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Remembering Gendered Histories of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia and Goli otok in Eva Grlić's *Memories* and Ženi Lebl's *White Violets*

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Abstract

This article examines Yugoslav women's transnational memories of state terror in two autobiographical texts bearing witness to the Holocaust and corrective labor camps on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur: Ženi Lebl's *White Violets* (1990) and Eva Israel Grlić's *Memories* (1997). I argue these texts recover disparate histories of state terror, coproducing shared strategies of memory and narration in the process. This article contextualizes how women's testimonies maneuvered the patriarchal cult of silence that marginalized gendered experiences of the corrective labor camps until the 1990s and women's erasure from Yugoslavia's important legacies, such as the antifascist struggle within which Ženi Lebl and Eva Grlić were actively involved. Drawing attention to how the Yugoslav state terror apparatus negated the women's revolutionary contributions and weaponized their biographies against them, this article argues that life writing reclaims their authorial agency and restores multilayered archives of the past.

In 1949, Eva Israel Grlić and Ženi Lebl were among the tens of thousands of Yugoslav citizens deemed supporters of Iosif Stalin and Party traitors in the wake of the 1948 Yugoslav-Soviet split. Both women were Yugoslav Jews and former *partizanke* (partisan women) who joined the multiethnic national liberation movement (NOB) to survive the Holocaust in Yugoslavia when, from 1941 to 1944, Yugoslav Jews were persecuted by occupying Nazi, Hungarian, and Italian forces, and domestic fascist regimes such as the Croatian Ustaša in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and the Nazi quisling government in Belgrade.¹ However, Eva Grlić's and Ženi Lebl's revolutionary biographies did little to save them from the false accusations that they had acted against the Yugoslav state during the period of state-sanctioned terror in Yugoslavia, referred to as the Informbiro period. Both women were sentenced to hard labor in corrective labor camps on the Adriatic Islands of Goli otok and Sveti Grgur where, it is estimated, around seventeen thousand men and 860 women were imprisoned during the camps' operations from 1949 to 1956.² The two women wrote about their experiences in the

¹ The Second World War in Yugoslavia is complex. In addition to multiple occupations, Yugoslavia descended into a violent civil war beset by inter and intra-ethnic violence. The main actors in the civil war include the Croatian Ustaša, a Nazi puppet regime; the Chetniks, Serbian ethnonationalist paramilitaries whose allegiances changed throughout the war; and the partisans led by the Yugoslav Communist Party (KPJ).

² While Goli otok had a separate men's camp and women's camp, Sveti Grgur was exclusively a women's camp. The women's and men's camps on Goli otok were segregated and placed on separate ends of the island to prevent interaction between the two.

camps only decades later in the 1990s. Both Ženi Lebl's memoir *White Violets* (1990) and Eva Grlić's autobiography *Memories* (1997) bear witness to successive histories of state violence from the Holocaust to the corrective labor camps of the late 1940s and 1950s.³

Ženi Lebl, a historian of Yugoslav Jewish life in Israel, was one of the first women to speak publicly about her experiences in the corrective labor camps in a documentary series produced by the Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš in the late 1980s.⁴ Lebl emigrated to Israel in the 1950s where, alongside another Yugoslav-Israeli emigre and former detainee, Eva Panić-Nahir, she approached Kiš with her testimony when he was visiting Jerusalem in 1986. Kiš agreed to interview the two women in a documentary TV series filmed on location in Israel and titled *Goli život* (Bare Life).⁵ The documentary, which was released on Yugoslav television in 1990, importantly broke women's collective silence on the subject nearly four decades after the conclusion of the purges and the cessation of the camps' use for the Informbiro period's political prisoners.⁶

Until the 1990s, the legacy of Yugoslavia's corrective labor camps was confined to a patriarchal memory narrative regarding "dissident" experiences in Yugoslavia that excluded women and denied them a possible framework for their testimonies.⁷ According to Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, broader cultural movements throughout the eastern bloc in the 1980s, such as *samizdat* publications about Stalin's Gulags, enabled men's Goli otok testimonies to emerge much earlier than women's.⁸ Later, testimonies such as Dragoslav Mihajlović's *Goli otok* pandered to the rising tide of ethnonationalism and historical revisionism that characterized the period after Josip Broz Tito's death in 1980 and the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Mihajlović's *Goli otok* in particular solidified the understanding of the corrective labor camps as an integral site of the male-dissident experience.

Bare Life was a watershed moment for women's memory despite its brief life on Yugoslav television and presumed disappearance during the Yugoslav dissolution wars.⁹ Renegotiating the patriarchal barriers women faced in official memory spheres, Ženi Lebl and Eva Panić-Nahir initiated the necessary precedent for many more women to come forward with their oral and written testimonies in the 1990s and 2000s.¹⁰ While *Bare Life* arguably still worked within the constraints of Yugoslavia's patriarchal memory culture, given that the women's testimonies were only realized with the help of a male mediator, the ensuing testimonial wave effected a pivotal shift toward women asserting their authorial agency outside the official memory frameworks from which they had long been excluded. Since the documentary's appearance in 1990, former female prisoners have recorded their camp testimonies in autobiographies and memoirs, documentary series, newspaper stories, and interviews conducted

³ Ženi Lebl, *Ljubičica bela. Vic dug dve i po godine* (White Violets: The Joke that Lasted Two and Half Years, Gornji Milanovac, 1990); Eva Grlić, *Sjećanja* (Memories, Zagreb, 1997).

⁴ Milka Žicina, an established interwar feminist writer, was the first woman to write a book on her experience in the labor camps in the 1970s; however, she kept the manuscript in a kitchen cabinet, and the manuscript was published posthumously in 2002 as *Sve, sve, sve . . .* (Everything, Everything, Everything, Zagreb, 2002). See Katarzyna Taczynska, "Diskurs o logoru Goli otok—ženska perspektiva" (Discourse on the Goli otok camp—a Female Perspective), *Književnost*, no. 4 (2014), available online at <http://www.knjizenstvo.rs/sr/casopisi/2014/zenska-književnost-i-kultura/diskurs-o-logoru-goli-otok-zenska-perspektiva#gsc.tab=0> (accessed October 1, 2024).

⁵ Danilo Kiš and Aleksandar Mandić, *Goli život* (Bare Life, Belgrade, 2020).

