Original scientific paper
Submitted: 4. 9. 2024.
Accepted: 22. 2. 2025.
DOI: 10.15176/vol62no13
UDK 929Lebl, Ženi
323.12(497.1=411.16)(091)
314.15-054.73(569.4)(091)

FROM *GOLOKAUST* TO *HAPPYLOGUE*: MEANING-CREATION PRACTICES IN JEWISH IDENTITY BUILDING. THE CASE OF ŽENI LEBL

KATARZYNA TACZYŃSKA
Institute of Slavic Studies, Warszawa

This article examines the case of Ženi Lebl (1927–2009), a Yugoslav Jew, communist activist, Holocaust survivor, and prisoner of the Goli Otok camp for political opponents of the Yugoslav Communist regime; Lebl emigrated to Israel in 1954. Her writings (including scholarly texts, ego-documents, poems, and letters) and cultural activities allow us to reconstruct the process by which Lebl's identity evolved over time. The research questions are: 1) How do her writings express the issues of Jewish, Yugoslav, and women's self-awareness and identity? and 2) When and under what social circumstances did she begin writing texts focused on the history of Jewish traditions in Yugoslavia? The article presents a comprehensive picture of Ženi Lebl, analyzing her as a representative of a minority group existing on the borders of many different divisions. Through a chronological reconstruction of her biography, considering the historical and cultural context, we can observe how the author's identity, with all its complexities and ambiguities, was shaped and changed. The analysis enables us to understand the pivotal role Lebl played as a woman writer in sustaining and transmitting the Jewish history of the Yugoslav region and allows us to examine the unique hybridity of the local Jewish Yugoslav community.

Keywords: Ženi Lebl, Yugoslav Jewish woman, Israel, identity, minority

INTRODUCTION

When Ženi Lebl (Jennie Lebel, 1927–2009) came to Israel in 1954, she was not a devoted Zionist dreaming of aliyah.[1] She was fleeing from Yugoslavia, a country where – as Dina

[1] This article is a result of the research project financed by the National Science Centre, Poland (No. 2022/47/B/HS2/00584). I would like to thank Chaim Damjan Peković for his assistance in providing access to materials from the Eventov Archive.

Katan Ben-Zion (a researcher of Jewish literature in Yugoslavia) wrote – she encountered exceptional cruelty (Katan Ben Zion 2002: 280). Jewish identity turned out to be a salvation for her, but not an obvious choice, because at that time she did not feel a close connection with Jewish culture. She miraculously avoided the fate of Jews who died as prisoners of the Staro sajmište concentration camp in Belgrade during World War II, and after the war she was a prisoner (1949–1951) of the Goli Otok camp for the political opponents of the Yugoslav Communist regime.[2] In Israel, Lebl started a new life and built a new identity, but her connection to Yugoslavia remained strong. Moreover, it was the history of Yugoslavia, and more specifically the fate of the Jews of Yugoslavia, that was the center of her interests, reflected in virtually all of her works: scholarly texts, ego-documents (see Degler, Jagodzińska and Wodziński 2024), poems and letters, along with her cultural activities. Without a doubt, her work has made a significant impact on Holocaust research, the reconstruction and writing on Jewish history in Serbia,[3] and on the struggle against myths about the history of Macedonian Jews (see Trajanovski 2024: 106). Primarily, however, hers was an important and influential voice of a Serb living in Israel, actively involved in the *Hit'ahdut Olei Yugoslavyah* (HOJ, the Association of Jewish Immigrants from Yugoslavia), founded in 1935, and she also played a key role in promoting Israeli literature in Yugoslavia.

Looking at the example of Ženi Lebl, we can see that Yugoslav Jewish women lived at the intersection of several cultures and social groups. They exhibited many intercultural and transcultural identification characteristics based on several specific reference points, such as gender, religion, education, region, culture, nationality and language. Ženi Lebl's activity was a unique phenomenon, important within various discourses related to the history of Yugoslavia. Some of Lebl's texts were analyzed by researchers, who helped bring to light the pioneering role of women and the importance of women's narratives about the past.[4] However, there are still several questions that can be asked when analyzing the cultural biography of Ženi Lebl. Among others: 1) How do her texts express the issues of Jewish, Yugoslav, and women's self-awareness and identity? and 2) When and under what social circumstances did she start writing texts that focused on the history of Jewish traditions in Yugoslavia? It is worth asking these questions because the answers reconstructed from Lebl's texts will enable us to understand the pivotal role played by Lebl as a woman writer in sustaining and transmitting the Jewish history of the Yugoslav region, and they will allow us to examine the original hybridity of the local (Jewish Yugoslav) community. Through a chronological reconstruction of her biography, considering the historical and cultural context, we can observe how the author's identity, with all its typical aspects and ambiguities, was shaped and changed.

