Karst massive, combines the lush vegetation and greenery and the barren rocks with scarce vegetation. The Rab island, one of the two greenest Croatian islands, with the Dundovo forest national reserve, is thus a likely neighbour to the dramatically less vegetated *Insulae Scardunae* (*Stormy Senj Archipelago*), including Goli otok, which is made mainly from lower Adriatic ultrakarst³⁴. With a large number of days with high insolation, this karst terrain makes a favourable dwelling place of a variety of snakes, including the *Vipera ammodytes*. One of the most venomous European vipers, it is known by their horn-like scales on their noses, and the venom capacity lethal to humans. Locally called *poskok* (Cro- Srb skok- jump, leap) for its dexterous, aggressive and head-long jump like movements when agitated, *Vipera ammodytes* is common to encounter on Croatian islands, throughout Dalmatia and beyond, throughout the Balkans.³⁵ Killing a snake found near the foundation of a building is considered an extremely bad omen. Killing a snake or seeing it dead, was the matter of human safety as well as of the distress and in the first building phase of the island, when the building foundations were made in the time of Pal's incarceration. This distress is arguably smaller than the fear of a deadly venomous bite, and of any animal which might appear capable of it. The dead bodies of snakes were real to Alfred Pal and his fellow inmates, a fearful warning of lurking danger.

However, shepherds today leave their sheep flocks to permanently roam on Barren Island freely without fear of venomous reptiles, as the locals are confident that, on Goli otok, there are none, and has not ever been.³⁶ On the islands of Stormy Senj Archipelago, Lovrić, Hrabrić and Antoniće noted only the presence of non-venomous colubridae,³⁷ Moreover biologists have never come across any venomous snakes on Goli otok, and they also believe that there has never been any, as the terrain salinised by wave-lifting bura wind and weather conditions on Goli otok might be intolerable, and even deadly toxic to the vipers.³⁸ The benign, non-venomous snakes on the island on the other hand, probably oblivious of the fear, the distress and symbolical notions they might have reflected on humans, tried to stay away from humans who feared them, killed them, took their food, occupied and altered their habitat.

³³ A. Pal in D. Mihailović *Goli Otok IV*, 252

³⁴ A. Ž. LOVRIĆ, O. ANTONIĆ & T. HRABRIĆ 'Prirodoslovna istraživanja Riječkog područja (Natural history researches of Rijeka region)' 109-119.

³⁵ For the list of Croatian Snakes see A. Ž. LOVRIĆ: 'Naše zmije' ('Our Snakes'). *Bilten Baška*, 3 :6 Rijeka: Tipograf (1976), 14 - 16

³⁶ Interestingly, Barren's larger and better known Soviet counterpart Solovetsky, the master prison island of Gulag Archipelago also has a snake story. Solovki, a former monastery in on the Solovetski Islands was first inhabited by monks in the mid-15th century. The Orthodox Christian monastery was founded on the island which was considered sacred owing to the absence of snakes. Samuel Rahpael FRANCO, on March 15, (2010), last accessed online on 15.09.2014 at <http://geocurrents.info/google-earth/the-gulag-archipelagoillustrated#ixzz2d7fd99Ou>

³⁷ Dice snake (*Natrix tessellata*) in vicinity of semi salinated puddles, *Malpolon monspessulanus* and a non-poisonous sub species of Cat Snake (*Telescopus fallax*) O. ANTONIĆ, A. Ž. LOVRIĆ, T. HRABRIĆ 'Prirodoslovna istraživanja Riječkog područja (Natural history researches of Rijeka region)' 109-119

³⁸ »The available literature does not mention *Viperæ ammodytes* on Barren Island, albeit its presence was investigated, as early as the beginning of 20th century before the first World War by the Austrian scholars. Similarly, there are no scholarly references to *Vipera Ammodytes* on the islands adjacent to Barren, St Grgur and Prvic, but this viper is common to be seen closer to the mainland, and on the islands such as Pag and Krk.

On the contrary, the snakes which have always lived on Barren are the non-poisonous ones *Tarbophis fallax* and *Natrix tessellata* (Southern Copperhead)... There are two possible reasons why the viper is nowhere to be found near these islands:

1. **Geology:** Rab, Grgur, Barren Island and Prvic, unlike most of the Adriatic islands, were not directly connected to the mainland (as adjoining Krk, Pag, etc.) during pleistocene glaciation, but are shown on recent geographical maps standing separately as the islands in a semi-salinated lagoon of a Pleistocene lake, the deepest part of today Kvarner, with today's depth of the bottom of 110 to-124m.

