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A Border Biography: The Image of the Past in Eva Nahir Panić's Memories as Presented in Dane Ilić's *Eva*[*]

Abstract: The primary objective of this text is an analysis of Eva Nahir Panić's biography (she lived from 1918 to 2015) titled *Eva*, written by Dane Ilić. The protagonist of this story is a Jewish woman born in Čakovec, who married a Serbian officer, survived the Holocaust, went through the camp for the Cominformists, and finally immigrated to Israel. An interpretative category that creates a framework for reading the text is the term "borderline," which encompasses two meanings here. The first includes borderline situations (such as the Holocaust and the stay in the Sveti Grgur prison camp) which Nahir Panić had to face in her life and which left an indelible mark on her (the burden of her traumatic experience is passed on to the next generation, in Eva's daughter, Tijana—signifying a postmemory issue). The second pertains to how she functioned in the borders between cultures which directly influenced her fate. With reference to Ewa Domańska's concept of the rescue history project executed in Poland, I suggest that the life of Eva Nahir Panić, though undoubtedly filled with painful experiences, ought to be considered not in terms of victimization, but of rebirth and affirmation. Nahir Panić's life story is a highly personalized narrative, which presents her own identity project, and through it the reader discovers the potential of the community. This may also provide a starting point for reflecting on the history of Yugoslavia.

Keywords: Goli Otok, Holocaust, biography, Eva Nahir Panić, borderline, postmemory, identity.

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Introduction

The life story of Eva Nahir Panić (1918–2015), as well as those of other inmates in isolation centers for Cominformists,[1] for many years remained on the fringe of researchers' interest. Let us recall that the breakthrough text for the women's camp discourse was the documentary series from 1989, *Goli život* [Bare Life] by Danilo Kiš and Aleksandar Mandić.[2] This first documentary film dedicated to the issue of Goli Otok[3] confirmed that women, too, were inmates at prisons and camps for Cominformists (the numbers previously had been reported merely in dry figures); the documentary also demanded that their voice be taken into consideration in discussions about the camp experience.[4] The protagonists of the film were two prisoners—Ženi Lebl and Eva Nahir Panić—to whom Kiš, the narrator of the stories, their interlocutor, and active listener, "gave a voice."[5] It was the first public statement that both women made about the past. The Serbian writer and intellectual in his film became "a mediator between the past and the present,"[6] in which both prisoners

[1] The dispute within Yugoslavia followed the international conflict between Yugoslavia and the USSR, as a result of which the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was excluded from the Cominform in 1948. Those Cominformists who supported the Kremlin's position believed that if Yugoslavia veered off the path charted by Moscow, it would make the realization of communist ideals impossible. The anti-Tito opposition which was formed at that time was recognized in Yugoslavia as a counter-revolution, and Tito's opponents as internal enemies who needed to be excluded from the society and re-educated. The correctional institutions had in fact become labor camps in which both actual and potential or alleged opponents were imprisoned. The history of the conflict between Yugoslavia and the USSR and the motives for setting up Goli Otok are discussed in detail in Katarzyna Taczyńska, *Dowcip trwający dwa i pół roku: Obraz Nagiej Wyspy w serbskim dyskursie literackim i historycznym końca XX i początku XXI wieku* (Warsaw–Bellerive-sur-Allier, 2016), 37–70.

[2] Ibid., 89–92, 219–226.

[3] The Goli Otok prison camp is only one of the places of isolation intended for Cominformists that were established in Yugoslavia after 1948. Because of its size and notoriety, it became a symbol of all the contemporary prisons and camps for Tito's opponents; see e.g. Ivan Kosić, *Goli otok: Najveći Titov konclogor* (Zagreb, 2009); Dragan Marković, *Josip Broz i Goli otok* (Beograd, 1990). The first group of political prisoners arrived at Goli Otok on 9 July 1949 and consisted of 1,200 people; see Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988*, vol. 3: *Socijalistička Jugoslavija 1945–1988* (Beograd, 1988), 232.

[4] Katarzyna Taczyńska, "Diskurs o logoru Goli otok – ženska perspektiva," *Književnstvo* 4 (2014), http://www.knjizenstvo.rs/magazine.php?text=130 [retrieved: 10 Oct. 2017].

[5] The audibility of the voice in culture depends, as Grażyna Borkowska writes, on attentive, sensitive reading which shows new "styles" of reception; see Grażyna Borkowska, "Wstęp," in Grażyna Borkowska, Liliana Sikorska (eds.), *Krytyka feministyczna: Siostra teorii i historii literatury* (Warsaw, 2000), 8.

[6] Ewa Domańska, *Mikrohistorie: Spotkania w międzyświatach* (Poznań, 2005), 274–275.

saw an opportunity to publicize issues concerning women in camps. Kiš's premature death impeded the chance to further develop this project. However, the author managed to encourage the first of his interlocutors to write down her memoirs. The prose by Lebl titled *Ljubičica bela: Vic dug dve i po godine* [The White Violet: A Joke That Stretched for Two and a Half Years] appeared in 1990 and is the first testimony of those events published by a woman.[7]

Although in the next decade the development of social debate was halted due to the civil war in Yugoslavia, the publishing of testimonies of former prisoners continued. Today the issue of Goli Otok is finally being re-examined. An important direction in the development of research on camp literature includes feminist critical studies which, by setting the gender criterion as the starting point, read texts as a means to establish the history of women and the specificity of the female experience.[8] For instance, the interest in female testimonies has allowed scholars to reinterpret the output of Milka Žicina, who previously had been perceived and interpreted in literary studies with almost exclusive reference to two novels from the interwar period—*Kajin put* [Kaja's Road; 1934] and *Devojka za sve* [A Maid for All Work; 1940]—and had been viewed only within the narrow framework of social literature.[9] According to Slavica Garonja Radovanac, the manuscripts describing Žicina's stay in the Glavnjača prison in Belgrade (1951) and in the Stolac prison camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1952–1955), published only after the author's death—first in magazines, then in a book form—re-focused the attention of literary scholars. The book entitled *Sve, sve, sve . . .* [Everything, Everything, Everything . . .] was first published in Croatia in 2002; the Serbian edition appeared in 2011, and Žicina's memoirs *Sama* [Alone] in book version first reached readers in 2009. As Ljuba Vukmanović observes, Žicina is probably the only writer convicted for Cominform activity.[10] Her camp prose is significantly distinguishable among all the texts of the former

[7] See Ženi Lebl, *Ljubičica bela: Vic dug dve i po godine* (Gornji Milanovac, 1990).

