

**A Space of Her Own:
Women in the Holocaust**

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**Women in
the Holocaust
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Women's Holocaust Narratives in the Yugoslav *Jewish Almanac*

Žarka Svirčev

The *Jewish Almanac* [*Jevrejski almanah*] (1954–1971) was the most significant vehicle of self-representation for the Jewish community in socialist Yugoslavia. It was a multidisciplinary and secularly oriented publication that was aimed at the broader, transnational community. One of the *Almanac*'s distinctive roles was commemorating and memorializing World War II. The *Almanac* served as a hybrid memorialization platform, intersecting diverse memory formations. The concepts or strategies of memorialization are organized by genres. In articles and essays, memorialization is consistent with the state's official narrative. The prevailing mnemonic narrative emphasizes the antifascist struggle, the heroic discourse of the partisans' liberation movement, and the collective suffering. In the context of Yugoslav *brotherhood and unity*, the memory of the victims of fascism did not acknowledge their ethnic origin. The state's politics of remembrance did not address the Holocaust. This tendency is also noted by the authors of the *Bibliography of Jewish Almanac*, Biljana Albahari and Vesna Trijić,¹

1 Biljana Albahari i Vesna Trijić, *Bibliografija Jevrejskog almanaha, Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, Beograd, 2023, p. 29.*

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pointing out that “there are few articles about the Holocaust in Europe in *The Jewish Almanac*. Much more common were the texts about Jews who participated as fighters in the Second World War. Memories and written biographies of national heroes were recorded [...] Of particular documentary importance are the appendices designed in imitation of collective biographies, with names, brief biographical notes, and photographs of the dead”.²

Nonetheless, the *Almanac* had a noteworthy Literary Section. The editor of the Literary Section was Ivan Ivanji, and within the Section, prominent Yugoslav writers were published (Danilo Kiš, Filip David, Ivo Andrić, Isak Samokovlija, Đorđe Lebović, Ivan V. Lalić). The Literary Section

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- 2 The representation of the female Jewish community in non-fiction genres also corresponds to this mnemonic pattern. Edita Vajs's text “Women's Participation in Jewish Public Work” is an exemplary reference in this context. Although Vajs mostly focuses on the organized work of women after the war, she traces the origin of networking and activism of Jewish women in the South Slavic region. In the context of WWII, the key figures are female fighters and members of the resistance movement, that is, Jewish women who participated in the illegal actions of the Communist Party during the 1930s. The text's conclusion illustrates the hierarchization of the victims. Vajs concludes that today, Jewish women must continue to actively participate in public life because by doing so, they pay tribute to “comrades who fought and died, and to all those who are not alive because they were Jewish.” The articles articulate the (self)awareness of the specific status and suffering of the Jews during WWII. However, Vajs shapes the representation through the official discourse of memorialization. There is a similar discursive practice in biographical articles about Jewish women (communists, illegals, partisans). Edita Vajs, “Učešće žena u jevrejskom javnom radu u Jugoslaviji,” *Jevrejski almanah*, 1957/58, p. 155.

incorporated a different strategy than the official discourse of the socialist memory culture “because the theme of the Holocaust was strikingly prevalent in fictional genres.”³ In a monograph dedicated to the Holocaust in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literature, Stijn Vervaet shows that during the socialist period, literature pointed to the blind spots of the representation and memorialization of various experiences of the Second World War, i.e., the Holocaust, and, consequently, socialist memory culture was less hegemonic than assumed.⁴ Different practices of narrativization of the experience of the Second World War/Holocaust, or in other words, memorialization that intersects in the *Almanac*, allow us to view the almanac platform as a space of articulation of “entangled memory”⁵ and of “studying the plurality of competing acts of remembering”⁶ and the dynamics, even the dialectic, of mnemonic forms. The *entanglement* refers to the intersection of diverse social,

3 Biljana Albahari i Vesna Trijić, *Bibliografija Jevrejskog almanaha*, Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije, Beograd, 2023, p. 30.

