

DISCOURSE AS A MEANS OF ESTABLISHING OTHERNESS AT GOLI OTOK

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Abstract: The paper will primarily explore the question of ‘otherness’ at Goli otok through the use of discourse. Goli otok used to be the most notorious prison island for political prisoners in Yugoslavia², established in 1949. Although it was officially in operation until 1989, the practice of sending political prisoners was ended by 1955³. Discourse was one of the various means by which the officials established the so-called ‘otherness’, a demarcation line between the politically correct (those who supported president Tito) and ‘banda’ or those who obstinately persevered in their support for Stalin. The analysis will try to show that, besides physical and mental torture, the prisoners of Goli otok were being constantly marginalized and brainwashed into abandoning their political beliefs and actions by the officials (and the very prisoners of Goli otok) through the use of discourse.

Key words: discourse, otherness, Goli otok, division, prisoners, marginalization, torture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mihas according to Gvozdenović defines the discourse as in a broad sense, a way of organizing human experience. It (discourse) creates the frames of meaning by retelling and interpretation of the events and situations[2]. However, Miles according to Gvozdenović states that discourses are not simple strings of sentences but they constitute a sequence of statements which have their meaning, power and an impact in the social context[2]. Gvozdenović in her work likewise differentiates between the public and political discourse[2]. According to Gvozdenović, public discourse is defined as all the linguistic realizations that serve the function of transmitting the messages which are important for a specific social community [2]. When it comes to political discourse, Moritz states that language and politics are inseparable companions. Political activity does not exist without the use of language [4]. According to Kulikova and Detinko in the political discourse, whose main goal is the struggle for power, the problems of inclusion in the group and the exclusion from the group (‘self-others’) are actualised most acutely [15]. Kulikova and Detinko argue that political discourse is the result of politics which, on the one hand, is viewed as struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it[15]. In the context of political discourse one can talk about the concepts of ‘otherness’ and ‘other’. According to Kulikova and Detinko discursive construction of ‘otherness’ takes a special place in political and discursive linguistics while ‘others’ is one of the main concepts in political communication [15]. Political discourse is according to Kulikova and Detinko based on the opposition ‘self-others’, one of its crucial components being ‘the fight against the enemy (fight)’ [15]. Consequently, ‘the other’ is close to the image of the enemy [15]. What is more, the enemy oftentimes represents a potentially subversive element or, as V. I. Karasik according to Kulikova and Detinko argues that the sign of the enemy is the presence of threat from his side to a group of people with whom the individual identifies himself/herself [15]. Staszak states that otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (‘Us’, the self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (‘Them’, the Other) by stigmatizing difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination[5]. Staszak further argues that the creation of otherness (also called *othering*) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us [5]. La Capra according to Pandey states that such binary categorizations and demarcations have a tendency to assume either in overt or covert ways a privileged position, a dominance of one’s group perspective over the other[6]. Consequently, the question of power relations plays a major role in these binary categorizations: what is more, according to Staszak the asymmetry in power relationships is central to the construction of otherness [5]. However, the creation (and discrimination of ‘others’ does not rest solely on discourse.

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Staszak argues that the ability of discourse to impose its categories depends also upon (political, social and economic) power of those who speak it. Only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures[5].

It is likewise important to note that political discourse is oftentimes connected with ideology. Wodak according to Kulikova and Detinko states that political groups need their own language and portray themselves via this language; they signal their ideology through certain slogans and stereotypes; their ideological structure is joined together in a certain way and so is their argumentation[15]. Marx defines ideology as any form of thinking that conceals the real relations in a society[7]. Golić states that ideology often misuses any form of knowledge to corroborate its abstract stances[7]. Stojanović according to Gvozdenović states that ideology is in its nature a perverted image of reality and, as such, it can act independently in directing the political behaviour that ought not be in line with the material processes in a society[2]. Consequently, the very communist/socialist ideology might, depending on the way of its implementation, be perverted and turned into its opposition in the reckonings with the real or the alleged political opponents[3].

In the paper we will explore how (political) discourse, employed by the Communist Party, served in creation of political otherness and how this very 'other' is represented as a potential threat, in the first place, to the existing unanimity of the Party and, subsequently, to the unanimity of the SFR⁴ Yugoslavia itself.