⁶ The camps continued to be used for juvenile political delinquents well into the 1980s.

⁷ Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, "Yugoslav Women Intellectuals: From a Party Cell to a Prison Cell," *History of Communism in Europe*, vol. 5 (2014): 36–53.

⁸ These texts include Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, which won the Nobel Prize in 1970, but also *7,000 Days in Siberia* (1971) by Karlo Štajner, an Austrian-Yugoslav prisoner of the Soviet Gulags. *7000 Days in Siberia* formed the archival basis for Danilo Kiš's short story *A Tomb for Boris Davidovitch* in the collection of the same time (1976).

⁹ Aleksandar Mandić published the script for each of *Bare Life's* episodes in 2020.

¹⁰ The testimonies of Eva Panić-Nahir, Ženi Lebl, Vera Winter, Eva Grlić, Jelena Halec Hadžikan, Dina Markuš, and Miljuša Jovanović, among others, circulated publicly during this period.

by Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, an anthropologist and authority on women's experiences in the corrective labor camps, and psychotherapist Dubravka Stijačić.¹¹

Kiš's *Bare Life* also importantly bookended the two women's testimonies with their memories of the Second World War and a discussion of Jewish identity in Yugoslavia, thereby initiating an important conversation about how we can approach other concentrationary histories after the Holocaust. This article reassesses the production of Yugoslav women's camp memories through a transnational lens, demonstrating how Ženi Lebl's and Eva Grlić's self-histories evaded political instrumentalization and initiated more productive encounters with a larger constellation of racialized and gendered violence in the twentieth century. Both *White Violets* and *Memories* bring women's experiences of the Holocaust and the NOB to bear on their experiences of Yugoslavia's brutal system of labor camps and life after their release.

The transnational and global shift in memory studies no longer treats the nation-state as the paradigmatic carrier of memory, instead considering how histories such as those of the Holocaust move beyond and transform outside their original spatial and temporal borders. Holocaust memory, in particular, has become global and transnational, resulting from its circulation across disparate contexts and media that establish new resonances with the Holocaust. While scholarship on transnational Holocaust memory is primarily concerned with how the Holocaust connects to the histories of colonialism and settler violence, studies such as Leona Toker's *Gulag Literature and the Literature of Nazi Camps: An Intercontextual Reading* and Stijn Vervaet's reading of Kiš's Gulag themed *A Tomb for Boris Davidovitch* as an extension of the author's writing on the Holocaust, prove transnational memory models useful for thinking comparatively and connectively about the Holocaust and histories of political internment under east European communist regimes.¹² My study does not privilege the Holocaust as the primary catalyst for other camp memories but thinks alongside Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory," which views the cultural memory of historical violence as the product of multiple trajectories of influence and exchange.¹³ In doing so, I demonstrate how the legacies of the Yugoslav corrective labor camps and the Holocaust converge and coproduce strategies of memory and narration in the two women's self-histories. At the same time, I address a lacuna in how women's testimonies and narration produce transnational memory and how they might employ different strategies than men's narratives.¹⁴

While this study does not seek to uphold gender as a stabilized category, it acknowledges gender as the primary subject position through which women understood their experiences and how this binary subsequently structured women's narration. I show how gender and sex dictated experiences of state terror, influencing how the state targeted certain groups, the forms of torture to which prisoners were subjected, and the possibility of bearing witness after their release. I argue that life writing, a term encapsulating different genres of

¹¹ See also Andrea Kulunčić's art exhibition, "You Betrayed the Party When You Should Have Helped It," which intervenes in the memorial absences surrounding the site of the women's camps on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur. In comparison to the men's camp on Goli otok, which is a major tourist attraction with golf carts shuttling tourists around the island and souvenir stalls, the women's camps have no official memorial. Alongside performance art and dance, Kulunčić's and Jambrešić-Kirin's project has also erected several informational plaques and memorials about the former prisoners and their experiences in the camps. The project has importantly led in recent years to the wider publicization of women's memory and interest in the subject, particularly in Croatia and Montenegro. "About the Project," You Betrayed the Party When You Should Have Helped It, at <https://www.zene-arhipelag-goli.info/en/o-projektu-english/> (accessed July 30, 2024).

¹² See Leona Toker, *Gulag Literature and the Literature of Nazi Camps: An Intercontextual Reading* (Bloomington, 2019); Stijn Vervaet, *Holocaust, War, and Transnational Memory: Testimony from Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Literature* (New York, 2018), 87; Danilo Kiš, "The Gulag and the Holocaust" in his *A Tomb for Boris Davidovitch*.

¹³ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonialization* (Stanford, 2009).

¹⁴ Even fewer studies, if any, have problematized the male-female binary.

self-narration such as (auto)biographies, memoirs, and autofiction, should be read as part and parcel of the process by which women produce transnational histories. Recording their authors' lives before, during, and after the camps, *White Violets* and *Memories* are embodied histories that aim to recover the entirety of women's lives rather than only their camp experiences. The extended period they document importantly attests to the all-encompassing violence that state terror in Yugoslavia in the late 1940s and 50s inflicted on women's sense of identity and biographical agency. By comparison, men's writing is less capacious, with most testimonies providing little detail about their lives before and after, therefore demonstrating fundamental differences in men's and women's respective experiences.

Despite the implied outcome of corrective labor leading to an individual's rehabilitation, former prisoners of the Yugoslav corrective labor camps were ultimately denied symbolic reentry into Yugoslav society. While both men and women faced continued state surveillance, internal and external censorship, as well as debilitating physical and psychological trauma, this extended oppression was far different for former female prisoners than for men due to changing gender politics in the late 1940s and 50s reducing women's agency and delegitimizing their pain in official memory spheres. Moreover, anthropologist Renata Jambrešić-Kirin articulates the political paradoxes of the period: "Contrary to the basic idea of communist emancipation, according to which oppressed people and proletarians began to manage their own time by narrating their own history for the first time, former prisoners signed a formal pact of silence to regain their freedom but also be written out of the history of Yugoslav communism."¹⁵ Eva Grlić and Ženi Lebl felt this erasure more intensely as former *partizanke* and Holocaust survivors who grafted their identities and sense of purpose onto Yugoslavia's immediate postwar promises, namely, the building of a utopian future founded on socialism and multiethnic and multireligious tolerance, or "brotherhood and unity." Instead, the state expunged these women's revolutionary pasts from the official record and denied them access to a collective past and future.