4 Stijn Vervaet, *Holocaust, War and Transnational Memory Testimony from Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Literature*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, p. 4.

5 The concept of “entangled memory on a theoretical level, brings to the fore the entangledness of acts of remembering. From a synchronic perspective, memory’s entanglement is presented in two ways. Every act of remembering inscribes an individual in multiple social frames. This polyphony entails the simultaneous existence of concurrent interpretations of the past. From a diachronic perspective, memory is entangled in the dynamic relationship between single acts of remembering and changing mnemonic patterns. Memory scholars, therefore, uncover boundless crossreferential configurations.” Gregor Feindt et al., “Entangled memory: Toward a third wave in memory studies,” *History and Theory* Vol. 53 No. 1, 2014, p. 24.

6 Ibid, p. 32.

political, and cultural contexts and viewpoints from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, that is, subject positions – national, religious, class, and gender – that coexist in the synchronic plane, while some are suppressed in the diachronic plane. The *Almanac* deserves a privileged place in research because it provides insights into how members of the Jewish community discursively shaped self-representation, engaging in dialogue with the dominant socialist culture of memory while also opposing the homogenization of its collectivist-heroic narrative. Moreover, the Literary Section prominently features not just the Holocaust theme but also a large number of female writers.

The works of Yugoslav Jewish female authors have recently attracted increased attention from researchers. In addition to studies dedicated to individual authors, Dina Katan Ben-Zion and Katarzyna Taczyńska have both offered instructional frameworks for further research. Katan Ben-Zion focuses on the fictional works of female authors, offering a comprehensive overview of the work of Jewish women in Yugoslav literature and noting that “the female perspective embedded in their work is unique as it conveys feminine status, position, and outlook in a changed world, while patriarchal conceptions and practices were still deeply rooted in society, along with a new recognition of feminine capacity and potential.”⁷ Taczyńska investigates literature in its broadest sense (fictional, para-literary, and documentary works), viewing it as the testimony of a specific experience – namely, a non-homogeneous experience of war – and an expression of diverse forms of female subjectivity. Referring to the marginalized position of these authors,

7 Dina Katan Ben-Zion, “A Symphony of Unique Voices: The Literary Testimony of Jewish Women Writers in Post-World War II Yugoslavia,” *Studia Judaica* Vol. 21 No. 41, 2018, p. 60. In the text, one can find biographical information about most authors who collaborated in the *Almanac*.

Taczyńska sees them as “representations with a strong performative potential that can initiate a change in the way the past is conceptualized.”⁸ The title of Katarzyna Taczyńska’s paper – *(un)spoken histories* – may be generalized in the context of Yugoslav Jewish women’s works. As I will show through the example of women’s literature in the *Almanac*, women did speak, write, and testify. However, their testimonies remain on the margins of memory culture because they challenged the revolutionary heroic narrative and the patriarchal configuration of mnemonic signifiers and practices.

The *Almanac*’s Literary Section featured Frida Filipović, Julija Najman, Miriam Steiner, Maja Zrnić, Eva Tićak Weiler, Sonja Nahman Premeru, Zora Dirnbach, Ina Jun Broda, Zlata Bojović, Dalia Lea Štern, Mirjana Papo, Vesna Demajo, and Marija Šmolka.⁹ It included prose, poetry, and (radio) drama.¹⁰ These texts are highly gendered, originating from

8 Katarzyna Taczyńska, “(Un)spoken Histories: The Second World War and Yugoslav Jewish Women,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 17, 2023, p. 3.

9 In addition to the Yugoslav women authors who published their texts, in 1967, *Jewish Almanac* published Ešref Čampara’s study on Laura Papo Bohoreta’s works, translations of Nelly Sachs’ poems, and an accompanying study by Ljubiša Jocić.