2. **Ecology:** Unlike non-poisonous snakes *Tarbophis* and *Natrix*, the vipers (*V. ammodytes*) seem not to stand salt, which seems to be even poisonous to them. On the Krk island where they are otherwise common, they are rarely to be seen on the eastern part, from Vrbnik to Stara Baska, even if the occasional one wanders in after salt-bringing bora gust, they are usually found dead, as if suffocated-poisoned. These salt bringing bora gusts are very common on Barren and adjacent islands.

Unlike professional biologists, some former inmates and guards still referred to the alleged *poskoks*... if they saw non-toxic ones [colubridae], they'd probably been imagining the viper.« A. Ž. LOVRIĆ online, interviewed by M. PROKIĆ, May 2014.

Leaving the Southern Slav pagan beliefs, and the notions of the old faith which were fed into the now Christian customs, as a very complex matter in itself,³⁹ it is nevertheless interesting to note that, by stealing eggs from the seagull nests, human prisoners on Barren Island in 1950s joined the food chain as competitors to the snakes in finding prey and, in a sense, 'dinned from the same platter' with their totemic ancestor/underworld demon symbol animal. In island's snake diet the small lizards were also present, whom humans did not claim as food: tiny Blue-throated keeled lizards or (Dalmatian *Algyroides* or *Algyroides nigropunctatus*), Dalmatian Wall Lizards, (*Podarcis melisellensis fiumana*) and Balkan Emerald Lizards (*Lacerta trilineata Bedriaga*), also reported be seen by biologists on Insulae Scardunaea.

FURTHER PARTICULARITIES OF THE HUMAN AND NON- HUMAN INTERRELATION ON GOLI OTOK

The animals who accompanied humans in their settling of the island between 1949 and 1956, on the ships with food and supplies cargo, were also mice and rats. To Barren Island prisoners, apart from the bodily health hazard, the corporeal contact with the rodents was a painful reminder of their overall position:

..It's where people pee in prisons, a bucket this tall, and deep like that. Imagine then seventy women using that, getting up at night. That thing inside with us, it's hell of a stench, no way you can sleep a wink, mice and rats running over us, all you could hear were screams, just screams.«⁴⁰

According to some testimonies, rats were also used for intimidation, threat and even physical harm of prisoners by the prison authorities during interrogations.⁴¹ Therefore the non-charismatic reputation this rodent already has in human eyes was even more enhanced in prison conditions on the island.

Humans also introduced Barren Island to new animal species by bringing large cattle, cats and dogs. Cats and dogs seem to have re- assumed the pet role. In certain testimonies they even serve to illustrate the notion of pride in human 'taming' and softening the aspect of the 'dead' rock. For example, Cveto Zagorski departs from the initial notion of island's desolation and deadness, continuing his account in the jocund spirit of re-education self- management:

»And look: after six months, after short two hundred days, the island betrays its name, its millennia of solitude and neglect... its inhabitants are no more just lizards and snakes, but joined by the humans, inmates at that, there are pigeons and sparrows, young cats play on the rocks, dogs bark at the moon through the silent nights, like somewhere in the countryside.«⁴²

Domestic animals, corporeally close, directly dependent on and directly employed by humans in modern times, were almost a reminder of human 'normality' on the island, of life before the incarceration. However, on Goli otok, socially constructed relationships between humans and animals were deconstructed, and re- established in accordance to the completely new human circumstances in the new surroundings. This is particularly true for the relationship between animals and incarcerated humans. For the prisoners, the life completely changed in most of the aspects, from their daily activities and living conditions, their emotional and mental state to the corporeal condition and diet. Abruptly ripped out from their everyday context, their lives were dictated by the combined factors of prison authority regulations, the newly established inter- human relations and the nature of the island as their new place and space. On the other hand, whilst the policemen and prison authorities had changed the place of dwelling, they

³⁹ For snake in Serbian folklore see Veselin ČAJKANOVIĆ, *Veselin Mit i religija u Srba. Izabrane studije* Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, (1973); Zečević, Slobodan *Mitska biča srpskih predanja* Beograd: Vuk Karadžić, 1981. for snake in wider context of Slavic folklore see Conrad 2001.