[2] For more on the Goli otok prison camp, see e.g. Taczyńska 2016.

[3] She received numerous awards for her writings from the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, and later of Serbia. She received their award for the first time in 1983, winning first prize for her work *The Tragedy of Belgrade Jewry in 1688*.

[4] For more on Lebl's writings, see Katan Ben Zion 2002: 280–286; Taczyńska 2014, 2017a, 2017b; Taczyńska and Twardowska 2020–2021; Taczyńska 2023.

The subject of my research is literature as a significant, meaning-creating practice in the field of Jewish culture. I am interested not only in the texts written by Lebl, primarily her autobiographical prose such as *Ljubičica bela: vic dug dve i po godine* (1990) [The White Violet: A Joke that Stretched for Two and a Half Years] and *Pit'om shonah, pit'om aheret* (1998) [Suddenly Different, Suddenly Another],[5] but also the way these texts were communicated to others (e.g. her choice of language). I use various types of texts, including unpublished materials, as source material for presenting the problem of identity (Giddens 1991; Bauman 2004). I support my analysis of these sources with testimonies submitted to the USC Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education, as well as with one-on-one in-depth interviews, which I conducted with members of the Lebl family. Due to the heterogeneity of Lebl's texts, I analyze their function and importance as qualitative, intrinsic case studies. An important aspect of this is examining how authors function within relations and spheres of influence with the non-Jewish community. The analysis thus results in a comprehensive picture of a minority group existing on the borders of many different divisions.

"SERBS OF THE MOSAIC PERSUASION"[6]

Ženi Lebl's activities for the history of Jews in Israel were preceded by a series of dramatic experiences that she went through in Yugoslavia. The period of World War II and the imprisonment of political prisoners were the turning points in her biography. At that time, Lebl did not perceive herself through the prism of Jewishness. However, this aspect of identity, as a definition coming from the outside, became crucial and inevitable in building her own characterization. When Lebl describes her early childhood in the small town of Aleksinac, 200 km southeast of Belgrade, she hardly mentions Jewish tradition. Her family was well-to-do; her father was a mining engineer, and her mother took care of the house (Figure 1).[7] Ženi's older brother, Aleksandar (1922–2020), recalls that they were the only Jewish family in Aleksinac, and there was no synagogue in the city. They would go to the synagogue when visiting Belgrade. In Aleksinac, Aleksandar went to a public school, and due to a lack of other options, his parents enrolled him in Serbian Orthodox religious classes. After World War I, in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1929, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), religious education was a compulsory subject. Religious education classes were held at the school and were assigned based on who belonged to which religious community (Vučina Simović 2016: 128). During the existence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, all children were registered at birth in a religious institution (e.g. in a church),

[5] In this article I use the Serbian edition of the book *Odjednom drukčija, odjednom druga* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2008).

[6] Jews in Serbia officially declare themselves as "Srbi Mojsijeve vjere" or "Mojsijevci" (see Jovanović 1992: 137).

[7] The Lebl family was related to Theodor Herzl. For more, see Lebl 2008a.

not in a municipal one. In this sense, it was known which religion they belonged to. As for the Jews, they did not have the status of a national minority in the Kingdom, but were treated as members of a religious community (Ivanković 2017: 30).[8]

Figure 1. Ženi Lebl as a young girl with her family[9]

Ženi and Aleksandar's parents were not members of any political organization. The family was acculturated into the dominant Serbian Orthodox population; they even celebrated the most important Serbian Orthodox family holiday, *krsna slava*, with their patron saint being

[8] For more about minority education in the Kingdom of SHS, see Janjetović 2021.

[9] All photographs used in this article are from the Lebl Family Archive. Reproduced with the permission of Ana Lebl.

