



Faculty of Political Sciences  
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# **The lack of interest in the remembrance of communist prison and labour camps in the Balkans: A case-study of Yugoslav Goli Otok**

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the memory of Goli Otok, the notorious political prison of the former Yugoslavia, within contemporary Croatian public life, focusing on the attitude of the Croatian State. Despite its historical significance, Goli Otok occupies a marginal position in public memory, characterized by indifference and minimal political engagement. The study addresses two research questions: how the Croatian State's attitude can be defined, and why this apparent lack of interest persists. The analysis is grounded in memory studies, emphasizing conceptualizations of forgetting, silencing, and amnesia, which are particularly suited to examining a memory defined by absence. Empirical insights are drawn from six expert interviews, analyzed using thematic analysis. One core finding is that if a memory cannot serve a political function, it loses relevance. Goli Otok's historical complexity, including its association with leftist prisoners and contested meanings, prevents its integration into simplified narratives that support national identity and state continuity. Consequently, it remains largely untouched by the Croatian State, which prioritizes memories that yield political benefits. Engagement with Goli Otok carries minimal reward but significant risk of backlash if mishandled, further discouraging action. Experts emphasized that this lack of engagement is not driven by malice but by political pragmatism. As a result, Goli Otok occupies a liminal space: neither actively suppressed nor fully commemorated, lying at the intersection of Hirst and Coman's selective retrieval-induced forgetting and Connerton's repressive erasure. Although limited by the small sample of interviews, this study provides a first in-depth exploration of the interplay between political utility, historical complexity, and collective memory in Croatia. It highlights the structural and perceptual factors that maintain Goli Otok's marginal status while pointing to avenues for further research, including discourse analysis and comparative studies with other politically contested sites in the Balkans.

**Keywords:** Post-socialist memory politics, Croatian political culture, Yugoslav legacy, Goli Otok, indifference, forgetting, silencing

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## 1. Introduction

Goli Otok, meaning barren or naked island, symbolises one of the most severe episodes of political repression in postwar Yugoslavia. The name refers to an island in the Mediterranean Sea, located near the better-known island Rab along the Croatian coast, named after its barren geological surface, since it was uninhabited until the moment it was turned into a political prison camp by the federal UDBA (Yugoslav Secret Police) in the aftermath of the Tito-Stalin split from 1948/49 (Previšić 2020). Since then, the name Goli Otok is synonymous with this camp and the “re-educational” practices the inmates had to endure on the island, including forced labour in a quarry and systematic humiliation and torture. The island operated as a political prison and labour camp until relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union became more stable in the year 1956. Interned on Goli Otok (while it was a political prison) were around 13,000 people, most of them communists and socialists who were deemed to be supporters of Stalin and the Cominform. The Serbo-Croat term for the Cominform, “Informbiro”, was often shortened to simply IB, which in turn gave supporters of the Cominform the name “Ibeovci” (Previšić 2019a; Previšić 2019b, 115-117).<sup>1</sup> Many of these estimated 13,000 people incarcerated on Goli Otok, or another island closeby (Sveti Grgur), were former partisan comrades of Tito and, in some cases, even highly influential party members after the Second World War (Previšić 2019b: 124), while others were incarcerated after being denounced as being a so-called “Ibeovac” or even due to much more banal reasons, such as telling a joke about Tito (Prokić 2023: 723). After the political prison was discontinued, the facilities on the island were continuously used as a prison for felons until the end of the 1980s – ever since then, the island has been abandoned almost completely, with some interest resuming over recent years in the location, mostly by tourists fascinated by “Yugoslav Alcatraz”.

To explain the research puzzle, I have to describe how arrived at the research questions that guide this project from two specific perspectives: Firstly, Goli Otok is by far not the only camp erected in the Balkans during the 20<sup>th</sup> century by different regimes. However, while the concentration camps of Nazi-Germany and their local auxiliaries across the Balkans have been very present, both in public perception as well as academia, the labour and prison camps built

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<sup>1</sup> Ibeovac in the singular form.

by communist regimes across the Balkans generally receive very little attention, especially in comparison to the camps of the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> This becomes evident when, for example, looking at the number of academic works and articles that have been published on the prison complex of Goli Otok, most of which written either in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian or in English.<sup>3</sup> The bulk of this research analyses the camp from a historical perspective, while only a few deal specifically with the reception of Goli Otok within memory studies (e.g., Prokić 2014, 2023; Đurišić-Bečanović 2022). Some academic works examine Goli Otok and its commemoration from a literature-based perspective by analysing so-called “camp literature” – autobiographical testimonies and memoirs published by former inmates (e.g., Gruenwald 1987; Taczyńska 2019; Đurišić-Bečanović 2022). However, amongst these different angles, the *role of the successor states* of Yugoslavia in the remembrance of these camps, specifically Croatia, to whose jurisdiction Goli Otok belongs nowadays, is a factor that has been mostly neglected in academic research.

Secondly, when engaging with state-led memory culture in general (not just in the Balkans), more often than not one encounters political narratives as the basis of commemorative acts and objects implemented by the state (such as ceremonies, speeches, monuments, museums etc.) that serve a specific function. In the case of Goli Otok, and specifically with the context of the prevalence of historical revisionism in Croatia<sup>4</sup>, my initial expectation was some sort of specific state-led culture of remembrance, or at least specific acts of commemoration grounded in revisionist or anti-communist narratives. However, I soon came to find that there is just *no* state-led culture of remembrance whatsoever, meaning there is no discourse or overt narrative on Goli Otok that could be critically examined, as initially assumed. This is what is particularly striking about Goli Otok as an empirical case study, that although it is quite prominent in the collective memory of all post-Yugoslav states, the memory surrounding it has barely been institutionalised. To clarify, it is not the case that there is simply *no* commemoration at all

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<sup>2</sup> Political prisons for enemies of the state weren't just erected by the political elite of Socialist Yugoslavia, but by all other communist regimes across the Balkans (see e.g., the Periprava labour camp in Romania, the Belene labour and concentration camp in Bulgaria, or the prisons of Spaç or Qafë Bar in Albania).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., the monographies of cultural anthropologist Božidar Jezernik (2013), or historian Martin Previšić (2019a), which is, so far, the most significant publication on Goli Otok as it is the most extensive work on the topic; historian Ivo Banac devoted a chapter of his book “With Stalin against Tito” to Goli Otok (“The Marble Isle”); as well as articles e.g., by Cvetković (2019), Mitrović (2013).

<sup>4</sup> For the role of historical revisionism in Croatia see e.g., Goldstein & Goldstein (2002), Marijan (2019), Kasapović (2019).

present – a few private or NGO-led initiatives have tried to contribute to the remembrance of the victims of Goli Otok by producing artistic interventions and educational content.<sup>5</sup> However, the Croatian state seems not to even care enough to safeguard the structure of the former prison on the island, which is slowly just withering away, let alone take initiative in any form of commemoration, such as installing a museum, memorial centre or any other monument on the island. Therefore, this research is aimed at discussing one core research question: *Why does the Croatian state display such a lack of interest towards the remembrance of the camp Goli Otok and its victims?* But before tackling this overarching research question, it has to be questioned whether it is even accurate to describe the attitude of the Croatian State as a “lack of interest”. This relates to the issue of deliberation – is the attitude of the Croatian state “just” a lack of interest because there are, for example, other priorities or because specific political actors do not see any political gain from showing interest, or is it rather the case that the Croatian state deliberately rejects and obstructs the commemoration of the victims of Goli Otok? Or can the status quo of the lack of active commemoration be defined differently altogether? Therefore, this study actually aims to answer the following two research questions:

- ⇒ How can the attitude of the Croatian State be defined?
- ⇒ Why does the Croatian State display such a lack of interest?

Notably, the product of this work cannot and does not aim to produce a single definite or causal answer to the latter research question but rather the objective is to critically reflect on and discuss the multitude of factors that all, to varying degrees, contribute to this absence, this lack of interest in the commemoration of Goli Otok’s victims by the Croatian state. Therefore, expert interviews were conducted to gather data, which was in turn analysed via the method of thematic analysis to discuss potential approaches from different perspectives when answering the overarching research question.

The structure of the thesis is quite straight-forward: The first chapter after the introduction explores the theoretical concepts relevant for the purposes of this thesis from the area of memory studies. The first segment deals with the politics and spaces of collective memory, briefly introducing the importance of collective memory for this project as well as some its

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g., the art project of Andreja Kulunčić or the virtual guide of the island designed by the Croatian NGO Documenta in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Zagreb, URL: <https://goli-otok.net/> (last accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025).

conceptual origins and (re-) interpretations. The second segment reviews three crucial concepts – Forgetting, Silence, and Amnesia – used by scholars to conceptualise various kinds of lack of interest in commemoration. Lastly, the concept of memory regimes is discussed to foster a better understanding of the agency of the Croatian State. The following chapter opens up the memohistoric field in which the case study is situated, combining a brief literature review of academic works that have been published on Goli Otok with the larger contextual basis in the specifics of memory culture in Croatia to create the empirical background of the case study. Afterwards, the methodology chapter describes the methodology employed by this project, the means of data collection (expert interviews), and method of analysis (thematic analysis). In the analysis chapter, the analytical steps taken in accordance with the methodological guides are presented, which entails the description of specific themes derived from the interviews. These themes are then applied to approach the two research questions in the discussion chapter and situate the findings from the interviews within the theoretical framework. The rest of the thesis consists of a conclusion, biography and appendix, which includes relevant methodological preparational material.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Memory studies is a wide field that overlaps with other fields such as history and sociology, while also engaging adjacent areas such as transitional justice, heritage studies, literary studies. In this chapter, the applicability of the often-used terms collective memory and political memory will be discussed for the context of this thesis. Specifically, the concept of collective memory will be discussed in relation to the spatial aspect as physical space is a relevant factor to consider for the case study of Goli Otok. Furthermore, the connection between remembering and forgetting will be specifically explored in relation to the absence of commemoration of the victims of Goli Otok. In this first approach to these concepts, the applicability to the case study of Goli Otok will be taken into account – however, part of the research aim is to test the applicability of theoretical concepts to this specific case study, which means that it's not possible to say beforehand which concepts are fitting the case study and which ones not – this can only be an approximation.

### 2.1. Politics and Spaces of Collective Memory

The subject of this research concerns the absence of memory culture and commemorative practices that were implemented and initiated by the Croatian state and is therefore connected to **collective** and **political** memory. *Collective memory* was first coined by Maurice Halbwachs and since then re-interpreted numerous times. Halbwachs defined collective memory as the shared recollections of a group which is shaped by social frameworks such as family, religious communities, and institutions (Halbwachs 1980; Misztal 2003: 4). Unlike individual (or private) memory, collective memory is constructed through social interactions and is influenced by the needs of the group. According to Aleida Assmann, collective memory contains and summarises the individual memories and experiences of people belonging to a group, which can be applied to smaller social groups just as well as an entire nation (Assmann 2008: 51).

#### 2.1.1. Collective Memory and Space

If on one hand, collective memory focuses mostly on the relationship between individuals and a group, and on the other hand, it is the Croatian state whose inaction is under scrutiny in this thesis, why discuss collective memory at all? For the purposes of this work, the connection Habermas made between collective memory and physical locations (a spatial framework) is of specific importance: According to him, collective memory is spatially anchored, which means

that places and environments play a crucial role in preserving and triggering collective recollections. Most importantly, Halbwachs remarks that the relationship between a location and a group is a reciprocal one, namely that a “place and group have each received the imprint of the other” (Halbwachs 1980: 129). Although Halbwachs looks at this relationship in the context of everyday life and mostly in urban spaces, it can also be applied to extraordinary events that happen within this specific spatial framework and therefore influence both the community that lives in this space as well as the space itself (Halbwachs 1980: 129f).

Halbwachs was speaking both of the role of “place and group”. I want to expand on space within collective memory by referring firstly to Pierre Nora, and on the idea and role of a group and its memory by discussing Paul Connerton’s approach to *social memory*. When speaking of specific localities in the context of memory studies and especially in connection to collective memory, such as Halbwachs does, it is impossible not to mention Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de Mémoire* (“sites of memory”). In his works, Nora discusses the relationship between history and memory and argues that with the complex and evolving relationship of history and memory, (collective) memory doesn’t occur spontaneously anymore (Nora 1989: 8f.). In this context he introduced the concept of *Lieux de Mémoire* (“sites of memory”) to describe physical places, but also symbols, or events that are focal points for collective memory. Nora continues to remark upon the notion that there is no spontaneous memory anymore and that rather, memory has to be deliberately created and cultivated through the management and upkeep of archives, anniversaries or celebrations – all of which can be classified as *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989: 12). This element of deliberation can be seen as crucial to the central issue this thesis wants to tackle: In the case of Goli Otok, only few instances of “spontaneous” and deliberate memory exist – and the deliberate commemorative efforts have all been implemented by non-state actors.

Nora’s concept has been adapted and rephrased countless times not just by himself but by many different scholars that deal with collective memory. One of them is, for example, Milica Božić Marojević, who built her concept of *mesto buđenja savesti*<sup>6</sup> on Nora’s *Lieux de Mémoire* to examine how post-Yugoslav societies engage with their difficult and contested pasts when confronted with specific locations, such as memorial sites, former prison camps or

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<sup>6</sup> Božić Marojević translates the concept in her own work as “sites of conscience” – a more literal translation would be “sites of *awakening* conscience”.

execution sites, and how these locations serve as spaces that can either foster reconciliation or deepen historical divisions (Božić Marojević 2020: 115f).

To circle back to the initial connection made by Habermas between a spatial framework and the group that operates in it: Paul Connerton refers to Halbwachs as the person who first coined collective memory, but ultimately uses the term *social* memory instead of *collective* (without defining the reason for using a different terminology) in his work “How Societies remember” (Connerton 1989: 1; 36). However, since he refers often to the memory of a specific social group, it makes sense to use the term social memory, rather than the more broader term collective memory, when addressing a specific group. Connerton views social memory as a legitimising factor of a present social order, since social memory is a precondition to participating in the very same social order it legitimises (Connerton 1989: 3). He goes on to differentiate between social memory and a practice he calls “historical reconstruction”, which is essentially the act of actively tracing back human activities into the past. Historical reconstruction can be influenced by and, in turn, shape the memory of a specific social group. Connerton applies this to an extreme case, in which a state aims to systematically suppress, or rather erase, the memory of its citizens, mostly those belonging to a specific social group. This applies to totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, whose aim is to gain control over its citizens by suppressing any individual memory or the memory of a social group which could challenge a singular state narrative. To achieve this, a totalitarian or authoritarian power would make use of so-called *organised forgetting* (Connerton 1989: 14). Here it could be argued that under Socialist Yugoslavia, the state did in fact install an official narrative, which went hand in hand with depriving its citizens of their memory in the sense that the official narrative did not allow a plurality of memories to exist (or rather, to be discussed) publicly. Furthermore based on this, the victims of Goli Otok constitute a specific social group whose memory was in opposition to the official memory fostered by the Yugoslav state. While this point of view provides important foundational knowledge to understand social and collective memory, it is not the central focus of this thesis. Rather, what is more relevant in the context of this work, which focuses on a contemporary state perspective, is the interplay between collective and political memory.

