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The Post-Sephardic Belgrade Narrative: The Case of David Albahari

Abstract

The paper attempts to establish a literary and historical continuity between the literary works of David Albahari and the pre-WWII Sephardic cultural context of Belgrade. The war and the Holocaust interrupted the natural development of this culture. The interruption in development caused by the Holocaust did not result in an effort to build bridges to the past, but rather to redefine basic identity codes, as is evident in Albahari's oeuvre. This indicates the appearance of a new and qualitatively different status of cultural patterns, into which events preceding the catastrophe were integrated after the fact.

Keywords: Sephardic literature, tradition, minhag, Holocaust, postmodernism, memory, religious canon.

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Introduction

The need to consider the literary work of David Albahari in the context of the narratives of Jewish literature is the result of several scientific facts. First of all, Albahari is an author in whose literary work Jewish themes and motifs appear relatively frequently, especially in the mature stage of his output, in the novels he has published since the late 1980s. It is not necessary to emphasize that due to the consequences of the Holocaust, Jewish themes are not just one of many motif options, but much more than that. These motifs are also present in Albahari's anthological, translation and editorial work¹. No less important is the way in which these topics and motifs are treated. Namely, next to the conventional and general representation of Jewish themes and motifs, reduced to the motif of the collective victim, several authors have appeared in contemporary Serbian literature in whose works the approach to the aforementioned complex of themes is different. Danilo Kiš (1935-1989)², Filip David (1940) and David Albahari (1948)³ approach Jewish themes with much more knowledge and personal attitude towards the subject, which is understandable if one takes into account the biographical fact of their ethnicity (all three of them are of Jewish origin). Since these are writers who represent the best in Serbian literature from the end of the 20th century, who have been translated and are respected beyond the boundaries of the Serbian language, we felt that it was necessary to consider the status of these motifs in their literature.

The decision to choose David Albahari's literary work as a case study, and to bring the reflection into the context of the Sephardic heritage, is a result of the potential that this methodological approach offers⁴ in research that could not rely on extensive critical literature. Namely, although many important works have been written about these writers, there are not many works that actualize tools which are immanent to the topic. We are referring to critical works which seek intertextual connections with Jewish traditional literature in the texts of these writers.⁵

¹ In the 1990s Albahari edited the magazine *Mezuza* (1993/94). He also published an anthology of contemporary Jewish women's stories, *Pegla i dijamanti [Iron and diamonds]* (2005).

² A dedicated website (in Serbian): <http://www.kis.org.rs/>

³ Website of David Albahari: https://www.davidalbahari.com/main_eng.html.

⁴ According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545).

⁵ Traditional literature includes Tanakh (Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim), Misnah, Gemara, Kab-

Sephardic Narrative of Belgrade⁶

If, as a starting point for our reflection, we used the perspective that the Sephardic narrative of Belgrade could be described as a phenomenon of cultural production limited to Belgrade's Sephardic community, we would have to stop right there.

This is primarily because David Albahari is a writer from and of Zemun, a town adjacent to Belgrade. However, ultimately we cannot separate him from Belgrade either. In the past, Zemun was not only on the border of two empires (Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman), but on the border of at least two cultures. Yet, regardless of the administrative and political changes that unfolded in this region of the Balkans during the 20th century (the formation and disintegration of Yugoslavia), the Belgrade and Zemun Jewish communities have preserved their autonomy to the present day. In the creative work of David Albahari, both cities occupy an equally important place, and the decision to generally define this paper as a Belgradian narrative is based on the premise that Belgrade represents everything that is relevant for the life, and therefore the literature, of Jews not only from Belgrade, not only from Zemun, but also most of the Jews from this part of the Balkans in the post-war period.

The term Sephardic is also unstable, if viewed from a present-day perspective. The Holocaust and post-war ideology have definitively erased once-existing differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Diachronically, however, heritage and tradition oblige us to acknowledge the existence of both the Sephardic and the Ashkenazy discourse, which still co-exist simultaneously, although merely as a form of nostalgia. This is probably because "The former [improvers of the past] reject 'the narrative of nostalgia [that] looks longingly to a past presumed to be simpler and better than ...the present'; the latter [traditionalists] regret 'the narrative of progress ...that has removed us from it'" (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 93). In the sense of all of the above, the prefix *post-* in the term *post-Sephardic* is not merely a result of postmodernism, to which David Albahari, a writer of Sephardic origin,

balistic texts, rabbinical interpretations, but also popular books such as *Me'am Lo'ez*, commentary on the Tanakh written in Ladino. This last one is thought to have been widely read among the Sephardim of the Balkans.