To this end, the task of life writing for women is manifold. Because life writing constitutes an ongoing performance of identity and subject formation, I claim it also affords women the possibility of reclaiming and reauthorizing their life histories after state violence.¹⁶ Recentering the links between life writing and the archive, I demonstrate how *White Violets* and *Memories* recover collective Jewish and gendered experiences of Yugoslavia, both of which suffered a double violence of erasure after WWII and the 1990s Yugoslav Dissolution Wars. Indicative of the patriarchal memory culture that marginalized Yugoslav women's histories and failed to fully acknowledge women's participation in the NOB, Jewish women's nuanced experiences in Yugoslav partisan units were erased from the historical record.¹⁷ Later, the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and with it its antifascist legacy and partisan mythology, rendered this history obsolete.¹⁸

Yugoslav Gender Politics and Gendered Violence during the Informbiro Period

In the tumultuous period following the 1948 Tito-Stalin split, Yugoslavia sought to chart its own "third way," which first involved overturning its former adherence to Stalinist-style

¹⁵ Jambrešić-Kirin, "Yugoslav Women Intellectuals," 41.

¹⁶ Susannah Radstone argues that autobiographical performance creates the self, rather than the reverse. See Susannah Radstone, "Autobiographical Times," in *Feminism and Autobiography*, eds. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (London, 2000).

¹⁷ The lack of historical memory surrounding Jewish women's resistance in Yugoslavia was further compounded by the official memory culture's embracing of ethnic neutrality.

¹⁸ Namely, Jambrešić-Kirin remarks on the absence of any state-funded institution or archive to adequately preserve this memory under socialist Yugoslavia despite the widescale participation of women in the NOB, including 91 war heroines decorated with the status of National Hero and veneration of the partisan fighter in official memory. Jambrešić-Kirin, "Yugoslav Women Intellectuals," 51.

socialism.¹⁹ The break would usher in reforms disbanding collectivization and gradually decentralizing state authority. However, despite the loosening restrictions on economic and political freedom in Yugoslavia, for women the period after the split was paradoxically defined by what Jelena Batinić describes as “a backlash in gender values and...the beginning of a stagnant episode in the history of women’s organization activity.”²⁰ While the depoliticization of feminist activism and women’s organizations in Yugoslavia has a long history stretching back to the interwar regime, most scholars mark the 1953 dissolution of the Antifascist Women’s Front (AFŽ), a women’s organization founded on the frontlines of WWII, as the defining moment in Yugoslavia’s failed emancipation project for women.²¹ Despite the AFŽ’s enormous success in mobilizing women on the NOB, the organization was limited in the early postwar years. Historian of Yugoslav gender policies Ivan Simić cites the AFŽ’s reliance on Soviet models (namely the women’s organization *Zhenotdel* disbanded following the Bolshevik Revolution), patriarchal attitudes about women’s political suitability, and controversies surrounding the existence of a separate women’s organization as the primary reasons for its premature dissolution.²²

The dissolution of the AFŽ was not an abrupt political move but the culmination of wider trends reassessing women’s revolutionary roles in the immediate postwar period. Women’s revolutionary activities and, moreover, the image of the *partizanka*, while celebrated in an official commemorative culture that relied on the NOB as its primary foundational myth, were pushed to the background and became more and more symbolic over time.²³ While gender roles in the partisans were far from equal, women ostensibly proved themselves in combat and the rear.²⁴ However, after the war, the male-dominated communist party did not take women’s political contributions or ambitions seriously. Even though Eva Grlić spent almost the entirety of the war engaged in the national liberation movement, with additional service as a Yugoslav emissary in war-torn Hungary due to her knowledge of the Hungarian language (her mother was a Hungarian Jew from Budapest), the party rejected her application to join, perceiving her political convictions to be lukewarm.

Likewise, the party’s desire to mass educate women in socialist values stemmed from patriarchal attitudes that viewed women as backward and potential vessels for enemy propaganda, rather than the need to emancipate women through education.²⁵ The period following the split brought these patriarchal attitudes into sharp relief, revealing the deeply entrenched sexism and misogyny in Yugoslav society and its system of governance.²⁶ The state expected Yugoslav citizens to show loyalty to Tito over Stalin and to the greater communist family that superseded blood ties and marriage. Following this patriarchal-familial and blatantly sexist logic, many women were targeted because they were the sisters, wives, and mothers of the accused.²⁷ Eva Grlić, for instance, was first arrested because of accusations against her second husband. In addition, the state targeted female intellectuals, ambitious women, and those who transgressed their prescribed social, gender, and ethnic

¹⁹ The split also allowed Yugoslavia to maintain a position of neutrality in the Cold War, focusing its attention instead on forging the Nonaligned Movement with countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. As a result of the split and more open relations with the west, Yugoslavs would enjoy the benefits of soft-core capitalism, free movement, and greater artistic freedom than that experienced in other eastern bloc countries.

²⁰ Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance* (Cambridge, Eng., 2015), 219.

²¹ For a contextualization of feminist writing and organizing in the interwar period, see Jelena Petrović, *Women’s Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (Cham, 2019).

²² Ivan Simić, *Soviet Influences on Postwar Yugoslav Gender Policies* (Cham, 2018), 60–61.

²³ Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 217.

²⁶ Jambrešić-Kirin, “Yugoslav Women Intellectuals.”

²⁷ Jambrešić-Kirin, “The Retraummatization of the 1948 Communist Purges in Yugoslav Literary Culture,” in Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Amsterdam, 2004), 126.

roles, like Ženi Lebl, a successful journalist at the widely read Belgrade newspaper *Politika*.²⁸ Lebl was arrested for laughing at and repeating a joke playing off a well-known partisan ditty about Tito's kilogram of white violets. The male colleague who first made this joke was a party informant and revealed Lebl's so-called "anti-Tito" attitude to the Yugoslav secret police, UDBA. In doing so, her male colleague removed his main competition at the newspaper and advanced to a coveted foreign post after her arrest. At the same time, this colleague also pursued Lebl romantically and may have denounced her out of petty revenge for rejecting his advances.

