

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Glasgow (UofG)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26A Modern Languages and Linguistics		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Combating Russia's 'Memory War' on the Gulag experience		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2015–present		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Andrea Gullotta	Lecturer in Russian	1 Aug 2015–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2017–31 <sup>st</sup> December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Between 1918–1987, at least 20 million detainees were confined in Soviet prison camps later known as the Gulag. Dr Gullotta's research brings to light cultural aspects of Gulag life including detainees' resistance using art and literature, and the Russian government's 'memory war' attempting to rewrite the historical narrative of the Gulag. His findings have formed the basis of public outreach including a permanent Hunterian Museum digital exhibition <i>Beauty in Hell</i> and have supported and enhanced the work of NGOs Memorial and Rights in Russia, human rights organisations whose work includes advocating against a return to totalitarianism, in part through commemorating the victims of the Soviet Gulag.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Andrea Gullotta's body of work, emerging from his doctoral research but developed substantially since his employment at UofG in 2015, has focused on the system of Russian forced labour camps known as the Gulag. These camps were active in the Soviet Union from the Russian Civil War until the 1980s. At least 20 million people <a href="#">were incarcerated in them</a>. Gullotta's research, based on largely unpublished archival materials, in contrast to existing ideas of 'Gulag literature' and 'Gulag culture', offers a nuanced understanding of the importance of culture for prisoners and camp institutions.</p> <p>By revealing what was written and created by prisoners within the camps, Gullotta illuminated complex dynamics between camp administrators and prisoners, and strategies used to avoid censorship or punishment and to defy the guards. Gullotta also brought to light the role of camp administrators in supporting cultural activities of the prisoners, and changed the perception of some historical figures. For example, Fedor Eikhmans was previously known only as a Chekist and first leader of the Gulag institution, but because of Gullotta's research is now also recognised as someone who helped intellectuals.</p> <p>Through film, text and images documenting camp lives and culture, Gullotta examined the Solovki Camp in depth, showing how the cultural activity of the artists, writers and other dissident intellectuals held there formed a resistance to the systematic violence and oppression of the camp. Poems, essays and even research by prisoners within the camp – for example Boris Evreinov's poetry, or various activities pursued by the intellectuals in the many camps – are viewed through this lens as acts of resistance. Gullotta's research into these phenomena formed the basis of a permanent digital exhibition at the Hunterian Museum, <i>Beauty in Hell</i> [3.1].</p> <p>Gullotta's subsequent monograph on the history, cultural dynamics and literary outputs of the Solovki prison camp [3.2] further developed this new interpretation of Gulag literature. Past scholarship tended to present an externalised perspective of the Gulag, for example focusing on works produced by survivors after liberation, and presenting more survival-oriented narratives of</p>		

their experience. Gullotta has shown the multifaceted nature of literature behind the Gulag's iron fence, paving the way for a new field of research within both Gulag studies and Russian literary studies – 'internal' Gulag literature, to complement the established canon of authors who wrote after their liberation, such as 1970 Nobel prize winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Gullotta's work demonstrates that, within the Soviet prisons and camps, many intellectuals were allowed to publish original literary works [3.4]. It shows how culture within the camps was a more complex phenomenon than historians had hitherto recognised. For instance, the literary works of Boris Shiriaev, thought to be inspired by Soviet propaganda, were reinterpreted in the exhibition and monograph as instances of resistance, based on the use of Aesopian language. Gullotta's research has thus demonstrated the artistic, literary and spiritual value of the cultural works made by prisoners, as well as their active use as a tool for intellectual resistance [3.3, 3.5].

In carrying out this research, Gullotta witnessed active resistance and interference of state actors towards NGOs and researchers working on the Gulag. This became a focus of his work, and he has described this phenomenon as an ongoing 'memory war' over how the Gulag are understood, taking place over several decades [3.5], and Gullotta's forthcoming monograph on the Gulag Memory War]. Gullotta's work reveals how Russian institutions initially ignored, then hindered, and latterly tried to control the memory of the Gulag, and how in contemporary Russian historical narrative, the place of the Gulag, and the millions of political prisoners, is under direct threat. The Russian authorities' counter-narrative strategy includes impeding funding for NGOs such as Memorial, the construction of a new (state-controlled) Museum of the Gulag, promoting a state-determined revisionist historical viewpoint, and the wrongful imprisonment of Gulag historians such as Yuri Dimitriev.

### 3. References to the research

3.1. Gullotta, A. 2017. *Beauty in Hell: Culture in the Gulag*.

A Virtual Exhibition hosted by The Hunterian. Available at:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/visit/exhibitions/virtualexhibitions/beautyinhellcultureinthegulag/>

3.2. Gullotta, A. 2018. *Intellectual Life and Literature at Solovki 1923–1930: The Paris of the Northern Concentration Camps*. Legenda: Cambridge. [Available from HEI]

3.3. Gullotta, A. 2019. *Psevdonimy Solovetskih literatorov: voprosy istoricheskoi i tvorcheskoi biografii*. In: Rusakova, E. (ed.) *Sbornik dokladov 16-h chtenii pamiati Veniamina Iofe "Pravo na imja: Biografika 20 veka"* (NIC "Memorial": St Petersburg), 37–45.