Saint Sava. These celebrations were predominantly social in nature. It was an opportunity for the Lebl family to reciprocate the hospitality they received from neighbors and friends during their *slava* celebrations. Ana Lebl, Ženi and Aleksandar's mother, was also an active member of the patriotic and charitable organization *Društvo "Kneginja Ljubica"* [Princess Ljubica Society].[10] Its objective was to support Serbian Orthodox churches in Old Serbia and Macedonia through voluntary contributions. Ana Lebl worked on the Aleksinac subcommittee. Thanks to her involvement, a memorial church was built in Deligrad in 1935, and her name is inscribed on the commemorative plaque (Figure 2). When Aleksandar recalled this event, he spoke with a certain pride. To him, this fact confirmed his family's strong roots in Serbian culture (Lebl 1998). Ženi also noted this fact, but in a different manner. She expressed doubts about the Society's activities, choosing not to investigate further despite being a researcher herself. This distance she maintained from her mother's activities was evident. She also mentioned that, during the church's opening ceremony, there were antisemitic comments directed at Ana Lebl, which, in her opinion, her mother was unaware of (Lebl 2008b: 104).

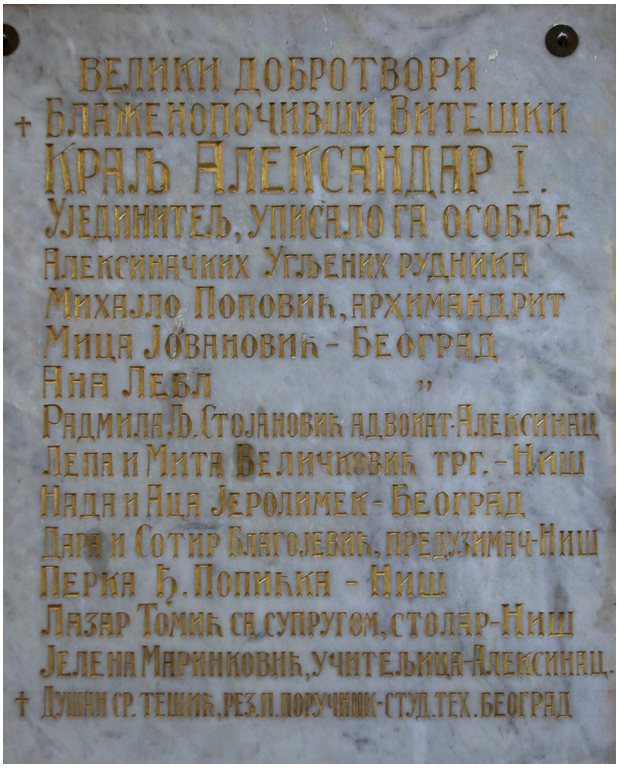

Figure 2. The commemorative plaque from the Serbian Orthodox church in Deligrad

[10] The society was founded in Belgrade in 1899. For more, see Nedeljković 2015.

The situation changed after moving to Belgrade in 1933. At the age of six, Ženi attended a public school and began religious classes at the synagogue on Kosmajska street. Due to small group size, religious lessons included boys and girls of different ages.[11] In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Jewish community as a whole accounted for 0.5% of the total population, consisting of two distinct groups: two-thirds were Ashkenazi, and one-third was Sephardi (Vidaković-Petrov 2013: 19). Typically, Sephardim and Ashkenazim were members of separate communities, even within the same city, and had separate synagogues and cemeteries (Ivanković 2017: 31). In Belgrade, in 1939, there were 10,388 Jews,[12] of whom – contrary to the general population in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – 8,500 were Sephardim and 1,888 were Ashkenazi (Freidenreich 1992: 365). The Lebl family had Ashkenazi roots.[13] In the memories of Ženi and Aleksandar, the family home from that time was non-religious, with Jewish tradition being observed to a limited extent during three holidays: Yom Kippur, Pesah, and Hanukkah. However, in this context, Ženi refers to family acculturation, not to assimilation (Lebl 1996). The term, used by Lebl in her memoirs many years later, is not accidental and clearly indicates that the author has in mind the cultural adaptation of a minority group to the majority of society (cf. Jagodzińska 2008: 11). Her family was defined as Jewish by the structures of the new state, while simultaneously being deeply integrated into the Yugoslav, specifically Serbian, framework. Serbian was spoken at home;[14] Ženi's great-grandmother Jelena was awarded a medal "for loyal and faithful service as a volunteer nurse in the Serbian-Turkish War" in 1877 (Lebl 2008b: 20), and Ženi's grandfather and father were honored with, among other awards, the Commemorative Medal for Loyalty to the Fatherland in 1915, a military decoration presented to all Serbian military personnel who participated in the Great Serbian Retreat during World War I (ibid.: 17).