#### 2.1.2. Collective and Political Memory

Aleida Assmann defines the two concepts of *political* and *cultural memory* as sub-concepts of *collective memory*: As such, cultural and political memory represent the parts of collective memory that shift away from a more subjective, personal experience and are in a long-term

perspective often institutionalised as “top-down memory”, which is more relevant for the purposes of this thesis (Assmann 2002: 25f.). Assmann defines three points that specifically apply to political memory: Firstly, political memory seeks to be presented in homogenous and homogenising narratives. Secondly, and based on the first point, political memory is usually translated into a clear and invigorating narrative that seeks to minimize plurality or different interpretations/memories. Thirdly, it always has to be based in something tangible – be that a something physical and/or visual like a monument, or a commemorative practice. In this sense, it could be argued that Assmann’s idea of political memory has to be rooted in what Nora understands as *lieux de mémoire*. Moreover, Assmann remarks that political memory (or rather those that propagate it), especially in its top-down form, has hegemonic aspirations, which is in alignment with the homogeneity Assmann assigns as inherent to political memory (Assmann 2002: 26f.).

When it comes to the specific relationship of collective memory and institutions, Jeffrey Olick makes one crucial point: Institutions are to some degree subjected to pressures that cannot arise from individual actions alone, which emphasises that even when focusing primarily on “the state” in an abstract sense, collective memory cannot be completely excluded from such a perspective because it does to some degree play a role in determining, or at least influencing the actions (or in this case, inaction) of the state (Olick 1999: 342).

## **2.2. Forgetting, Silence, Amnesia**

While one conceptualisation of forgetting was already introduced via Connerton’s interpretation of the function of social memory to operate both historical reconstruction as well as organised forgetting, other theoretical approaches to this specific area of memory studies will be discussed now. This work deals with the absence of a specific phenomenon, which can be seen as an opposition to (active) memory and remembering. The overarching research question has purposefully utilised the rather vague phrase “lack of interest” to avoid a premature labelling of the phenomena at hand. Therefore, specific conceptualisations that encompass a lack of something will be introduced so that the applicability of these theoretical concepts to the case study of Goli Otok can be assessed later on in the discussion. The following segments will identify potentially suitable sub-concepts of *Forgetting*, *Silence*, and *Amnesia*. At the end of each sub-chapter, their main characteristics will be summarised in a table.

### 2.2.1. Forgetting

Many scholars within memory studies have categorized *forgetting* as a natural by-product of remembrance – when choosing to remember one thing, it is inevitable that another thing will not be remembered, and therefore forgotten. However, forgetting can manifest in many different forms, most of which have been categorised through typologies of e.g., Aleida Assmann and Paul Connerton.

Assmann clarifies two things of fundamental importance: Firstly, that forgetting is, unlike remembering, the natural condition, meaning that forgetting is, first and foremost, something biological and inevitable (“automatic forgetting”). Secondly, there is no reason to devote more thought to remembering and less to forgetting (Assmann 2014). Generally, most types of forgetting operate on a personal level. Connerton’s (2008) types entitled *structural amnesia*, *forgetting as annulment*, *forgetting as planned obsolescence* and *forgetting as humiliated silence* are additionally based on societal or structural issues that all define to varying degrees the role forgetting plays within society and the individual. He describes in his typology different types of forgetting that should make the present conditions more pleasant and the future easier to grapple with. He furthermore differentiates two types that pose as two sides of the same coin, with forgetting being either induced through too little or too much information (*structural amnesia* / *forgetting as annulment*). Of bigger relevance for this thesis are, however, the first two types introduced in Connerton’s typology, *repressive erasure* and *prescriptive forgetting*, as they are both defined as forms of forgetting directed or imposed by the state.

Within Assmann’s typology, some overlap can be found with Connerton. For example, one similarity between Assmann’s type *damnatio memoriae – repressive forms of forgetting* is the issue of repressiveness, which is also covered in Connerton’s type *repressive erasure*. The two types do differ from each other somewhat, as Assmann’s interpretation clearly emphasises the overt role of political repression, and even links the structural mechanisms of the patriarchy to this type of forgetting (Assmann 2014), while Connerton argues, contrary to Assmann, that repressive erasure doesn’t always have to be malign (Connerton 2008: 60f.). Another striking overlap can be found between Assmann’s type *constructive forgetting – tabula rasa for a new political biographical beginning*, and Connerton’s type *prescriptive forgetting*, which reflects to some extent what Assmann has called *tabula rasa*, and *forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity*, which observes similar functions of forgetting but locates them on

a more personal level. Some of these typologies could potentially be applied to this case study, as they are induced by the attitude of the state, as defined by either “forgetting as a new political biographical beginning” (Assmann 2014), or “prescriptive forgetting”. They usually accompany political change and supposedly have a uniting function that ensures a smooth transition from one government or even regime to another (Connerton 2008: 60f.).

Another way to look at forgetting is defined by W. Hirst and A. Coman, who approach forgetting as a necessity to build a collective memory. Their main argument is that selective remembering through active communication between individuals might lead to *collective selective forgetting*. This means that, for example, the speakers of the same group, while communicating about something they collectively (want to) remember, will remember the one thing in favour of another, which induces forgetting of the other thing. Hirst and Coman call this specific way of forgetting “selective retrieval-induced forgetting”, meaning that the retrieval of one memory induces the forgetting of another (Hirst and Coman 2018: 89f.). This seems to be a relevant approach in connection to Goli Otok, especially in the context of the fragmented “memoryscape” (Pavlaković 2020) across the post-war former Yugoslav countries and societies after the wars of the 1990s and the struggle that goes into creating/facilitating a shared/collective memory culture and the many attacks/contestations each narrative is exposed to, the principle of “selective retrieval-induced forgetting” comes into play, meaning that while retrieving (with a lot of effort) and trying to sustain memories and commemoration of the wars and especially defending these memories from attacks, the forgetting of another memory, meaning that of Goli Otok, is induced. Especially since this memory has been already covered by a veil of silence.

<b>Sub-Concept of Forgetting</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Key Points</b>
Automatic Forgetting	Assmann (2014)	General	Natural condition, inevitable and foundational
Damnatio memoriae	Assmann (2014)	Political	Political repression of memory, intentional, structural
Repressive erasure	Connerton (2008)	Political	State-driven forgetting; not always malign
Prescriptive forgetting	Connerton (2008)	Political	Strategic forgetting to support regime change, support national unity

Constructive forgetting	Assmann (2014)	Political, Societal	“Tabula rasa”, political or biographical renewal
Selective forgetting	Assmann (2014)	Societal	Forgetting through neglect, oversight, or ignorance; not necessarily malicious.
Planned obsolescence / Annulment	Connerton (2008)	Individual, Societal	Forgetting outdated knowledge to make way for new societal conditions.
Structural Amnesia / Forgetting as Annulment	Connerton (2008)	Societal	Forgetting due to overload or absence of information
Selective retrieval-induced forgetting	Hirst & Coman (2018)	Societal, Collective	Retrieval of one memory induces the forgetting of another

### 2.2.2. Silence

But what if the lack of interest is less about forgetting something and rather about keeping (someone) silent? Jay Winter, for example, gives the following definition of silence: “Silence [...] is a socially constructed space in which and about which subjects and words normally used in everyday life are not spoken” (Winter 2010: 4). His definition is situated within the context of war and violence, two things usually accompanied by silence. He accordingly speaks of three impulses behind silence, namely a liturgical one that includes sacred themes of loss, a political one that strategically hopes to put an end to (social) conflicts or the aftermath of wars, and lastly an essentialist one, which stems from a place of privilege and the issue of who is “allowed” to talk about an experience and who is not. Similarly, the issue of silence is found in Connerton’s typology as *forgetting as humiliated silence*. This specific type of silence stems from humiliation and a feeling of “collective shame”, which often settles in e.g., around events of mass violence (Connerton 2008: 67f.). Furthermore, Winter sees silence as a cultural practice that reflects on who perpetuates and who breaks silence within a society and for what reasons. One of the aspects of silence as a cultural practice is what he calls *commemorative silences*. This aspect can also be found with the aforementioned Hirst and Coman and is exemplified by Winter through the lens of war, and how framing the remembrance of war into a positive memory inevitably leads to the silencing of the negative sides of war. Silence is usually discussed as a cultural and less so political practice, which is especially prevalent in a context of war or systematic violence. The traumata of the camp’s victims as a result to the structural

repression and violence would, according to J. Winter, therefore foster silence on the issue within society (Winter 2010: 4f.).

To summarise, silence can, on one hand, be produced by the victims themselves, for example as a result of shame or to forget/overcome their traumatic experiences, which hinders them from speaking up about their experiences. On the other hand, silence isn't necessarily produced by the victims themselves but rather a result of being silenced, either by society as a whole, or by specific political or societal mechanisms that seek to prevent these lived experiences from becoming a part of collective memory. Often, there will be a reciprocal interaction between these two sources of silence. Lastly, V. Vinitzky-Seroussi and C. Teeger provide further theoretical input specifically on the ways silencing can induce forgetting and how both silencing and amnesia are part of collective forgetting. Their main argument touches upon notions already mentioned previously, namely that "silence can [...] be used to facilitate recollection, while talk can be used to enhance amnesia" (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010: 1104).

<b>Sub-Concept of Silence</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Commemorative silence	Winter (2010)	Political, Societal	Positive framing of memory (e.g., of war) silences its negative aspects
Humiliated silence	Connerton (2008)	Societal	Forgetting driven by shame, often after mass violence or trauma
Silencing in collective forgetting	Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger (2010)	Societal, Collective	Silence aids memory, talking promotes forgetting (amnesia)

### 2.2.3. Amnesia

Although amnesia was touched upon by Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger already, there is a reason as to why it is discussed separately. While there is ample theoretical discussion on the broader concept of forgetting, and its many sub-concepts, the lack of a sufficient definition of amnesia as a concept becomes apparent while reviewing the majority of the literature within this niche of memory studies. The term *amnesia* is mentioned and discussed less frequently than forgetting or silencing, and a clear outline of the concept is hard to be found. Moreover, many

authors conflate the terms of *amnesia* (meaning conventionally loss of memory) and *amnesty* (understood usually as state-granted pardon). Therefore, it is hard to discern what kind of amnesia is implied when used within works that deal with forgetting – would it be politically motivated amnesia, amnesia in the sense of a biological issue or even illness, or are there other, entirely different underlying factors to this concept? On top of this, the question of how amnesia is to be integrated into the concept of forgetting arises. Is amnesia perhaps subordinated under the “umbrella” concept of forgetting, or it a stand-alone phenomenon?

Assmann’s description of her third type of forgetting, *selective forgetting*, entails an important remark, that could be the foundation of an approximation of amnesia. There she mentions: “All processes of remembering include various shades of forgetting such as neglecting, overlooking, ignoring” (Assmann 2014), meaning that neglect and ignorance do not necessarily stem from harmful intensions but can rather become a by-product of remembrance (through remembrance of another thing). This thought, also articulated by Hirst and Coman or Winter, can only point in the direction of what might be understood under amnesia, but is by no means a sufficient explanation. She furthermore connects amnesia with complicit silence of political players and situates it in the context of crumbling regimes with the effect of protecting perpetrators (Assmann 2014).

A definition that grasps the concept so far most clearly is the following by J. Winter: Amnesia is a “legal remedy providing a way in which societies wrestling with intractable political and social conflicts can draw an arbitrary line separating when legal and other grievances were pursued and a now when, in the interest of the collective, no further reckoning is permitted” (Winter 2010: 18). Whether this definition, which is rooted in a legal understanding, is actually applicable to the case of Goli Otok is up for debate; however, it could be useful in the sense that it connects silence to the agency of the state. Furthermore, as it is always the case in situations in which people have been unjustly incarcerated, the focus on the victims is important just as much as the question of who the perpetrators were. In the case of Goli Otok, where the incarcerated people often found themselves both to be a victim in the broader sense of a person that was unjustly incarcerated due to their political beliefs or affiliation with other dissidents meaning victim of an authoritarian system, in a more acute way victim in the sense that they were subjected to violence but could simultaneously also become the perpetrators who subjected their fellow inmates to violence (Previšić 2019a: 144–162, 239f.). Here, the aforementioned legal dimension of amnesia could be applied in a context that allows perpetrators (both those that were appointed by/acting on behalf of the state as well as

those that unwillingly found themselves both in the role of victim and perpetrator) to move on from this chapter of their past. However, legal amnesia, put into place to protect perpetrators, is for the Croatian state of today, almost 70 years after the usage of the political prison on Goli Otok was discontinued.

Connerton mentions amnesia in his type four – *structural amnesia*. Here, however, he does not work towards a definition of what amnesia, and specifically structural amnesia in comparison to other (also undefined) types of amnesia, might be (Connerton 2008: 64). The term amnesia is employed here without any reflection on *why* specifically it was used instead of other terms like, e.g., silencing like Winter did. Unlike Connerton, Winter actually made an effort to approach the term *amnesia* conceptually, instead of just using the term without any further clarification. He states that amnesia is not synonymous with merely forgetting something, and defines it as a “legal remedy providing a way in which societies wrestling with intractable political and social conflicts can draw an arbitrary line separating when legal and other grievances were pursued and a now when, in the interest of the collective, no further reckoning is permitted” (Winter 2010: 18). This legal dimension is most obviously visible in the act of pardoning criminals and granting them amnesia for their crimes. This can, in turn, be applied to crimes that took place on a larger societal scale, e.g., genocides, and which want to be ignored and overlooked to facilitate a unity or form a collective identity, which doesn’t allow the space to identify as predators amongst more positive things. Assmann provided a similar thought with her type *defensive and complicit forgetting (protection of perpetrators)*. Apart from the role complicit silence plays in protecting perpetrators, she also specifically situates amnesia in the context of crumbling regimes that are trying to cover up their crimes by getting rid of all incriminating evidence (Assmann 2014).

<b>Sub-Concept of Amnesia</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Legal/political amnesia	Winter (2010)	Legal	Societal boundary between past accountability and present
Complicit silence	Assmann (2014)	Political	Political silence used to shield perpetrators and obscure regime crimes

Structural amnesia	Connerton (2008)	Personal	Forgetting things of little social importance
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To summarise, one of the most important notions that was voiced by many of the quoted authors was that forgetting (and in some instance silence as well) must be seen as connected to remembrance in a broader sense, and that more often than not, forgetting doesn't have to be a thing induced through repression, but is just a more or less natural by-product prioritising to remember something else instead.