[8] See Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, "Izdajice su uvijek ženskog roda: Političke zatvorenice u archipelagu Goli," *UP&UNDERGROUND* (Spring 2010), 232–242; Slavica Garonja Radovanac, "Goli otok i rezolucija Informbiroa (IB) u srpskoj književnosti koju pišu žene (Ženi Lebl, Vera Cenić, Milka Žicina)," in Jovan Delić (ed.), *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik* (Novi Sad, 2011), 661–678.

[9] Dunja Detoni Dujmić, *Ljepša polovica književnosti* (Zagreb, 1998), 48; Garonja Radovanac, "Goli otok i rezolucija," 229.

[10] Ljuba Vukmanović, "Samoće Milke Žicine," in Milka Žicina, *Sama* (Beograd, 2009), 15.

prisoners presenting this experience as well as among her own texts. Žicina is currently considered to be the first inmate to have recorded her prison experience, writing as early as the 1970s—although for the next decade the manuscript lay hidden in the double bottom of a kitchen cabinet.[11]

The history of women arrested as Cominformists was subjected to double stigmatization and exclusion. First, the topic was taboo until the 1980s. Second, the symbolic power over this memory had been dominated by a male-centered narrative, and had ignored the stories and experiences of women. A concept that perfectly captures the process of creating, recovering, and shaping a woman's narrative about the Goli Otok is called "rescue history." Created and executed by Ewa Domańska,[12] this project of "involved history" considers voices from the periphery as an accurate representation of an "important center for creating knowledge."[13] Rescue history promotes community and integration, includes within the scope of its interest individual and collective memory, goes beyond the academic sphere, and responds to the needs of local communities. This approach incorporates the postulates of affirmative humanities into scholarly analysis; it proposes that humanistic research should abandon postmodern "ideas of the end and disasters" and traumatocentric studies. However, in the world of real threats, the study of violence, terror, and conflicts clearly remains a key issue, which in turn leads researchers to reflect on the condition of humanity and the world around us. The proposal of the Polish researcher tends toward a potentiality in which the focus shifts from perceiving someone as a victim to considering him or her a subject with their own agency, an "actor of the past." Finally, it expresses an affirmative reflection which encourages the formulation of fresh research questions covering previously untrodden ground, and applies theories that will empower individual and collective subjects.

Using the approach proposed by Domańska, in this article I analyze the authorized biography of Eva Nahir Panić, written by Dane Ilić and published in 2016 under the title *Eva*. It is the first monograph published

[11] See Slavica Garonja Radovanac, "Rezolucija Informbiroa (IB) 1948. u srpskoj književnosti koju pišu žene (Iz rukopisne zaostavštine Milke Žicine)," *Književna istorija* 147 (2012), 367–397; Katarzyna Taczyńska, "Odzyskać przeszłość – obóz Goli otok w relacjach kobiet: Przypadek Milki Žiciny," in Agnieszka Matusiak (ed.), *Postkolonializm – tożsamość – gender: Europa Środkowa, Wschodnia i Południowo-Wschodnia* (Wrocław, 2014), 267–279; ead., "U potrazi za strategijama preživljavanja – logorska proza Milke Žicine," *Književenstvo* 5 (2015), http://www.knjizenstvo.rs/magazine.php?text=158 [retrieved: 10 Oct. 2017].

[12] Ewa Domańska, "Historia ratownicza," *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2014), 12–26.

[13] Ibid., 12.

in Serbia devoted to Nahir Panić. Its author, a journalist and radio correspondent of RTS (Radio-Televizija Srbije) from Kragujevac, prepared the documentary *Eva: Goli život Golog otoka* [Eva: Bare Life on Bare Island] in 2013, using interviews with Nahir Panić conducted that same year in Israel. These interviews also became the basis of the biography which is the subject of this article. Ilić wrote a cognitively and socially interesting text depicting the story of a Jewish woman who survived the Holocaust, was sent to a camp for Cominformists, and finally immigrated to Israel. It should be added that earlier, apart from the television series *Goli život*, Nahir Panić had also been the protagonist of the documentary *Eva* directed in 2002 by Avner Faingulernt and of a biography *Dvije ljubavi i jedan rat Eve Panić Nahir* [Two Loves and One War of Eva Panić Nahir], written by the journalist and publicist Aleksandra Ličanin and released in 2015 in Čakovec.[14] As an interpreter[15] of the reality described in Ilić's prose, I will analyze a sequence of events chronologically depicted in it and trace the way in which Nahir Panić gives meanings to particular events. I treat a culturally embedded text as a literary representation of specific cultural issues.[16] Following Norman Denzin, in my reflections I accept that biographical materials are a type of conventionalized narrative, containing objective and subjective markers, turning points he calls epiphanies, which signify experiences leaving marks on human life.[17] However, the recorded testimony of Nahir Panić, despite presenting her traumatic experiences, can also be regarded as an expression of the struggle for remembrance of the past and as an attempt to save her own subjectivity. I interpret the

[14] Aleksandra Ličanin, *Dvije ljubavi i jedan rat Eve Panić Nahir* (Čakovec, 2015). This book is a bilingual Croatian-English publication, in which the main narrative is supplemented by direct quotations from Eva Nahir Panić and her daughter Tijana Wages. The interviews conducted with Nahir Panić in 2012 and 2014 constituted the basis of the monograph. The book was further enriched with photographs depicting the protagonist at various moments of her life. On the book see e.g. Andrej Pal, "Dvije ljubavi i jedan rat Eve Panić Nahir," *Hakol* 138 (2015), 19.