⁴⁰ Smilja FILIPČEV Interviewed by M PROKIĆ, Belgrade, Aug 2011.

⁴¹ According to Zoran Ašanin, a vice president of Barren Island inmate association in 2011, rats were intentionally put in solitary confinements and even put in small claustrophobic tubes with an opening leaned against the body of the prisoner, and made to bite and scratch humans in attempts to escape during interrogations. Interview Zoran AŠANIN, Bačko Dobro Polje, Serbia August 2011, Interviewed by M. PROKIĆ

⁴² C. ZAGORSKI 'Moje leto osemištirideseto' 3282-3283

were fully aware and largely in control of their circumstances, retained their job posts and many everyday commodities and, subsequently, also largely retained what seems to be an unchanged relationship with the animals. To prison authorities, the native wild animals may have stayed on the plain of scenery of the barren island, as the policemen did not have to worry whether the reptile under a rock was a deadly horn nosed viper or just one of the benign *colubridae* as they did not work in the quarries and stone construction sites. They were not in need to know where was the seagulls' nesting place as they have shipped the large cattle, cats and dogs to complement their human context on the island.

Was then the view on the domestic animals and the secluded natural world of Goli Otok a view of a tribal, pagan Slav, a Classical man, a modern man, or a human animal- a 'natural' man? How did different human circumstances of the inmates and the prison authorities influence their view, their perception and their use of different animals? How is this inmate place different to the place occupied by humans- prison authorities? Perhaps on a desolate island, far removed from the home of both the inmates and the guards, there is also the space where we could observe, among others, the notion of a 'modern', 'non- animal animal' which John Berger refers to in his work, the pet which the owner needs to be completed, albeit the fact that no animal confirms man neither negatively or positively⁴³, or the animality of human body as discussed by environmental historians and philosophers, as well as the notions of humans' insight and place in the animal world.

Steve Baker engages with the ideas of a cultural mind- shift regarding pets and domestic animals as set by other scholars in his work on picturing the the beasts⁴⁴. He collapses the ideas of John Berger, with the views of Keith Tester, Keith Thomas and Michael Foucault⁴⁵ in analysing this switch in perception of animals from Classical to 'modern'. Both Berger and Tester refer to the end of nineteenth century as the definite time shift to the broadly 'modern' attitude toward animals, both take the urbanisation as the key reason for this switch, and both 'regard it as marking the demise of a symbolic relation between humans and animals.' (Baker 1993:18), whilst Keith Thomas stresses the radical importance of late eighteenth century urbanisation in changing social perceptions of the natural world.

The notion of 'modern' class- specific attitudes towards animals identified by Berger and Tester on Barren Island could not be thoroughly applied on all the humans, as neither the inmates of the rural nor urban descent were in the surrounding familiar to them. On Barren Island, there was no context of that sort. In order to illuminate the de- constructed and newly established interrelation of Barren Island prisoners and their new surroundings, some thoughts of environmental historians and the relevant schools of thought in the embodied environmental history context are called for aid. As Christopher Sellers noted in 1999: 'We still know comparatively little about how perceptions of humans' nature have evolved hand-in-hand with changing experiences and involvements with non human nature -flora and fauna as well as other aspects of the material world.'⁴⁶

Sellers voices the intellectual need for viewing human body from outside of the anthropocentric human viewpoint. He places the inquiry in human body as natural, animal and cultural site in the exploration of Henri David Thoreau's ideas of corporeal and visceral investigation of nature and human animality. Identifying the material human body as this middle ground, or perhaps the border area, between 'nature' and 'culture' Sellers is here also in accordance with John Berger, who states that 'animals interceded between man and their origin because they were both like and unlike man.'⁴⁷

Goli otok emerges as a good terrain for testing these ideas, out of their 'usual' context, as a spatially isolated phenomenon- a place abruptly inhabited by humans, unsaturated by the notions of civilisation or history. This clash of Berger's notions of domestic animals' 'confirmation' and 'completion' of humans, according to Steve Baker, makes pet a non- animal⁴⁸. Berger's ideas correspond with Deleuzian