### 2.3. Memory Regime

The overarching research question – *Why does the Croatian state display such a lack of interest towards the remembrance of the camp Goli Otok and its victims?* – clearly centres the Croatian state. But who or what is referred to with the term “the Croatian state”? In short, “the Croatian state” includes state institutions (such as e.g., ministries of education, culture, ...) as well as state actors (individual politicians, political parties, members of ministries, the state apparatus as a whole). Kubik and Bernhard use the term **memory regime** to denote “a set of cultural and institutional practices that are designed to publicly commemorate and/or remember a single event, a relatively clearly delineated and interrelated set of events, or a distinguishable past process.” (Kubik and Bernhard 2014: 14). While Kubik and Bernhard make further differentiations on memory regimes, they mostly focus on *official* memory regimes, whose development and upkeep heavily depends on the participation of state institutions and/or political society. This angle is particularly relevant for this thesis, as it focuses on actions taken by state actors to produce and shape an official memory regime – in regard to the case study of Goli Otok, the almost complete absence of an official memory regime can be attested a priori due to the lack of state-led initiatives. Furthermore, Kubik & Bernhard differentiate between four types of the aforementioned *mnemonic actors*: (1) *mnemonic warriors*, who advocate for a singular, incontestable narrative of history and reject alternative interpretations; (2) *mnemonic pluralists*, who respect diverse historical narratives and encourage multiple perspectives; (3) *mnemonic abnegators*, who show indifference toward memory politics or avoid engagement due to potential accountability for past events, and lastly (4) *mnemonic prospectives*, who promote a forward-looking vision to build a better future while challenging existing historical interpretations (Kubik and Bernhard 2014: 14-16).

In this case, the Croatian state is not so easily labelled as one specific mnemonic actor, however, label (1) – mnemonic warrior and (3) – mnemonic abnegator both seem suitable. In a broader sense, and specifically in the context of the creation of the Croatian state during and after the breakup of Yugoslavia, the label of mnemonic warrior is suitable to describe Croatian state actors especially with regards to the revisionist efforts to re-interpret Croatian contemporary history in the context of the creation of Croatian nationhood that took place under the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman (1990-1999).<sup>7</sup> In a more narrow sense that is focused specifically on the actions, or rather the inaction of the Croatian state in relation to the case study of Goli Otok, the third label of a mnemonic abnegator seems much more suitable.

Most scholarship in memory studies engages with canonical figures such as Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Aleida Assmann – this thesis is no exception. The reference to these authors was not made to merely restate already established arguments, but rather reflects the foundational significance of their contributions, which continue to shape our understanding of memory. While the first segment therefore served as the broader fundament for this thesis to understand how societies (and in the case of this thesis states) construct and negotiate collective memory, the second and third part of this chapter provided the more precise theoretical framework necessary to address the research questions of this study later on during the discussion.

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<sup>7</sup> For the role of historical revisionism in Croatia see e.g., Goldstein & Goldstein 2002, Marijan 2019, Kasapović 2019.

### 3. Mnemohistorical State of the Field

This chapter reviews existing scholarship and cultural production on the case study in connection within the broader context of Croatian memory politics. This combination is rooted in Jan Assmann's concept of mnemohistory (*Gedächtnisgeschichte*) which emphasises not only the historical events themselves but also the ways in which they have been remembered, interpreted, and reconfigured across time. Rather than treating history as a fixed account of the past, *mnemohistory* focuses on the dynamics of remembrance and forgetting, as well as the narratives that continue to shape collective understandings of contested events (Assmann 1992). This perspective provides a useful lens for the present study, since only limited scholarly and other public attention has been devoted to Goli Otok.<sup>8</sup> The first part includes an overview of the limited but significant publications that address the topic, while the second situates these within Croatia's memory politics, marked by selective commemoration and silence. Together, this provides an overview of current research and representation while laying the groundwork for the thesis's methodological approach to collective and political memory.

#### 3.1. Literature Review

While some significant academic works have been published ever since the topic of Goli Otok gained more traction in the public interest during the 1980s after Tito's death, there are more individual papers dealing with Goli Otok than monographs entirely devoted to the island. The academic work published so far takes up a few different perspectives on Goli Otok, for example by examining the first attempts at a public discussion of the traumata endured on Goli Otok through so-called "Camp Literature". Others approach the prison system on the basis of the crimes against humanity that were committed there, including torture, starvation and forced labour. Another, relatively new angle on the topic centres the island itself through the lens of environmental history. Lastly and most importantly, there are a few publications that closely work with archival material. Generally, the academic works are based on three different kinds of sources: archival documents, autobiographic camp literature of former inmates, and oral

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<sup>8</sup> This is exemplified by the fact that one of the most comprehensive publications on Memory Culture in Croatia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pavlaković and Pauković 2019) does not mention Goli Otok even once.

history interviews, either with survivors or people local to the Croatian coast and neighbouring islands.

One of the first academic papers dealing with Goli Otok was published seven years after Tito's death in 1987 by Oskar Gruenwald, who wrote about Yugoslav camp literature analogue to Soviet Gulag camp literature. His paper was published during a time in which the Yugoslav press had slowly but surely started to publicly discuss flaws and failures of Tito's rule (Gruenwald 1987: 514). Yugoslav camp literature essentially encompasses the (often autobiographical) works of former inmates of Goli Otok. The term can also be extended to other Yugoslav authors who brushed upon the issue of Goli Otok as a synonym for political prison culture in Yugoslavia. According to Gruenwald, the first significant autobiographical work that opened up about the traumatic experiences endured on Goli Otok was published in 1981 by Slovenian Branko Hoffman, which sparked a first wave of public interest in Goli Otok (Gruenwald 1987: 519). From Gruenwald's perspective in 1987, the most important function of the camp literature was then to kindle the focus of the conversation on dissidents and human rights issues in Yugoslavia, while simultaneously trying to lift the silence surrounding the prison camp (Gruenwald 1987: 526f.). Another, more recent example of an academic work that deals with the taboo surrounding the political prison on Goli Otok in literature is Tatjana Đurišić-Bečanović's analysis of two narrative texts by Yugoslav writers Dragoslav Mihailović and Mirko Kovač. This paper is a good example of illustrating how the so-called camp literature was able to address the taboo and amnesia surrounding Goli Otok relatively early on, while highlighting the effects silence has on these memories in the form of self-censorship (Đurišić-Bečanović 2022: 60-64).

Still in the context of camp literature, Polish literary scholar Katarzyna Taczyńska highlights specifically the experience of women on Goli Otok, who were often incarcerated just by association with male political dissidents or Cominform supporters (such as their husbands or brothers; Taczyńska 2019: 269). She does so by examining the strategies of storytelling employed by female prisoners in their autobiographical publications. While all victims of the prison camp suffered from the silence surrounding Goli Otok, Taczyńska assesses that the experiences of women were even more neglected – only with the exception of a documentary film released in 1989 called *Goli život* (Bare Life), which was produced by famous Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš, who focused solely on the female perspective on Goli Otok by including testimonies of two women who survived the dire conditions and torture on the camp (Taczyńska 2019: 269f.). In another, earlier paper, Taczyńska advances into the field of memory studies by

analysing the documentary film *Goli*, published in 2014, which aimed at confronting both the silence of the survivors and society as a whole (Taczyńska 2017: 148). According to Taczyńska, the emerging cultural and artistic products dealing both with Goli Otok overall and the female perspective specifically, were soon put on a definite halt due to the Yugoslav wars (Taczyńska 2019: 269).

Not only autobiographic literature was released during the 1980s: In 1986, an early monography was published on Goli Otok by Milivoj Marković, which analysed the perception of Goli Otok in Yugoslav literature. The already mentioned Đurišić-Bečanović remarks on the state of historiography of Goli Otok that Martin Previšić is the only author apart from Marković to devote a full monography to the island and its prison (Đurišić-Bečanović 2022: 56). This is not entirely correct, as cultural anthropologist Božidar Jezernik published his book on Goli Otok in 2013. Even historian Ivo Banac devoted a chapter of his book “With Stalin against Tito” to Goli Otok (“The Marble Isle”). Notably, both Banac and Jezernik employ the thesis of “Stalinist Anti-Stalinism” to interpret the political and social mechanisms that created Goli Otok (Banac 1988: 244f.; Jezernik 2013: 12-14).

The monography of historian Martin Previšić (2019a) is, so far, the most significant publication on Goli Otok as it is the most extensive work on the topic. Based on a plethora of archival material, most of which was previously not analysed by historians or other researchers, Previšić depicts a comprehensive and structural history of the prison camp, starting with the political context of the Tito-Stalin split, including a discussion of the character of Yugoslav supporters of the Cominform, who would become the predominant victims of the incarceration. He then recounts the path and methods of incarceration, from the process of apprehension to the journey onto the island and the struggles people faced when first arriving there. Then, over several chapters, he goes into details about the organisation of the camp, the struggle of everyday life for the inmates and the specifics of the “re-education” and forced labour. Further chapters are dedicated to death and illnesses, but also to a sort of cultural life that developed on the island as well as the developments of inmates lives after their release.

Another article that employs archival material, which was made accessible after the archives of the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) were opened to the public, is Srđan Cvetković, who provides statistical data on the inmates of Goli Otok to approximate the background of the victims (Cvetković 2019: 91-99). Momčilo Mitrović does a deep-dive into a specific source material in a similar fashion to Cvetković, with the aim to bring more clarity to the question of

how many people actually died on the island during the time of their incarceration. Mitrović processes the contents of a notebook that contained the names of people who died on Goli Otok between 1949 and 1952 and which was allegedly employed by Aleksandar Ranković, head of the secret police (Mitrović 2013: 289f.)

An additional perspective on Goli Otok was introduced by Milica Prokić, who analysed the prison island from the angle of environmental history. By focusing on the natural elements that contributed to the hardships prisoners were faced with, she recounts the journey of the prisoners to the island and describes how the natural conditions utilised by the prison administration contributed to the dehumanisation of the prisoners (Prokić 2014: 136). She situates a second paper not solely in the context of environmental history but within the scholarly research on “carceral archipelago” and “carceral geographies”, the research on the interconnectivity and simultaneous isolation of prison systems. The geographical aspect plays into her earlier research through an environmental lens, since it emphasises the intricacies of the prison-island that is Goli Otok. This intersection between the structural isolatory nature of prison camps and the “natural” isolation of an island is, according to Prokić, a promising analytical category. She explores this potential by discussing the specific immobility of prisoners incarcerated on an island, while simultaneously the limestone the inmates had to produce as part of their “rehabilitation” developed a great mobility due to its export abroad (Prokić 2023: 721–723). In both papers, Prokić emphasises the change the island underwent: The first generation of political prisoners arrived to a completely different environment on the island, barren, inhospitable, made up mostly of limestone with few vegetation, whereas the island as it is today underwent significant changes, not least due to the presence of the prisoners (Prokić 2023: 722). Having conducted several Oral History interviews surrounding the memory of Goli Otok, Prokić furthermore explains how unreliable the memory of the individual tends to be (which is generally true for any kind of Oral History project). Specifically in the case of Goli Otok, the decades of silence of most inmates and their advanced age when they finally open up about their experiences caused many of her interviewees to doubt their own memory and experiences (Prokić 2014: 138).

### 3.2. Contextualisation – Memory Politics in Croatia

The current state of memory culture and politics of memory in the successor states of Yugoslavia, and specifically Croatia, is a complex field which centres around two focal points with very different characteristics: The Second World War and the Yugoslav Wars of Succession in the 1990s. Therefore, the discourse is grounded in post-war memory politics, which is still the most prevalent discourse related to memory and commemoration in most of the former Yugoslav republics. The reason for this is rooted in the fact that the creation both of socialist Yugoslavia as well as its successor states were closely intertwined with the aforementioned wars, which makes the memory of these two wars specifically an effective tool in the strategy of nation-building across the region (Hoepken 1999: 191f.).

During Socialist Yugoslavia, the memory of the Second World War was instrumental for the narrative of a unified Yugoslav identity grounded in anti-fascism and partisan victory. The collective memory was as such strongly institutionalised and based on official narratives defined by the state, which was visible given the amount of literary and scholarly works, cultural productions such as movies,<sup>9</sup> museums, monuments<sup>10</sup>, official holidays and commemorations as well as veteran organisations dedicated to the memory of the war (Hoepken 1999: 196f.). This left little room for the various, and often starkly contrasting individual memories as well as collective memories of smaller groups whose experiences differed from the official memory, perhaps due to ideological affiliations.

Not only did the wars of the 1990s bring about a completely new, so-called “memoriescape”, they also radically changed the commemoration of the Second World War across the region (Pavlaković 2020: 12). This was most clearly visible during the first years of

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the best-known Yugoslav movie productions are partisan movies, such as *Bitka na Neretvi* (Battle of Neretva, 1969), *Most* (The Bridge, 1969) or *Valter brani Sarajevo* (Walter defends Sarajevo, 1972). See e.g., Vranješ, Aleksandar. 2008. „Partizanski film kao sredstvo političke propagande“ [Partisan Movie as a Medium of Political Propaganda], *CM Komunikacije i Medije* 3/6: 101–115.; Horton, Andrew. 1987. “The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Partisan Film: Cinematic Perceptions of a National Identity.” *Film Criticism* 12/2: 18–27; Radović, Mina. 2021. “‘Das ist Walter’: The Evolving Figure of the Archetypal Hero Embodied by Velimir Bata Živojinović in the Yugoslav War Film’, *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*: 1–18.

<sup>10</sup> The monuments dedicated to the memory of the Second World War in Socialist Yugoslavia were created in a distinct brutalist style and are still of great cultural relevance across all post-Yugoslav states, see e.g.: Horvatinčić, Sanja. 2015. “Spomenik, teritorij i medijacija ratnog sjećanja u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji.” *Život umjetnosti* 96: 6–21; Putnik Prica, Vladana, Lajbenšperger, Nenad. 2018. “On the Wings of Modernity: WWII Memorials in Yugoslavia.” *Docomomo Journal* 59: 60–65.

post-communist transition in the former Yugoslav states, during which an ideological struggle between emerging regimes and their alternatives in the area of memory politics unfolded. In areas most impacted by the 1990–1995 conflict, the discourse was, according to Dejan Jović, distinctly anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav but, at the same time also lacked liberal democratic characteristics. This meant that the new state actors sought to maintain and control a centralized concept of “official memory”, which is usually a common element only in authoritarian regimes. This production of official memory not only re-interpreted the events of the Second World War and the way they should be remembered, but cleverly utilised the concept of forgetting to stabilise their official narratives. Jović stresses that this specific usage of ideology for legitimisation mirrored the strategies employed by Yugoslav Communists following the Second World War (Jović 2004: 102f.).

This trend was, however, also present in 1990s Croatia, as the creation of a narrative of Croatian statehood strongly reframed the Yugoslav experience and legacy as a whole. Therefore, Croatia is a good case study to see the effect of historical revisionism on memory culture: Especially in the years after the EU accession, no official commemorative act remained uncontested, but rather sparked protests, counter-commemoration, and political debates that even contributed to alienating Croatia’s neighbours. Two examples here would be the commemoration of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp as one of the most prominent cases of the brutalities of the Ustaše (Croatian Fascists who constructed the Independent State of Croatia – NDH, 1941–1945), and the so-called Bleiburg Massacres, which are interpreted as a prominent case of violence on behalf of communists and communist partisans towards the end of the Second World War. Essentially, the Jasenovac Concentration Camp exemplifies the political manipulation of victims of fascism in the region, while the Bleiburg commemoration can serve as one of the clearest examples of the rebranding of fascist collaborators as anti-communist patriots (Pavlaković 2020: 15f., 18). But it is not just events that are subject to a re-interpretation and revisionism, it is also individuals who were once, under the official memory politics of Socialist Yugoslavia, considered to be “enemies of the people” that were now during the 1990s pardoned in the official narrative and even turned into heroes. This “rehabilitation of the past” was a vital, constitutive process for the nation-building of the post-Yugoslav states. Furthermore, Jović assesses that this endeavour would have never been so successful, had it not “landed on the blank sheet of official memories, produced by the chaos and anarchy in the last days of the old regime” (Jović 2004: 99f.).