⁶ The decision to limit the study to Belgrade stems not only from the fact that Albahari is a writer who, in a synchronous terms, is inseparable from Belgrade as a cultural centre, but also from the fact that the Sephardic traditions of Sarajevo and Belgrade, as important centres of the Balkans, are not identical. This can be seen not only in the different pronunciation of individual Judeo-Spanish phonemes, but is also based on the different cultural-historical contexts which influenced the Sephardic communities of Sarajevo / Bosnia and Belgrade / Serbia.

also refers⁷, but should be understood also as a sign of a different sensibility of some Jewish writers' literary production in Yugoslav/Serbian literature.⁸

This new phase of literary history is constituted around a complex set of literary and non-literary factors (the breakdown of the development of religious and cultural tradition, the trauma of the Holocaust, the change of the political system, nostalgia and identity issues), suggesting that transgressing the border of a discourse (of the region's traditional Jewish literature) could be of key importance for understanding the position that David Albahari occupies in the diachronicity of Judeo-Spanish literature. In that sense, despite Palavestra's⁹ supposition that neither language, thematic content, national or religious background can stand as sufficient criteria for any kind of classification when it comes to Jewish writers who create within the context of Serbian literature (Palavestra, 2003, p. 16), speaking of a Jewish literary phenomenon, we must rely first and foremost on thematic criticism as the instrument capable of crossing over discursive delimitations which could be established on the basis of either synchronic or diachronic criteria. Using this approach, we will try to point out some specificities of Jewish literature written in Serbo-Croatian after World War II.

As early as in the 17th century, we encounter works springing from the Belgradian school (Vidaković Petrov, 1990, p. 25), and starting from 1874 some of these books were printed in Belgrade (Vidaković Petrov, 1990, p. 26). At first these books were written in Judeo-Spanish, which was abandoned "in less than 20 years, in the space of a single generation, and it affected all walks of life at the end of the 19th century" (Palavestra, 2003, p. 73). Abandoning the Judeo-Spanish language marked a new stage in the development of Sephardic literature and it preceded the one we have labelled as the post-Sephardic Belgradian narrative.

As Krinka Vidaković Petrov states, "according to Davičo, the fundamental and constant element of Jewish Diaspora identity was religion and religious tradition, while secular language and culture – not one, but many – were a secondary element conditioned by geography and history" (Vidaković Petrov, 2014, p. 439). As another assimilative element of this kind, one should add the Yugoslav context, which has existed since 1918 and which has been characterized by the ideology of integral Yugoslavianism. Albahari's literary heritage, mainly from the inter-war period, viewed in such a way, can

⁷ More in: Obradović, 2016. Also, in auto-poetic texts Albahari defines himself as a postmodern writer.

⁸ The same could be attributed to writers from the Ashkenazy tradition.

⁹ Palavestra's book is, as a rule, a starting point for considering Jewish literature written in Serbo-Croatian. The quotation is found at the beginning of Palavestra's book, which points to the complexity of the problem of discursive demarcations.

be described as a number of literary works, both adaptations and originals, of drama and prose texts, as well as poetry, whose development is in many ways comparable to the development of other national literatures of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

More precisely, in Serbia, Jewish books were printed from 1845. In a letter to the Serbian Minister of Education from 1869, Moša Alkalaj reports with gratitude that over fifty books have been printed in the state printing press and that, thanks to the quality of the press, they were distributed in the surrounding countries, above all in Turkey and Romania. Since 1890, Jewish books were printed exclusively at Šmuel Horovic's Prosveta printing shop (Belgrade). He continued printing there until 1914, when he was arrested in Vienna, as a Serbian citizen. He died in 1915 in a concentration camp in Timisoara. His son and son-in-law ran the printing press until 1941.