Ženi begins her biography with the words "*proizvod sam kraja treće decenije dvadesetog veka*" [I am a product of the end of the third decade of the twentieth century] (ibid.: 3).[15] Apart from family acculturation, the author – I believe – also has in mind the intellectual formation that dominated both at home and at school. Lebl recalls that as a girl, she read Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, and Rudyard Kipling, among others, i.e., classics of youth literature. From her school years, she remembered Serbian epic songs, "*pune krvi, gde se ginulo za krst časni i slobodu zlatnu*" [full of blood, where people died for the honorable cross and golden freedom] (ibid.: 7). As the daughter of a mining engineer, she eagerly read books that introduced her to the world of people working underground, in a form that was digestible for a child. That is why she took to reading novels by Archibald Joseph Cronin and Bruno Traven. An important part of her childhood reading included

[11] During the lessons, the children learned basic issues related to Judaism and the Hebrew alphabet (see Lebl 2008b: 35).

[12] In 1931, the population of Belgrade was 238,775 and growing.

[13] During our conversation (Oct 19, 2023), Ana Lebl (Ženi Lebl's niece) mentioned that both Ženi and Aleksandar researched their family's Sephardic roots.

[14] Nowhere in Lebl's memoirs does she mention Yiddish as the language spoken in her home.

[15] All the quoted passages, if not stated otherwise, were translated by the author.

novels by the Soviet authors Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov, which were extremely popular at the time in Yugoslavia. The fictional language of this adventurous and imaginative reality quickly became part of her childhood world. Under its influence, she took her first steps as a writer, creating works modeled on the adventures of Ostap Bender.[16] Ženi Lebl, as a young reader of popular literature, did not extend beyond the typical model of a well-to-do bourgeois family in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

"ARE YOU JEWISH?"[17]

Events throughout the following years further imposed a Jewish identity on her or forced her to take an attitude towards it. Soon after National Socialists came to power in Germany, increased antisemitic propaganda was felt in Yugoslavia. The expansion of Nazi Germany's influence in Yugoslavia was driven by ideology, in which antisemitism played a key role (Koljanin 2008: 233–234). The tragic finale would be the events of World War II, which led to the death of 88% of the pre-war Jewish population of Serbia (Vučina Simović 2016: 165),[18] including, among others, Ženi's mother.[19] As I have already discussed Lebl's war history itself in another article (see Taczyńska 2017a), here I focus on the aspects of culture and identity in Lebl's texts which are related to the war, the Holocaust, and the post-war period. These fragments, which have not yet aroused much interest among readers and researchers, reveal another dimension of the complex identity of the Jewish writer and researcher from Yugoslavia.

Despite the clear integration of the Jewish minority into the dominant culture, Ženi Lebl heard an antisemitic comment from a teacher at the beginning of her primary school education. The teacher forbade the girl from making the sign of the cross before the prayer that began the lesson because "it was you who killed Jesus" (Lebl 1996). Ženi was the only Jewish girl in the class, so she also attended Serbian Orthodox religion classes. This situation, noted by Lebl, is a manifestation of traditional antisemitism that refers to a myth based on anti-Judaic motifs (Bulska and Winiewski 2017: 2). The teacher's words remained in the girl's memory and deeply affected her; Lebl herself calls it a kind of trauma (Lebl 1996). This situation shows that, even among the teaching staff, there were acts of antisemitism embedded in the old cultural framework, preceding the large-scale antisemitic propaganda related to World War II.[20]

[16] Ostap Bender is a fictional character, anti-hero and fraudster who first appeared in the novel *The Twelve Chairs*, written in 1928 by a tandem of Soviet authors: Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov.

[17] Lebl 2009: 40.

[18] Ženi Lebl's memoirs about the events of World War II were also published as *Drug iz detinjstva: moj "Zid plača"* [A Childhood Friend: My *Wailing Wall*] (Lebl 2005).

[19] Her father Leon H. Lebl (1888–1965) and brother Aleksandar Lebl (1922–2020) survived the war.

[20] The question of "how to recognize a Jew?" is also posed by Jelena Glavaška, the person who sheltered Ženi Lebl during World War II, which deeply surprised her (see Lebl 2009: 40–41). On September 3, 1987, the Yad Vashem Institute recognized her as Righteous Among the Nations based on Ženi Lebl's testimony.