Generally, two trends can be observed in the shaping of memory politics across the region: Firstly, both in connection to the Second World War and the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, most countries engage to some degree in a form of competitive victimization, striving to depict both the Yugoslav state and its collapse as particularly harmful to their own ethnic group. Secondly, each nation has undertaken extensive memorialization efforts and projects to further stabilize their official narrative of the past. In the cases of Croatia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, even more extensive “memoryscapes” focusing on the wars of the 1990s emerged. Notably, it is again specifically Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Serbia that experienced the biggest rupture in their memorialization of the 1990s, which means that the dissolution of Yugoslavia still is a constantly present factor in politics (Pavlaković 2020: 22f.). Pavlaković connects the higher degree of historical revisionism and contested commemorative practices or “memoryscapes” in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to firstly, a greater presence of ethnonational divisions that trump ideological ones and secondly, higher levels of violence experienced by the Bosnian, Croatian and Serb population during the breakup of Yugoslavia (Pavlaković 2020: 15). Although the region’s political elites have largely based their legitimacy on rejecting the shared Yugoslav state and its official memory politics, they have simultaneously facilitated the development of new narratives through symbolic nation-building strategies. These strategies selectively draw on the past to create new narratives that are ultimately equally problematic memory frameworks to those they initially aimed to dismantle (Pavlaković 2020: 11). Either way, these new “memoryscapes” are largely centring on and defined by post-war memorialisation, which also applied to some degree already on the period between the two major defining wars of Socialist Yugoslavia and its official memory politics, since these narratives heavily employed the triumph over fascism in war, partisans and Tito generally, but also specifically as a military leader (Karge 2009: 50f.). Goli Otok, curiously, lies at the intersection of the new “memoryscapes” and the old official Socialist narratives in a sense that it is absent in both cases. It is not surprising that the memory of political prisoners was not present in the official narrative of the very regime that imprisoned them. However, from the point of view of contemporary memory culture, it is quite striking just how absent Goli Otok is from public discourse and memory culture in the sense that it is not even present enough to produce a revisionist, contestable commemorative narrative about it.

## 4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework of the study and details both the data collection and subsequent analysis. The primary data source consists of expert interviews as they provide a thorough and detailed understanding of contemporary interpretations and memory practices related to the case study. The first section describes the means of data collection, including the definition of experts and interviewee groups, interview preparation and topics, and ethical considerations and limitations. The second section presents the means of data analysis, explaining the use of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns across the data. Together, these sections establish the transparency and ethical grounding of the study.

### **4.1. Means of Data Collection – Expert Interviews**

To analyse the almost complete lack of commemoration and the disinterest of the state, the method of expert interviews will be utilised, which is defined as “a qualitative semi-structured or open interview with a person holding ‘expert knowledge’” (Van Audenhove and Donders 2019: 179), which allows for a more flexible conversation to adjust the interview to suit the expert's assessments and experiences. Van Audenhove and Donders propose concrete methodological steps to be taken before an expert interview: 1) gather information on the topic of expertise, 2) identify and approach experts suitable for the project, and 3) prepare the interview in terms of content (prepare open-ended questions) and technicality (location, recording) (Van Audenhove and Donders 2019: 188-193)

#### 4.1.1. Definition of Experts – Different Groups of Interviewees

Potential interview partners were classified as experts based on their professional experience which connects them to Goli Otok, memory culture in general and specifically the memory culture surrounding Goli Otok. This means that they were interviewed solely about their professional experience and opinions they formulated over the course of their career, which they often also shared previously in public in their capacity as experts. Since the research question asks about a phenomena which is by its nature less tangible than e.g., an official commemorative act that is contested in some way or other, the data collection via the method of expert interviews is the most suitable to approach potential answers to the research question. Notably, the product of this work can never be a definite answer but should rather critically

reflect on the multitude of factors that constitute this particular situation. Therefore, in the course of analysing the interviews, common lines of arguments are to be worked out by utilising the method of thematic analysis, which enables the researcher to discuss potential approaches from different perspectives to answer the research questions.

Five expert groups were initially identified:<sup>11</sup> (1) academics researching Goli Otok and memory culture, (2) artists engaging with Goli Otok through creative projects, (3) journalists covering commemoration attempts, (4) NGO members working on remembrance culture, and (5) institutional representatives, e.g., from Lopar municipality, whose perspectives (if accessible) illuminate state and political attitudes. Based on this classification, the initial research design aimed for a minimum of five (5), but not more than eight (8) interviews to be conducted to include a diversity of opinions and assessments. Since some overlap between the categories might occur in the sense that one expert can be considered to fit into more categories, the maximum number of participants shouldn't exceed eight different people. Given that the output on Goli Otok is not exceedingly high, only few people specialise on Goli Otok, either from an academic, activist, or artistic perspective. In total, fourteen potential experts were identified. Out of those, eleven had publicly accessible contact information (such as a personal website, institutional affiliation etc.) and were contacted, including three historians, two people working for NGOs that supported projects related to Goli Otok, one artist, two photographers (one of which also being a documentary filmmaker), and three journalists. All three historians agreed to be interviewed, as well as one of the two contacted NGO representatives, one political scientist who also reports for media across the Balkans (journalist), and an artist. Moreover, I contacted the municipalities of Lopar and Rab via email and later by telephone as these are the municipalities in the nearest vicinity of Goli Otok. However, I was unsuccessful in recruiting an interview partner that would represent a local institutional perspective. Therefore, a total of six interviews were conducted:

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<sup>11</sup> For a more thorough definition of interviewee-groups see the list in the appendix.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Type of Expert</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Date</b>
Martin Previšić	Expert Historian on Goli Otok	47min	27.05.2025
Boris Stamenić	Academic, formerly NGO Documenta Zagreb (project on Goli Otok together with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Zagreb)	41min	28.05.2025
Milica Prokić	Art-Historian; Environmental History, Oral History surrounding Goli Otok	1h6min	11.06.2025
Sven Milekić	Journalist, Political Scientist	43min	16.06.2025
Stefan Gužvica	Historian (History of Communism, focus Balkans)	1h13min	18.06.2025
Andreja Kulunčić <sup>12</sup>	Artist, Project on Goli Otok: “You betrayed the party just when you should have helped it” <sup>13</sup>	39min	17.07.2025

#### 4.1.2. Preparation of Interviews – Topics

An important step in the preparation of any expert interview is, as indicated above, the evaluation of certain thematical areas to be explored during the interviews. Several broad thematical areas with sub-questions have been identified to help answer the research questions.<sup>14</sup> These thematical areas include, for example, the current state of memory culture in Croatia, which includes the interplay of collective and institutionalised memory, public and official memory not just in connection to Goli Otok, but in a more general sense. Furthermore, the interactions with the island itself were touched upon, which included a broader assessment of touristic developments, artistic interventions, photography projects, documentaries, but also the lack of safeguarding of the remaining structures of the deserted prison on the island as well

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<sup>12</sup> While Kulunčić consented to being interviewed and her interview being used to inform the analytical part of this work, she did not consent to being quoted verbatim. Her opinions were largely overlapping with those of other experts, and most information related to her project is publicly available, too.

<sup>13</sup> Vi ste Partiju izdale onda kada je trebalo da joj pomognete. Interdisciplinary art project centering the experiences of female prisoners on Goli Otok and Sveti Grgur. Project Homepage: <https://www.zene-arhipelag-goli.info/> (last accessed 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> See the extensive list of questions per topic attached in the appendix. Which of these topics was discussed more or less in-depth depended on the individual expertise and experience of the expert. Note that these topics weren't discussed in the order they are listed – depending on the expertise of the individual expert, some topics were more suitable to start the interview with than others.

as controversial ideas of repurposing (parts of) the island.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the few visits of state officials to the island, mostly in the context of the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes, were discussed. One crucial set of questions sought to define the attitude of the Croatian state, which aimed at answering the first research question by ascertaining whether there is “merely” a lack of interest on behalf of state institutions and state actors or a palpable tendency to obstruct commemorative efforts. The core focus of each interview, however, lay on discussing potential reasons for a lack of memory culture, which included discussing the profile of the people incarcerated, which are commonly believed to have been Stalinists, however, the people incarcerated on the Goli Otok prison complex (including the neighbouring island Sveti Grgur) are more heterogenous than commonly believed, which is why other factors such as the ideology, the ethno-religious make-up of the prisoners and gender were explored (Cvetković 2019: 91–99). The experts were furthermore asked to elaborate on the role of the wars of the 1990s in not just in opening a new mnemonic landscape, but also abruptly interrupting the beginnings of a more open discussion and even first steps of remembrance of the victims of Goli Otok.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.1.3. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Although expert interviews pose fewer ethical challenges than interviews with private individuals or marginalised groups, there are some important ethical considerations to be addressed. Prior to contacting potential interviewees, the researcher applied for and obtained ethical approval for the research project by the *Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects* by the University of Glasgow. This process ensured that all phases of the research, including the preparation of the interviews, the initial contact, the interviews themselves as well as the data analysis were carried out in strict compliance with the ethical guidelines as assessed by the Ethics Committee.

A core focus of the ethical process was ensuring the protection of participants’ personal data and securing their informed consent. Each participant received detailed information beforehand, including a *Participant Information Sheet* (plain language statement) which

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<sup>15</sup> See amongst others: Lukić 2014; Zebić 2014.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g., the emergence and publication of autobiographical “camp literature” in the 1980s: Gruenwald (1987), 514-516; Like literature, other cultural and artistic productions, such as documentaries, came to a sharp halt due to the Yugoslav wars.

outlines the research aims, the structure and scope of the interview. In addition, a *Privacy Notice* was provided, detailing what kind of personal data would be collected, how it would be stored and processed, and who would have access to it. Written consent was obtained from all participants. This included consent to the use of the contents of the interview for analytical purposes, including verbatim quotes to support the analysis, as well as consent to their names being included in the research. The option to provide some degree of anonymity by using either a pseudonym or no name at all was offered to participants should they not consent to being named in the project. However, this was not required as all participants consented to be named.

Participants were selected exclusively on the basis of their professional expertise. The interviews were conducted solely on topics related to their expertise and professional experiences. Nonetheless, it was anticipated that some participants might have a personal connection to the subject. To mitigate this, the *Participant Information Sheet* explicitly stated that the interviews would focus only on professional insights, not personal experiences. To ensure this, the questions were prepared to allow the participants to volunteer as much or little information as they seem fit as well as for the interviewer to react spontaneously to the answers of the participant, either engaging more or moving onto different topics as needed. The interviews were either held in person in a public location or online, depending on the preference of the interviewee. In order to develop a conversation during which the most crucial question would be discussed sufficiently to obtain substantial results, interviews lasted between 30 minutes but not much longer than one hour (see table). Participants were made aware beforehand that they were free to stop the interview without giving a reason at any given moment. Interviews were conducted in English and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, depending on the preference of the interviewee. In accordance with the ethical approval and data regulation, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed manually. During online meetings, participants were invited to turn on their camera to create a more personal and productive interview atmosphere. However, even in online-meetings, only the audio of the interview was recorded, no screen-recordings or any other visual recordings were produced.

Due to the nature of the phenomenon this study seeks to explore, the research project faces some **limitations**. Firstly, while expert knowledge is grounded in professional experience, it is not free from subjective perspectives. Experts may interpret historical events and memory politics through personal, disciplinary or even ideological lenses. Since the goal of this research is not to arrive at definitive or causal conclusions but rather to explore multi-layered interpretations of the lack of interest in Goli Otok that strongly profit from different

perspectives, this subjectivity is something that was accounted for and is addressed accordingly during the analytical and discussion segments. Secondly, in accordance with the impossibility to provide a causal conclusion, the goal is to discuss the plausibility of different contributing factors and to situate Goli Otok as a case study within broader debates in memory studies. Lastly, there are some limitations concerning my own person as a researcher that need to be taken into account: As a master student that lived and received her previous education outside of the region and specific country I am researching, I have a different level of knowledge and general understanding about Croatia, Yugoslavia and the region as a whole, since it was not part of the cultural and collective understanding in which I was socialised. Moreover, I am not a native speaker of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. Both factors greatly influence how I approach the research project as a whole as well as individual participants. To mitigate any friction here, I continuously reflect on my role and position from the outside, while simultaneously not just specialising on the history and politics of the post-Yugoslav states, but especially studying at the University of Sarajevo and improving my language skills in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian.

These reflections are consistent with the methodology chosen for this study, which is Braun and Clarke's conception of thematic analysis. As a methodological approach, it emphasises not only on the importance of researcher subjectivity and reflexivity, but also emphasises "meaning-making" rather than claims to an empirical truth, which will be discussed in more detail in the following segment (Braun and Clarke 2019: 591f.).

#### **4.2. Means of Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis**

The data collected during the interviews were firstly transcribed and then analysed using the method of *thematic analysis* based on the methodological framework by Virginia Braun and Viktoria Clarke (2006, 2019). In comparison to other analytical methods, thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke is the most suitable for this project as it is not tied to any specific theoretical framework, which makes it an efficient method for conducting qualitative research as this research project plans to. In the most general sense, thematic analysis aims to find repeated patterns of meaning across the entire data set by first creating codes out of the data and then forming those codes into specific themes, which, given the relatively small number of interviews conducted (six), is an efficient but clear way to organise and interpret the content of the interviews (Braun and Clarke 2006: 86).

Braun and Clarke stress the importance of researcher subjectivity and reflexivity, which means that the researcher must be, first and foremost, transparent in their goals in approaching the data, but also reflect upon the fact that themes do not passively emerge from the data but are actively constructed by the researcher in dialogue with the data (Braun and Clarke 2019: 590-592). This becomes especially true when evaluating the data to produce answers to already established research questions, which means utilising the theoretical approach (as opposed to inductive approach) to thematic analysis: For the purposes of this study, the theoretical or deductive approach as defined by Braun and Clarke is much more suitable, since this approach is “driven by the researchers theoretical or analytical interest” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 84), which allows to code the data with a specific research question in mind. The analytical process as employed in this work followed the concrete steps described by Braun and Clarke, which involves six iterative phases (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87):

1. Familiarising yourself with your data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes (generating initial themes, Braun and Clarke 2019: 593)
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Firstly, the process of familiarisation with the data was a continuous process during the data collection, starting with the transcription of each interview and then re-listening to the audio-recording to check the accurateness of the transcript. During this process already, several crucial moments in each interview were tentatively identified and later on revisited. The second stage calls for generating initial codes. These codes mark specific information from the interviews as particularly interesting or relevant, which means that usually a relatively high number of differing codes is created in this step to have enough precisely coded material to work with in the following steps. More precisely put, the coding process is the first step to *organise* the data, which differs from the development of themes, which is the first step in the *interpretation* of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 88f.). The initial themes are generated during the third stage. Themes are defined as capturing “something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some kind of patterned response or meaning within the dataset” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 82). This is done by grouping and arranging the specific codes accordingly to a common feature, which means that the themes will be semantically broader than the individual codes, who can be quite specific. The next step calls for a review of the established themes.