The Book of Psalms of the Sephardic community (in Ladino) was printed in Vienna as early as 1813. The preface was written by Jisrael ben Haim, who is the author of two books educational in character, *Hanuh Lanoar* [Prosveta za omladinu] from 1821 and *Ocar hahaim* [Hajimovo blago] from 1823. His grandson of the same name, Hajim Davičo, will write a series of stories from Dorćol (and lower Dorćol – Jaliya), an urban neighbourhood of Belgrade where Sephardic Jews lived, published in a collection of short stories, *Sa Jaliye* (1898). And the first book of the famous Zemun rabbi, Jehuda Alkalaj, was printed in Ladino in 1839. It is a Hebrew tutorial, completely dedicated to the idea of the Jews returning to the old homeland. Because of such views, rabbi Alkalaj is considered a proto-Zionist. Hajim Buhor printed the four-volume book *Tezoro de Jisrael* (1890 and 1894). It is considered one of the most widely read books in the entire Balkans. It is an unpretentious Jewish history, filled with biblical legends and anecdotes. Texts printed in Belgrade included prayer books, moral-legal texts, Kabbalistic texts, the paraliturgical *Las Koplás*, poetry, history, textbooks teaching Hebrew and other languages. Many had at least a preface in Ladino, and some were bilingual. In a text published in the Belgrade *Jewish Review* [Jevrejski pregled 14 - 14/1936] under the title "What Did Our Old Ones Read", Jakov Maestro wrote that studying the reading matter of a given time was the easiest way to learn about the cultural aspirations and the level of a certain generation (Lebl, 1990, p. 102). Maestro observed that religious literature prevailed in the past. Nevertheless, in 1870 a handwritten songbook appeared with profane songs, some of which were translated from Serbian to Ladino. And the Dreyfus Affair was described in Ladino in 1898, under the title *Istoria del Captain Alfred Draifus*. In 1904, in the foreword to the book *Kehilat Jaakov*, the first attempt was made to list all the Jewish books published in Belgrade up to then.¹⁰

¹⁰ More about the Jewish press in Serbia in: Lebl, 1990.

Besides religious books, the inter-war period was marked by works with which Jews made strides into the literature of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Laura Papo Bohoreta from Sarajevo published the article “Die Spanolische Frau” already in 1916, which would later become the ethnographic study *La Mužer sefardi de Bosna*.¹¹ She wrote plays, prose and poetry. Also from Sarajevo was Dr. Kalmi Baruh, who introduced the Bosnian Sephardic heritage to the world.¹² Paulina Lebl Albala from Belgrade dealt with literary criticism. Her most important work was the school textbook *Literary Theory* [Teorija književnosti i analiza pismenih sastava, 1923]. Then followed writers who still occupy an important place in the history of ex-Yugoslav/Serbian literature: avant-garde poet Moni de Buli, humourist Žak Konfino, prose writer Isak Samokovlija, surrealist poet Oskar Davičo as well as Stanislav Vinaver, author of the manifesto of Serbian expressionism, journalist, parodist and poet. Apart from Albala and Vinaver, the above-mentioned writers are of Sephardic origin, although only Bohoreta wrote in Ladino. Kalmi Baruh left Sarajevo and moved to Spain.

The Holocaust and the Post-War Era

The Holocaust interrupted this development.¹³ In the post-Holocaust era we can hardly talk about the parallel or synchronous development of Jewish literature in relation to Yugoslav (first and foremost Serbian and Croatian) literature. The *differentia specifica* is certainly the Holocaust experience and the trauma incurred as a result of this experience. First of all, “the Holocaust practically erased past differences between writers of Sephardic and Ashkenazi backgrounds. In addition, the difference between Jews and gentiles also diminished due to mixed marriages and the ‘brotherhood and unity’ policy of the post-war government” (Vidaković Petrov, 2014, p. 447). Nevertheless, dealing with topics of the Holocaust, a tendency which began immediately following the war (first of all in Đorđe Lebović’s plays)¹⁴, would become practically an iconic theme for Jewish writers in the post-war period.

There were various ways in which writers approached Jewish / Sephardic themes and motifs. This was conditioned not only by individual sensibility, but also by poetic trends. Djordje Lebović caused controversial reactions with *Nebeski odred* [Himmelkommando], the first play of his tetralogy.