10 The exception is Ina Jud-Broda’s memoir *From my Black Notebook* [*Iz moje “Crne beležnice”*]. It contains the author’s memories of people and events from the Dalmatian partisan hospitals composed from anecdotes from the diary that she kept during 1943. At the same time, it is the only para-literary text in the *Almanac* that discusses the participation of women in the Liberation Movement. Jud-Broda’s memoirs are engaging; for example, they detail the daily life of partisans wounded and the hospital staff about, the activities of the Women’s Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia in Split, her own friendship with nurse Lea, the atti-

a woman's epistemological and experiential position within the Holocaust. The corpus reflects the translation or transition of "communicative memory" into the field of "cultural memory," in Jan Assmann's terms.¹¹ These texts depict actors, agency, and emotional landscapes absent from official commemorative practices, historiography, and dominant literary production. They seek to legitimize women's specific experiences in the public sphere as traumatic.

Identifying the typical features of this literary corpus is challenging because it entails neglecting the author's specificities and interests. The texts published in the *Almanac*, in the context of the author's poetics, open up several interpretive possibilities. The psychological drama of concealing one's Jewish identity during the war is one of the formative motifs in Julia Najman's books *Making Faces* [Nameštanje lica], *Black White* [Crno belo], and *Places, Events* [Predeli, događaji]. In the *Almanac*, this motif in Julia Najman's texts does not play the role of a cohesive factor as in her books, but rather an element of polycentrism of female experiences. A key feature of the *Almanac*'s content is the

tude of the wounded towards female staff, which reflected patriarchal attitudes about women, and the ethos and spirit of the hospital community. Moreover, Jud-Broda's anecdotes are presented in a humorous tone, one of the most amusing being that the wounded partisans referred to the massage that she incorporated into the rehabilitation process as *marxsage* (marksaza): "Surely, in their subconscious, the combination of modern medicine with Marxism seemed to be the peak of effective therapy." Ina Jud-Broda, „Iz moje 'Crne bilježnice',” *Jevrejski almanah*, 1967, p. 199.

- ¹¹ Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, De Gruyter Berlin, New York, 2010, pp. 109–118.

mediation and curation of the diversity of women's experiences during the Second World War, i.e., the Holocaust. Women's experiences are not reduced to one paradigm but rather display generational and class differences, cultural peculiarities, and experience in partisan units, refugees/shelters, and camps. Moreover, the authors open numerous taboo socio-political issues of that time: anti-Semitism, crimes in the Independent State of Croatia, wartime collaboration, and passivity of so-called neutral observers, but also numerous anthropological and existential questions.

In terms of poetics, the psychological story/drama and the subjective, intimate narration or experiences hold a privileged position. As Dina Katan Ben-Zion concludes, "Most of the literature created by Jewish women writers is generally realistic, delivered as a life story of the heroine, written out of an evident urge to 'let the world know'."¹² To put it somewhat more precisely, the realism of the micro-histories of the *Almanac's* women writers, while being documentary-based, with the documentary aspect playing a (necessarily) formative role in these texts, primarily reflects an analytical realism focusing on the psychological and affective states of the heroines, their inner experiences and motivations. Personalization, as shown in prose, for example, is narrated in the first person; the heroine's stream of thoughts is focalized through the narrator's voice, reflecting the affective anchoring of the narrative. This approach allowed for the configuration of traumatic experiences beyond the notion of testimony as "historical material."¹³

12 Dina Katan Ben-Zion, "A Symphony of Unique Voices: The Literary Testimony of Jewish Women Writers in Post-World War II Yugoslavia," *Studia Judaica* Vol. 21 No. 41, 2018, p. 60.

13 Stijn Vervaet saw literature in the socialist period as crucial to re-conceptualizing the discourse of testimony. Testimonies were used

Furthermore, this approach allowed for unobserved experiences as well as experiences suppressed by social taboos or cultural normalization/stereotyping to emerge.

The *Almanac*'s first issue features Frida Filipović's short story "Roses on Porcelain" (Ruže na porcelanu), which depicts the heroine's life story from early girlhood to internment.¹⁴ The author dedicated the story to her mother.¹⁵ The short story contains micro-procedures that later

in the SFRY to document war crimes (or as a basis for demands for reparations), either for legal or ideological purposes. Therefore, the testimonies were directed towards facts related to crimes or heroic acts, uniting the dominant motifs of suffering and resistance, and so contributing to "revolutionary history." Stijn Vervaeke, *Holocaust, War and Transnational Memory Testimony from Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Literature*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, pp. 4–6.