Braun and Clarke propose a two-fold process, firstly revising the themes on the basis of the created codes, and secondly assessing the logic of the themes in relation to the data set as a whole. This means that in case of any incoherence, the research does not just operate with the codes created initially, but also has the opportunity to re-code the data, if needed. The outcome is supposed to be a “satisfactory thematic map”, which means that the themes are coherent, logically derived from the data and suitable as units of analysis for the given research questions (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91f.). The fifth step calls for refining, defining and naming the final themes and sub-themes, which is followed by the last step, the production of the report. In the context of this thesis this means that the analysed themes will be presented in the analysis chapter and the report of the findings takes place in the discussion chapter, which aims to first answer the first research question based on some of the themes extracted from the interviews and then furthermore to discuss potential reasons that contribute to the status quo by putting the themes, specific quotes from the individual material in dialogue with literature and media coverage related to the themes from the interviews.

## 5. Analysis of the Interviews

The following chapter presents the main findings of the data collection, analysed according to the thematic approach outlined by Braun and Clarke in the previous chapter. Despite providing fascinating insights into the mechanics of the memory of Goli Otok based on their individual expertise, the tone of the interviews tended to be at times a bit resigned when discussing the reasons for the lack of interest of the Croatian State, with many expressing the perception that the topic is too historically complex, and at the same time simply not as relevant as other focal points in the recent Croatian past, to serve any viable state-led commemorative narrative, which in turn results in the observed avoidance by politicians and state institutions alike. While this explanation risks sounding deterministic and overly simplistic, it nonetheless emerged as the most persuasive explanation of the absence of political engagement. After all, sometimes, a simple answer is the most likely answer. However, all experts provided much more layered and nuanced interpretations besides this simple answer, both of Goli Otok as a historical phenomenon and its presence within collective memory and the relationship between collective and institutionalised memory. Therefore, this chapter seeks to systematically express the nuances provided by the experts by exploring the key themes that emerged from the data, which are analytical categories that provide the basis of the discussion of the findings in the sixth chapter.

### **5.1. Goli Otok as an “Empty Signifier”**

The first theme describes the somewhat paradoxical phenomenon where Goli Otok as concept lives on in collective memory, but factual knowledge about it as a historical phenomenon is as scarce as it is superficial. All interviewees presupposed the undeniable presence of Goli Otok in the collective memory of the post-Yugoslav societies, which, however, does not translate to a broad and factual understanding of Goli Otok as a historical phenomenon, with most experts confirming that a lot of wrong assumptions and untrue information on Goli Otok is circulating. Therefore, at least according to Previšić (personal interview, 27.05.2025), Goli Otok is specifically present in the form of assumptions that serve as the basis for tasteless jokes within society, or even a sort of prank, in which Goli Otok as a synonym for a bad place was used to start a petition to send corrupt politicians there (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025; Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025; Milekić 2016). This leads to a certain dynamic, which was discussed in all interviews but is best labelled with a term Gužvica introduced: “Empty Signifier” (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025). This means that the name Goli Otok

works as a symbol that evokes not factual knowledge but certain nebulous associations of repression and punishment. This is in accordance with Stamenić, who stated that one of the central issues when confronting the (lack of) memory culture on Goli Otok is that “every dealing with Goli Otok is actually a simplification” (Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025). The vague understanding of Goli Otok as a historic phenomenon causes therefore a situation in which the name Goli Otok is actually more often used to imply things that are not founded in historical reality rather than discussing Goli Otok properly.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the “empty signifier” helps to subvert expectations as, on the surface, Goli Otok could be understood as almost a “cliché of communist terror” (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025), but once the historic conditions are taken into account, its manifold facets become evident, which in turn requires any hypothetical commemorative effort to be sensitive enough to honour these complexities.

As most experts observed, limited or inaccurate knowledge about Goli Otok as a historical event fosters confusion, since it is to most people, despite being aware of the general history surrounding the Tito-Stalin-Split, unclear what actually occurred on the island, who the victims were, and, more importantly, whether those affected were innocent individuals or potentially also complicit in violence. This leads to a sense of overwhelm when trying to approach the topic in the context of memory culture, which, in turn, makes sustained engagement beyond a superficial level uncomfortable and difficult. This dynamic applies both to a collective level as well as an institutional level, and is challenging to change, both from an educator’s perspective, as Stamenić stressed, and from that of advocates promoting memory culture.

## **5.2. “Many of your answers you will find not in history, but in today’s politics”**

This quote by Previšić (personal interview, 27.05.2025) describes a theme that deals with questions of history that were discussed during the interviews. Although he rightly argued that answering the research question requires a look at contemporary politics, it is still vital to have a solid understanding of Goli Otok as a historical phenomenon and recent Yugoslav history to grasp the complexity of the topic and the challenges of commemorating it. At the same time,

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<sup>17</sup> Milekić (personal interview, 16.06.2025) mentioned the case of Dobroslav Paraga, a far-right Croatian politician active during the 1990s who was incarcerated on Goli Otok during the 1980s as a juvenile delinquent for political reasons as he was distributing propaganda. While he was incarcerated for political reasons and recounted his difficult experiences in a book, him displaying himself as someone who “lived” through Goli Otok shows that the political prison and labour camp that was active on Goli Otok during the 1950s and the jail it was afterwards is being equated and conflated, which creates a false sense of continuity of political repression.

perspectives on recent Croatian and Yugoslav history are largely informed by the current political climate, which explains why many experts oscillated between the explanation of historical events as such and its significance for memory culture or a specific political narrative during the interviews (especially Milekić, Previšić, and Prokić).

Furthermore, the theme includes the transition of active or recent memory into becoming a part of (distant) history, as touched upon by Previšić, who observes that former political prisoners have largely passed away, likewise the first generation of their descendants. This transition into history has a two-fold effect: On one hand, the topic has become a part of “dealing with the past”, which a lot of people find tedious, difficult, and irrelevant to improving the country’s political future (Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025). On the other hand, it simply means that there are no people left to advocate for the remembrance of Goli Otok, both in collective and institutional memory. Prokić disagrees, to some degree, with this assessment as she emphasises that it is often the second generation of descendants that are now approaching the memory of Goli Otok via academic works or artistic projects, which is in and of itself a form of advocacy for the remembrance of Goli Otok.<sup>18</sup>

Stameniće pointed towards something much more crucial, which is the role history plays (or more accurately does not play) for Croatian state actors and institutions. He analysed for example the stance of current prime minister Plenković when it comes to the relevance of history and historical remembrance, which seems to be that the remembrance of history is not central to him as a political person/his political program. Furthermore, this approach to history was extended to the current Minister of Culture (Nina Obuljen Koržinek), stating that she “doesn’t see these kinds of places or stories relevant in any way for the culture” (Stameniće, personal interview, 28.05.2025) and that her priorities lie elsewhere, like in the promotion of culture and traditions. Milekić supported the argument that there is no real interest taken in Goli Otok by the Croatian Ministry of Culture because it cannot serve as a distinct “pan-Croatian monument”, and therefore not contribute to the fostering of a distinct Croatian culture (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025). This prioritisation to the detriment of historical memory becomes manifest when presented with pleas to finance concrete ideas for projects that seek to commemorate “less convenient” memories, such as Goli Otok.

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<sup>18</sup> See for example the documentary movie *Goli (Naked)*, (2014) by filmmaker Tiha Gudac, whose grandfather was imprisoned on Goli Otok: Taczyńska (2017); Krstičević (2014).

### 5.3. Investing in Memory

When trying to approach why there is no initiative on behalf of the Croatian state to further the commemoration of Goli Otok (besides a few private projects, such as by A. Kulunčić), experts related any hypothetical commemorative effort, such as the establishment of a museum, educational and/or memorial centre, monument, etc., to the crucial aspect of funding. There were some diverging opinions on whether the reason why there are no state-led commemorative projects is due to a lack of money for such endeavours (StameniĆ, personal interview, 28.05.2025) or whether the money is available in theory (Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025: “There is EU-money, there is Croatian money”), but there is just no political will to devote funding to commemorative projects about Goli Otok. Two things need to be noted here: Firstly, these., While the Croatian state did co-finance some of the commemorative projects initiated by private actors, considerations about state-led commemorative projects were purely hypothetical since no state actors have proposed any such projects (and are, according to the general tone of the expert interviews, very unlikely to do so in the future).

The issue of funding and profit is seen as a crucial factor impeding any hypothetical initiatives before they could even develop. Most experts argued that while projects on the commemoration of Goli Otok would per se not be met with public opposition, it would be highly unpopular for any politician to propose the devotion of fundings to such a hypothetical project. StameniĆ argues specifically that any commemorative project on the island simply is not profitable enough and an investment by state institutions in such projects would be met with scrutiny by the media and general public, given that there are many museal projects in dire need of funding both in Zagreb as well as in other cities across to Croatia (StameniĆ, personal interview, 28.05.2025). Both StameniĆ and Previšić (personal interview, 27.05.2025) described the state’s approach to funding based on anecdotes, some of them drawn from their own experience: Typically, when asked about potential funding for any projects on Goli Otok, representatives of state and local institutions typically responded with polite sympathy, acknowledging the idea as important and promising to return to it, but in practice rarely followed up. The result is not obstruction or hostility, but a kind of benign neglect where Goli Otok is simply never made a priority.

One reason why financial investment in Goli Otok is considered unprofitable is its remote location. The aspect of the island’s location was specifically discussed in another related context, namely when discussing the intersection of tourism with the memory of Goli Otok.

This intersection was assessed quite diversely: According to Previšić (personal interview, 27.05.2025), putting effort into the commemoration of Goli Otok at its location could enhance tourism in the region. Prokić, on the other hand, was less enthusiastic about the role of tourism, and warned that developing a (state-led) memory culture intertwined with touristic interests would turn Goli Otok and its remembrance into a business. This would not just contribute to the commodification of history, but greatly affect the livelihoods of people living on nearby islands such as Rab or Krk (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025). Tourism has to be taken into account even without any actual efforts of commemoration since over the last few years, some rudimentary touristic infrastructure has emerged on the island anyways, which can be related to “dark tourism”. This includes a few facilities on the island, created by private individuals such as a tavern and a little touristic train that is supposed to carry tourists around the island, which is called “Goli Express”. This translates to “naked express” – a name rather unsuitable given the seriousness of the location it is supposed to make accessible, as specifically both Gužvica and Milekić pointed out. This development was, therefore, judged rather negatively, with Milekić remarking that it “looks like a ridiculous place now, a combination of everything”, which makes the island resemble a “post-apocalyptic theme park” (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025), and that these things were not only done poorly, but with bad taste. In this sense, the sensationalised form of “dark tourism”, albeit still a marginal phenomenon, has already started to influence the conditions on the island.

#### **5.4.Ambiguous Victimhood as a Challenge of Commemoration**

This theme captures the difficulty of commemorating people that were subjected to injustice and violence when both the reasons for their suffering as well as their victimhood as such remain ambiguous. This ambiguity was discussed across all interviews and was the only issue on which the experts expressed different, and to some degree even opposing opinions. The question of victimhood is quite delicate, but necessary to reflect upon here because it significantly adds to the complexity of Goli Otok. Uncertainty over who should be commemorated, coupled with limited public knowledge, produces misunderstandings and makes it difficult to clearly distinguish victims from perpetrators.

A historic injustice is usually more easily processed when a clear differentiation between perpetrator and victim can be made, which allows the construction of a coherent commemorative narrative to guide remembrance, a process often induced, or at least supported by state institutions. This requires not just clarity about the background of both perpetrator and

victim, but furthermore about who exercised the violence, whether one person over another, a group over another, or the state over its citizens. In the case of Goli Otok, however, none of this is clear: It is neither clearly discernible that one political group is repressing another, as a majority of the prisoners subscribed to the same ideology not just as their fellow inmates but also as the state that jailed them, nor is it a clear case of state violence against its citizens, since the inmates inflicted the brunt of the actual physical violence on each other, not just guards or any other members of the state apparatus (Previšić 2019b: 118-120). This is why Previšić emphasised that the purpose of commemoration, according to him, should neither be to evaluate or critique a specific ideology, nor to use such an assessment as the basis for determining whether individuals are “worthy” of remembrance, but rather to acknowledge human suffering. While the prisoners were incarcerated as (alleged) Ibeovci or Stalinists, they were ultimately subjected to torture and humiliation as human beings. Accordingly, the victims should not be remembered primarily as Stalinists punished for their political beliefs, but as individuals who endured violence and repression (Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025). Others, however, approached the question of victimhood in a more nuanced way. Kulunčić explained that her project aimed at highlighting the trauma that the prisoners, specifically the female prisoners, went through, which does centre the suffering on the island, but tries to include their agency and their ways of survival without reducing them to victims (Kulunčić). Gužvica approached the question of victimhood from an entirely different perspective. He stated that he understood core Communist principles as such that violence was regarded as a necessary means to establish and defend socialism. Therefore, he asked whether those people who consciously subscribed to such an ideology would have understood themselves as victims of repression, or rather as heroes for remaining loyal to their convictions under extreme circumstances. And while many were unjustly incarcerated on arbitrary grounds, such as telling a harmless joke, a significant number were indeed staunch Stalinists (just like Tito was until the conflict with Stalin, see: Banac 1988, Previšić 2019a), who as such may have anticipated repression as an inevitable consequence of their ideological stance and thus rejected the label “victim” altogether (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025). This interpretation is quite unique and perhaps the only point across all interviews in which the experts had clearly contrasting opinions on the subject.

Perhaps importantly to add here, Prokić mused whether commemorative initiatives should be devised by curators, historians, or intellectuals, but that they should instead remain grounded in the testimonies of survivors that were recorded still in time and adhere to their experience as closely as possible as told by them (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025). This

logic to follow the voices of the survivors themselves can be applied to the question of victimhood as well: Ultimately, it is futile to speculate whether the prisoners would have regarded themselves as victims, heroes, or merely survivors, as the answers would have varied greatly among inmates anyways. Therefore, while it is important to discuss different interpretations on victimhood, imposing uniform categories from today's perspective would be presumptuous.

### **5.5. The European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes as a Commemorative Tool**

23<sup>rd</sup> of August, known as *European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, established by the European Parliament in 2009, is one of the only contexts in which Goli Otok received some form of commemorative attention by state representatives.<sup>19</sup> This commemoration day is more popular and prevalent in some Eastern European Countries, and also regularly commemorated in Croatia. Since 2011, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August was established by the Croatian parliament as an official memorial day (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025; Hrvatski Sabor, “23. Kolovoza”).

Depending on the interpretive frame, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August can be mobilised to serve divergent political narratives. From a liberal perspective, it may function as a unifying device that groups together individuals who experienced violence and repression under markedly different regimes and contexts, based solely on their shared victimhood. Conversely, from a right-wing perspective, it can be employed to conflate distinct ideologies in ways that relativise their respective historical significance and moral implications. Therefore, the symbolism of this day was interpreted by most interviewed experts rather negatively, because, as Gužvica called it, the day equates “those that created Auschwitz with those that liberated Auschwitz” (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025). The focus is put on the struggle against two totalitarianisms, but it actually prioritises the struggle against Communism by the choice of locations that are usually visited as part of the commemoration on this day (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025).