[15] In sociological research, the scholar is even placed in a triple role—that of a reader, an exegete of the text, and an interpreter of social reality; see Hanna Palska, "Badacz społeczny wobec tekstu: Niektóre problemy analizy jakościowej w socjologii i teoria literatury," in Henryk Domański, Krystyna Lutyńska, Andrzej W. Rostocki (eds.), *Spojrzenie na metodę: Studia z metodologii badań socjologicznych* (Warsaw, 1999), 162. See also Agnieszka Nikliborc, *Uwięzione w KL Auschwitz-Birkenau: Traumatyczne doświadczenia kobiet odzwierciedlone w dokumentach osobistych* (Kraków, 2010).

[16] Wolfgang Iser, "Czym jest antropologia literatury? Różnica między fikcjami wyjaśniającymi a odkrywającymi," *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2006), 11–35.

[17] Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Thousand Oaks, 1989), 70.

"border" to which the title refers as having a double meaning[18]: not only as borderline situations (i.e. the Holocaust or the stay in the Sveti Grgur prison camp)[19] which Nahir Panić had to face in her life and which left an indelible mark on her, but also as a term referring to functioning in the borderlands between different cultures which directly influenced her fate.

Borders of Biography

The analysis of the text must be accompanied by a brief, factual reconstruction of Nahir Panić's life. This will allow us to indicate the events and circumstances which played a decisive role in shaping her identity, had a direct influence on her decisions, and formed the historical framework for a literary representation. She was born in 1918 as Eva Kelemen, the youngest of three daughters of a wealthy Jewish family from Čakovec, a city in the Međimurje region, which was then a part of the Kingdom of Hungary.[20] Soon, however, due to geopolitical changes after World War I, Međimurje became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Eva's parents, Bela and Ema Kelemen, owned a fashionable clothing store which, according to Eva, sold textiles imported from Paris and Prague.[21] At home they spoke Hungarian; Eva learned Croatian and German at school. From a very early age, she was familiar with the multi-lingual features of East European Jewish culture before World

[18] Agnieszka Czyżak writes about "border" lives in the context of Polish-Jewish and Jewish-Polish biographies, see Agnieszka Czyżak, *Świadectwo rozproszone: Literatura najnowsza wobec przemian* (Poznań, 2015), 55.

[19] See Karl Jaspers, "Sytuacje graniczne," in Roman Rudziński (ed.), *Jaspers*, trans. Mirosław Skwieciński (Warsaw, 1978), 186–242.

[20] In 2014 Eva Nahir Panić, as the first in the history of Čakovec, personally received the City Medal of Honour. See Ivica Beti, "Preživjela holokaust i robijala na Golom otoku, a sada je prva počasna građanka Čakovca," *Večernj list* (19 May 2014), https://www.vecernji.hr/regije/prezivjela-holokaust-i-robijala-na-golom-otoku-a-sada-je-prva-pocasna-gradanka-cakovca-939561 [retrieved: 10 Oct. 2017]. It should be mentioned that the first individually published testimony (there are obviously more recorded yet unpublished memories of other people) of a Jew from Međimurje is Branimir Bunjac's interview with Eva Schwarz (1927–2012); see Branimir Bunjac, *Iz pepela čakovečke sinagoge: Životopis Eve Schwarz* (Čakovec, 2014). The above-mentioned book of Ličanin is a continuation of this type of publications (Ivan Pranjić, "Pogovor: Progon," in Bunjac, *Iz pepela*, 71; Ličanin, *Dvije ljubavi*, 8). Although—as Bunjac writes in his introduction—Schwarz lived in Budapest after the war, for the rest of her life she played the role of an informal leader of the surviving Jews of Međimurje (Bunjac, *Iz pepela*, 7, 9).

[21] Dane Ilić, *Eva* (Kragujevac, 2016), 11.

War II[22] though her mother—as she remembers—"[d]idn't know even a word in Croatian."[23] Early in her life, Eva partook in the activities of a left-wing youth organization, and while travelling to visit her sister in Pest, she carried communist propaganda materials. These illegal activities stemmed from Nahir Panić's idealism and naivety: "I was young and I saw in it a community of people who share ideals and a desire to change the world together;"[24] "I didn't want anyone to ask me again whether I was Jewish or Gypsy."[25] However, she consciously exploited the fact that she was a daughter of wealthy Jews, which gave her a privileged position in society: "I often didn't know what was there. No one suspected that in the suitcase of a young Jewish woman with a ticket for the most expensive train compartment were publications intended for an illegal organization."[26] In 1936, she met Radosav Panić, a young Serbian officer, and they married in Belgrade in 1940 despite their social differences (Panić came from a poor family in Mala Kruševica, a village in southern Serbia) and legal restrictions (to make the marriage possible, Radosav bought a false written proof of baptism for Eva, which formally made her an Orthodox Christian), and together they lived in the Serbian capital. When the war broke out in 1941 in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, her husband was mobilized and she went to Mala Kruševica. Lack of news from Radosav made her return to Belgrade: "There is no life for me without Rade."[27] With documents presenting her as a Hungarian married to a Serb, she left her husband's family home. By coincidence, she found him wounded in Belgrade ("I remember every moment, every street from the meeting with my Rade")[28] and organized the transport to Mala Kruševica, where they moved together. Radosav joined the underground communist movement, for whom he gathered intelligence on the Chetniks.[29] When the

[22] Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, *Odcienie tożsamości: Literatura żydowska jako zjawisko wielojęzyczne* (Lublin, 2004), 12–13.