¹⁴ Frida Filipović, "Ruže na porcelanu," *Jevrejski almanah*, 1954, pp. 214–221.

¹⁵ We learn about this dedication in an interview with Frida Filipović from 1998, stored in the archives of the American Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. (<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/vha48917>). Frida Filipović subtly transposed autobiographical elements into her short stories and novel. They are more concerned with positions and roles (for example, a Jewish woman married to a Serb who had hidden during the war or as prototypes for certain characters) than specific contents. However, there is probably an additional layer of autobiographical experience that, in the absence of something akin to a memoir, eludes readers/potential researchers. In the short story *Roses on Porcelain*, a father who has returned from the Galician battlefield meets with his young daughter, who does not recognize him because she does not remember him. Frida Filipović spoke about a similar event in an interview from 1998, showing the photo taken immediately after her father's return, in which the photographer staged the meeting between father and daughter. The encounter is narrated in a short story in

appeared in various ways in the *Almanac*'s women's literary corpus. Several authors write about the pre-war life of the Jewish community, while some authors focus on the war and post-war period, that is, on the experience of the Holocaust trauma. Filipović shows a distinct sensitivity towards the archeology of everyday life of a Jewish family through the presence of numerous items from its material culture and by illuminating intimate family rituals, the synagogue practice, social standards, ethical foundations, and connection to heritage and tradition, as well as their involvement in the broader community's "fate." All these elements in the story function as characterizations or motivations for the character's actions, but they also represent an essential aspect of memorialization. Focusing on the history of private life, which Frida Filipović conveys to us palpably and vividly, is a narrative strategy for remembering a devastated existence and culture. In *Roses on Porcelain*, there is a clear intention to chronicle (one's) life, to archive the experience in its most integral form, that of love, regret, loss, joy, anxiety, hope, and to preserve the memory of life in its uniqueness. We find (and leave) the old woman in the story awaiting the arrival of the police to detain her. Mediating her memories through the narrator/literature is an attempt at remembering her life. The awareness of the inevitability of her violent death emotionally charges the reader. Moreover, *Roses on Porcelain* sheds light on the experience of cross-marginalization in the context of the official culture of remembrance – a Jew, a woman, an old woman. Filipović's narrative can also be seen as an interventionist act in the dominant culture of remembrance and from

the same emotional register that Filipović used in the interview. In other words, Frida Filipović seemed more interested in literary interpretation and conveying lived experience and the emotional complexity of specific memories than in creating an accurate documentary-style piece conveying empirical evidence on a narrative level.

the point of view of age because the discourse of youth pervaded the socialist culture of remembrance.

A theme that stood out in the *Almanac* was motherhood. Women write about motherhood in a way that redefines traditional views, grounding motherhood in agency not traditionally ascribed to (middle and upper-class) women. Motherhood is not confined to one paradigm but rather depends on the context or the psychological profile of the heroine. There are different moments of crisis and different responses to crises. The ethics of sacrifice and the trauma of separation are thematized in Zora Dirnbach's radio drama "Phoenix from the Ashes" (*Iz pepela Feniks*).¹⁶ The drama contains several micro-narratives: staying in a transit camp, a generational conflict between daughter and father regarding the issues of passivity vs. resistance, the role of helpers or neutral observers, and the separation of mother and child. Although abandoning a child so it could survive can be deemed acceptable from a moral perspective as a response to a categorical imperative, arriving at such a decision is a process and the separation itself a traumatic war experience.