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<sup>19</sup> For example, in 2020, Prime Minister Andrej Plenković visited the island and put down a wreath next to a cross dedicated to the victims (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2020). It is important to note, however, that this was a singular event, not an annual commemoration.

This is the context in which Goli Otok has been acknowledged by the Croatian state previously. Prokić (personal interview, 11.06.2025) argues that this day is the “lowest hanging fruit” as it is a convenient way of “collecting political points” by signalling that Goli Otok is not entirely forgotten or ignored while simultaneously being able to avoid any closer or more substantial interaction by simply roping Goli Otok into this narrative that equates all victims of all kinds of totalitarian states. This subsumption resembles what Gužvica (personal interview, 18.06.2025) called a “contentious and clumsy attempt” at commemoration, and Prokić even described as „not just glib, but also very dangerous to conflate the commemoration of Goli Otok and the commemoration of Jasenovac, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Pag” (meaning fascist concentration camps erected during WW2; Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025) under the umbrella of totalitarian regimes, a notion similarly expressed by Milekić, who says the symbolism of the day runs the risk of enabling right-wing narratives.<sup>20</sup>

However, the day is insofar interesting as it is not just criticised as inadvertently feeding into right-wing trivialisation, but first and foremost comes from a place of (neo-) liberal understanding of victimhood and repressive systems that connects any form of totalitarian repression, regardless of ideology, on the basic premise of centring the endured violence and oppression. Prokić (personal interview, 11.06.2025) specifically called this mechanism a “clever way to submerge it in this liberal soup”. As previously noted in relation to subverted expectations, Goli Otok should, on a surface level, fit right into this commemorative day as it should operate as a clear symbol for a repressive Communist regime. However, most of those imprisoned there do not fit neatly into a liberal narrative of victimhood under totalitarian repression due to their own ideological commitments, as all experts, but specifically Gužvica (personal interview, 18.06.2025), point out. Therefore, Goli Otok can still be accommodated within a broader commemorative framework (such as the 23rd of August), as long as the commemoration remains superficial (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025; Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025). A deeper engagement, however, is complicated by the left-wing orientation of most of the prisoners, which opposes the narrational basis of the commemorative day, which frames victimhood in an almost apolitical manner by emphasising that all prisoners were victims of a totalitarianism, in this case, Communism.

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<sup>20</sup> See for further criticism of the Commemoration Day for example Troebst (2011) or Wetzel (2013).

This explains why those commemorative efforts in the context of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August are bound to remain ambiguous and superficial as quite some effort would be necessary to integrate Goli Otok and its complexity into this liberal narrative while avoiding historical distortion. Here, we circle back to Goli Otok being an **empty signifier** and the **question of victimhood**, since the factual basis of who is actually being commemorated (namely, amongst others, also people that largely identified with Stalinism, which is one of the totalitarian systems the commemorative day opposes) is left purposefully as untouched as possible in the framework of this commemorative day.

### 5.6. Trivialisation of Goli Otok

In collective memory, Tito's actions and therefore the creation of Goli Otok are sometimes trivialised because they are seen by some as justified due to the necessity of self-defence against the (perceived) threat of the Soviet Union under Stalin. This stance, often connected to a sense of pride in Tito for standing up against Stalin, relativises the scope of the violence and downplays the suffering of the victims (Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025). This narrative operates either by focusing on the pride felt for Tito's tough and victorious stance against Stalin, or, in cases where the horrible nature of Goli Otok is acknowledged more seriously, the focus shifts to defensiveness by regurgitating what General Jovo Kapičić, who was a senior official of the UDBA, serving as deputy to security chief Aleksandar Ranković and as such oversaw Goli Otok, stated in an interview in 2010: "If we hadn't created Goli Otok, the whole of Yugoslavia would have become Goli Otok"<sup>21</sup>, referring to the (perceived) threat of the Soviet Union and arguing that what had been done was not ideal, but it was a necessary as a defence against Stalin's claims to hegemony (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025; Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025; Cvetković 2019: 91f.). In this case where the opinion of Goli Otok is heavily influenced by the positive and perhaps even nostalgic perception of Tito and Yugoslavia, it is important to stress what Milekić specifically pointed out, which is that Yugonostalgia is less applicable in Croatia overall, and that it is, especially in comparison, relatively marginal for Croatian politics since the Croatian "political culture of the 1990s was

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<sup>21</sup> „Da nijesmo napravili Goli otok, cijela bi Jugoslavija postala Goli otok“, quote from transcript of the interview with journalist Tamara Nikčević, 01.04.2010, Žurnal jedina slobodna teritorija. URL: <https://www.zurnal.info/clanak/goli-otoci-jova-kapicica-1-necu-da-me-saban-oslobada/1316> (last accessed: 12.08.2025).

very anti-communist, even on the left wing”, a trend that hasn’t really faded until now (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025; Kolstø 2014: 777; Maksimović 2017: 1071)

Apart from this trivialisation induced by nostalgic views of Yugoslavia, another quite puzzling phenomenon became evident during the interviews: It appears that Goli Otok and its commemoration can exist only in contexts of comparison or in conjunction with other historical events meaning comparisons with other political prisons (“Tito’s Alcatraz”), or with other camps within the Yugoslav sphere like Jasenovac or Pag<sup>22</sup> (irrespective of the perpetrator’s ideology), or, albeit very seldomly, with the Bleiburg-massacres as another example of partisan-turned-state-violence (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025; Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025). This ultimately relativises and minimises Goli Otok and its victims to the point where it is deemed too insignificant to be awarded its own space. Notably, experts not only commented on this dynamic during interviews but also engaged in it themselves. However, the latter needs to be slightly differentiated from the former, as comparison is a logical tool to illustrate a problem whose defining feature is its absence. For example, in order to illustrate why there is so little interest in the topic, it makes sense to approach the scale of the tragedy by e.g., comparing the number of people that suffered and those that died during their imprisonment on the island with the number of victims from other historical events of mass violence (as for example Gužvica or Stamenić did). After all, in most cases, an event that claimed significantly more lives than another will automatically be more present as more people were affected overall, and often more people in their capacities as relatives of the victims will become advocates of the topic.

### **5.7. “The topic is not national”**

Previšić stated clearly that “Croats in a national sense” have no reason to care because the “topic is not national”, since people were jailed as Ibeovci, not as Croats or any specific national or religious group (Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025). However, despite these historical circumstances, some efforts to utilise the memory of Goli Otok in a nationalist framework to position the camp in a (constructed) continuity of national Croat suffering were touched upon

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<sup>22</sup> The comparison with Pag is a somewhat paradoxical example that the relativisation does not just have a minimising effect: Prokić remarked that at least there is a commemorative plaque installed on the island and some minimal attention devoted to Goli Otok, whereas none of this applies to Pag (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025). Stamenić said similarly that the number of people that died on Goli Otok is smaller than those that died on Pag, yet in comparison, Pag receives even less attention (Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025).

during the interviews. This framing was enabled by the loose assumptions surrounding Goli Otok, because those that were imprisoned on Goli Otok in the 1970s and 1980s, long after its role as a political prison of the 1950s was over, were invoked to place Goli Otok in the continuity of Croat suffering during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025; Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025; Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025). According to Gužvica (personal interview, 18.06.2025), the creation of these nationalist narratives often involved some degree of falsifying history, or at least cherry-picking individuals, to launch a relatively convincing narrative. However, these narratives ultimately remain marginal and irrelevant for a larger political discourse in Croatia due to the circumstances that in comparison with other focal points of Croatian history, such as Bleiburg, the narrative of Croat martyrdom lends itself much more easily with a look at the perpetrator-victim dynamics than in the case of Goli Otok. Moreover, despite sparse factual knowledge about Goli Otok, even with a superficial understanding the idea that Goli Otok was a place of (implied: solely) Croat suffering is quite easily debunked (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025; Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025; Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025).

The other side of the same coin is the effort to include Goli Otok in an anti-communist discourse which does not just aim to discredit Communism as an ideology, but specifically includes a narrative framework by roping together Yugoslavia, Communism and Serbia (or Serbdom) and imagining this as something inherently anti-Croatian. However, when it does appear in anti-communist narratives, it consistently occupies a secondary position to other, more prominent events such as Bleiburg. This is because the most effective anti-Communist narratives manage to highlight simultaneously the continuity of Croat statehood and/or Croat martyrdom (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025). One reason why Goli Otok ultimately fails both as a Croatian statehood and anti-communist narrative is because of what Milekić pointed out, which is that once the narrative begins to falter by understanding that Croats on Goli Otok were number-wise not even the majority, let alone the only imprisoned ethno-national group, one would consequently have to take one step further and acknowledge that many of them were Socialists and Communists themselves, which means that one would have to acknowledge that not just Serbs (as they were ethno-nationally speaking the largest group on the island, Cvetković 2019, 91f.) but actually that “Communists can be victims”, which completely contradicts the main goal of the narrative (Milekić, personal interview, 16.06.2025).

### **5.8. Political Gain – Risk but no reward?**

One of the most relevant analytical angles is to look at the question of who would benefit from a more pro-active commemoration. The simple answer was unanimously that no one, not a single political actor or state institution would benefit politically from actively approaching the topic of Goli Otok or proposing any commemorative efforts initiatively. On the contrary, Stamenić assessed that political actors are much more likely to suffer “severe political damage” because the topic is just simply “too complex for the purposes of memory culture”. The risk of misjudging the situation and thereby causing severe backlash is already a significant deterrent, while there are simultaneously no other incentives, such as pressure from bottom-up advocacy groups, which results in a climate in which disincentivising factors are already dominant and incentivising factors practically non-existent. Interestingly, this simple logic applies to all political actors, irrespective of their ideological orientation or the narratives they promote.

### **5.9. “Dead in the water”**

The final theme encompasses attempts at describing this twilight state the memory of Goli Otok finds itself in. Prokić (personal interview, 11.06.2025), remarked that “people weren’t trying to put a huge force to obstruct [the memory of Goli Otok] because it was so dead in the water”, and describing therefore quite vividly how the topic is so absent from state-led political discourse that too much effort and initiative would be needed in order to surface it in the first place to reinstate a discussion about potential commemoration of Goli Otok, let alone actually take steps to commemorate it appropriately. Moreover, to use Prokić’s words again: there is simply no need for anyone to identify as an “anti-Goli Otok warrior” because the topic is so marginalised in memory culture anyways. In fact, when asked directly about specific political actors that have been or are trying to actively obstruct the commemoration of Goli Otok, none of the experts were able to clearly identify political individuals or groups with such intent. On the contrary, all participants reiterated that there is simply no necessity to actively obstruct commemorative efforts when it is much easier to just ignore this topic altogether, as it has been done for the most part of Croatia’s political discourse since independence. Therefore, the memory of Goli Otok remains “somewhere in the grey zone” of collective memory (Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025) – not at all gone, but not quite there either.

The experts reached overlapping and mostly complementary conclusions during their interviews. All mentioned mostly the same factors, although some had differing opinions on

specific subjects or weighed their relevance differently. The consensus was generally what Stamenić (personal interview, 28.05.2025) neatly expressed as Goli Otok being simply “too complex for the purposes of memory culture”.

## 6. Discussion of the Findings

On the basis of the previous analysis of the expert interviews, the following chapter aims to discuss potential answers to both research questions on the basis of the previously established themes. The first segment reflects upon the applicability of the theoretical concepts and labels discussed in chapter two, whereas the second segment seeks to embed the opinions of the experts in a larger context to examine potential factors that contribute to the persistence of the status quo.

### 6.1. How can the attitude of the Croatian State be defined?

During the interviews, it was remarked that Goli Otok lies somewhere in a “grey zone”, and that the easiest solution for everybody would be to just ignore it, or forget and do anything about it, a sentiment captured in the theme “dead in the water”. Based on this, the question of whether any state actor actively seeks to obstruct commemorative efforts can be challenged since Croatian politicians and high-ranking officials have shown at least some commemorative gestures, albeit irregular and largely superficial in nature. This was seen, for example, in the context of the commemoration day on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, during which not just Prime Minister Plenković visited the island (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2020), but also a previous Prime Minister, Jadranka Kosor, who visited the island in 2011 and installed a commemorative plaque there (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2011). The fact that there was *some* engagement with the island and its history from high-ranking officials opposes the notion that the state wants to silence the memory entirely or obstruct any commemorative efforts. Such interactions, however, remain the exception rather than the norm. They tend to be isolated, often one-off and superficial engagements with the subject, rather than sustained or systematic forms of commemoration. Apart from a few sporadic commemorative acts undertaken by specific politicians, the co-funding of various commemorative projects by different state institutions is a second reason to reject the idea of active obstruction.<sup>23</sup> However, according to some anecdotes told by Previšić during the interview, representatives of state and local institutions generally

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Andreja Kulunčić’s art project was partially funded by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia as well as the City of Zagreb. URL: <https://www.zene-arhipelag-goli.info/oprojektu/produkcija/> (last access: 17<sup>th</sup> August 2025).

acknowledged the value of such initiatives but hinted that limited financial resources compelled them to prioritise other areas.

If deliberate obstruction appears unlikely, could the phenomenon instead be characterised as silencing? On closer examination, however, it appears that this characterisation may not fully apply as well: Prokić remarked that she was unaware of anyone seeking to silence the memory of Goli Otok, she just stressed that, as analysed before, there is no wish to surface Goli Otok out of its state “dead in the water”, and that any “deeper dealing” with it as a commemorative subject is undesirable. However, she added to the question of silencing by evoking a comparison: „Goli Otok is not the only Otok [island] that suffers from that kind of oblivion. You know, there's Pag, for example, that was the first Ustaša camp. That's completely uncommemorated“ (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025). However here, while pointing out that Pag is even “worse off” and fully in a state of oblivion, she acknowledges that Goli Otok is in a similarly “uncommemorated” state, but “at least has a plaque” (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025; Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025). One definition of silence, namely Connerton’s *forgetting as humiliated silence*, describes a specific type of silence which stems from humiliation and a feeling of “collective shame”, which often settles in e.g., around events of mass violence (Connerton 2008: 67f.). Although Goli Otok presented a case of extreme violence for the people incarcerated on it, it is difficult to classify it as a case of mass violence. Of course, it could be argued that for some, especially those who look back on Yugoslavia and Tito fondly and with nostalgia, the crimes and injustice Goli Otok symbolises could evoke some sense of shame that a leader and a system that one glorifies is at the same time responsible for this gross mistreatment and political repression. However, this is a very broad and generalising assumption, and can be opposed by two things: Firstly, the relevance of Yugonostalgia for Croatian politics,<sup>24</sup> and secondly, the circumstance that Goli Otok is not unanimously seen as something bad, and that there are people who view Tito’s approach to his political enemies and specifically Stalinists as justified (a notion observed and retold by all six experts).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> It has to be noted here that most assessments of Yugonostalgia as a phenomenon in the post-Yugoslav states and societies determine that Yugonostalgia is perhaps not less common, but certainly less relevant politically in Croatia in comparison to the other successor states of Yugoslavia. See e.g., Kolstø 2014: 777, Maksimović 2017: 1071.