2. THE USE OF DISCOURSE FOR ESTABLISHING OTHERNESS AT GOLI OTOK

Michel Foucault in his work *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* states that all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who is he; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized, etc.)[8]. At Goli otok the authorities insisted upon the division between 'brigada' (consisting of the prisoners who 'redeemed' their political sins) and 'banda' (those who still persevered in their old political beliefs). [3] The use of derogatory term 'banda' for describing political opponents can be interpreted in the light of overt denigration of Othered groups through name-calling and various other lexical strategies[6]. According to Lazić thus the authorities drew a strict demarcation line between those who were still 'out of favour' and those who 'advanced' in the camp hierarchy[3]. Roth states that (in the prison system) classification was used to determine the security level of each inmate in order to place the individual in the proper environment[9]. Lazić argues that 'banda' was the subject to all kinds of mistreatment, which was bound to happen constantly when the prisoners were 'in boycott', namely boycotted by their fellow prisoners[3]. What is more, the said branding of the Cominform supporters with the term 'banda' (as opposed to the positive term 'brigada') was employed as a means of emphasizing, establishing the prisoners' 'otherness', their deviation from the norm[3]. René Žirar according to Lazić states that it is a characteristic of every sacrificial system that it presents an image of a world of an 'absolute' perfection since it automatically excludes everything it considers imperfect, or that might seem imperfect, unworthy of existence, everything prone to forceful exclusion[3]. In the case of an individual being 'in boycott' (the state of collective hatred), everyone may abuse that person, spit at him/her, insult him/her, whereas he/she⁵ would not have any right – his/her only right would be to work twelve hours per day without rest. Eva Nahir Panić, a Jewish woman who was the inmate of Sveti Grgur camp from April 1952 to November 1954[10] according to Lazić provides her experience of 'being in boycott': First, a prisoner 'in boycott' works twelve hours per day, she is not allowed to talk to anybody and no one is allowed to talk to her⁶. Everyone has a right to spit at her, or to beat her. She is not allowed to sleep on the box, and she has to sleep underneath it. I, being boycotted, slept underneath the bucket⁷, so the other inmates would often urinate in my mouth. You have no rights when being boycotted. You have one right only, and that is to

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⁵The pronouns he/she are used interchangeably because of the existence of male and female labour camps respectively.

⁶Since Eva relates her experience in a concentration camp for women we have used the pronoun *he/she*.

⁷The bucket used for urination and defecation of the prisoners.

ask your companion (you are assigned a permanent one), an activist (if you have luck, that companion is benevolent one, if not, the companion is maleficent and sadistic) the following question: 'May I go to the toilet.' The companion has to accompany and take care of the boycotted one[3].

Kiš and Mandić according to Lazić state that while being in boycott, Eva faced numerous hardships, such as not being allowed to sleep at night or, once asleep, being suddenly awoken and interrogated, being constantly on her feet which resulted in her developing atrophy, being under constant psychological pressure from her interrogators, etc. [3].

Besides boycott, the camp discourse included the terms such as 'critique' and 'self-critique': on a weekly basis, the inmates of Goli otok were brought together to talk about the 'sins' of other inmates (critique) and their own (self-critique), which was just another way of completely subjecting the prisoners[3]. Concerning self-critique, Ayrault according to Foucault states that it is not enough that wrong-doers be justly punished. They must if possible judge and condemn themselves[8].

Martin Previšić in his work *Goli otok: istorija* states that the verbal ostracism of the Party was pretty cruel; consequently, the Cominform supporters were often being stereotyped as the fifth-columnists, saboteurs, traitors, careerists, fractionalists, vermin, people who did not advance politically, even the spies of Gestapo[11]. Previšić likewise argues that the nomenclatural humiliation of the Cominform supporters reached its apotheosis at Goli otok where they were named 'banda', something that in the public discourse remained a synonym for a politically and socially worthless person[11]. Žirar states that a totalitarian system endeavours to free itself from any guilt by denigrating the scapegoat. In order for a system to solidify itself, the belief in that mythical blackness needs to be strengthened. The most successful way to achieve this is, doubtlessly, the proper confession of a culprit[12]. The confession of a Cominform supporter, in which he renounced his old political position and returned to Tito and the Communist Party, was a way of his/her advancement in the camp hierarchy (which meant better food, daily ration of water, physically not so demanding jobs, etc.), or his/her 'ticket out of the island'. What the camp officials (and the Communist Party in general) wanted to achieve in extorting confessions from the former Cominform supporters (their renouncing their support for Stalin and espousing the politics of the Communist Party) was the overall uniformity (the power of the norm), Party and country respectively. According to Foucault the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences [8].