[23] "nije znala ni reč hrvatskog jezika." Ilić, *Eva*, 21.

[24] "Bila sam mlada i na to gledala kao na zajednicu ljudi koje povezuju ideali i želja da zajedno menjaju svet." Ibid., 15.

[25] "Nisam želela da me više iko pita da li sam Jevrejka ili Ciganka." Ibid.

[26] "Često ni sama nisam znala šta se tu nalazi. Niko nije sumnjao da se u koferima mlade Jevrejke, sa kartom najskupljeg razreda u vozu, nalaze publikacije namenjene ilegalnoj organizacji." Ibid., 14.

[27] "Bez Radeta mi nema života." Ibid., 53.

[28] "[s]ećam se svakog momenta, svake ulice, mog i Radetovog susreta." Ibid., 54.

[29] After the attack of the Axis countries, two main movements fighting for liberation and competing with each other for power were formed in Yugoslavia: the Chetniks, supported by the émigrés and the allied government, led by Col. Dragoljub Draža Mihailović,

danger that Eva would be recognized as a Jew became real, she moved to Užice. She met her husband again in Belgrade in May 1943. At that time she was thinking while travelling: "'Who am I?' she asked herself as she descended the steep street towards the city center. 'I am not allowed to be a Jew. Is it less scary to be Serbian or Hungarian?'"[30] All these thoughts led her, upon arrival, to introduce herself as a "refugee from Croatia."[31] The question about her origin, and the affiliation and non-transparency of the answer followed Eva throughout her life. The imperative to maintain a camouflage and change her identity, forced by circumstances of the war (which changes at the level of external functioning came to her relatively easily and did not raise suspicion, primarily because she knew languages and had the "right looks"), is a recurring motif of the story. Meanwhile, her parents along with other Jews from Čakovec, which was under Hungarian occupation, were deported and at the end of April or in early May 1944 died at Auschwitz.[32]

It should be noted that in Belgrade Eva and Radosav were also involved in illegal guerrilla activities. Radosav Panić—as his wife says—in June 1944 officially became a member of OZNA (Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda / Odeljenje zaštite naroda [the Department for People's Protection]).[33] As we read in the biography, on the instructions of OZNA he also cooperated with the NKVD. Although the couple managed to survive the war and even had a daughter named Tijana in 1945, the postwar period turned out to be truly dramatic for them. During his intelligence work,

and the communist guerilla under Josip Broz Tito, supported by the USSR, and later also by the United Kingdom and the USA. See Barbara Jelavich, *Historia Bałkanów: Wiek XX*, trans. Marek Chojnacki, Justyn Hunia (Kraków, 2005), 280–281.

[30] "'Ko sam ja?' – pitala se dok se spuštala strmom ulicom ka centru grada. 'Jevrejka ne smem da budem. Je li manje strašno biti Srpkinja ili Mađarica?'" Ilić, *Eva*, 63.

[31] "izbeglica iz Hrvatske." Ibid., 64.

[32] Međimurje, like Prekomurje, Baranje, and Bačka, was under the Hungarian occupation from December 1941. Compared to the rest of Hungary, the attitude toward the Jews in those areas was particularly hostile and this was exacerbated in April 1944. See Mladenka Ivanković, *Jevreji u Jugoslaviji (1944–1952): Kraj ili novi početak* (Beograd, 2009), 38. The only remembrance of parents and loved ones from Čakovec which survived the war turned out to be a box of photographs and letters buried by Eva in 1941 in Mala Kruševica in the Panić family courtyard. This motif brings to mind a metal box found many years after the war and containing documents, photographs, and a letter, which appears in the novel by Filip David, *Kuća sećanja i zaborava* (2014). Thanks to the contents of the box, buried by the parents of one of the main protagonists of the story, Miša Brankov/Volf, he learns that he is of Jewish descent. On the novel see Sabina Giergiel, Katarzyna Taczyńska, "'When Night Passes' and 'When Day Breaks' – Between the Past and the Present: Borderlines of Holocaust in Filip David's Works," *Colloquia Humanistica* 6 (2017), 75–96.

[33] Ilić, *Eva*, 69.

Radosav was arrested several times,[34] for the last time in October 1951, when Yugoslavia had already been excluded from the Cominform. He was then charged with spying for the NKVD and allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself on a bandage tied to his bed. Shortly after, Eva was arrested too. At first, the UDBA (Uprava državne bezbednosti [State Security Service]) tried to force her to renounce her husband as a Soviet spy and an enemy of the nation. When she refused to do so, she was accused of espionage. At some point, wrought by emotional tension, she attempted to commit suicide in her cell. Such situations when women were "encouraged" to break up with their husbands and renounce them are relatively often described in the memoirs of former women prisoners.[35] Eva refused to sign the agreement to cooperate; she was prepared to die rather than act against her own convictions. During interrogation, she even recited a fragment of a poem by the Czech proletarian poet Jiří Wolker, beginning with the words "I do not fear death." For her resistance, she was eventually sent to a re-education camp, as the labor camps for opponents of Tito's politics were then called. Eva was imprisoned in the camp on the island of Sveti Grgur[36] from April 1952 to November 1953.

Mothers, sisters, and wives of political prisoners as well as women with Russian family members constituted a significant segment of the arrested.[37] For their kinship or close contacts with the detained "enemies of the state" they were persecuted, deprived of rights, blackmailed, and forced to break all contacts with husbands, brothers, or lovers. Those who resisted were considered "political criminals" and were arrested on account of their relationships. Renata Jambrešić-Kirin estimates that the number of prisoners sentenced for having close relations with the "enemy of the state" was considerable. According to the Croatian researcher, family-related arrests are one proof that, politically speaking, women at that time were not considered as independent, self-governing subjects.[38]

[34] To obtain the release of her husband, Eva even appealed to Moša Pijade, who helped her. Ibid., 81–87.