¹¹ Laura Papo Bohoreta, *La Mužer sefardi de Bosna*, translation into Bosnian and preface by Dr. Muhamed Nezirović (Papo Bohoreta, 2005). The manuscript was completed in 1932.

¹² His memory was honoured by Serbian Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić (Palavestra, 2003, p. 91).

¹³ We do not consider wartime literature here.

¹⁴ Đorđe Lebović (1928-2004), himself a Holocaust survivor, had the premiere of his play *Nebeski odred* [Himmelkommando] already in 1956.

Although the play was a prize-winner of the most important national festival, “Sterijino pozorje”, his poetics met with a very casual response and misunderstanding from critics.¹⁵

David Albahari entered the literary stage in the 1970s, as part of the second generation of Serbian/Yugoslav postmodernists. His first creative period was marked by experimenting with form and compressing literary expression¹⁶:

Persistently examining short prose forms, Albahari found himself stuck between conciseness, which brought him to writing a one-sentence story, and a variety of models, a repercussion of which was that a formal strain begun to be evident: it seemed that almost every story needed to find its own particular type of narration. ... His texts are more like fragments that speak through the absence of a connection between particular parts rather than through establishing a logic of narration. (Jerkov, 1992, p. 35)

This instability of form, however, is explained by Albahari as moving the focus from the rhetorical to the poetic (Albahari, 2004, p. 9). According to the author, the key issue in understanding literature in such a way, and also the key problem of a literary text's/language's survival, can be summed up in a single question: “Who really determines the meaning of facts and fiction in a work of art and in reality itself?” (Albahari, 2004, p. 9). Perceiving, and therefore writing, modifies the object of observation, and the meaning is a result of such an interactive interpretation. This points to the discussion of problems that were of importance to postmodern writers: truth, meaning, creative act, creation, status of the subject. Retrospectively, this also explains how Albahari reached a stage in his work in which Jewish motifs appeared as constitutive. Considering the categories of subject, otherness, and Derrida's *différance*, in the case of David Albahari led to deconstruction of the metanarrative of his time, but at the same time to the reconstruction of the discourse of heritage. And in the heritage, the signifier was founded in the Torah. Traditionally, the one who should have passed the inheritance on to his son was the father.

Indeed, in Albahari's literary work, the inheritance is primarily mirrored in the motif of the father, to whom Albahari dedicates the novel *Zinc* [Cink]. As critics have already stated, the father is, as a rule, portrayed as weak, but for our purpose here it is more important that through the father's motif we can see Albahari's attitude towards big narratives. A kind of dialogue with the father begins after the father's death. The emptiness left by his departure enables emotional communication that had never existed before. “When we

¹⁵ More in: Todorić, 2017.

¹⁶ He himself says: “When looking back, the collection of stories *Fras u šupi* (1984) represents the furthest point of my efforts to reduce the narrative as much as possible and approach silence” (Albahari, 2010, p. 50).

were together, we kept silent, we never touched” (Albahari, 1997, p. 71). But the consideration of an emotional connection that is released through the death of a father is at the same time an auto-poetic determination:

There was something else: emotions are old-fashioned; a man who suffers because his father has died does not belong to the present time, which has no time for anything except for itself, nor to the past or mythical one in which the father was eaten and forgotten; he belongs to some kind of middle time in which emotions were given various attributes of power and powerlessness, virtue and vice. I wanted to get rid of all of that, especially of mythology: castrated father, murdered father, dismembered father, father like a male vagina, father like a mother (Albahari, 1997, p. 68).

The discourse of the past presented in this way, freed of mediating narratives, was the discourse of Jewishness and the family that carried the scars of the Holocaust.¹⁷ We believe it is no coincidence that there is a search for words in Albahari’s poetic text, although he began by trying to get rid of them: “When I first tried to sketch out my family tree, it looked like that blade of grass, like a bare tree, without leaves” (Albahari, 2005, p. 25). It turns out that words and the reliability of their meaning depend on a story that has yet to be told. This is the way to reconstructing the past. Going along that path, Albahari will encounter textual heritage too, so in the past he will find words.