Following the mass arrest of citizens in the late 1940s, the Yugoslav state terror apparatus now required a peripheral space where bodies compromising the security of the center could be contained. Authorities chose Goli otok (the barren island) and Sveti Grgur, two distant and uninhabited islands in the Kvarner Bay to accommodate political prisoners.²⁹ The landscape subsequently shaped the forms of torture to which prisoners were subjected.³⁰ The newly arrived women were tasked with hauling stones in the sun and heat of the day without any end goal.³¹ The barracks for the women's camps were rudimentary, especially in the first years of operation, leaving them vulnerable to the Mediterranean *boras* and severe weather. In addition, they suffered from severe malnutrition due to the lack of food in the camps. The women proved their self-correction through labor, beating and spying on other prisoners, as well as other "corrective" actions such as confessing in the camp "theaters," or writing a "self-critique" (*raskritikovanje*) of their life histories and the people with whom they were associated.

Women's experiences in the camps were defined by internally enforced hierarchies separating prisoners into two main groups: the *banda* and the *brigada*. The *banda* consisted of new arrivals and those who had yet to be reeducated, while the *brigada* referred to those who had proven their so-called "re-education" and therefore held much more authority in the camp hierarchy. Prisoners required those in the *banda* to perform the most difficult labor and subjected them to various humiliations and physical abuse, such as forcing them to "run the gauntlet" (*špalir*).³² Women could only transfer from the *banda* to the *brigada* if they proved their self-correction by enthusiastically abusing other prisoners. Eva Grlić admits that very few prisoners were not complicit in beating or humiliating others because the camp system required their participation to avoid being beaten themselves. Because prisoners essentially became agents of the self-correction of themselves and others, the camps created an

²⁸ Jambrešić-Kirin, "Yugoslav Women Intellectuals," 48.

²⁹ Goli otok was formerly the site of an Austro-Hungarian prisoner-of-war camp during the First World War. However, the dry climate and winds erased most traces of the camps' former infrastructure, and prisoners had to build their accommodations from the ground up when they arrived in 1949. For an eco-historical perspective on the camps, see: Martin Previšić and Milica Prokić, "Ecohistorical Aspects of the Goli otok Labor Camp 1949–1956," *Economic and Ecohistory Journal for Economic History and Environmental History*, vol. XII (2016).

³⁰ And vice versa. Prokić and Previšić also argue that prisoners shaped the landscape of the islands via the forms of torture and labor they were subjected to, planting and caring for trees that were not formerly part of the landscape to create shade and better living conditions for themselves.

³¹ Little record exists concerning any profitable labor carried out in the women's camps on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur, which differentiates Yugoslav women's experiences from Soviet women's in the Gulag. While the actual economic benefit of the extensive system of labor camps throughout the Soviet Union is still debated, the Gulag system was designed for productive output alongside interment. The Yugoslav corrective labor camp system was primarily designed to punish political prisoners. While prisoners were sometimes involved in building public infrastructure, the state also involved civilians (particularly youth) in these postwar reconstruction brigades. The men's camp on Goli otok was active in mining marble and timber after the initial phases of construction were completed, yet it did not incur a great source of material resources for the Yugoslav state. Rather, the mining project was simply to occupy prisoners. See: Previšić and Prokić, "Ecohistorical Aspects of the Goli otok Labor Camp," 189.

³² Prisoners established additional hierarchies within the *banda*, referring to the lowest rung in this category as the "boycotted." Boycotted prisoners were given even less food and water than usual, deprived of sleep, and forced to work twelve hours a day.

environment where solidarity among women was nearly impossible and contributed to their long-lasting silences and shame regarding their experiences.

This system of surveillance, self-correction, and self-censorship was the women's reality during their time in the camps and after their release. As Giorgio Agamben reminds us in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, despite the concentration camps' peripheral and hermetic topography, they are the spatial extension of biopolitical control and normalization of the state of exception at the center.³³ However, women more acutely perceived this extended world of Yugoslav corrective labor camps due to their reduced agency in patriarchal Yugoslav society and taboos concerning experiences of rape and gendered violence. According to feminist theory and philosophy scholar Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, Agamben's singular definition of bare life problematically erases racial and sexual differences, thus failing to account for sexual violation.³⁴ Until the creation of rape camps for Bosniak women during the Yugoslav dissolution wars, the women's camps on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur were one of the most extreme manifestations of misogyny and gendered violence in Yugoslav history as spaces that sanctioned the degradation, abuse, and violation of women's bodies.

While sexual violence was ubiquitous in both the men's and women's camps, it operated within different power structures.³⁵ In *White Violets*, Ženi Lebl reveals how the camp doctor raped her when she went to him for medical care, and how certain guards had a "harem" of women who presumably traded sexual favors for protection in the camps. Additionally, women suffered specifically gendered forms of injury which had long-lasting effects on their social and political agency. The vast majority of female prisoners were of childbearing age, and the years of strenuous labor and malnutrition in the camps damaged their health and, consequently, many women's reproductive capabilities. The misogynist logic inherent to reproductive violence views women's bodies as the producers of new political enemies; thus, the extreme deterioration of "deviant" women's bodies as a result of forced labor—to the point that it affected the biological capabilities of that body—provided a cracked mirror to the party's privileging of women as mothers and primary caretakers of the next generation of socialist citizens. Furthermore, in a patriarchal system of governance that defined women's roles as both producers and reproducers for the state, women who could not reproduce were marginalized and rendered dysfunctional. The patriarchal configuration of biopolitical control during this period in Yugoslav history ultimately transformed "deviant" women into non-being through a form of symbolic death in which they would not be granted reentry into society.

"Automortography" and Recovering the Self

At Kiš's urgings, Ženi Lebl published her memoir, *White Violets*, in 1990, after which it was translated into Hebrew and became a bestseller in Israel. *White Violets* begins in the days leading up to Lebl's arrest and denouncement of her so-called "sins," as she labels her perceived transgressions against the state in individual chapters. She details her imprisonment in Glavnjača, the main prison for political prisoners in Belgrade, her show trial, and the subsequent completion of her sentence in the labor camps of Ramski Rit (the precursor to the island camps), Goli otok, and Sveti Grgur. The chapters following her camp memories

³³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, 1998).