The Cominform supporters are consequently used as a deviation from the norm, from a proper member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, thus 'drawing' a stark demarcation line, creating two separate groups, 'us' (who espouse the correct political beliefs) and 'them' (those who have strayed from the political line of the Communist Party and who have to be 're-educated'). Riggings according to Pandey argues that expressions that are most revealing of the boundaries separating Self and Other are *inclusive and exclusive pronouns and possessives* such as *we and they, us and them, and ours and theirs*[6]. Lazić states that it is important to emphasize that in extorting confessions from the former Cominform supporters the Party officials often endeavoured to represent this process as completely willing, namely as if the Cominformists gave their confessions of their own accord, often glorifying Tito and the Communist Party in these 'confessions'[3]. Previšić in his work provides numerous examples of the inmates giving their confession under physical coercion, two of them being Nikola Čuić and Milenko Lukić[11]. Rade Žigić, the accused Cominformist, was confronted with Čuić and Lukić who testified against him. Žigić according to Previšić provides the following description of Čuić: I have listened to the statement of Nikola Čuić. Nikola Čuić gives an impression of a man who absolutely does not control himself. The intellect and honesty are fighting against fear within this man, the fact that was clear during his interrogation. Whenever the intellect and honesty prevailed over fear, the investigator interrupted, intervened and suggested to Čuić what he was supposed to say[11].

Previšić likewise provides the final statements of Lukić and Čuić which are identical in terms of content, the fact that leaves room for a doubt that these 'confessions' were being orchestrated by

UDBA⁸: I have realized that I have made a mistake. I've thought of everything I've done and I do repent it, and particularly the fact that supporting Cominform brought me into the company of spies, the ustashas and other enemies of this country[11]. Žirar according to Lazić states that it is necessary that those defeated willingly confess their sins. It is necessary that their confession does not seem extorted by violence. It is demanded that those damned bless their damnation. They do not have to forgive, it is the least needed from them, because that would mean that the persecution is not absolutely infallible. What is needed from them is an enthusiastic agreement with the decision that annuls them[12]. The fact that physical violence in most of the cases played a major role in obtaining these confessions leaves no room for the Cominformists' willing support for the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

Otherness of the Cominformists was created through the very process of their isolation by the authorities on the 'Adriatic islands turned into concentration camps'[1]. Namely, otherness may be created not only through the discourse (though the discourse has a significant role in this process), but also through the spatial practices and constructs[5]. According to Staszak the in-group and the out-group derive part of their identity and their otherness from the more or less stigmatizing space prescribed to them. On a smaller scale, the constructs confining the insane or the condemned in asylums and prisons fit the same logic. Their confinement sets them apart, worsens their condition, and confirms their particularity. They derive part of their identity – or other, their otherness – from their prison [5].

Roth according to Lazić states that islands have proven to be popular with prison planners. From Van Diemen's Land and Norfolk Island to the world's largest island, Australia, to America's Alcatraz, France's Devil's Island, and Italy's Lipari island, the planet's oceans have an enviable record for providing the ultimate in correctional security[13]. Foucault argues that the isolation of the convicts guarantees that it is possible to exercise over them, with maximum intensity, a power that will not be overthrown by any other influence[8]. Consequently, the isolation and segregation of the Cominformists on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur played a major role in their (political) re-education: what is more, the Cominformists were treated as lepers that might 'contaminate' the (politically) healthy population. Marinković and Ristić according to Bentam⁹ argues that prior to the application of any disciplining and supervising technology which originated from the geo-epistemology of plague, the geo-epistemology of leprosy ought to be applied; the individuals ought to be in the first place separated, divided, classified by the new forms of knowledge/power which were legitimized in medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy, economy and knowledge management. *Interrogation* ought to be applied[14]. Consequently, these islands were employed as a form of lazarettos or hospitals meant to quarantine individuals with contagious diseases[9], Stalinism being a (contagious) disease that ought to be prevented or stopped by all means available.

According to Lazić the authorities used more subtle forms of the inmates' isolation, and these were related to the methods of transportation of the future camp inmates[3]. The process of the creation of the inmates' otherness began long before they physically reached the islands. Beganović according to Lazić provides the experiences of Eva Nahir Panić and Ženi Lebl: In the remand Eva Nahir Panić is brought by car in which she is forced to lie face-down on the floor, in order to avoid being seen. The same happens with Ženi Lebl. According to Lebl, from there the prisoners are being transported, in a column of buses, under the cover of night, within the vehicles with dark screens. The trains and ships by which the inmates are being transported to the camps always drive when the outside world is fast asleep, the fact that consequently excludes any possibility of the cognition of what is going on before its (world's) eyes – so close, yet so far. These forms of transportation are just a metonymy of the social system in its entirety. Darkness, silence and secrecy in which the inmates are wrapped are just the symptoms given as the determinants of the totalitarian societies. (...) But above all, an uncertainty as a constant which determines the structure of the Gulag in its entirety. What is most necessary is to force the inmates not to know what to expect tomorrow, to abolish their future and, simultaneously, to convince those who might sympathize with the victims that for those people (the victims) time as projected temporal dimension has become illusory[3].

⁸The secret police organization of Yugoslavia.

⁹Jeremy Bentham.