⁴³ S. BAKER: *Picturing the Beast*, 13

⁴⁴ S. BAKER: *Picturing the Beast*, 19

⁴⁵ See Michael FOUCAULT: *The order of things* New York: Pantheon Books-Random House, Inc (1971)

⁴⁶ Christopher SELLERS: 'Thoreau's Body: Towards an Embodied Environmental History' *Environmental History* 4:4 (1999) 486-514, 503

⁴⁷ J. BERGER: *Why Look At Animals*, 16

⁴⁸ S. BAKER: *Picturing the Beast*, 13

'sarcastic' attitude towards domestic animals⁴⁹. Like Berger, Deleuze (and Guattari) seem to prefer wild animals, and insist on an 'animal relationship with animals', and consider 'canine barking □the shame of the animal kingdom.'⁵⁰ Perhaps on Barren Island, this 'non-animality' of a dog as a pet emerges in its clarity. On Barren Island dogs seem to have been kept in the truest of the sense of the term pet in the modern human world. Unlike some other examples in history such as the event in 1790s when, according to Paul Youngquist, 'the British used dogs trained to attack and eat black people to quell the Maroon uprising in Jamaica'⁵¹, dogs on Barren Island were present, but according to an inmate's testimony they were not mobilised, even in the events of pursuing the runaways. On the contrary, humans on Barren Island were used instead in the chases:

Sometimes the word would spread that someone ran away, using a wooden plank or something, sometimes it would be that someone has drowned down by the shore and so on. But I remember that [once] the entire Wire was rushed out and that we all, as if [marching] on a front, side by side, went and looked behind each rock..nearly holding hands, that's how close to one another we walked...then rushed us, to run over those rocks, those sharps and cracks which were hurting us, we couldn't heal those wounds for months...I wonder how come they didn't have any dogs to use for that...Never. I was surprised by that. Because I knew that those dogs would be useful for pursuing the enemy, the slaves.⁵²

On Barren Island, cows were also new species. To prison authorities they were a source of food and perhaps in relation to them the cows assumed a very similar position as they normally have in the relation to an urban human dweller. Cows were milked (although inmates were not allowed their milk), fed and cleaned after by the inmates. But there was no benefit which the inmates were getting from cows in turn. For the inmates, cows were therefore just a source of yet another chore, alongside, for example, burying their dead fellow inmates, and a part of scenery in the place of their suffering:

Then we got dysentery...and each day one pavilion had this duty of serving other pavilions, and (that day) we were delivering food, buckets, carrying slops where the cow sties were, for policemen's and interrogators' milk... And that day that young guy, I felt so sad about him, he was such a good, nice guy, I know that he was twenty or younger, about my age at the time- died. And the four of us (from the pavilion on duty) had to take him...⁵³

On Barren Island humans were present as species, but within the species two major groups can be identified in regard of their living circumstances and social status- the prison authorities and the prisoners. Albeit the fact that in human terms the prisoner group operated a complex hierarchy within itself, dividing the humans into these two major groups serves the inquiry in human place in the natural world of Barren Island. As previously discussed, the prison authorities retained much of their everyday human role from the pre- island life. But the main subject of this research is the bodily experience of the prisoners, whose life took a dramatic turn after the incarceration. Their place within the natural world of Goli otok was partially within the food chain of the native animals, and they therefore assumed a partial position within the 'wilderness'.

Deleuzo- Guattarian ecosophy also communicates with the Goli otok world in attempt to contemplate the human corporeal experience in the context of the new environment and its native life forms. Examining the position of Goli otok prisoners, between socially constructed human role and the bio- sociological corporeal implications, at the same time within and outside of Barren Island bestiary, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming- animal is an intriguing canvas onto which the inquiry of this corporeal and trans- corporeal experience could be projected. As summed up by Alain Beaulieu, the two 'examine the link between human and animal, a link that cannot logically be entirely human or totally animal'⁵⁴. As an Art historian, Steve Baker uses the Deleuzo- Guattarian becoming- animal concept and

⁴⁹ See Alain BEAULIEU, 'The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought' *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, 9:1/2, 2011, 69-88, 70

⁵⁰ A. BEAULIEU: 'The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought', 71