³⁴ Plonowska Ziarek's feminist reading of Agamben's work claims that "Agamben ignores the way bare life is implicated in the gendered, sexist, colonial, and racist configurations of biopolitics. If we argue that bare life emerges as the aftereffect of the destruction of the symbolic differences of gender, ethnicity, race, or class—differences that constitute political forms of life—this means that bare life is still negatively determined by the destruction of a *historically specific* way of life. Thus, another paradox of bare life is a simultaneous erasure of the political distinctions and negative differentiation retrospectively produced by such erasure." Ewa Plonowska-Ziarek, "Bare Life on Strike: Notes on the Biopolitics of Race and Gender," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 93.

³⁵ In the men's camp, rape was more common among prisoners.

describe the trauma of her failed re-assimilation into Yugoslav society and life in Israel. While Lebl primarily focuses on her experiences in the corrective labor camps and life after her release, significant spatial and temporal interruptions punctuate her writing with past traumas such as the Nazi occupation of Belgrade and subsequent persecution of Serbian Jews under Milan Nedić's quisling government from 1941 to 1944. For instance, she opens her account of the days before her arrest with a note on the Sajmište concentration camp, an SS-run concentration camp established in Belgrade's former world fairgrounds where her mother perished, as seen on her daily tram line to work.³⁶ *White Violets* concludes with a selection of Lebl's poems that reflect on multilayered historical and personal traumas from the Holocaust, the corrective labor camps, and life in emigration.

Eva Grlić's autobiography, *Sjećanja* (Memories, 1997) follows a more traditional autobiographical structure beginning with the author's early life growing up between Budapest and Sarajevo. The outbreak of WWII and the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) in 1941 overshadow personal events, such as her first marriage and the birth of her daughter Vesna in Zagreb. After her father and husband are murdered by the Ustaša, she makes the difficult decision to entrust her daughter to a Catholic woman in Zagreb and escapes to a partisan unit with her mother. Eva survived the war thanks to her participation in the NOB. Still, her mother was killed in circumstances never revealed to her, and she returned to Zagreb to find that most of her family and friends were murdered in the Holocaust.³⁷ The second part of Eva's autobiography details her life in the postwar period with a similar structure to the first. The larger historical events of the postwar period and the Informbiro period impinge on personal ones—her second marriage to Danko Grlić and the birth of her son Rajko. She devotes the last section to her life after the camps and her role in supporting her husband's prolific intellectual career as a philosopher and member of the Yugoslav Praxis and Korčula School.³⁸ *Memories* concludes with a collection of self and family photographs.

The memory of extreme violence, bodily pain, and loss in *White Violets* and *Memories* renegotiates the expectations of life writing that often presupposes the author's move towards self-understanding and closure. By instrumentalizing the body as an agent of enacting pain on the self and others, the camps disavowed women of their authority to speak of their pain after their release. The task of restoring their agency after decades-long silence, however, necessarily reflects on the past from a certain distance and acknowledges the impossibility of bringing totality to their experiences of state violence. Eva expresses the inadequacy of language to fully convey her pain in the following: "... it seems that everything appears milder than it really was in my writing, that the blood, sweat, tears, blisters, pain, and toil cannot be felt."³⁹ Her writing on the camps creates embodied memories by detailing the grueling labor, and physical and psychological torture alongside her observations about the physical degradation of the body, such as the temporary cessation of her menstrual cycle. Ženi Lebl also gestures to the lacuna between bodily pain and speech that maintained

³⁶. The Sajmište concentration camp is located on several major tram lines in Belgrade. Movie theaters, restaurants, pubs, and a football stadium frequented under the occupation were all in the vicinity of the camp's north entrance. Jewish and Roma prisoners were murdered with the use of vans outfitted with Zyklon-B gas, the *dušegupke* (soul extinguishers) that the SS drove through the streets of Belgrade. The Nazi murder apparatus implemented these early precursors to the gas chambers in Serbia and Belarus; eventually, they proved too costly due to gas consumption and were replaced by gas chambers. By 1942, the Nazis declared Serbia "cleansed of Jews."

³⁷. I will henceforth refer to Eva Grlić by her first name to avoid confusion with her husband and son, both influential public figures in Croatia. Her son, Rajko Grlić, is a critically acclaimed film director whose 1981 film *You Only Love Once* critiqued the failures of utopian socialist ideals in Yugoslavia and the ideological dogmatism of the Informbiro period.

³⁸. The Praxis school refers to a group of Yugoslav Marxist philosophers and intellectuals founded in the 1960s. They published a journal of the same name, to which Danko Grlić contributed several influential essays, and established an international summer school for philosophers and social theorists on the island of Korčula.

³⁹. Grlić, *Memories*, 163.

women's silences about their experiences, citing the words of an anonymous prisoner: "We had to remain silent. The terms for release from Goli otok were that you swore you'd never say a word about what you saw or experienced. There was something else, too, which I won't tell you."⁴⁰ For Lebl and the anonymous speaker, the refusal to name that "something else" comprises the core element of their camp experiences, echoing Elaine Scarry's argument that pain evades language because it obliterates the "world" of that body.⁴¹

White Violets and *Memories* further attest to how the long-reaching hand of state violence complicates the task of self-representation. The system of torture in the camps marked prisoners' bodies with new identities: that of the traitor to party and nation, and unmade their understanding of self and their biographies in the process. Lebl aptly defines the violence of self-erasure as *automortografija* (automortography) in one of the poems attached to *White Violets*. As Jambrešić-Kirin explains, the obsession with modeling "desirable" biographies in the Yugoslav Communist Party, one that emphasized "cultivation of virtues" and values based on revolutionary archetypes (namely partisan heroes) and their desired traits, transformed into something much more sinister during this period as the state targeted individuals' life histories and revolutionary contributions.⁴² "Automortography" dealt a double blow to Yugoslav Jews, who were actively involved in the national liberation movement. Lebl was only fourteen when she ran away from home to join the partisan resistance after witnessing a Nazi officer shoot their family dog. She changed her name to the more Serbian-sounding Jovanka Lazić and joined the underground partisan press near the Bulgarian border in Niš. Lebl was captured by the Bulgarian police after her unit's activities and whereabouts were betrayed. She endured torture and sexual violence before being transferred to Gestapo prisons in Germany. Ultimately avoiding deportation to the death camps thanks to her unsuspecting partisan name, Lebl returned home to Belgrade at the end of the war, where she was reunited with her father and brother.