Albahari – a Jewish Writer

Albahari himself describes a Jewish writer as an author “of Jewish origin whose works address topics pertaining, to a greater or smaller degree, to Jewish tradition, history, religion, or culture in general” (Albahari, 2004, p. 80). He believes that such ethnic literature “is centred on the question of what it means to be ‘someone else’ in a contemporary and historical context” (Albahari, 2004, p. 83). Finally, referring to Albert Memmi, Albahari states: “The greatest deed of boldness for a Jewish writer, and also his real exile/banishment, is starting to talk to all people like a Jew” (Albahari, 2004, p. 84).

Our question, then, is: What topics related to Jewish tradition, history, religion and culture are present in the literary expression of David Albahari, and is he really someone who talks to people like a Jew?

First of all, the question of Jewish identity in Albahari’s generation (although we could say the same about several of the previous generations, because of *Haskalah*) was a question of choice, and not one of heritage and tradition in the conventional meaning of these words. Following this logic, the principle of *Minhag Yisrael Torah* (e.g. *Tosafot to Menahot 20b s.v. nifsal*), or “the sages extended authority to *minhag* on the basis of verses such

¹⁷ Difficulties with communication and emotional exchange are typical of Holocaust survivors.

as ‘Remove not the ancient landmark, which your father has set up’ (Mishlei, 22: 28) and ‘Hear, my son, the instruction of your father and forsake not the teaching of your mother’ (Mishlei, 1:8)” (Lopes Cardozo, 2004, p. 117) is no longer of help. Moreover, if we reference the understanding of fathers in a literal sense and compare it to the motif of the father in Albahari’s novels, we see, among other things, that *the father* is often weak and sick, and *the son* meets and accepts him only in such a condition. The conveyor of tradition, but the tradition of narration, is the mother, who, the writer states, converted to Judaism of her own free will (Albahari, 2001, p. 14). She is also a witness of time. In the novel *Bait* [Mamac], she says:

I don’t know whether you will understand, but you can’t be happy when the past is all you have and when you don’t give up your memories. We were living in a world that, however much you talked of a bright future, was only marking time, that, however hard you tried to forget, existed only in order to be remembered, that, however much you claimed we were all alike, only showed how different we were from one another. When we visited Israel for the first time, not one of the people I met spoke of what had taken place before the founding of Israel, before their arrival. Life had begun the moment they left the deck of the ship, or got off the airplane, and stepped onto the soil of Israel. What had been before belonged to another time, to a time that had ended. (Albahari, 2001, p. 59)

The character of the mother mediates and testifies to the breakdown of the temporal continuum in the novel. That fracture divides Holocaust survivors into those who moved to Israel and those who remained in Europe. The cited excerpt also points to the breakdown of a connection with the religious canon (something different than in the case of a father) that has traditionally acted as a signifier for Jews. In the case of Albahari’s literature, an emptied-out, zero signifier appears in place of the religious canon, and coincides, on a poetic level, with the revolutionary nature of post-war Yugoslavian ideology on the one hand, and with the postmodernism of Western culture on the other.

It has been noted earlier that Albahari searched for the form¹⁸ of a short story. By its mere existence, Albahari’s short story should answer questions of identity that he poses in his work. In one interview, he even said:

I am still trying to figure out who is hiding behind my name and surname,” and shortly after: “For the first time I felt that I was something else in comparison to my schoolmates when someone asked me: ‘Hey kid, what kind of last name is Albahari?’ As I tried to find that out, I was becoming more and more aware of my otherness, even though I should not have felt any difference. As time went by,

¹⁸ We understand the term form as “*the structure or unifying principle of design in a given work*” (Baldick, 2008, p. 134).

that feeling became stronger and stronger, until I was able to define it as Jewishness at one point. (Pavlović & Albahari, 2016)

Therefore, the actual act of narrativization of the question precedes the answer that writing is supposed to produce. In a time that does not have, and does not recognize, the framework of any canon (post-war modernism and postmodernism) such an a priori imperative of writing is comparable in a paradoxical way to the concept “na’aseh v’nishma” – “We will do and we will listen”.¹⁹ Albahari’s later works would confirm that answering the question HOW was a necessary precondition for attempting to answer the question WHAT/WHO. In other words, the question about all sorts of identities could not be posed before establishing a framework within which it could be raised and the answer sought. The paradox of this comparison lies in the fact that Albahari, personally and as a writer, does not have a canon at his disposal (poetic or theological), because he did not inherit the traditional forms of behaviour of the Jewish collective (with regard to the canon), known as *minhag*. What he does have is a void or a crack, as it is referred to in a study on the novel *Bait* [Mamac] (Vladiv Glover, 2010, pp. 2–3).