[35] Taczyńska, *Dowcip*, 121–122.

[36] Other sources in which the Nahir Panić's memories were published report that she was also a prisoner of Goli Otok. See Dragoslav Mihailović, *Goli otok, knjiga 2* (Beograd, 1995), 250.

[37] Dragan Marković, *Istina o Golom otoku* (Beograd, 1987), 183; Eva Grlić, *Sjećanja* (Zagreb, 2001), 194.

[38] Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, "'Šalje Tito svoje na ljetovanje!': Ženska trauma i arhipelag Goli," *Treća* 1 (2007), 30. See also Taczyńska, *Dowcip*, 117–123.

Eva Nahir Panić devotes much space in her recollections to her period in isolation, all the more so because the weight of the experiences increased and the consequences of the arrest became integral to her subsequent life. After her release, she first went to Lendava in Slovenia, to her daughter Tijana who remained in the care of Eva's sister. However, as the city was located close to the Hungarian border and thus presented a risk that Eva might try to escape, and perhaps because her family was afraid to shelter the former political prisoner, she was forced to leave Slovenia. She moved to Belgrade, but the stigma of having been a prisoner made it difficult for her to start a new life. It took her no less than two years to find an apartment,[39] which finally allowed her to bring her daughter to Serbia. Life burdened by belonging to a family of political opponents turned out to be too difficult for Tijana, who was persecuted because of her parents' past,[40] so after graduation she decided to move to Israel and live at Kibbutz Sha'ar ha-amakim. The relationship of these two women—mother and daughter—is an important, but not dominant, topic recurring in Eva's testimony, which I will analyze later in this article. Here it should be added that Tijana's mother joined her daughter only in 1966, after she was finally able to read her husband's files and confirm that he had died innocent. Upon reaching Israel, she opened a new chapter in her life. Although the burden of the camp tragedy and Radosav's death were forever to be an integral part of her life, the need for a new beginning turned out to be stronger. In Israel, she married a man named Moše Nahir, but decided to keep the names of both husbands. For the rest of her life she lived at the kibbutz, and died in 2015.

"My story was not important to me at all, I was not important"[41]

Eva Nahir Panić's life story as presented by Dane Ilić unfolds on two levels. On the first, the reader encounters the situation of a journalist's arrival in Israel in 2013 and follows a conversation the journalist holds with the

[39] Because problems were piling up, it was then that Nahir Panić first considered emigration to Israel. Help in finding a home came again from Moša Pijade. See Ilić, *Eva*, 140.

[40] Eva mentions a situation when in the classroom one of the students wrote on the blackboard: "Tijana Panić is a child of the enemy of the nation" ("Tijana Panić je dete narodnog neprijatelja"). See ibid., 143.

[41] "Moja priča nije meni uopšte bila važna, ja nisam bila važna." Cf. "Politika: drugi dan okruglog stola pisaca," in Mirjana Miočinović (ed.), *Danilo Kiš (1935–2005): Između poetike i politike* (Beograd, 2011), 136.

subject of the biography. On the second level, we read the linear retrospective history of Nahir Panić. The two parts are fused in Ilić's narrative, which reveals the details of the meeting in Israel, but above all, has an informational character. Its purpose is to build a terse historical-political context, partially based on academic sources, for the events the text describes. The biographer thus creates a picture of the life of a certain individual and directs the reader's attention so as to highlight past experiences. Ilić, like Danilo Kiš before, becomes a mediator of the story of Nahir Panić, the weaver[42] who interweaves fragments of the heroine's story. Referring to James Young's findings on the content of testimonies in video format, we could look at Nahir Panić's memories—both in Kiš's documentary and in *Eva*—as "a narrative in a narrative" consisting of three elements: the story of the protagonist, the telling of the story, and its record.[43] Using the words of Ewa Domańska, it can be said that Ilić, symbolized by the written word, by the mediation mechanism, makes Eva the speaker so that the testimony becomes an act of empowerment.[44] Describing the story is an act intended to show that the heroine has managed to save her future and re-establish herself in "the civilization of life" and at the same time save her own experiences through articulating them—the experiences of both a Jewish survivor of Holocaust and a former prisoner of the camps for Cominformists.

We could ask why Nahir Panić never wrote down her own memories. In one conversation about the camp experience, she emphatically states that "My story was not important to me at all, I was not important."[45] It is clear from her recollections that she does not perceive her own experiences as valuable enough to record. In the same utterance she also stresses that the past was of major importance to her in individual and private terms: she wanted to preserve her husband's memory and demonstrate that he

[42] It is worth reminding that the work of weaving is often interpreted in culture as feminine speech and language; see Kazimiera Szczuka, "Prządki, tkaczki i pająki: Uwagi o twórczości kobiet," in Borkowska, Sikorska (eds.), *Krytyka feministyczna*, 71. Thus, the term "arachnology" of Nancy K. Miller was born, referring to the mythical Arachne, which metaphorically described the creativity of women and was a kind of response to Roland Barthes' "hyphology" idea; see Anna Burzyńska, Michał Paweł Markowski, *Teorie literatury XX wieku: Podręcznik* (Kraków, 2007), 409–411.

[43] As cited in Piotr Filipkowski, "Historia mówiona i wojna," in Sławomir Buryła, Paweł Rodak (eds.), *Wojna. Doświadczenie i zapis: Nowe źródła, problemy, metody badawcze* (Kraków, 2006), 18.

[44] Domańska, "Historia ratownicza," 30.