⁵¹ Paul YOUNGQUIST: 'Cujo Effect' in *Gorgeous Beasts: Animal Bodies in Historical Perspective* Philadelphia: Penn State Press (2012) 14

⁵² Interview with Fedor Pifat in D. MIHAILOVIĆ *Goli Otok IV*, 148

⁵³ I. RADULOVIĆ, Interviewed by M.PROKIĆ, Crvenka,, August 2011

⁵⁴ A. BEAULIEU, 'The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought', 81

its explicit dialogue with the role of the artists. However, more importantly to the investigation of human corporeal and trans- corporeal of humans and animals, especially the 'wild' native animals on Goli otok, Baker makes a remark that 'the relation of the human self and the animal pack, the idea that the becoming-animal maybe something typically experienced only for an instant'⁵⁵.

'So, becoming implies a series of assemblages between deterritorializing forces that are circulating on the edge, for instance, of the human and the non-human, in order to make them indiscernible. It is in such a zone of proximity, of uncertainty, or of indetermination that becomings occur.'⁵⁶In eating a raw seagull egg, like a snake, from the same place as the snake, in order to corporeally survive, does this distance collapse? Does one experience a becoming- snake instant? In chasing humans in a dog manner, in the way which dogs are used, does one become-dog? Baker notes that the question of becoming- animal 'is not so much what it is but what it does.'⁵⁷He poses a question: What does it take to gesture toward the other-than-human, and thus to enter that privileged 'experimental' state of identity- suspension which they call becoming-animal?⁵⁸

The corporeal state of Goli otok prisoners was by no means 'privileged' or willingly experimental. In going where snakes go to get the food which snakes get, for instance, it is highly unlikely that they had any other motives other than the bodily sustenance, in the circumstances in which they were not in willingly.

GOLI OTOK'S HUMAN INHABITANTS AND THE NON- HUMAN INHABITANTS OF SURROUNDING WATERS

Come what may, the bodily suffering of the inmates combined with the behaviour of the new surroundings had played not only with their identity, humanity and becomings, it also played with the bodily ability to perceive and understand things in the new place:

The things were made harder by the fact that we, due to the hunger, exhaustion and bad nutrition also saw the world around us differently. For example, I had chicken blindness. It was due to the lack of... Vitamin A. This reflected in the fact that, at night, I saw all the light sources as green, so, as if the bulbs were emanating greenish light. I didn't find that strange at all. I tried to rationalise it: the bulbs throw green light so that the camp wouldn't be visible from a long distance, and so that from the ships which pass by it wouldn't be possible to see that the camp was there...⁵⁹

The food was scarce, so was water, the labour was crushing, the rock was heavy, hard and sharp on feet, scorching in the summer and freezing in the winter, bora gust were harsh, the beatings were often and human bodies were weak. But through sharing food with snakes, by looting seagull's nests, they replenished the starved bodies with protein. Through eating the flowers of scarce island cacti they tried to preserve their teeth, and through contact with fish, by sporadically getting a hold of them and eating them, they were helped to quite literally see the world of the island in a different light:

There was an order, the puree would be handed out first, one spoon of root puree, then a spoon of black...licorice, and then they would literally throw in a spoonful of sugar... But [that day] at the handout window someone threw something else into my ration. Those were baked skippers...That fish had enough of that Vitamin in them... In the evening I, quite surprised, asked the guy standing next to me: »Look, do you see that they've changed the bulbs? The light from the bulbs was green this morning and now its white.« He looked at me as if I was going mad.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ S. BAKER; 'What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like' in *Representing Animals* ed Nigel Rothfels Bloomington: Indiana University Press (2002) 67

⁵⁶ A. BEAULIEU: 'The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought', 75

⁵⁷ S.BAKER: 'What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like', 74

⁵⁸ S.BAKER: 'What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like', 68

⁵⁹ Interview with Alfred Pal in D. MIHAILOVIĆ *Goli Otok IV*, 154

⁶⁰ A. Pal in D. MIHAILOVIĆ *Goli Otok IV*, 155

Different marine animals which inhabit the waters around Goli otok were used by the humans in different ways. The threatening presence of sharks was used by the prison authorities with a rightful assumption that no one who cares to stay alive would risk exploring their presence by getting deep into the waters⁶¹. There were cases of escape attempts where the runaway would swim back to the island willingly in fear of the sharks.⁶²