<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/184546/>

3.4. Gullotta, A. 2019 (accepted for publication). "I feel, I know, I am immortal": literary works in the newspapers of Soviet prisons and camps in the 1920s. *Russian Literature*.

<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/183857/>

3.5. Gullotta, A. 2020. Religious Thought and Experience in the Prison Camps. In: Pattison, G., Poole R. and Emerson C., *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 580-591. <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/184547/>

**Quality:** the outputs are mostly peer-reviewed and expected to meet or exceed the 2\* threshold.

### 4. Details of the impact

Gullotta's research and his public outreach work is helping to counter the increasing spread of disinformation on the realities and significance of Soviet history, in particular of the Gulag and their millions of detainees. Gullotta is the first researcher to have applied the term 'memory war'

to the government-approved discourse around the Gulag, at a December 2017 event at Pushkin House, London, organised by the British NGO Rights in Russia. The introduction of this term – not widely used in the Russian press or abroad – is significant because Russian institutions are actively trying to suppress or debase historical narratives of the Gulag. Independent NGOs and researchers in Russia investigating this era and the mechanisms of Soviet repression have been attacked and vilified, and existing documentation is increasingly under threat.

### **Raising awareness of the memory war on the Gulag and the Gulag experience**

Gullotta's research shows how archival documents have been disappearing and/or made less accessible, while private archives, online databases and individual publications on social media attempt to counteract this tendency. In its review of Gullotta's work [3.2], the *Financial Times* notes the timeliness of the research in this regard [5.1]: *'this book also comes at a time when access to the materials it analyzes is being limited by the Russian government'*.

Gullotta has worked closely with Memorial, a Russia-based human rights organisation co-founded by Nobel Peace Prize winner and dissident Andrei Sakharov (himself a former political detainee), Memorial itself having been nominated for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize. Memorial calls out political repression in both Soviet-era and present-day Russia, including commemorating the lives of forgotten Gulag prisoners. The Director and board member of Memorial's St. Petersburg Office commented [5.2]: *'Gullotta's work has shed new light on the lives of the victims of the Gulag not simply as victims but as creative and artistic people whose output ... was an important channel for resistance to the regime.... Bringing out this depth of detail and understanding of life in the Gulag ...is important, especially in the current climate in which there is a concerted effort to minimise the existence and reality of the Gulag in the contemporary history of Russia.'*

Rights in Russia, a UK-registered charity that supports the work of human rights organisations based in the Russian Federation, circulated a petition, written by Gullotta based on his findings, against the vilification and wrongful arrest of Russian Gulag historian and human rights campaigner, Yuri Dimitriev. This letter has collected 428 signatories [5.3], including academics, cultural figures, politicians and journalists, with notable signatories including Nobel Prize laureate John Maxwell Coetzee, Italian MPs Leah Quartapelle and Gennaro Migliore, and Robert van Voeren, the Director of the Sakharov Research Center for Democratic Development. As a result, Gullotta's findings were used in a formal request by three Italian MPs to the Italian government to put pressure on the Russian government for the release of Dimitriev.

Gullotta has collaborated with Rights in Russia, including appearing by invitation on their podcast [5.4]. They commented that *'Gullotta was the first ever to use this term, 'Memory War,' which has now become widespread'*, adding that *'Dr Gullotta's framework deepened our understanding of the motives of the prosecution of the Russian historian'*. They also commented on the petition against Dimitriev's persecution, stating: *'without Dr Gullotta's research findings, it is most likely that the petition would have had less impact.'* The publication of this signed letter has amplified media coverage of both the memory war and the injustice against Dimitriev, with coverage by the *New European* (30<sup>th</sup> July 2020), the *Festival of Human Rights*, Italy (23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020), and an interview with Gullotta published by *Meduza* (13<sup>th</sup> July 2020), one of the major non-governmental platforms in Russia, which was shared on Facebook 2,100 times [5.5].

Gullotta's insights into creativity and continued resistance within the Gulag, communicated through his book, exhibition, press coverage, public events and work with NGOs, provides an

accessible and distinct view of the Gulag. He presents these political prisoners as intellectuals and artists, highlighting their sustained resistance to oppression through their continued production of artistic and cultural activities and outputs while detained in the Gulag. His work thus directly confronts an official counter-narrative of the Gulag's decades-long existence. Gullotta wrote an article for [The Conversation](#) on this topic (10<sup>th</sup> July 2020), which was read by ~19,000 people and shared 578 times in the first month [5.6]. It was translated into Italian by *L'Internazionale*, a weekly review of significant articles worldwide with a readership of 125,000.