[45] "Politika: drugi dan," 136.

was innocent.[46] For this purpose she agreed to cooperate with Kiš, whom she valued very highly. First, together with the Israeli journalist Raul Tajtelbaum, she recorded her memories on tapes that were given to Kiš. She later appeared with Ženi Lebl in the above-mentioned series *Goli život*. It is also possible that her internal compulsion to tell her story was a kind of a narrative therapy, "a way to understand the reality that is an inherent element of subjective being in the world."[47] Nahir Panić draws a clear distinction between the turbulent past that deeply influenced the current shape of her life under new conditions and the present that was passing in relative calm. She divides her life into two parts. The first marks her time in Yugoslavia when her mental state before leaving for Israel was close to depression. Full of anxiety, Nahir Panić was living then in the shadow of the camp experience. In the second part, in Israel, she was forced to focus on situations around her at the moment, even if the memory of the past was still vivid and she continued to return in her memories to the people and places she had lost. The meeting with Kiš pushed her out of the rut of everyday life and presented an opportunity to pull her experiences from deep layers of memory and recreate her own biography. Ilić largely repeats Kiš's role as a mediator, but in his writing he tries to preserve his interlocutor's utterances. He styles the text as a dialogue, so a large part of what Nahir Panić says is represented in independent speech. The main purpose is to give testimony; thus, the language of the memories expressed by the protagonist preserves what is called reduced record, characteristic of camp memories, devoid of figurative language and approaching the style of so-called factual literature.[48] It is the text that performs functions other than aesthetic.[49]

Undoubtedly the experience of loss, concrete and personal, first that of her parents during the Holocaust, then after the war that of her husband as a result of political cleansing, accompanied Nahir Panić throughout her life and remained an indelible part of it. In Eva's case, we can also

[46] Ibid.

[47] Barbara Józefik, "Terapia jako proces współtworzenia nowych znaczeń i opowieści: Idee i praktyki narracyjne," in Lech Górniak, Barbara Józefik (eds.), *Ewolucja myślenia systemowego w terapii rodzin: Od metafory cybernetycznej do dialogu i narracji* (Kraków, 2003), 2; http://psychoterapia-certyfikat.pl/wp-content/uploads/Barbara-Jozefik-Terapia-narracyjna.pdf [retrieved: 10 Oct. 2017].

[48] Bożena Karwowska, *Ciało. Seksualność. Obozy Zagłady* (Kraków, 2009), 40.

[49] Przemysław Czapliński, "Zagłada jako wyzwanie dla refleksji o literaturze," *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2004), 19.

talk about the loss of place.[50] She had to break ties with geographical locations several times in her life, as she was forced to resettle and leave home, and finally, her homeland, Yugoslavia. Interestingly, even in the 2013 interview with Ilić, Nahir Panić describes modern Serbia by the term "Yugoslavia," emphasizing her deep relationship with the country and her attitude toward its loss. Because she uses that name of the country, it is also appropriate to talk about the relationship with a certain remembered reality, based on multi-culturalism and realizing the premises of communist ideology: "After all this I am still a socialist, a communist, even if I was never a member of the Party."[51] Eva plainly declares that the idealistic vision of life based on shared property and equal division still appealed to her in Israel, and that is why she decided to live at the strongly left-wing Kibbutz Sha'ar ha-amakim. It is worth stressing that even many years after leaving the prison camp, the protagonist does not renounce her sympathy for communism, a movement she perceived primarily as a victory over fascism. Even if she herself became a victim of Tito and the policies of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, she does not blame them for the harm she suffered: "Tito was a capable statesman; he was the first to stand against fascism, against Hitler's evil."[52] In her opinion, the state of affairs should be blamed on the USSR, which pressured Yugoslavia and posed a real threat to the country.

For Nahir Panić, the loss is closely related to cultural dependence and to historical and political events, but in her story, narrative optics deal with the public sphere only through context. Her story centers on private space, on facing the challenge of losing her loved ones and home and the need to build a new life in a foreign territory. However, the reality of the emigration life from which she speaks is limited to a side story continuing along the main tale and serving as a supplement or framework for the reconstructed past. This side story reveals that Nahir Panić's life in Israel focused on her role as a wife and on family matters. The professional sphere of the

[50] In an interview given to Dragoslav Simić, Eva Nahir Panić described Yugoslavia as her old homeland, to which she turns back in dreams. See Dragoslav Simić, Audio i Foto Arhiv, "Eva Nahir Panić" (2014), http://www.audioifotoarhiv.com/gosti%20sajta/EvaPanic.html [retrieved: 10 Oct. 2017].

[51] "Posle svega, ostala sam socijalista, komunista, a da nikada nisam bila član Partije." Ilić, *Eva*, 166.

[52] "Tito je bio sposoban državnik, prvi se podigao protiv fašizma, protiv Hitlerovog zla;" ibid. Eva Nahir Panić exchanged correspondence with Milovan Đilas on the idea of creating the Goli Otok prison camp and the responsibility for the events that took place there; ibid., 162–163.

protagonist is practically non-existent in this narrative. Perhaps, as Bożena Karwowska writes, "the identity" reaction of the heroine is narrowed to a private role as a sign of the situation in the peripheral countries from which émigré women escaped "into family roles, and above all in the role of wife."[53] The division into "private" and "public" is not present in Nahir Panić's life in a binary and obvious way; these categories are intertwined, "so there are no disjoint sets, no impassable zones."[54]

To understand the details of Eva Nahir Panić's experience, it is necessary to view it in a broader perspective of political influences. If we discuss her history against a socio-historical background, we receive an enriched narrative spectrum of the fate of Yugoslav Jews. Nahir Panić's voice, which is a part of war and camp discourse, can be interpreted as a community relation,[55] which for the societies of the countries of the former Yugoslavia seems to have built a connection to their Jewish past and has "both scientific-cognitive and social-integration functions."[56] A similar role is fulfilled by the autobiographical prose of Ženi Lebl.[57] Nahir Panić's biography can be interpreted as a border biography that confirms the existence of heterogeneous identity, in which culturally (Hungarian, Yugoslavian, Jewish) and socially (private/public) significant influences are clearly expressed. The conversations recorded by Ilić incorporate the relations of communities existing outside the borders of the traditional model of national history so that they become a part of this narrative.[58]

[53] Bożena Karwowska, "Kobieta – Historia – Tożsamość: Kilka uwag o powojennych emigrantkach polskich," in ead., *Kobieta – Historia – Literatura* (Warsaw, 2016), 40.