To show, very concretely, how Albahari treats Jewishness and the interrupted tradition, a few of the most obvious examples can be highlighted.

The first one comes from the novel *Götz and Meyer* (1998), where we find a catalogue of the names of the main character’s missing Jewish relatives (Albahari, 2005, pp. 26–27) as an intertextual relation with the Genealogy of Adam (Bereishit / Genesis, 4-5) and the Genealogy of the sons of Noah (Bereishit / Genesis, 10):

When a relative begins to list the names of the murdered in a certain way, and it is not a coincidence in Albahari’s output, he repeats the act of Godly creation (viewed from the perspective of Judaism). To name is to create. ... Therefore, the listing of the family members’ names is confirmation of their existence as contrary to oblivion. However, let us add, through naming the narrator’s relatives, Albahari is not only recreating their existence, but also through a procedure of irony, he is creating a void never to be filled, as we shall see at the end of the novel. (Todorčić, 2012, pp. 83–84)

The second example appears in the novel *Leeches* (2005). The main character is a non-Jew, i.e. *the Other*, who begins to find unusual street signs in the streets of his native Zemun. It turns out that it is Magen David. After numerous mysterious events and circumstances, he obtains an unusual manuscript:

¹⁹ The principle *na’aseh v’nishma* is from the Torah and it is interpreted as: “The ultimate moment of glory for the Jewish people — their greatest hour — occurred as God revealed His Torah at Mount Sinai. The Israelites remarkably pledged, Na’aseh v’nishma — ‘We will do and we will listen to all that God has declared’ (Exodus 24:7). They made two promises: to do, and to listen. The order is crucial. They promised to keep the Torah, even before knowing why” (Vaisberg, n.d., p. 4).

It started off as an historical narrative, then turned into a history of dreams, followed by a collection of Kabbalistic exercises, furnished with an assortment of lists of people and events and material expenditures, books and artwork and porcelain bowls, and the lists were followed by verses, anecdotes, and dramatic dialogues. (Albahari, 2011, p. 34).

This introduces the motif of the text and the need for its interpretation, which coincides with the command to learn the Torah (Deut. 6:7), which is inseparable from the interpretation of the text known as Midrash. The meaning is further hidden by the fact that it is a Kabbalistic text. At the same time, according to the postmodernist strategy, motifs are reduced to a catalogue, extracted from the traditional context, because the manuscript is given to a non-Jew who does not have interpretive tools. Or he himself thinks he is a non-Jew.

Likewise, related to the unusual manuscript, the writer introduces three old Jews from Zemun into the story. All of them search for the identity of a certain Elazar or Eleazar, Volf Enoch, a Turkish Jew from the 18th, 19th and later centuries (it's actually about playing with the motif of the eternal Jew), a water carrier "who slaked people's thirst, their thirst for water and their thirst for Zion, the thirst of the body and the thirst of the soul, because only in harmony between soul and body do the soul and body survive" (Albahari, 2011, p. 72). The Kabbalah notions of gilgul, sefirot, and the Angelic Chariot and Palaces (hekhalot), encloded layers of reality, are built into the unique path of the main character/narrator as the possible incarnation of Elazar, as well as anti-Semitism. The end of the novel, which finds the lead character confessing that he was within reach of the throne but has not succeeded, is pessimistic: "as far as I know, God spoke while he created the world, he wasn't reading a document drawn up in advance. The sound of words is the sound of the world, its true face" (Albahari, 2011, p. 307); the narrator renounces the fictionality of the text, and writing itself, and chooses silence. Thus, he ceases to be a partner in the creation of the world.