It was rumoured that between 1949 and 1956, sharks were patrolling the surrounding waters in exuberant numbers, due to the dead bodies which were allegedly thrown into the sea as well as those who would attempt a suicide. However, according to Allesandro de Maddalena, the author of a historical account on great white shark presence in the area, albeit the non-provoked attacks were noted in the Eastern Adriatic area more than once, there were no recorded attacks of the white shark in the Kvarner bay between 1940 and 1963⁶³. Marine Biology Professor at the University of Split (Croatia) Alen Soldo, who specialises in Elasmobranchi, is also sceptical regarding the rumoured white shark attacks and scavenging.⁶⁴ As for the blue sharks, they were native to the area, contrary to the belief that they migrated there in search for human prey.⁶⁵ This notwithstanding, their presence, or rather the notion of their presence served to the prison authorities as a perfect natural water patrol, and as such they underlined the oppressive, imprisoning and threatening character attributed to the island by the humans through decades.

Perhaps this infamous reputation and decades of isolation of the master island of Goli otok Archipelago and its surrounding waters is among the reasons why the marine biologists today find that the human circumstances allowed a rich biodiversity to remain in the waters surrounding the island,⁶⁶ Ironically, this is however not true for the shark population. A globally endangered species, both great white and blue sharks are also largely pursued and illegally hunted in Croatia today. Therefore it seems like the decades of human suffering and incarceration had enabled the marine biodiversity to thrive, whilst, and at the same time, the most feared inhabitants of these waters are the most endangered ones.

EPILOGUE TO THE PRISON YEARS- THE SUCCEEDING GOLI OTOK INHABITANTS

Our Goli otok historical safari started in 1949 with pictured goats. It ends in the present day, at the very same place, but with a picture of sheep. Flocks of semi-wild sheep are now to be seen on Barren Island in Kvarner bay, where Istria region ends and Dalmatia region begins. The region bears its name after their historical inhabitants Dalmatae (Dalmati), an ancient llyrian tribe who championed the resi-

⁶¹ Marija (Zelić, the Women Camp warden), said to me: »You want to escape swimming«... I also said: »It is a bit far to swim up to Rijeka I am not sure I could do that«. »No, you could not, you would be eaten by sharks« Dragoslav SIMIĆ & Boško TRIFUNOVIĆ: *Ženski Logor na Golom Otoku- Ispovesti kaznjenica i islednice (Female Camp on Barren Island- Confessions of the prisoners and an interrogator)* Beograd: ABC Produkt (1990), 51–2

⁶² F. Pifat in D. MIHALOVIĆ *Goli Otok IV*, 147

⁶³ Alessandro DE MADDALENA: 'Historical and Contemporary Presence of the Great White Shark', *Charcharodon Carcharias (Linnaeus, 1758) in the northern and Central Adriatic Sea' Annales Series Historia Naturalis* 1:19, Oct (2000) 10

⁶⁴ »I have authored the work in which I proved that the presence of a great white shark in the coastal area associated with tuna, which are their main prey. Great White in the area was little more numerous than other areas of the Adriatic because there was the most important coastal tuna hunting place (from Bakar Bay and along the Velebit channel). The development of a fleet fishing for tuna shifted to the open sea in the seventies of the last century. Hence there has been the receding number of the 'great white' from coastal areas because there was no tuna. So, Goli (Barren) and any activity on the island have nothing to do with the great white shark.« Alen SOLDO, online interview Split, Croatia/Bristol, UK, April 2014, Interviewed by M. PROKIC

⁶⁵ Blue Sharks are the kind that do not deliberately attack people, but if there was some carcasses that have consistently been present around the island may they have been staying there in large numbers. However, I must mention that this is a wider area, specifically around the island of Dugi Otok, or designated as spawning and maturation of a blue shark, so that their number was already large in the area, especially in those times of lower traffic, industrialization, tourism and similar anthropogenic influence, [their presence] would be nothing unusual.