[54] Inga Iwasiów, "Wstęp," in ead. (ed.), *Prywatne/publiczne: Gatunki pisarstwa kobiecego* (Szczecin, 2008), 7.

[55] Domańska, "Historia ratownicza," 14.

[56] Ibid. It is worth remembering that one of never completed research projects of Ženi Lebl concerned Jewish experiences related to a stay in the Goli Otok camp; see Aca Singer, "Neostvarena želja," in Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl, Dina Katan Ben-Cion (eds.), *Ženi* (Beograd–Tel Aviv, 2013), 45. Certainly, Eva Nahir Panić's testimony could be considered as one of the sources. The author notes in it that during her isolation when she was boycotted, other fellow prisoners tried to force her to march through the barrack with Nazi parade step; see Ilić, *Eva*, 126. About boycotts and other groups of prisoners see Taczyńska, *Dowcip*, 65–68.

[57] See Katarzyna Taczyńska, "'A Scattered Mosaic of Records and Reminiscences': Ženi Lebl's War Odyssey in Her Personal Writings," in Urszula Markowska-Manista, Justyna Pilarska (eds.), *An Introspective Approach to Women's Intercultural Fieldwork: Female Researchers' Narrations Based on Their Intercultural Experiences from the Field* (Warsaw, 2017), 68–102.

[58] Cf. Karwowska, "Kobieta – Historia – Tożsamość," 32.

Camp Experience in Intergenerational Relations

The multi-layered prose of *Eva* is valuable for at least one more reason, which in the text itself is located beyond the main narration and even the main text. It is the problem of the mother–daughter relationship and the issue of intergenerational trauma. Nahir Panić's camp experience, the context of her arrest (the death of Radosav), and the resulting consequences are the key elements of the protagonist's biographical experience, the specific turning point—as I have shown—shaping her later life. In Eva's biography, the camp past is a type of "borderline situation" as described by Karl Jaspers. The philosopher uses "borderline situation" to denote an existential event which cannot be avoided and which condemns man to choose. Decisions taken at that point completely change a life.[59] According to the literary representation in the analyzed text, the burden of traumatic experience turns out also to encumber the next generation, the children of former prisoners, or in this case Eva's daughter Tijana. This complicated relationship clearly shows hidden cracks in the mental state of the mother, rebuilt with so much difficulty.

The issue of postmemory[60] in the camp discourse on the Goli Otok is still a rare topic, although some cultural texts discuss the transgenerational trauma and give it fictional forms.[61] It is worth recalling here the novel *Oko otoka* [Around the Island] by Vanja Bulić, whose father was arrested as a Cominformist.[62] The author, utilizing authentic memories, creates a literary picture of the conflict between a father, the prisoner of Goli Otok, and a son, first a rebellious teenager, and then a security agent, who is looking for understanding in a father who is still silent about his absence and the past. The second important work, widely received, is *Goli* [Bare] from 2014, a documentary film by Tiha K. Gudac, debuting as a documentary artist. As the director and screenwriter, this granddaughter of a former prisoner shows from the perspective of personalized narrative

[59] Jaspers, "Sytuacje graniczne," 186–242. As Jacek Leociak writes: "[w]ith border experience we have to deal when a man can no longer endure, but he must endure—and he endures." Jacek Leociak, *Doświadczenia graniczne: Studia o dwudziestowiecznych formach reprezentacji* (Warsaw, 2009), 20.

[60] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, 1997).

[61] See Katarzyna Taczyńska, "Obóz Goli otok w relacji międzypokoleniowej: Przypadek filmu *Goli* Tihej K. Gudac," *Politeja* 47 (2017), 145–157.

[62] See Vanja Bulić, *Oko otoka* (Beograd, 2009).

how the camp experience influenced and still influences the generations following the victims of the camp, namely their children and grandchildren.

The bond between the mother and daughter appears on the pages of the memories discussed here quite inconspicuously and in most cases only in the margins, as a footnote. I have already mentioned that Tijana, as a child of former prisoners, became a victim of bullying and ostracism at school. Social exclusion was a key factor in mobilizing her to emigrate from Yugoslavia. The passages of Ilić's 2014 conversations with Tijana quoted in *Eva* reveal that the moments of disappearance (after the arrest) and return (from the camp) of the mother are deeply imprinted on the child's life. A specific tension between the daughter and her mother emerges from the daughter's confession. This family conflict is revealed in two ambivalent images. The first is the voice of a little girl who expresses a deep longing for her absent mother and hopes for her quick return. The moment when the officers of UDBA came for Eva has been preserved by Tijana as a very detailed memory:

> I will never forget this morning when they knocked on the door of Mira Carin, where we were both staying. We waited for Mom to return and come to dinner. I kept repeating to Mira: "Aunt Mira, we just can't eat the whole dinner! Mom will come back, so we have to leave something for her." Even today I remember in detail every piece of furniture from this dining room in Mira Carin's apartment on the first floor of Ivan Begova Street no. 6.[63]

Similarly vivid is the scene of Eva's arrival in Lendava, which Tijana recreates for the interview. In this memory, the meeting appears as a magical moment, a little unreal, as if it were a page of a film script:

> I was eight. I don't remember exactly what time of year it was, but I remember that there was no snow. I was sitting at the table and heard a knock at the door that opened straight to the main room where I was sitting. She was wearing wrinkled clothes. Her legs were very swollen. I remember that moment when I looked up at the doorway—like in a movie scene, without words. . . . It was Eva.[64]

[63] "Nikada neću zaboraviti to jutro kada su pokucali na vrata Mire Carin, u kom smo se nalazile samo nas dve. Čekali smo mamu da se vrati i stigne na ručak. Uporno sam ponavljala Miri: 'Teta Miro, samo da ne pojedemo ceo ručak! Mama će se vratiti, pa da i njoj nešto ostavimo'. I danas se tačno sećam svakog komada nameštaja u toj trpezariji u stanu Mire Carin u ulici Ivan Begovoj br. 6, na prvom spratu." Ilić, *Eva*, 108–109, footnote.

[64] "Imala sam osam godina. Ne sećam se tačno koje je doba godine bilo, ali sam upamtila da nije bilo snega. Sedela sam za stolom i čula kucanje na vratima koja su gledala pravo u glavnu prostoriju u kojoj sam sedela. Na sebi je nosila sivu zgužvanu odeću. Noge su joj bile jako otečene. Pamtim taj trenutak kada sam podigla pogled ka vratima – poput scene iz nekog filma, bez reči… To je bila Eva." Ibid., 137, footnote.

In the second instance, the daughter's voice are the words of an adolescent and adult woman who for many years resented her mother for at the time of Eva's arrest choosing love for her husband and fidelity to her ideals over returning to her daughter. For many years, Tijana was unable to feel compassion for her mother, accusing her of egoism and abandonment. The pain and anger between them lasted for a very long time, and was particularly acute when they lived together in Yugoslavia.[65] The reader may have guessed that the daughter had to fight so that her mother would recognize the daughter's story. Perhaps Tijana's urge to leave for Israel sprang from the need not only to cut off the past but also to become independent, which would allow her to discover her own identity. The tension and turbulent emotions can also be read in the words of the protagonist on the memories, as she indicates that the daughter is the only person who may have a legitimate claim on her. Eva was aware of the consequences of her conduct in prison: "By this act, I condemned not only myself, but also her [Tijana]. . . . She often accused me of loving her father more, but I couldn't deny my greatest love, my Rade."[66] She calls the decision she reached at that time "a great sacrifice" which—in her opinion—she had to make in order to go on living: "I sacrificed Tijana's childhood and my freedom to prove that Rade was killed innocent."[67] Another choice would mean betraying not only her husband but also herself, their daughter, and their love.[68] The protagonist admits simultaneously that the fight for the good name of her husband and family was dramatic and that often it was the thought of her daughter that allowed her to persevere. There is a striking scene in which Eva describes a moment when she was working at the camp on the island—and we must add that it was Sisyphean labor which literally consisted of carrying stones pointlessly up and down the mountain[69]—and during that time she created projections in her mind to give meaning to her actions. She imagined that Tijana was waiting for her upstairs and that Eva was carrying medicine for her.[70]

[65] Ibid., 165.

[66] "Tim činom nisam samo presudila sebi već i njoj [Tijani]. . . . Često mi je prebacivala da sam više volela njenog oca, a ja se nisam mogla odreći svoje najveće ljubavi, mog Radeta." Ibid., 143.

[67] "Žrtvovala sam i Tijanino detinjstvo i svoju slobodu, da bih dokazala da je Rade stradao nevin." Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Work played an important role in the re-education of the prisoners, but it was also used as a method of torture. See Taczyńska, *Dowcip*, 68.

[70] Ilić, *Eva*, 126.

From this perspective, the strategy for working through this difficult relationship which is mentioned at the end of the book seems interesting. The borderline moment for their relation was the trip of the mother, daughter, and granddaughter to Goli Otok in 2002. Faingulernt's film documents this journey. It was then that the question about the relationship between the mother and daughter was openly asked for the first time, so that the journey became a trope for the developments in the mother–daughter relationship. As a result, the trip proved to be a sort of therapy with a cleansing function, shedding accumulated regrets. It gave both mother and daughter a chance to revisit their experiences and the related trauma, and to make that painful heritage a shared one through recognition of the daughter's history. It became the nucleus for a new relationship and opened the space for understanding and forgiveness. The tension and asymmetry in the relationship gave way to an equal arrangement, in which both Eva and Tijana become the depositors of the burden of family recollections and the memory of them. And when we look at this event from the point of view of feminist criticism, the process of birth of a conscious bond can be interpreted as the retrieval of a female-based genealogy which maintains the family's "continuity and identity, not only in the biological but also in the socio-cultural aspect."[71]

Conclusion

Ewa Domańska's rescue project can be used as inspiration for recovering and shaping narratives about female experiences from camps for Cominformists. The biographical memories of Eva Nahir Panić collected by Dane Ilić fit into its scope well. The story of the main character represents a tale that evades uneqivocal classification. Her biography is permanently unified (not divided) by the concept of "border" defined in this case by the events of the war and postwar history of Yugoslavia, Jewish history, and the process of establishing one's own subjectivity in relation to the category of private versus public. Through this lens, the life of Eva Nahir Panić, though undoubtedly filled with painful experiences, can be perceived not as a story of victimization, but of rebirth and affirmation.

[71] Tatiana Czerska, *Między autobiografią a opowieścią rodzinną: Kobiece narracje osobiste w Polsce po 1944 roku w perspektywie historyczno-kulturowej* (Szczecin, 2011), 89.

Her life story is a highly personalized narrative, presenting her own identity project, which also discovers the potential of communities and may provide a starting point for reflection on the history of Yugoslavia, with universal application.

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