The short story "The Whisper" (Šapat) by Julija Najman focuses on the psychological breakdown of a woman faced with the imminent death of her children. The mother of three children, she was able to rescue the youngest child before leaving for the camp. The semblance of a mother's determination, strength, and endurance, made possible by a skewed perception of reality, collapses after the woman's and the child's departure. The sudden realization that she would never see her youngest child again is at once a painful moment of lucidity – she sees the marks of illness and "old age" on her children and experiences a breakdown: "She thought of everything without thinking of herself. She

16 Zora Dirnbach, "Iz pepela Feniks," *Jevrejski almanah*, 1960, pp. 227–249.

has become the smallest part of all that will disappear. Mother was free at this moment of her life. Mother loved that moment of freedom from her suffering.”¹⁷

In the short story “The Hyenas” (*Hijene*) by Maja Zrnić, the theme is a woman’s decision not to be separated from her child, despite the possibility of her child being taken care of.¹⁸ The tension in the story is intensified as the mother becomes aware that death awaits the family and decides not to hand over her daughter to members of another national-confessional community because “no one will get her except the earth.” This decision, as well as the woman’s insensitive behavior towards her daughter and potential adoptive mother, are presented in the broader perspective of the woman’s traumatized and paranoid mind (murder of her husband, intensified stories about the crematorium) and feelings of general vulnerability. However, the absence of the capacity to reason does not abolish the woman in a moral sense. The deviation of the protective attitude, which has detrimental consequences, makes this story entirely atypical in the context of the theme of motherhood in the *Almanac*.

The theme of motherhood is central to Mirjana Papo’s short story “A Letter Was Found” (*Nađeno je pismo*), one of the most outstanding literary pieces in the *Almanac*.¹⁹ Following the camp’s liberation, Red Cross workers discover a letter written on a piece of toilet paper by an unnamed woman to her husband and son. The text of the letter is preceded by an introductory note – the narrator’s comment on a Red

17 Julija Najman, “Šapat,” *Jevrejski almanah*, 1960, p. 301.

18 Maja Zrnić, “Hijene,” *Jevrejski almanah*, 1956, pp. 350–354.

19 Mirjana Papo, “Nađeno je pismo,” *Jevrejski almanah*, 1964, pp. 273–285.

Cross worker's remark that "it was not like that for them" because they "had everything" – a kitchen, a dining room, barracks with beds, even bathrooms. The order and structure of everyday life, the camp's spatial arrangement which suggest the "normality" indicated, undermine the narrator's voice, whose perspective is marked by the camp experience. The inmate is not objectified but personified in her speech mediated by the letter. The introductory note draws the outside/inside opposition, indicating the (im)possibility of the mediation of experience and the "interpretation" of material traces. The transition to the intimist genre testifies to the formative role of testimony in understanding the camp experience.

In the letter, the woman writes about her relationship with a Jewish boy who secretly stayed in barracks of non-Jewish women after his mother was murdered in the camp. The narrator is staying in the camp as a political prisoner, concealing her Jewish identity. The story is profoundly intense in its psychological analysis, the existential questions it raises, and the emotional charge it carries.

The cruelty of the Nazi biopolitical camp regime, and the emotional state of the heroine, especially her loneliness and need for others, are depicted with intensity. Memories of a previous life combined with the present moment – we learn in retrospect about the woman's family background, deportation, and forced labor in the camp. However, she insists on a sharp separation of past and present, of inner and outer worlds. The emotional bond with the boy and its ethical repercussions as she writes the letter to explain her decision to her husband and son, which we can already sense in the transformation of the pronoun *we*, reflecting her change in identification from family community to camp community to the camp's Jewish community. In the end, we learn that

the letter was written at night when she decided to reveal her identity and die with the boy.

The dilemma she faces is whether one can survive in hiding, knowing that the boy has no choice and that death is inevitable. Is it her duty to survive in order to be a mother to her biological child, or rather to take on the role of mother to a child in extreme conditions? We can understand both decisions in the context of morality devoid of pragmatism and consequentialism. Although she is aware of the necessity of the inversion of ethical principles in the “concentration universe” (the unethical nature of hiding and lying), rational reasons give way to emotional ones – life is not worth living if the boy dies alone. Moreover, we can interpret this decision as confirmation of humanity – accepting motherhood as a social role is an act of humanity based on the ethics of care for the other, especially if the other is weaker or powerless. The story’s essential problem is that of choice. It denaturalized motherhood and mothers’ decisions – women choose to die with (their) children. The female writers featured in the *Almanac* challenge the self-understanding of these choices and actions, the self-understanding of women’s care and sacrifice. Choosing to die with a child, hiding with children, caring for one’s own and children’s lives, and being separated from children are all traumatic experiences.