For Yugoslav Jews who remained in Yugoslavia (rather than emigrating to Israel) the antifascist struggle became a crucial part of their identity. Both the state and the Jewish Federation of Yugoslavia, which initiated large-scale memorial projects in the 1950s dedicated to specifically "Jewish victims of fascism and fallen fighters," actively encouraged these frames of identity by inscribing the Holocaust and Jewish experience into official Yugoslav memory of WWII.⁴³ Lebl even kept her partisan name, Jovanka, after the war, demonstrating the extent to which the NOB shaped her identity in her formative years. While women's Holocaust testimonies often affirm identity as a Jew, a wife, and a mother, among others, for Lebl, her experiences as a *partizanka* and the Yugoslav master narrative superseded her Jewish identity.⁴⁴ However, when the state labeled her a traitor to the party, it simultaneously revoked her revolutionary biography via various forms of manipulation and torture. Her UDBA interrogators distorted her wartime activities: how did she survive when her mother was murdered? She must have been in a relationship with a Nazi, her interrogators intimated lasciviously. "Why didn't you emigrate to Palestine if you're a Jew?"⁴⁵ While antisemitism went against the official Yugoslav policy of brotherhood and unity, Yugoslav Jews still experienced it.⁴⁶ When first asked about antisemitism in *Bare Life*, Lebl denies that she experienced any form of antisemitism while under interrogation or in the camps. She

⁴⁰ Lebl, *White Violets*, 10.

⁴¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985), 27.

⁴² Jambrešić-Kirin, "The Retraumatization of the 1948 Communist Purges in Yugoslav Literary Culture," 49.

⁴³ Emil Kerenji, "Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944–1974" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008).

⁴⁴ Zoë Waxman, "Unheard Testimony, Untold Stories: The Representation of Women's Holocaust Experiences," *Women's History Review*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2003).

⁴⁵ Kiš, *Bare Life*, 50–51.

⁴⁶ Eva Grlić, for instance, claims that her father-in-law was against her marriage to her second husband because she was Jewish.

instead points to the ways that the Yugoslav state terror apparatus weaponized individual aspects of their biography and used their identities against them to “touch a nerve.”⁴⁷ At the same time, the negation of Lebl’s revolutionary biography and story of survival denied her access to the collective narrative of the war and the building of postwar Yugoslavia’s utopian future.

Scholarship on women’s testimonies of state terror often pinpoints strategies that women employ to “escape” the physical pain of torture.⁴⁸ Lebl had already experienced torture and even sexual violence before her imprisonment in Bulgarian and Gestapo prisons. Yet the Yugoslav state terror apparatus foreclosed any possibility for a momentary escape from bodily pain, such as the ability to imagine a better future. Comparing her experiences of WWII to the corrective labor camps, Lebl remarks that the two disappearances and returns defined her life. Her return from Goli otok and Sveti Grgur was much more difficult, however (if not impossible), than her return home from WWII, due to the shattered social agency and foreclosure on a utopian Yugoslav future. While the peripherality of the island camps enabled spaces where the state physically disappeared bodies it deemed compromising the integrity of the nation, Lebl also marks them as sites of symbolic erasure where women who crossed the camp boundaries were permanently banished from their symbolic community and its national mythologies.

If Ženi Lebl notes the discrepancies between her experiences of the Holocaust and state terror, Eva Grlić, by contrast, finds direct connections between these two histories of persecution in Yugoslavia. Like Lebl, Eva joined the partisan struggle with strong antifascist convictions and connections to the underground communist movement, yet she accepted the realization of the revolution with less vigor. Eva’s reflections on the immediate postwar period reveal her impressions of ideological dogmatism and careerism that would later reach dangerous proportions during the Informbiro period. As noted earlier, she was not accepted as a party member after the war, which dimmed her more optimistic impressions of postwar society. Moreover, Eva’s sentencing to Goli otok and Sveti Grgur resulted from her vocalizing Yugoslavia’s backsliding on its revolutionary promises. Following her husband’s arrest and sentencing, she too was imprisoned, then released and placed under constant surveillance. She was forced to move out of their apartment because of the family’s politically undesirable status, after which the new “politically acceptable” tenants confiscated some of their belongings. The experience of expulsion and property appropriation was familiar to Eva, whose apartment and property the Ustaša confiscated in 1941. She believes she received her three-year sentence in the camps on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur because of a remark she made in front of a UDBA agent comparing the two instances.

Both *Memories* and *White Violets* subsequently work within the camps’ engulfment of temporal and spatial boundaries to reveal the unequal power structures, external and internal censorship, and the legacy of violence on the self and body that negatively affected the trajectories of their lives. After the camps, Eva abandoned her former career ambitions and retreated into domestic life where she became Danko’s secretary, editor, and primary audience. The labeling of specific sections in *Memories* acknowledges the roles she ultimately accepted: she titles the section devoted to her post-camp life as “Life with Danko,” and her epilogue concludes with a description of her children’s successes.⁴⁹ However, Eva also reveals moments of dissatisfaction with her domestic role, acknowledging how WWII and her three-year sentence in corrective labors prevented her from reaching her full potential. While Eva would not enjoy the same prolific writing career as her husband, her autobiography,

⁴⁷ Kiš, *Bare Life*, 120.

⁴⁸ For similar discussions on the dynamics and politics of women’s testimonies of state terror, see: Barbara Sutton, *Surviving State Terror: Women’s Testimonies of Repression and Resistance in Argentina* (New York, 2018); Nanci Adler and Selma Leydesdorff, eds., *Tapestry of Memory: Evidence and Testimony in Life-Story Narratives* (New York, 2017).

⁴⁹ Jasmina Lukić, “Eva Grlić: Between Silence and Speech,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 7 (Spring 2004): 186.

published as she approached her mid-70s, is an attempt to amend her diminished sense of self-worth resulting from repeated persecution and thwarted opportunities.