## THE HUNTERIAN



Figure 1: Cover image from [Beauty in Hell: Culture in the Gulag](#)

Up to early 2020, *Beauty in Hell: Culture in the Gulag*, the virtual exhibition hosted by the Hunterian Museum since 2017, had over 22,500 page views by the end of December 2020 [5.7]. Its key message, of the sophistication of cultural activity and acts of resistance in the Gulag, has resonated with visitors. A senior Fellow of the Kennan institute (a prominent US think tank devoted to improving American understanding of Russia) stated [5.8]: '*Gullotta has prepared an amazing virtual exhibition ... a good starting point to get to know an unconventional and not simple theme: art behind the walls of the Gulag. ... I [hope] Andrea and his colleagues plan to continue initiating the public to the beauty coming from other corners of the Gulag Hades...*' The curator of another [online exhibition](#) launched on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020, specifically on a Gulag rebellion at the Sobibor camp, has also used Gullotta's research to underpin their activity [5.9].

The findings, imagery and documents from the exhibition have also been used in public engagement by Gullotta, for example at the annual European Researchers' Night (Explorathon), at Glasgow's Riverside Museum (2019). Typical comments received include one [visitor](#) saying they '*knew about the Holocaust, [but] never knew anything about the Gulag.*' At another public talk in Gorizia, Italy, 2019, 78% of 45 attendees surveyed said their understanding of the Gulag and Gulag culture had been changed; the remaining 22% desired to know more. 80% had no prior knowledge of Gulag culture [5.10]. These talks relate to a subject only just gaining recognition, as indicated by the fact that Memorial's [Facebook page](#) has ~24,400 followers. However, the topic has political and moral resonance with the public at a time when disinformation remains a major cultural challenge on an unprecedented scale, and Gullotta's work makes a key contribution.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- 5.1 *Financial Times*, 27 April 2018, Intellectual Life & Literature book review [PDF, also available at <https://www.ft.com/content/5932c62c-47d2-11e8-8c77-ff51caedcde6>]
- 5.2 Testimonial letter, Director of Russian NGO Memorial in St. Petersburg [PDF]
- 5.3 Letter of support signed by 428 academics, hosted at Memorial Website [PDF]
- 5.4 Testimonial letter, Director of Rights in Russia [PDF].
- 5.5 Media coverage of the Dimitriev case and the memory war that is its context [PDF]
  - a. *Pravda Severa*, 'Virtual'naia vystavka, posviashchennaia istorii SLONa, otkrylas' na saite universiteta Glazgo' (8 Oct 2017)
  - b. *Messaggero Veneto*, 'La difficile democrazia nella Russia di Putin e già sta scattando la lotta alla successione' (26 Mar 2019)
  - c. Severreal.org, ["Война за память". Иностранные ученые потребовали освободить Дмитриева](#)
  - d. Meduza.io, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020 [Россия не может еще раз идти по дороге репрессий» Историк Юрию Дмитриеву грозит 15 лет колонии. Специалист по ГУЛАГу Андреа Гуллотта объясняет, почему его защищает весь мир](#)
  - e. Information.dk, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, [Historiker viede sit liv til at afdække Stalins forbrydelser. Nu er han selv blevet straffet](#)
  - f. Festival dei Diritti Umani, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, [Aggiornamento: condannato Dmitriev, lo storico che ha scoperto le fosse comuni di Stalin](#)
  - g. Dagbladet, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020. *Historikeren, der viede sit liv til at afdække Stalins forbrydelser, er nu selv blevet straffet.*
  - h. New European, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020. *Russian and the Gulag: Putin is fighting for state control over how Soviet horrors are remembered.*
- 5.6 Summary of engagement indicators from The Conversation of Gullotta's article *Russia and the Gulag: Putin is fighting for state control over how Soviet horrors are remembered*. [PDF]
  - a. Summary report dated 8<sup>th</sup> August 2020, showing numbers of times read and number of comments, saved from Excel spreadsheet
  - b. Screenshot from the website [<https://theconversation.com/russia-and-the-gulag-putin-is-fighting-for-state-control-over-how-soviet-horrors-are-remembered-142438>] showing numbers of shares on Twitter and Facebook.
- 5.7 Web analytics report from the Hunterian Museum on the *Beauty in Hell* virtual exhibition [<https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/visit/exhibitions/virtualexhibitions/beautyinhellcultureinthegulag/>] [PDF], showing digital engagement, and email from the Hunterian's Visitor Experience Manager giving attendance figures for an online event held 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Due to a technical issue, accurate geographical data were unavailable.
- 5.8 Facebook comment by Kennan Institute Fellow, 29 September 2017 [PDF of screenshot]
- 5.9 Webpage from online exhibition including acknowledgement of Dr Gullotta's research [PDF]
- 5.10 Evaluative questionnaires collated in Excel and saved as PDF, with accompanying summary report relating to Gorizia and Explorathon public talks  
See also: European Researchers' Night 2019: [Explorathon video hosted on YouTube \[at 1.25\]](#)