Two stories describe sexual violence against women in the concentration camp. Eva Tićak Vajler’s short story “A Meeting on the Adriatic” (*Susret na Jadranu*) takes place in the post-war period and addresses the impossibility of overcoming trauma. The encounter of two women on a tourist trip, Edit from Novi Sad and Lea from Vienna, who “recognize” each other by their tattoos, provides the incentive for them to evoke their experiences in Auschwitz. The delightful Adriatic landscape and

the beauty of the cultural heritage, expressed in poetic tones, disrupt the naturalistic description of life in camp evoked by the “two camp sisters” in their conversation: “The numbers on the hand show that they were there, at the same time even, that they were equally suffocated by the thick smoke and bit by lice and bedbugs, that both were tormented by hunger, exhaustion, diarrhea, typhus, ulcers, itching, and all of this combined, and that all this was happening in a massive cauldron of barbed wires, full of electric tension, where the threads of countless lives hung like a cluster upon cluster of grapes, lined up in rows: thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions... One to the right, one to the left. Those on the left went directly into the crematorium, those on the right into the clutches of perfidious torture, before, finally, also moving to the left.”²⁰

This shared experience, “the ghostly story of an unforgettable past,” however, differs as the conversation unfolds. Edita’s narrative, that of a Yugoslav political prisoner in Auschwitz, is more consistent with the topos of heroic resistance. In the camp, Edita contributed to draining the swamp, worked on the railroad, in the laundry facility, and, finally, in the infirmary. She was also a member of a group that secretly distributed news and newspapers, and she had a physical altercation with one of the heads of the camp shortly after the liberation. During the conversation, the SS officers’ cowardice, hiding, fleeing, drunkenness, and destructiveness are constantly apostrophized. The camp’s liberation is represented through a collective image of formerly enslaved people with verses on their lips. On the other hand, Lea’s experience relativized the narrative of resistance and collectivism. Upon learning that members of Lea’s family had not survived, unlike her own family,

20 Eva Tičak Vajler, “Susret na Jadranu,” *Jevrejski almanah*, 1956, p. 359.

Edita attempts to cheer and motivate her by telling her that there is still joy and laughter in the world and that she will give birth to a child. To which Lea responds:

“Never! You forget that there is a triangle beneath my number, a sign of Jewishness. I passed the tenth block and was forcibly subjected to a gynecological procedure. I was used as a guinea pig for three months. Everything in me is dead.

Edita clings to her brother. How does one respond to that? We should have found a word of comfort and offered support and hope, but the truth is so terrible that there are no answers.”²¹

A Meeting on the Adriatic resists both the homogenization of the camp experience and that of post-war narratives that exclude the diversity of responses to traumatic experiences. The representation of the camp experience of two women, Jewish and non-Jewish, points to a difference that is also a fracture in the teleological narratives of the socialist culture of remembrance. Moreover, by raising the question of the purposefulness of memory, that is, the pragmatic nature of forgetting, as opposed to its impossibility, the story also points to the issue of mediation of experience, the limits of understanding, empathy, and solidarity. The absence of an answer at the end of the cited dialogue is a refusal to heroize, mythologize, sacralize, or sentimentalize the violence and suffering to which Lea was exposed, as a gesture of acknowledging extreme suffering. The anthropological pessimism that concludes the conversation between the “two camp sisters” is overshadowed by the social framework that exposes victims to constant re-traumatization because they are unable to forget. Although there

21 Ibid., p. 362.

are not enough indicators in the text, bearing in mind the social context, one can assume that the pressure of patriarchy on the victims' perception and their reintegration into society by fulfilling the expected gender roles is one of the factors contributing to the impossibility of overcoming the traumatic experience.