The problematic identity of the main character, who is uncertain as to whether he is a Jew, is yet another symptom of postmodernism, but precisely thanks to postmodernism, so important to poetics and so present in Albahari's auto-poetic texts, we can and must read David Albahari as a Jewish writer when we read the works he created. This is precisely what points to the search for what would be a paradigm of identity that was interrupted in the past and not transmitted as heritage. Again, he proves this in his last published novel, *Today Is Wednesday* (2017). Jewish motifs and themes are present in Albahari's work as rudiments of something that was supposed to be his participation in minhag.²⁰ Instead, starting from the zero signifier,

²⁰ Minhag is an accepted tradition in Judaism. Time and repetition are a condition for its existence.

free of canons and big narratives, Albahari has searched for the truth and the meaning of those rudiments he has inherited. But we should also add that the belief in a continuous tradition that is revealed to us, is questioned today, as some believe that tradition runs through interpretations, and every act of interpretation is innovation (Halbental, 2012).

History, religion, the motifs of father, mother, daughter, family tree, and thus all iconic constituents of a private identity, became building material for the literary but also para-Godly procedure of recreating the world (that had disappeared). In other words, the zero signifier (the lack of a religious canon but also of some of the possible Jewish traditions of the inter-war period), which is a consequence of the Holocaust, shapes the story through narrativization of the gap. And the story, as in the case of the name catalogue from *Götz and Meyer*, confirms the truth of existence. In this sense, the post-Sephardic narrative of David Albahari is an effort to establish a sort of continuity and an emanation of the freedom to accept a Jewish canon that would offer meaning once again. And we finish in the way we began: with a dilemma. Namely, Albahari's literary output is an example of first-rate literary production. Because of this, the level of its approachability is challenging. The text is not, as was the case in the past, a mediator between the religious canon and the readers, at least not in the way in which Me'am Lo'ez²¹ was in its time. Nor was that the intention. Individual searches remain individual today, especially if we are talking about artistic texts. Nevertheless, a question arises: How will this newly won freedom to embrace the Jewish canon shape meaning in the generation of Albahari's readers/ interpreters?

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²¹ "Despite its simplicity, this series [of Me'am Lo'ez] managed to forestall the moral and religious decadence of the Sephardic Jews because of its remarkable quality, its timing shortly after the Shabbatai Tzvi experience and the suffering surrounding it" (Rosette, 1988, p. IV).

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Postsefardski narativ Beograda – slučaj Davida Albaharija

U radu ćemo nastojati da uspostavimo književni i istorijski kontinuitet između sefardskog kulturnog konteksta koji je u Beogradu postojao pre Drugog svetskog rata i književnog dela Davida Albaharija. Prirodni razvoj sefardske kulture prekinuli su rat i Holokaust. Taj prekid u posleratnom periodu, u slučaju teritorije bivše Jugoslavije, nije rezultirao naporom da se kontinuitet reuspostavi, nego je doveo do procesa redefinisanja temeljnih identitetskih postavki, što je očigledno upravo u Albaharijevom delu. Ovo ukazuje na pojavu novog i kvalitativno različitog statusa kulturnih obrazaca, u odnosu na koje su se one pojave koje su prethodile katastrofi, *post festum*, saobražavale.

Cljučne reči: sefardska književnost, tradicija, minhag, Holokaust, postmodernizam, pamćenje, verski kanon.

Postsefardyjska narracija Belgradu – przypadek Davida Albahari

W artykule postaramy się ustanowić literacką i historyczną ciągłość między sefardyjskim kontekstem kulturowym, który istniał w Belgradzie przed II wojną światową, a literacką twórczością Davida Albahari. Naturalny rozwój kultury sefardyjskiej został przerwany przez wojnę i Holokaust. Przerwa w okresie powojennym, w przypadku terytorium byłej Jugosławii, nie zaowocowała próbami przywrócenia ciągłości rozwoju tej kultury, lecz uruchomiła proces redefiniowania podstawowych założeń tożsamościowych, co odzwierciedla właśnie twórczość Davida Albahari. Wskazuje ona na pojawienie się nowego, jakościowo odmiennego statusu wzorców kulturowych, w odniesieniu do których *post festum* wyrażano zjawiska poprzedzające katastrofę.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura sefardyjska, tradycja, minhag, Holokaust, postmodernizm, pamięć, kanon religijny.

Przełożył z języka serbskiego
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