A. SOLDO, online Interviewed by M.PROKIC April 2014.

⁶⁶ »The area is a well-preserved fishing area, i.e., not yet menaced by overfishing 'M. ARKO_ PIJEVAC et al, 'A benthos survey of the Senj Archipelago', 40



Tab. 2 Goli otok 2008.
Photo by M. PROKIĆ

stance to Roman conquests of the region.⁶⁷ One of the hypotheses about the etymology of the name for Dalmatian region and its inhabitants is that it comes from an ancient Illyrian word for ‘sheep’, and that this word remained in word for contemporary Albanian language: delme.⁶⁸ Archeological evidence from the region show that the Illyrians, Dalmatae included, were sheep stock breeders,⁶⁹ and it is also hypothesized that sheep was a Dalmatian totem or protector animal.⁷⁰

The flocks of sheep which now roam the human abandoned Barren Island were largely brought to the island by the locals from Rab after 1988, when all the prison activity was discontinued. The shepherds leave their flocks on the island and sporadically come back to cut their fleece for wool, and take some of them for the slaughter. The island is used by humans as a 4.4 square km of a sheep barn. Their fleeces are marked with red or blue paint, in order to designate which sheep belongs to which human owner.

As the largest animals in the sight, they seem to claim sovereignty over the place and the space of the island and transcend the notions of domestic or wild. Together with the wild hares running pass, and the forest patches, they again only emphasise the desert like stone terrain. The eyes of a Barren Island sheep have undoubtedly seen a world much more varied than their counterparts who live in sties within human ran households or farms. The sheep walk the unstable a hilly rocky terrain and feed on various shrubbery and cacti found on the island. Their gaze reaches the Velebit mountain range, the adjacent St Grgur island (now largely populated by fallow deer), also used as political prison in the past and the surrounding islets and the Adriatic horizon. Could we for a minute hope that we would ever see or know what the sheep know about the past and the present of Barren Island? Although an imagined view of the animal’s eyes has proven to result in an interesting and very insightful historical account written by an environmental historian Gregory Rosenthal⁷¹, this method will not be followed here, the distance shall rather remain undisturbed, as defined by Berger:

The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man. The animal can be killed and eaten so that its energy is added to that which the hunter already

⁶⁷ Aleksandar STIPČEVIĆ, *Iliri- povijest I kultura (Illyrians- History and Culture)* Zagreb: Skolska Knjiga (1974), 29

⁶⁸ See Noel MALCOLM: *Bosnia: A Short History* London: Pan Macmillan (2002) ,2

⁶⁹ See A. STIPČEVIĆ: *Iliri- povijest I kultura (Illyrians- History and Culture)* 107-109

⁷⁰ See A. STIPČEVIĆ: *Iliri* Zagreb: Skolska Knjiga (1989) 190

⁷¹ See Gregory ROSENTHAL, ‘Guano Life and Labor in a Seabird Colony: Hawaiian Guano Workers, 1857–70’ *Environmental History* 17:4 : (2012), 744-782 first published online September 6, 2012

possesses. The animal can be tamed so that it supplies and works for the peasant. But always its lack of common language, its silence, guarantees its distance, its distinctness, its exclusion, from and of man.⁷²

Goli otok sheep might know more about their habitat than any human ever will as they wander around the former prison island, with blue and red painted patches on their whitish fleece, in a small archipelago where, according to some stories, the mythical adventure of Jason, Argonauts and the Golden Fleece came to the end.⁷³

CONCLUSION

Goli otok exists as a land mass at least since the pleistocene.⁷⁴ In the long past of this place, the sporadic human presence was a small number of mere moments. However it took humans to arrive and switch this timeline from past to history. Humans, both with their animal and non- animal attributes, merge with other life forms such as animals and plants, arriving to and departing from the sight in the way peculiar to Goli otok. In this merging they share the front line in the observation of the place which compels to be viewed beyond, but not excluding the adverse circumstances of human presence on its soil. From the seemingly desperately vacant human view onto the barren island's body, we arrived to the encounters with over two dozen animal kinds. Even more of the plant species were noted by humans,⁷⁵ who still call the island Goli (Barren). Despite the notable changes induced by human presence during its prison years, Goli otok has indeed remained largely barren and stoically mysterious to this day. Moreover, it is very likely that this seemingly vacant and dead rock in Croatian Adriatic will withhold its many secrets. After the decades of exuberant human presence, the island is today again uninhabited by humans. The humans on Goli otok were simultaneously its temporary fauna and the element opposed to the rest of nature- the main protagonists from the anthropocentric viewpoint of social history and the cameo appearance in one particular sequence on the timeline of the island's environmental past. Therefore, in analysing the past of this historically underrepresented place, the environmental approach is called for the purposes of the deeper insight in the everyday corporeal experience of the Goli otok political inmates between 1949 and 1956. Furthermore, the rich cultural heritage of the northern Croatian Adriatic and the Kvarner area, perpetually intertwined with the environmental implications, is called to be viewed beyond, but not excluding Goli otok and its prison past as a compelling example of the human relationship with the non- human environment.