<sup>25</sup> The thought that Goli Otok is not inherently bad is sometimes even expressed publicly, see e.g., an opinion piece published by Croatian economist and journalist Vedran Sršen (2020) who argued that Goli Otok “represented the necessary evil of breaking away from the Soviet zone of influence”. This is specifically interesting because the

Since this definition of silence also does not apply to the case study, it can neither be spoken about an act of structural silencing (as defined by, e.g., Connerton 1989: 14f.), nor complete silence taking place. Firstly, StameniĆ spoke, as quoted above, that it seems as if the Croatian state is just trying to slowly forget about Goli Otok. The different categories of forgetting as discussed in the theoretical framework that are suitable for forgetting on the level of the state are Connerton's *repressive erasure* which differs from Assmann's *damnatio memoriae – repressive forms of forgetting* as it allows for interpretations of the state-imposed forgetting to be not of malign intent, meaning that forgetting is facilitated and supported by the state, but does not have to mean that memory is forcefully repressed. This seems generally applicable to the circumstances surrounding Goli Otok, as none of the interviewees were able to identify any active obstruction or malign intent in state actors, just a general sense of indifference. However, both Assmann and Connerton apply these dynamics on a much larger scale, which implies that the whole past of a regime is forgotten in order to establish a new state after a crisis, rupture or war. This is, therefore, not exactly applicable to this case study, as the focus here is on the lack of interest in one specific element of the Yugoslav past, rather than on a general disinterest in, or deliberate erasure of, the Yugoslav system and state as a whole. Furthermore, the concept of *selective retrieval-induced forgetting* (Hirst and Coman 2018: 89f.) where recalling one memory induces the forgetting of another, is potentially relevant to Goli Otok, especially in the context of the fragmented “memoryscape” across the post-war former Yugoslav countries and societies after the wars of the 1990s that prioritise different memories over Goli Otok – this prioritisation of different memories by state actors (supported by a collective perception) is the other side of the same coin that deems the memory of Goli Otok impractical and unprofitable for political purposes. Yet, as Previšić commented on this prioritisation, the issue is per se not a lack of space in collective memory („there is room for everything“, Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025), but rather political will to give room to Goli Otok and intentionally commemorate the memory of the camp.

To circle back to StameniĆ's initial quote, Goli Otok is neither subjected to intentional forgetting nor afforded active commemoration, but instead lingers in a grey zone of latent collective memory, and letting it remain there is actually the most convenient solution for all political actors (StameniĆ, personal interview, 28.05.2025). The best label for this “grey zone”

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author connects Goli Otok to another, much more prominent and contested focal point of Croatian memory, the concentration camp Jasenovac.

is simply indifference, since there is neither a need to oppose nor an incentive to do anything. This kind of indifference has not fully materialised in this specificity in theoretical typologies, as it is a state-fostered indifference on one singular feature of the state's past that does not seek to suppress the memory, but simply has no reason to actively engage with it.

Another way to approach the indifference from a conceptual point of view is to assume the Croatian state as the sum of its political actors and institutions, all of which are characterised by indifference that leads to inaction about the memory Goli Otok. Kubik and Bernhard's typology of mnemonic actors identifies the "mnemonic abnegator" as particularly applicable: "Mnemonic abnegators avoid memory politics. They are either uninterested or see no advantage in engaging in them" (Kubik and Bernhard 2014: 14). This concept describes the stance of the Croatian state, in whose interest it is to discourage the inclusion of historical events that do not fit a unified national narrative, since engaging with them is costly and politically unrewarding. Mnemonic abnegators may also condone selective forgetting to focus on the present without the complexity of inconvenient historical legacies (Kubik and Bernhard 2014: 14). This characterisation becomes visible in one specific case, namely with Prime Minister Plenković, whose limited engagement with Goli Otok exemplifies this stance since he does not seek to engage with history all that much, let alone with Goli Otok, as he sees no advantage in any further engagement (Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025; Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025).

To summarise, it can be clearly determined that there is no active opposition to the memory of Goli Otok, just not a lot of enthusiasm or initiative either. Furthermore, while the trivialisation of Goli Otok is prevalent, there is no negation of Goli Otok.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, the site as such has been acknowledged in the past by several high-ranking officials (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025; Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025) and lastly, there is at least some financial support for commemorative projects organised by private and civil society actors. There is no malign intent in the prioritisation of other memories and the simultaneous ignoring of Goli Otok, it just does not fit the political agendas as well as other memories do. Therefore, the memory of Goli Otok remains in this limbo state where it is never the priority, never at the forefront, but also never completely gone from the view and entirely

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<sup>26</sup> Prokić (personal interview, 27.05.2025) remarked upon the fact that several focal points of memory within the region suffer from contestation, denial and negation that any such event ever took place, most prominently the Concentration Camp of Jasenovac, or the Genocide of Srebrenica (see also: Pavlaković 2020: 17-23).

ignored – in this sense, Goli Otok lies somewhere at the intersection of Hirst and Coman’s *selective retrieval-induced forgetting* and Connerton’s *repressive erasure*.

## 6.2. Why does the Croatian State display this attitude?

This chapter aims to discuss the following question: Why is Goli Otok in such a „state of non-commemoration“ (Prokić)? Simply put, because no one can benefit politically from commemorating Goli Otok actively, and without political gain, there is little incentive to engage with the memory of Goli Otok purely for moral reasons. So the follow-up question is: Why can no one properly benefit from it? All experts assessed that Goli Otok both as a historic phenomenon and a subject of commemoration is far too complex to be reduced to a simple narrative usable for state-led commemoration. Therefore, this complexity prevents Goli Otok from being utilised as a political tool, which in turn makes engagement with it unattractive for politicians and state institutions. The following discussion aims to explore on one hand factors that contribute to this complexity and how they hinder a state-led commemoration by illustrating the few marginal engagements of the Croatian State with Goli Otok. Analysing why these efforts remained so marginal and superficial helps to substantiate the understanding of the reasons that make Goli Otok such a touchy subject.

### 6.2.1. Attempts at Narrative-Creation

Despite stressing repeatedly how difficult it is to use Goli Otok for a political narrative, since Goli Otok is so complicated “that it doesn’t fit the general expectation of culture of remembrance to have a single event that you can commemorate in a simple way that is understandable for the society” (Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025), all experts discussed the sparse moments in which politicians and other state actors would interact with Goli Otok, whose goal was implicitly understood to be primarily *not* the commemoration of victims, but rather the utilisation of historical memory for their own political narratives. As touched upon in chapter two, Assmann defines political memory as focused on the production of homogenous as well as homogenising narratives that seek to transport a clear and simple message, which often works best when tied to a specific place or commemorative practice (Assmann 2002: 25-27). This is in accordance with what most interviewees discussed: The overall priority of Croatian state actors is to produce their own narratives – differing in content, but similar in structure, and be as clear and effective as possible when doing so. While the dominating interpretation according to all experts was that the reason why Goli Otok is not

commemorated more actively and thoroughly is because it is not worth it to do so from the point of view of any state actor, since the memory of Goli Otok ultimately cannot serve as a tool for political gain, as it can neither be used to construct a new political narrative, nor can it be compressed into already existing narratives. However, despite this being the dominant interpretation across all interviews, the sparse points of contact of state actors with Goli Otok that were discussed revealed that any of these points of contact were, at least implicitly, attempts at including Goli Otok into a broader narrative: Firstly, as efforts to nationalise the memory or, secondly and more covertly, in the context of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August.

#### 6.2.2. Nationalising the memory of Goli Otok

One factor previously assumed to feed into the Croatian state's reluctance to devote significant space to Goli Otok is the ethno-national composition of Goli Otok's prisoners, which was composed statistically of around two-thirds Serbs and Montenegrins, while Croats represented not even a majority on the island (Cvetković 2019, 91f.). This numerical imbalance has led to the assumption that it would be politically uncomfortable for Croatian state actors, regardless of ideology, to actively commemorate an event in which Serbs make up the majority of victims – in the post-1990s context, where Serbs were seen as aggressors, erecting monuments that would implicitly recognise them as victims could easily appear politically unpopular. While this might, to some degree, be true, most experts were quick to point out the fact that first and foremost, the people sent to Goli Otok were not sent there because of their ethno-national background, but rather because of the ideology they either proudly represented or were falsely accused of subscribing to. To paraphrase what experts expressed clearly, especially the historians Previšić (personal interview, 27.05.2025) and Gužvica (personal interview, 18.06.2025), people were not sent to Goli Otok as Serbs, as Montenegrins, Croats or Bosnians, Slovenians or Albanians, but as Stalinists and Ibeovci, as (alleged) supporters of the Informbiro (Cominform). Still, while Prokić (personal interview, 11.06.2025) also clearly states that the ethno-national belonging is *not* the main issue why there are no commemorative steps taken, she also acknowledges that it would be “tricky” to erect a monument or museum, that would, even in an implicit sense, be dedicated to Serbs and award them the status of victimhood. Therefore, any attempts of viewing Goli Otok through a national lens distorts historical reality.

However, this does not mean that there were no attempts made to nationalise the memory of Goli Otok: Some, albeit rather superficial, efforts were taken to construct a narrative that positions the camp in a (constructed) continuity of national suffering, which was more

prevalent in Serbia, enabled by the statistics of the background of the prisoners. In Croatia, these efforts were even rarer – only one example was discussed by Prokić (personal interview, 11.06.2025), which involved Croatian HDZ-politician Vladimir Šeks, former Speaker of the Croatian Parliament during the 2000s. In 2015, he visited Goli Otok as part of a government delegation in his capacity as a special advisor to the president of Croatia, at that time Grabar-Kitarović (Index 2015), on the occasion of the commemoration day on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, where he laid down a wreath and commented that what happened on Goli Otok may never be forgotten. He proceeded with the following statement: “This day of remembrance should be a reminder of the victims and the difficult history of the Croatian people.”<sup>27</sup> This is a clear, and in its clearness perhaps the only public attempt of a high-ranking Croatian politician to interpret Goli Otok through the frame of a national history “of the Croatian people”. However, the attempted narrative failed to gain political traction and remained largely irrelevant in public discourse (Prokić 2017).

There is one way in which differing perspectives on the Yugoslav and socialist past, inform the state’s approach to Goli Otok: Some conservative and nationalist political actors tend to view the Yugoslav past negatively or avoid commenting on it altogether. One example of engagement with Goli Otok in this context were public references made by then-president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in 2019. When publicly commenting on her disdain of former Yugoslavia, she characterised herself as having been “born on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain,” and made (jokingly) remarks towards journalists about introducing a “Week of the Former Yugoslavia” and that anyone speaking against her would “end up on Goli Otok.” (Danas.hr 2019; Grgurić Zanze 2019). Yugonostalgia, on the other hand, generally leads people to a dilemma where a positive judgment of Yugoslavia and especially Tito produces a conflict when engaging with the memory of Goli Otok that makes it difficult to reconcile the positive and nostalgic views of Yugoslavia and Tito with the fact that it was nevertheless (at least until the end of the 1940s; Previšić 2019a) a totalitarian system that allowed its dictator to imprison people based on their political views without fair (or often any) trials and subject them to forced labour and inhumane conditions all under the name of “re-education”. While experts attested that Yugonostalgia has a marginal influence at best on state-level policies regarding Goli Otok, it plays a notable role in interpreting Goli Otok in collective memory (Maksimović 2017).

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<sup>27</sup> “Taj dan sjećanja treba biti podsjećanje na žrtve i tešku povijest hrvatskoga naroda..“ (Index 2015).

During the interviews, the experts explained that Yugonostalgia is much more relevant to understand collective memory than it is for institutional politics in Croatia.

### 6.2.3. Narrative Utility of the European Day of Remembrance

Apart from unsuccessful efforts to nationalise the memory of Goli Otok, especially in the context of the commemoration day on 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, a more subtle, secondary effect of this day is that it facilitates the construction of a more convenient, „cost-effective“ narrative. By integrating Goli Otok as a symbol of communist repressions into this commemorative day, implicitly rather than explicitly, Socialist Yugoslavia is equated with other twentieth-century European totalitarian regimes. This subtly reinforces negative perceptions of Yugoslavia, and more specifically of (State) Socialism, while avoiding the political risks of making explicit statements to foster certain anti-communist narratives (again, why would any conservative politician currently feel the need to reheat or even start anew such narratives, looking at the broad support for conservative politics in Croatia) while still signalling engagement with the country’s past and contributing to a broader ideological narrative. In this sense, the commemoration day is actually the “lowest-hanging fruit” (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025), it needs minimal effort while simultaneously having one clearer and another, more subtle, side effect. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of August is therefore a good example of the combination of political gain and empty signifier, because, as explained, to make a nationalist argument, the prisoners of the “normal” prison after the end of the political camp were invoked to under this empty signifier “Goli Otok”. This can be seen more overtly with Šeks, who actually spoke of a place of Croat suffering, but also indirectly with Prime Minister Plenković, who during his visit to the island on 23.08.2020 was not so clear in calling Goli Otok a place of Croatian suffering as Šeks was, but did include the prisoners of the 1980s to create a false sense of continuity of repression (Vlada Republike Hrvatske 2020).

### 6.2.4. (Un)successfully surfacing Goli Otok

Another point of contact of state actors with Goli Otok reveals the dynamics between Goli Otok in collective memory and political reactions to and interactions with it, which proves to be a dynamic that, in this instance, briefly resurfaced Goli Otok from its “grey zone”, but eventually evaporated into thin air, which is the attempted privatisation in 2014. Generally speaking, it would seem logical that if commemoration is neither prioritised for moral, humanitarian, or other normative reasons, nor pursued for political gain (given its lack of political utility), profit,

especially in connection to tourism, could be a potential motivation. However, in comparison to other tourist destinations in the region, which are better connected and already generate significant revenue, Goli Otok offers little incentive for investment. From the perspective of the Croatian state, the issue of high risk but little reward comes into play again: Even if the main reason for an investment was primarily tourism and not commemoration, it would be impossible to do so without acknowledging the island's history. As it was established, this is rather inconvenient and uncomfortable for the Croatian state as it carries the risk of causing negative backlash already in the earliest stages of introducing a potential plan, while simultaneously, profits (neither financial nor political) are not guaranteed.

However, there was one attempt made by the Croatian state to profit of Goli Otok in financial terms: During the summer of 2014, Goli Otok regained a brief spotlight in public discourse when it was placed on a list of 100 objects as part of the "Projekti 100" privatisation initiative by the Croatian State Office for State Property Management (DUUDI). The "Projekti 100" program intended to solicit expressions of interest for the potential sale, lease, or concession of hundred state-owned properties. Mladen Pejnović, head of the DUUDI, even publicly stated that putting Goli Otok on this list was done as a small provocation to spark a debate amongst Croatians on how they would like to deal with their past (TPortal 2014). This worked insofar as public resistance to an impending commodification of Goli Otok in 2014 arose from civil-society actors, including associations of former inmates and local residents (Novi list 2014). The association *Udruga Goli otok "Ante Zemljar"*, which represents former inmates and their families, published an open letter insisting that the island must be preserved as a memorial rather than exposed to "entertainment or uncontrolled private initiatives," warning that Croatia risked "putting history and victims up for public sale" (eZadar 2014). Both "Ante Zemljar" and the NGO *Documenta – Centar za suočavanje s prošlošću* ("Center for Dealing with the Past") framed the issue as an obligation of the state to safeguard sites of suffering and advocated for the urgent preservation of the site to prevent the further deterioration of the former prison structures (eZadar 2014; Avaz 2014). However, after significant public opposition, any plans for privatisation were abandoned, public interest soon faded, and the Croatian state returned to its relatively indifferent attitude towards Goli Otok, judging by the fact that the few commemorative projects that contributed to the remembrance of Goli Otok were private projects which, at best, received a portion of their funding from Croatian state institutions.