Another important event, described clearly and in detail by Ženi Lebl, is the introduction of the *Numerus clausus* resolution on October 5, 1940, which restricted Ženi's brother from taking up studies. Although German propaganda against Yugoslav Jews in 1937 already showed signs of conspiratorial antisemitism, a model widely used in the period of antisemitic propaganda around the war (Bulska and Winiewski 2017: 2),[21] it was this event, in Lebl's memory, that preceded the spread of the antisemitic campaign in the press. Interestingly, thanks to the documented history of the Lebl family's loyalty to Serbia, the family managed to convince the authorities to allow Ženi's brother to start his studies, after a one-semester delay. This situation, however, undermined the belief in family roots in Serbian, or now Yugoslav, tradition. Ženi recalls the doubts that her parents had: "[…] *bili su ubeđeni da se tako nešto ne može desiti nama ovde, u Jugoslaviji. Mi, jugoslovenski Jevreji, verovali smo iskreno u poštenje, u ravnopravnost dužnosti i prava u našoj domovini. Ali zar sada možemo smatrati ovu zemlju svojom domovinom?*" [they were convinced that something like that could not happen to us here, in Yugoslavia. We, Yugoslav Jews, sincerely believed in honesty, in equality of duties and rights in our homeland. But can we now consider this country our homeland?] (Lebl 2008b: 18). This moment was remembered as the first noticeable step in the Kingdom's relegation of Jews to a second category of citizens.

From 1940, Ženi attended the First Women's Real Gymnasium, one of the most prestigious schools in Belgrade.[22] The consequences of the *Numerus clausus* also directly influenced her life. She shared her home problems with her friends from *Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* (SKOJ) [The League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia], of which she was already a member. Ženi, young and naive, was initially unaware of what the illegal organization SKOJ, part of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia operating in the Kingdom since 1919, was doing. She was recruited by her older colleague, Ružica Vasić, not as a person ideologically and politically interested in communist activities, but as a person with potential, active among younger classes, able to easily encourage other people to participate. Ženi was impressed by the interest shown in her by her older colleague, so she agreed to work for SKOJ.

After the introduction of *Numerus clausus*, she decided to share her dilemmas with Ružica. Ženi recalls that Ružica at that time told her: "*Vi, Jevreji, mislite samo na sebe, na svoje najuže i najbliže probleme. Vi ne razumete taktiku kojom se postiže uzvišen krajnji cilj. Nije fer od vas da se izdvajate. Ali ako zaiste želite rešenje jevrejskog problema, Sovjetski Savez pronašao vam ga je u Birobidžanu*" [You, Jews, think only of yourselves, of your narrowest and closest problems. You do not understand the tactics by which we achieve the lofty end goal. It's not fair of you to single yourselves out. But if you really want a solution

[21] For more on antisemitism in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, see Koljanin 2008.

[22] The First Women's Real Gymnasium (now known as Fifth Belgrade Gymnasium) was founded in 1905 and was dedicated to the education of women. The school holds an important place in the history of women's emancipation in Serbia. Among its notable teachers were the painter Nadežda Petrović (1873–1915) and the poet Desanka Maksimović (1898–1993). Ženi Lebl recalls a meeting with Maksimović many years later, when she was already permanently living in Israel. In Maksimović's poetry, Lebl found a reflection of her own experiences, giving her understanding and solace (see Lebl 2009: 115–116).

to the Jewish problem, the Soviet Union found it for you in Birobidzhan] (Lebl 2008b: 26). Ružica accused Ženi of lacking collective thinking in the communist spirit, for which the right path is to follow "the path of the working people in the Soviet Union" (ibid.: 24). She treated her as a representative of a collective entity – a group of Jews – and made an argument typical of Soviet discourse, sending Jews to the Soviet "Promised Land".

Ideologically oriented youth were saturated with this dominant narrative in the communist movement about Jews as a national minority for whom the possibility of settling in the Far East was provided. Lebl describes this time with a great sense of detachment; she does not delve into details, aiming to illustrate that as a child, the notion of the national question – which held various meanings in interwar Yugoslavia (Petrović 2018: 66–67), including among the Jewish community – was a distant concept for her and did not constitute a subject of reflection. She did not perceive her activities in SKOJ through the prism of ideology or politics. In the context of Jewish organizations' activities at that time, she only briefly mentions elsewhere that members of various youth organizations operated independently of each other, with strong divisions between them. Combining their efforts to fight together against the occupiers during World War II was not an obvious choice. While describing the time of the occupation, she mentions in passing the challenges in accepting members of Hashomer Hatzair, a Labor Zionist, secular Jewish youth movement, into the ranks of Yugoslav partisan units (Lebl 2008b: 71–73).