Following her return from the camps, Ženi Lebl was denied her former job as a journalist, her former colleagues declaring her untouchable. Realizing the futility of building a life again in Yugoslavia after the camps, she sought permission to emigrate to Israel. Yet the Jewish Federation of Yugoslavia questioned her decision to emigrate when the majority of survivors had left in the immediate postwar years, and did not immediately grant her exit papers. Struggling to cope with the extended world of the camps and surveilled self-correction that continued after her release, she became an alcoholic and contemplated suicide until she received employment from a man who sympathized with her despair. When the Federation finally granted her permission to leave, she seized the opportunity for a new life, despite the reluctance of her father, who feared she would not succeed as an émigré. His fears were briefly confirmed when he went to visit her while she was working as a nanny for minimum wage. However, in 1956, her father accepted her decision to leave after the arrest of Yugoslav statesman Milovan Djilas for his support of the Hungarian Revolution. Because Djilas had handpicked Lebl to work at *Politika* when she was a young journalist, UDBA again appeared at her former place of residence to arrest her. While physically safe from further imprisonment and torture, her emigration to Israel did not automatically release her from the trauma experienced in her homeland. Instead, many of the challenges Lebl faced in Israel as an émigré reproduced her camp trauma. She recalls how the struggle to express herself in Hebrew triggered fears that her words would be misconstrued as they had been during the UDBA interrogations, leading to further self-censorship during her initial years in emigration.

Between Private and Public Histories

The capacious scope of both texts demonstrates the women's desire to recover the entirety of their lives rather than just their camp experiences. Reauthorizing their biographies anew, they counter the symbolic death of the self and one's identity, to which Lebl ascribed the term "automortography." At the same time, autobiographical performance proves to be an archival practice engaging with individual and collective histories as both women use personal and public materials to inscribe their self-narratives with their multilayered identities as Yugoslav Jews, *partizanke*, Holocaust survivors, victims of the corrective labor camps, wives and mothers, and emigres, among others.⁵⁰

Ženi Lebl's identity was strongly linked to her work as a professional historian of Jewish life in Yugoslavia, publishing many important works on the subject in Israel.⁵¹ She had no formal university training in history, only a desire to write. After arriving in Israel and overcoming her initial disillusionment and self-censorship, she eventually began to recover her sense of self-worth and identity as a Yugoslav Jew. While learning Hebrew was initially a source of trauma for Lebl, her colleagues found her voice to be engaging and encouraged her to write more after she attended a conference abroad and had to relate her experiences back to her Israeli colleagues in Hebrew. Emboldened, she published short stories for newspapers in Israel about Yugoslavia and later began working as a self-taught historian of the Balkan Jewry. Historians credit Lebl with initiating some of the first serious studies on Jewish life and artistic culture in Serbia, and her works are widely cited today.⁵² Interestingly, *White*

⁵⁰. For further explanation of the links between autobiography and archive, see: Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Alternative, Imaginary, and Affective Archives of the Self in Women's Life Writing," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 40, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 15–43.

⁵¹. Lebl's works include *Jevrejske knjige štampane u Beogradu 1837–1905; Jerusalimski muftija Haj Amin i Berlin, Do konačnog rešenja; Juče, Danas: Doprinos Jevreja sa teritorije bivše Jugoslavije Izraelu*. She was also a prolific translator and translated many works from Hebrew into Serbo-Croatian.

⁵². See: Milica Rožman, "Ženi Lebl i počeci istraživanja jevrejske umetnosti u Srbiji (Ženi Lebl and the Commencement of Scholarship on Jewish Art in Serbia)," *Artum—Istorijsko-Umetnički Časopis*, vol. 5, no. 5 (2007).

Violets opens with a letter from a member of the Macedonian Jewish community thanking her for shedding light on their once vibrant community and their experiences during the Holocaust. Lebl includes this letter as part of her self-history to show how her work as a historian and producer of historical narratives, rather than as a victim of history, ultimately defined her. The concluding section of *White Violets* further impresses this conviction upon her readers: “I have a lot of *ersatz* for those lost years: I work on the past. But not my own. Not *that* past. I work on our people’s past in the land of Yugoslavia.”⁵³ Despite the expectations of the genre, Lebl does not include any photographs of herself, supplementing them instead with archival images of Belgrade’s Jewish heritage sites destroyed during WWII or the city’s postwar reconstruction. The use of archival photographs in *White Violets* rejects an individualistic reading of her memoir, positioning it instead within a collective history of silenced and marginalized pasts that her writing seeks to recuperate from oblivion.

In comparison to Lebl’s use of public archives in place of the personal, the photographs attached to Eva Grlić’s *Memories* are of a more intimate, family album nature: photographs of her youth and family before the Holocaust, family vacations, celebrations, gatherings on the Adriatic, and milestones in her and her children’s lives. As Lukić argues, Eva is a “historian of private lives,” evident from the fact that her autobiography also comprises many anecdotes, descriptions, and collected documents related to her family and friends.⁵⁴ The first part of her biography paints a vivid portrait of her childhood between Budapest and Sarajevo and her family members: her father was a Sephardic Jew from a Ladino-speaking family in Sarajevo, and her mother, an Ashkenazi Jew from Budapest. In this way, her autobiography also provides a transnational, Hungarian/Yugoslav Jewish family history before, during, and after the Holocaust. Her family record meshes personal and public archives to fill any gaps in her direct knowledge, as details of individual family members’ deaths in the Holocaust are supplemented with the extensive research and reading about the Holocaust that Eva undertook later on in her life. She also includes sketches of her friends and romantic interests in the youth communist group in Sarajevo—most of whom were also killed in WWII, and individuals she met along the way in the NOB. She also provides brief yet careful descriptions of named and unnamed women on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur.

The enduring legacy of women’s involvement in the antifascist movement and its expressions of solidarity, care, activism, and optimism is also central to *Memories*. Involved in various tasks in the rear and frontlines, Eva details how she worked as a stenographer and editor for the underground partisan press and radio and organized public performances to educate peasant women about socialist values as part of the AFŽ’s wartime activities. While Lukić rightly points out that Eva does not see herself as a “creator of history” but as a “person endangered by its forces,” apparent from her rather modest and unheroic descriptions of her wartime activities, I would add that her recurrent role as an archivist and writer in the process of self-preservation also recovers the margins, footnotes, and absent spaces of history.⁵⁵ In this way, *Memories* reauthorize her participation in both the everyday and historically defining moments of Yugoslav history decades after her removal from its important legacies during the Informbiro period and her later existence in the shadow of her more successful husband.⁵⁶ Eva further points to the Yugoslav dissolution wars as her underlying motivation to write and publish her autobiography in 1997, recording how the Siege of Sarajevo laid waste to personal and collective sites of memory, such as the city’s Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish cemetery and the monument to the murdered Jews of Sarajevo containing the names of many of her family members and friends. During the siege, Bosnian-Serb soldiers mined the cemetery for a sniper hangout and inflicted extensive damage on other Jewish heritage

⁵³. Lebl, *White Violets*, 166.