#### 6.2.5. No function, no relevance?

The absence of proper knowledge about the topic in combination with its multi-layered nature ultimately results in a (perceived) lack of relevance, both individually and collectively, which in turn removes any pressure on the state to act. As Previšić observes, this is reinforced by the near absence of “natural” advocates, such as victims or their relatives. Moreover, the lack of understanding makes it nearly impossible to construct a coherent narrative, as any attempt risks misinterpretation (whether deliberate or accidental) that could provoke backlash, leaving political actors with little to gain but much to lose (Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025; Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025). This relates broadly to the dynamics between politicians and the public, or specifically their constituents. The connection can be made via what Olick (1999: 342) stresses, which is that institutions are not exempt from public pressure and that collective memory must be taken into account as it can shape or constrain institutional behaviour. In the interviews, it was suggested that Goli Otok in collective memory is in a similarly grey zone as it is in institutional memory – it is very much present (much more than in institutional memory), but largely irrelevant. People acknowledge what happened (or at least not negate it ever happened) and associating it, despite the generally little knowledge with something negative (Gužvica, personal interview, 18.06.2025; Previšić, personal interview, 27.05.2025; Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025). On the other hand, there is no desire or bottom-up initiative or pressure to demand action of the state. So, while it was frequently touched upon in the interviews, it is impossible to determine “how big of an influence” the presence of Goli Otok within the collective memory can be on the state, and specifically state actors and institutions, it is interesting to observe that this (lack of) dynamic between collective and institutional memory contributes to the state’s passivity, since no significant societal pressure is exerted on political actors or institutions. Moreover, questions such as whether the state would continue to display a lack of interest, were there public and collective demands for more state led remembrance, remain futile.

This passivity and reluctance to deal with the past could also be connected to what was established previously, namely that “you can tell the story of the contemporary Republic of Croatia without mentioning Goli Otok” (Stamenić, personal interview, 28.05.2025). The Tito-Stalin split which caused the creation of the camp on Goli Otok was foundational for Yugoslavian statehood (Kolstø 2014: 764), yet it holds little to no relevance for contemporary Croatian national identity, which relies on two to three core elements as foundational myths, of which Goli Otok is certainly not one. Moreover, it cannot be repurposed into an anti-Croatian

narrative, which leaves the state with no incentive to integrate it into its memory culture, but enough risk of „getting it wrong“ and receiving significant backlash, as seen with the brief resurfacing on the political agenda in 2014.

Based on the analysis of the interviews and in light of this discussion, it could be hypothesised that Croatia would actually have little need to engage with this issue, precisely because Croatians were not the primary victim group and the case does not align with the state's narrative, were it not for the fact that Goli Otok lies within Croatian territory. But nevertheless, it is part of Croatian territory, and so it has to be dealt with somehow in the easiest, bare minimum, least effort way is to mention it in the context of commemorating all victims of totalitarian systems, so that the basic duty is fulfilled and there can be no accusations of concealment, yet nothing more is done beyond this minimal acknowledgment – a sobering thought.

## 7. Conclusion

The memory of Goli Otok occupies a peculiar space in Croatian public life, but what seemed to be even more peculiar is the attitude of the Croatian State towards this tragic chapter of its recent history which is characterised by a lack of interest and indifference in the memory of Goli Otok. In order to approach the two research questions, how can the attitude of the Croatian State be defined, and why does the Croatian State display such a lack of interest, the thesis was grounded in a theoretical framework within memory studies which particularly showcased the difficulty to put a label on a phenomenon whose primary characteristic is its absence by including different conceptualisations of forgetting, silencing, and amnesia.

The key takeaway of the expert interviews is as simple as it is stark: if a memory cannot fulfil a political function, it loses relevance. Goli Otok is too complex to fit into simplified national narratives, yields no political benefit, and thus is left largely untouched by the Croatian state. As all experts stressed, this complexity creates a situation of risk without reward, in which there is already little to no political gain to be achieved, but simultaneously, significant potential for backlash if mishandled, which further disincentives political actors to engage beyond superficial recognition. On top of this dynamic, there are other memories that are prioritised by Croatian state actors precisely for the reasons that Goli Otok is put in the back seat, because they can be utilised to further their own political agendas and/or contribute to specific narratives of Croatian statehood and national continuity. No malign intent was identified in this prioritisation to the disadvantage of Goli Otok – it simply not fit anybody's political agendas as well as other memories do. Therefore, the memory of Goli Otok lingers in a permanent state of ambiguity where it is never any state actor's priority, but also never completely gone from the view and entirely ignored. To go back now to answering the first research question, it was established that the memory of Goli Otok lies somewhere at the intersection of Hirst and Coman's *selective retrieval-induced forgetting* and Connerton's *repressive erasure*.

It is of utmost importance to note here that due to the research design of this study, which was based in conducting expert interviews and analysing them using thematic analysis, all conclusions and take-aways can only serve as an approximation to answering the research questions. Due to the relatively small number of experts consulted (six interviews), no absolute answers can be postulated, and this thesis must not be understood as such, but rather as a first step to open up a discussion of this predicament. One way to deepen this piece of research would be to include another methodology, for example discourse analysis, to analyse the

speeches and public acknowledgements of Croatian politicians and state officials since Croatian independence, given that these statements happen neither regularly nor frequently, the timeframe would be quite interesting. Ultimately, for the scope of this thesis and as a first approach to the topic, expert interviews proved far more suitable, as they offered in-depth insights that serve as a much more solid basis for the discussion of the research questions.

While the main takeaways are quite sobering, and at times seem even frustrating for those advocating for the commemoration of even marginal aspects of historical memory, including questions of historical responsibility, I would like to conclude on a more positive note: Two experts, Stamenić and Prokić, explicitly talked about the complexity of Goli Otok from a different angle as well, namely that while they (like the other experts) identified **the complexity of the subject** as the major factor obstructing a thorough state-led commemoration, it is simultaneously the reason what makes Goli Otok intriguing for researchers and artists alike: “The layered nature of this story, for better or worse, prevents you from rendering a simplistic answer” (Prokić, personal interview, 11.06.2025).

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## 9. Appendix

*Ad 5.1.: Attach indicative themes/questions in separate document, in sufficient detail to present a clear view of the project and its ethical implications.*

### **General areas to explore during interviews:**

The experts will be asked to comment and give their assessment on some of the following topics. These topics don't have to be discussed in the order they are listed – depending on the expertise of the individual expert, some topics might be more suitable to start the interview than others. Which of these topics will be discussed more or less in-depth is again dependent on the individual expertise and experience of the expert. Five groups of experts have been identified:

1. **Academics**, specifically historians, who have researched various aspect of Goli Otok and its culture of remembrance, can give valuable insight into e.g., the process of conducting research on a marginalised topic and assess the current state of (institutionalised) memory culture in Croatia today.
2. **Artists**: People who have approached Goli Otok and its commemoration via artistic projects, such as art installations, documentary movies or photo exhibitions. Participants of this group can help to shine a light on the practical dimensions of establishing or contributing to a specific memory culture and reflect both on the role of art and research as well as of the state in establishing a culture of remembrance.
3. **Journalists** who have published articles and reports about Goli Otok, and specifically on the few commemorative instances that were already implemented by e.g., politicians, can help to explore the attitude and reactions of the Croatian state when engaging with attempts of establishing commemorative practices.
4. **Members of NGOs** that deal with establishing a culture of remembrance in Croatia (generally and specifically on Goli Otok). It is again possible to have some overlap of people falling under this category and the category of academics. Based on their specific careers, these participants can provide both insights into the mechanisms of memory cultures on an abstract/academic level, as well as on an institutional level.
5. **Institutional Representatives** that have come into contact with the remembrance of Goli Otok in the context of their profession in the municipality of Lopar. Here, unfortunately, it is not guaranteed that a person belonging to this group can be recruited for an interview for the research project. However, their perspectives could illuminate further the attitude of Croatian state and politics towards commemorative efforts of Goli Otok and its victims.

The list of relevant topics and questions includes the following areas:

#### **1. Current state of memory culture**

- a. Interplay of collective and institutionalized memory/public and official memory – neither initiative from within society, nor on behalf of the state
  - b. Deliberate silence in order to forget traumatic experiences
  - c. Forgetting/Amnesia just a “logical” result of directing commemorative efforts elsewhere – forgetting as byproduct of remembering
- ⇒ Relevant especially for groups 1), 2), 3), 4)

## 2. Interactions with the island itself

- a. Assessment of artistic interventions, photography projects, documentaries
  - b. Lack of safeguarding of remaining structures of the former prison
    - i. Were there initiatives, demands, ideas, ... brought forward how to safeguard the structures? If yes, what did they envision and who proposed them?
    - ii. Brief attention on the island due to a possible sale and repurpose as a touristic resort – sale did not happen in the end; but why did this incident fail to start a broader discussion of Goli Otok and the necessity to safeguard the remaining structures of the former prison?
      - 1. Why were they upset about the sale? Is it because of the personal experience, because of their religion?
  - c. “Dark Tourism” – private boat tours, private discovery tours on the island – sensationalism over education
  - d. Why are there so few educational trips organized to the island, even by NGOs? Is it a lack of funding? A lack of interested participants?
- ⇒ Relevant especially for groups 2), 3), 4), 5)

## 3. Potential reasons for lack of memory culture

- a. Makeup of group of victims – not “just Stalinists”, but actually vastly different biographies
  - i. ethnic/religious component – high percentage of what today would be interpreted as ethnically Serbian – no interest in Croatia to commemorate Serb victims?
  - ii. continuity of incarceration under different regimes (fascist regimes during WW2, now under Tito’s Yugoslavia) – challenges partisan myth, since some of the people incarcerated in Goli Otok fought alongside Tito as part of the partisans, sometimes after having experienced incarceration by fascist forces during WW2
  - iii. Specific role of Women – gendered experience, gendered remembrance
- b. Role of wars of the 1990s
  - i. as interrupting factor of a process of commemoration of Goli Otok that slowly started in 1980s through the first publications of autobiographical works of former inmates
  - ii. new, complex and heavily contested memory-scape after the wars of 1990s – no relevance/no capacity to remember “fewer” victims of Goli

Otok when the much more recent wars affected a significantly higher number of the post-Yugoslav societies

- c. Yugo**nostalgia**/Tito-nostalgia
  - i. Yugo**nostalgia**/Tito-Nostalgia – glorification of Tito and his legacy leaves little to no room for critically examining his crucial role in sending people to these camps, often based on denunciations and without any trial
  - ii. Pride in “how Tito dealt with Stalinists” – is there even consensus that unjustified crimes against humanity were committed on Goli Otok by Tito and his regime?
- d. Prevalent Historical Revisionism in Croatian politics and to some degree also in Croatian academia
  - i. political situation in Croatia generally
  - ii. Role of Education/interplay of historical revisionism on education in Croatia (school and university curricula)
  - iii. possibly negative attitudes towards Communism – no desire to commemorate communists (Stalinists)
  - iv. Historical Revisionism: no desire to acknowledge victims that were either communists and/or Serbian?
- e. Role of Europe/EU
  - i. general commemoration of victims of totalitarian & authoritarian regimes as framework has produced some of the few commemorative efforts by e.g., politicians
  - ii. Why did Croatia’s EU accession not lead to a more thorough re-examination of the state’s past? (connection to historical revisionism)
  - iii. Could the EU do something to induce some sort of institutional commemoration in Croatia? Should the EU do something, or would it rather be seen as unwanted interference which would further deter Croatian politicians and institutions from implementing any commemorative efforts?

⇒ Relevant especially for groups 1), 2), 3), 4)

4. **Experience of expert** while researching, working on, publishing, ... about Goli Otok
- a. Did they receive any institutional support (e.g., regarding financing of projects, accessing material, receiving grants/permission for projects etc.)?
  - b. Did they encounter any issues or obstacles put there by institutions? (e.g., regarding financing of projects, accessing material, receiving grants/permission for projects etc.)
  - c. How easy or difficult was it to publish, distribute, publicly comment, ... on Goli Otok? What made it easier/more difficult?
  - d. How well could the expert connect to other experts/like-minded people within their respective fields? Were there any state institutions that helped or obstructed this process?

- e. Summary Question: Is there “just” a lack of interest on behalf of state institutions or a palpable tendency to obstruct commemorative efforts?
- ⇒ Relevant especially for groups 1), 2), 3), 4)

**5. Questions specifically suitable for institutional representatives that have come into contact with Goli Otok and specifically its remembrance during their work:**

- a. How would you assess the few commemorative efforts, such as the irregular and sparse visits of Croatian politicians to the island, that have taken place so far?
  - i. Who took initiative for these events?
  - ii. How were these efforts communicated to the media – did your institution reach out to media to report on the commemoration?
  - iii. Why is there no annual visit, ceremony, or something similar?
- b. How did your institution (municipality) react to the commemorative efforts implemented by artists about the victims of Goli Otok, such as art installations, photography exhibitions or documentaries?
  - i. Has your institution supported them? If yes, how?
  - ii. Has your institution taken notice of these projects but not engaged further? If so, why?
  - iii. Has your institution not taken any notice of these projects or refused to engage/be affiliated with these projects? If so, why?
- c. Has your institution been approached by local activists, NGOs or others with demands, ideas, ... about the implementation of commemorative practices for Goli Otok?
  - i. If yes, who has approached your institution? How was the communication? How did your institution react to these approaches?
    - 1. If an approach was made and your institution was generally open to the ideas/demands presented, why have no substantial commemorative acts/efforts been implemented?
    - ii. If no, why have no approaches been made to your institution?
- d. Has your institution been approached by foreign/EU-based activists, NGOs, or others?
- e. Does your institution feel a responsibility to further the remembrance of the victims of Goli Otok?

**6. What can be done?**

- a. What could be done to provoke the interest of the state to deal with its own and relatively recent past?
- b. Which commemorative, educational, or other efforts could be implemented on behalf of the state, or at least supported by the state?
  - i. Regular ceremonies of commemoration

- ii. Safeguarding the structure of the former camp on the island; building a museum, educational installations, monuments, ... on the island
    - iii. Educational events, projects, trips to the island
    - iv. Other ideas/initiatives?
  - c. What role do the experts feel they play when it comes to promoting memory culture?
  - d. What role do state institutions play? Should they even be more proactive, or would it suffice if they agreed to cooperate more closely with activists, artists, academics, ... on their projects?
  - e. More provocatively: Should something be done at all? Can something be done at all?
- ⇒ Relevant especially for groups 1), 2), 3), 4)