SAŽETAK

Ljudska prošlost na Golom Otoku je nedovoljno historijski zastupljena, iako je kao tema obradjivana od strane nekih povjesničara. Jednako tako, Goli otok je bio tema istraživanja kako Hrvatskih, tako i inostranih geologa, ekologa i biologa, ali u širem kontekstu bogatog biodiverziteta dinarskoga krasa u Hrvatskoj i ekosustava Kvarnerskoga Zaljeva. Bivši politički zatvori, mjesta vojne obuke, bojna polja te

⁷² J. BERGER, 'Why Look At Animals', 5

⁷³ According to Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautica*, Senj Archipelago might have been the 'The place beyond Scylla and Charybdis' where only Argo could pass safely on its way home.' Argo turned away and around to go back home at Liburnike Nessoi (Liburnian Islands) (see p. 156 Book II, 597-598 and book IV, 859-958, Apollonius of Rhodes, »Jason and the Golden Fleece«, Trans. Richard HUNTER Oxford: Oxford University Press (1993)) In the Antic times, Insulae Scardunae, including Barren Island were in the nautical realm of Liburnians- an Illyrian tribe who held nautical dominion over the entire east Adriatic coast- *Liburnike Thallasokratia- Liburnian Sea Realm*. (See A. STIPČEVIĆ, *Iliri- povijest i kultura*, 31. There is also a local version to the Greek myth in local *cakavski* dialect of Dalmatia, »Poveda od Matanih navakryeh tar žloatneh yanac« (»Legend of Mythical Sailors and golden sheep«) describing the antic sailors and their settlement to Dalmatian Islands. (See Mihovil LOVRIĆ, & Fabijan TOMASIĆ, (ed A.Z.LOVRIĆ) 'Arhaična Pučka Predaja u 'Cajkasčini' Brdskih Sela na otoku Krku' *Cakavska Rič*, 25:1-2 Split (1997), 172

⁷⁴ A.Ž. LOVRIĆ online, interviewed by M. PROKIĆ, May 2014.

⁷⁵ Friedrich MORTON, *Croatia Dalmatia Plants* [Wien,1914] Contributed by: Mertz Library, The New York Botanical Garden Subjects, New York Botanical Garden, BHL Collections

radni i koncentracijski logori, kao mjesta ljudske patnje i zarobljeničtva, diljem svijeta su proučavana od strane povijesničara u raznim kontekstima, uključujući i ekohistorijski. Kombinacijom navedenih pristupa stvara se prostor za istraživanje bogate i dinamične okolišne prošlosti Gologa otoka. Uprkos tome što ljuti kras otoka fizionomski potseća na kamenu pustinju, njegov je biodiverzitet impresivan. Godine uporabe otoka za zatvaranje ljudi, pogotovo inicijalno razdoblje političke kaznionice (1949-56), donele su dramatične okolišne promjene: mirni otok je naseljen ljudima koji su izgradili zatvorski kompleks, otok je bio raskopavan u potrazi za mramorom i boksitom i na njega su dovedene domaće životinje. Usporednom analizom radova znanstvenika iz raznih oblasti, kao i usmenim i pismenim svjedočenjima bivših političkih kažnjenika, ovaj članak ima za cilj sagledati okolišnu tranziciju Golog otoka kroz vrijeme, od zatvorskih godina do trenutnog stanja napuštenosti od strane ljudi, ali uz životinjsko prisustvo. Fokusirajući se na životinjski svijet otoka, glavni cilj ovog rada je sticanje potpunije slike o svakodnevnom životu političkih kažnjenika na Golom otoku, a kroz pitanje koje su se životinje, na koji način i kojim redom pojavljivale pred očima i u mislima tim ljudima, na tom mjestu i tih godina.

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