⁵⁴. Lukić, “Eva Grlić,” 182.

⁵⁵. Lukić, “Eva Grlić,” 183

⁵⁶. Grlić, *Memories*, 117.

sites in Sarajevo. Lamenting the destruction of these personal and collective sites of memory, Eva's writing preserves affective attachments to Jewish spaces and the individual people inscribed into them. She thereby restores their relevance after their destruction and recovers private and collective histories from oblivion.

Written from a transnational perspective as Yugoslav Jewish women with multiple identities and affiliations, both Eva Grlić's and Ženi Lebl's memories of Jewish persecution during the Holocaust and survival among the partisans rewrite Jewish women's participation back into the history of the NOB during a period of widespread historical revisionism delegitimizing the socialist Yugoslav project and the foundational antifascist struggle. While both texts are a response to the personal loss of Yugoslav ideals following the women's sentencing to Goli otok and Sveti Grgur, they must also negotiate the physical loss of the Yugoslav national project and its legacies as a result of emigration, as in Lebl's case, and its physical disintegration in violent ethnic conflict in the 1990s. While this article cannot feasibly explain post-Yugoslav memory politics regarding WWII in its entirety, I will focus on a few defining features relevant to women's counternarratives of the past. During and after the Yugoslav dissolution wars, Tito's partisans and domestic fascists were conflated in revisionary discourse, like in Croatia, where Franjo Tuđman's regime sought to unite Croats regardless of their wartime affiliations under a shared ethnonationalist banner. In the contemporary Yugoslav post-successor states, the current regimes continue to project the Holocaust and communist oppression on Goli otok as two sides of the same coin, leading to a lack of societal confrontation with and knowledge of domestic involvement in the deportation and murder of Yugoslavia's Jewish communities.⁵⁷

By contrast, *White Violets* and *Memories* remember successive regimes of state terror in ways that avoid superficial comparisons between fascist and communist oppression. Both women's self-histories counter a larger societal matrix of oblivion from the Holocaust to the corrective labor camps and the Yugoslav dissolution wars in the 1990s. The centrality of men's testimonies of Goli otok to Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav memory discourses represents the failure to generate an ethical community that would listen to women's suffering. Framed within ethnonationalist frameworks, men's testimonies are instrumental to post-Yugoslav memory politics, which privilege the suffering of their own nationality at the expense of others, despite the camps being a "Yugoslav" experience. By contrast, Ženi Lebl and Eva Grlić negotiate their memories outside patriarchal and ethnonationalist boundaries to reverse the silence and appeal to a transnational community of silenced others from those murdered in the Holocaust to the women and men imprisoned on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur.

The auto-archival impulse in each reverses multilayered silences as Ženi Lebl and Eva Grlić use their writing to recover forms of solidarity in ways that traverse ethnic, national, and other affiliations. Lebl concludes *White Violets* with a statement on how writing might become the ultimate act of solidarity against the camps' violent erasure of women's lives: "...I wouldn't write about Glavnjača, Ramski Rit, Zabela (the VIII pavilion), both ends of Sveti Grgur and Goli otok if they were already acknowledged and written about, resonated, and apologized for. But they are not. Even today, over forty-five years later, the hundreds of women who passed through these sites live in silence and fear."⁵⁸ *White Violets* can thus be read as dedicated to the hundreds of women silenced in a topography of violence extending

⁵⁷ The 2014 exhibition *In the Name of the People—Political Repression in Serbia 1944–1953*, held at the Historical Museum of Serbia, exemplified these contemporary memory trends. In her study on the instrumentalization of Holocaust memory in the former Yugoslavia, Jelena Subotić reports that the exhibit showcased photographs of all "victims of communism," lumping together innocent victims with fascist collaborators and known war criminals of the Serbian quisling government and nationalist Chetnik movement. In the section on Goli otok detainees, the exhibit carelessly appropriated an iconic image of the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize-winning author Eli Wiesel in Dachau, claiming the image to be a Serbian prisoner on Goli otok. Jelena Subotić, *Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance after Communism* (Ithaca, 2019), 19.

⁵⁸ Lebl, *White Violets*, 200.

from prison cells to the labor camps. Lebl's polyphonic self-history, demonstrated by her use of other's words, illustrates how personal traumas must be negotiated in dialogue with others, including men, as implied by "both ends of Goli otok." Recovering a gesture of solidarity previously denied by the brutal hierarchies of the corrective labor camps, *White Violets* and *Memories* negate their transformation into bare life and contribute to the universal struggle to be heard and remembered.⁵⁹

Reflecting on personal traumas to make sense of their role in Yugoslavia's complex history, Eva Grlić and Ženi Lebl reclaim the spaces of silence. The process of writing reasserts authorial agency over their life histories after their cooptation by the state and subsequently restores private and public histories of the Holocaust, WWII, and corrective labor camps in ways that affect the present and the future. Opposing reductive comparisons between histories of state violence, Ženi Lebl and Eva Grlić memorialize their complex experiences of the Holocaust and Yugoslav corrective labor camps within co-productive and multidirectional memory frameworks. In doing so, they challenge official memory discourses' spatial and temporal containment of extreme violence and its concentrationary worlds, laying bare the ways racial and gender-based violence informs the lived present and future. The enduring legacy of Ženi Lebl's and Eva Grlić's writing accordingly resists the regimes of silencing and negation of the past that enable the nation's persistent persecution of ethnic, gendered, and racial others.

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⁵⁹ I borrow this thought on solidarity from Ewa Plonowska-Ziarek, who argues that the suffragettes effectively mobilized bare life in their emancipatory movements by engaging in collective hunger strikes as gestures of solidarity. Plonowska-Ziarek, "Bare Life on Strike," 98–102.