Lazić further states that the indicative of the need for secrecy of the totalitarian regimes is likewise the description Ženi Lebl provides of the proceedings the inmates were subjected to upon the liberation[3]. The following excerpt is given in the form of a dialogue between Kiš and Ženi:

Ženi Lebl: We [the prisoners] could not wait to see the other world besides that of Goli otok. The moment we came, we embarked on the trucks, we arrived at the first city and suddenly – there was no electricity!

Kiš: I don't understand.

Ženi Lebl: We didn't know what had happened. We left the city, and then there was electricity again.

Kiš: You took a look – and there was a lighted city.

Ženi Lebl: We entered another populated place – the electricity was gone! We left the place – the same situation happened again!

Kiš: Of course, and suddenly you began to realize...

Ženi Lebl: That they [the other people] were not allowed to see us!

Kiš: That they [those in power] put out the electricity in the city so that people could not see you?

Ženi Lebl: Yes[3].

According to Lazić after the deprivation of liberty, the inmates are being deprived of a short-term contact with the outside world: the 'socialist darkness' devours them as if they had never existed[3].

Kulikova and Detinko in their work note the importance of the so-called technique of paternalistic attitude towards 'others'[15]. According to Kulikova and Detinko, some of the means of realization of this technique are lexical constructions with the meaning of *care, guardianship, assistance, partnership, security, peace, stability, support, help, safety, partner, contact, etc.* as well as direct address to enhance the effect (*We'll help you*)[15]. This paternalistic attitude towards the former inmates was often achieved through the use of euphemisms such as re-education, the term used for the tortures the inmates of Goli otok were put through. Moritz emphasizes the importance of euphemisms in the political discourse for blurring the reality[4]. According to Previšić the Yugoslav communists, or those who were responsible for the methods that were used in the camp, thought of the work at Goli otok as a procedure of re-education and a method of redemption, in the words of Aleksandar Ranković, the keyman of UDBA, during the VI. Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1952. in Zagreb[11]. The Cominformists are, in a manner of speaking, deemed of as 'prodigal sons' that ought to be returned 'on the right (political) path' to Tito (who represents a father figure) by all means available, whereas the euphemism 'Tito's fight for every man' meant 'breaking the spirit of each individual man'[11]. According to Lazić the totalitarian regimes are completely convinced in the probity of their 'mission', to the extent that the crimes committed against the imprisoned individuals the perpetrators consider as a way of helping those individuals get ideologically 'cured': consequently, we do not talk about 'traumatizing', but the 'ideological (curing)'[3]. Beganović according to Lazić states that the secrecy of all the totalitarian regimes, their craving to conceal the very existence of the camps, represents the component that one may find in Nazism and Stalinism. Their main goal is, first of all, to escape the very discourse about the camp: through their being quiet about the existence of the camps, the authorities wanted to convince the outside world of the illusory of the existence of such institutions, to prevent their cause from being stained[3]. Consequently the camps are turned into a form of penitentiaries where violence and murder are justifiable in protecting the unity of the country[3].

Lastly, the otherness of the former inmates of Goli otok was particularly visible upon their liberation. According to Previšić the social environment to which the former inmates returned

boycotted them due to their being considered 'traitors'. It was a problem to associate with those people. Their humiliation continued. The people kept away from greeting or even looking at the former Cominformists upon their liberation. The long-term friendships were being broken-up[11].

Considering the fact that the majority of them experienced difficulties in finding a proper job (and consequently the means of subsistence), it is obvious that the stigmatization of the Cominformists continued long after their alleged 'liberation'.

3. CONCLUSION

The paper has primarily explored the question of establishing 'otherness' at Goli otok through the use of discourse. Discourse was one of the means by which the officials established the so-called 'otherness', a demarcation line between the politically correct and those who still persevered in their support for Stalin.

In the paper we have discussed the division between 'brigada' (those who renounced their support for the Cominform) and 'banda' (those who persevered in their support for Stalin). We have proven that, besides physical and mental torture, discourse was one of the means of breaking the inmates' spirit. Euphemisms were often being employed for that purpose: the authorities used them in order to disguise the brutalities behind the inmates' (political) re-education. Additionally, otherness at Goli otok was created not only through discourse, but also through spatial practices and constructs, through the inmates' isolation on the 'Adriatic islands'. Thus, the inmates were treated as 'lepers' that were detained on these islands in order to protect the (politically) healthy population of Yugoslavia. What is more, the stigmatization of the (former) Cominformists continued even after their liberation: they never fully reintegrated into society.

All things considered, discourse is not just a simple string of words, a benign thing, but can be put to very malicious use, with detrimental effects upon its targets. Due to this fact it is often employed in the field of politics, in demonizing the political opponents by those in power, the destinies of the former inmates of Goli otok being an example for that.

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