Sexual violence is openly addressed in *Ricki Is Back* (*Riki se vratila*), a nightmarish story by Julija Najman that explores sexual exploitation in the camp through existential questions of the meaning of return. The story is shaped as a harrowing account from Riki's perspective. Her memories (forcibly) resurface when she is confronted by questions about the fate of Clara, another inmate. Elliptical narration, the semanticization of lacunae, and the reconstruction of broken fragments based on analepsis connect the elements of Riki's traumatic experience (parting with her husband and child, interment in the camp, liberation from the camp). The sexual exploitation to which she was exposed in the camp is depicted through hallucinatory episodes. The story's primary focus is the will to live of the inmates, nourished by Riki, who perish daily, the disintegration, that is, dissociation of Riki's personality, and the strong desire to kill the oppressor. At the end of the story, we realize that Riki never verbalizes her experience: "Riki's lips move without a sound, oscillating between crying and laughing, trembling with fear, retracting as if vanishing, her hands rise, extending widely ... she crucifies herself. Clara, my little one! Somewhere under the grass, your hands are laid to rest."²²

22 Julija Najman, "Riki se vratila," *Jevrejski almanah*, 1956, p. 357.

The play *The Doll* by Đorđe Lebović, published in *Almanac* in 1967, clearly testifies to the impossibility of articulating the experience of sexual violence in the camp and the social perception of this crime. The play highlights that sexual exploitation is among the most sensitive and taboo

Female collaborators of the Literary Section of the *Jewish Almanac* opposed cultural norms that victimize women, but also cultural norms that fail to recognize the various forms of oppression against women and the wide range of traumatic experiences they endured. The literary works of women in the *Almanac* are an authentic contribution to the societal struggle for memory. This contribution confirms that every memory is caught between interpretations articulated from different positions and a clash of disparate mnemonic communities. The writings of women authors in the *Almanac* can be understood as a collective emancipatory project. These women used the almanac as a platform to articulate and legitimize the female experience of the Holocaust.

topics. *The Doll* shows that people are willing or have the capacity to understand a multitude of actions within the “grey zone” or “choiceless choice” situations (such as the case of Sonderkommandos). However, for the women forced to have sex in camp brothels, it is better to die than to survive. Lebovič dramatizes the strength of patriarchal stigma and the redistribution of guilt and responsibility to the victims. Czarnecka and Taczyńska have interpreted Lebovič’s play *The Doll from Bed No. 21* in detail and suggestively. Czarnecka, Barbara and Katarzyna Taczyńska, “*Lalka z łóżka 21* Dorda Lebovicia, czyli trauma wojny i opresja wolności,” *Teksty Drugie. Teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja*, 5, 2018, pp. 45–64. *The Doll from Bed No. 21* is a slightly modified version of *The Doll* published in the *Jewish Almanac*. The critical difference between the two versions of the text (besides the inclusion of the director’s notes in the later version) pertains to the part discussing the Sonderkommandos case: the dialogues are structured differently, and the lines are arranged in a distinct order. In the first version of the text, Vilma’s husband demonstrates understanding of their situation; in the second version, his understanding is absent. In *The Doll*, this solution reinforces the isolation of women who were sexually exploited, the patriarchal stigma, and their ultimate culpabilization. A comparative textual analysis of *The Doll* and *The Doll from Bed No. 21* warrants an independent study.

They intervened in the politics of the culture of remembrance of socialist Yugoslavia and in the masculine and patriarchal frameworks that validate categories such as traumatic experiences, victims, and crimes in the social sphere. By forming a mnemonic community, that is, a moral community, the *Almanac* provides a platform for the manifestation of female agency. In this way, women's experience becomes part of general knowledge and shared memory. Female writers featured in the *Jewish Almanac* exhibit extraordinary literary activism. The legacy of that activism ought to be mapped and explored in the context of both Yugoslav literature on the Holocaust and that of later Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav women's traumatic narratives.

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