In her autobiographical texts, Ženi Lebl made sure to include a detailed description of events both before and during World War II. Her texts constitute important historical testimony about the occupation of Belgrade, the course of the Holocaust in Serbia, but also the fate of Jews who, like her, survived by hiding their Jewish identity, despite being interned in several prisons and camps. Ženi Lebl survived under a false name as Jovanka Lazić, arrested for her partisan, communist activities (ibid.: 107–111). In the context of the war, it is worth paying attention to another important topic discussed by Lebl in her memoirs, namely the issue of the social attitudes of the non-Jewish population, an issue almost absent in Serbian (and, more broadly, post-Yugoslav) narratives devoted to World War II. What I mean here is the so-called third instance (next to the perpetrator and the victim) occurring in acts of violence, who may be a victim, participant, observer, or substitute witness (or even a perpetrator) (see e.g. Rothberg 2014; Wylegała 2021).

The growing antisemitic propaganda revealed the passivity of Serbian society, which hit Ženi's mother particularly hard. Ana Lebl, using the language of metaphor, said that what hurt her most about the introduction of racial laws was "*bučna, gromoglasna tišina naših suseda i prijatelja*" [the loud, thunderous silence of our neighbors and friends] (ibid.: 18). More fragments regarding social attitudes before and during the war can be found in Ženi Lebl's texts (see Lebl 1990). Historians agree that collaboration began in Serbia shortly after the German army entered Belgrade.[23] Although the issue of the collaboration of

[23] The Council of Commissioners of Ministries, led by Milan Aćimović (1898–1945), was established at that time. After four months, the German occupation authorities, unhappy with Aćimović's efforts to suppress

the Serbian government, led by Milan Nedić, is a topic strongly present in Serbian public discourse (partially due to recent attempts to rehabilitate Nedić), the low visibility of the third instance in research reflection is surprising. Some researchers note the presence of acts of third-party violence in Yugoslavia (see Goldstein 2022; Koljanin 1992), but there is still no in-depth research on this subject in academic publications. Lebl's texts constitute an important voice in an attempt to develop this issue systematically and thematically.

Another important turning point in Ženi Lebl's process of building an identity was her imprisonment at Goli Otok (1949–1951),[24] when she was arrested and imprisoned for 2.5 years for telling a joke about Josip Broz Tito. Prior to this, after the end of World War II, Lebl had not joined the Jewish community. However, when regaining her apartment after the war, she faced antisemitic verbal violence from officials in the new country (Lebl 2008b: 177–179). As she wrote, in 1945 she wanted to avoid questions about "double loyalty", and Yugoslavia remained the obvious and only choice for her. She wanted to start a new life, regardless of religious affiliation, by adopting a Yugoslav non-Jewish identity, believing that there would be a place for her in the socialist state. In doing so, she was not unique. Loyalty to the Yugoslav socialist and multi-ethnic ideology suppressed any distinct Jewish identity among many Jews (see Gordiejew 1999; Kerenj 2008). For Ženi, who still did not feel any closer connection with the Jewish community, such a decision did not raise any doubts. However, she did not officially become a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Lebl 2008b: 189). She returned to her studies and began her career as a journalist. Then, as a result of the joke she told, she became a *persona non grata*, undesirable in Yugoslavia at that time.

Lebl emphasizes that her time of imprisonment and its accompanying consequences were the most dramatic moments in her life. It was a physically, mentally and socially difficult period, during which she also was a victim of sexual violence (for more Taczyńska 2017a: 93–94): "*Ovog puta bila sam usamljenija nego ikad ranije*" [This time I felt lonelier than ever before] (Lebl 2009: 114). After being released from prison, she was forbidden from sharing her experiences under threat of punishment, and, burdened with the stigma of having been a prisoner, she could not even find a job. She started drinking and considered suicide. It was then that she wrote the only poems in her life dedicated to what had happened on the island.[25] *Goli eho: moje "Golokaust" pesme* [Bare Echo: My *Golocaust* Poems] is an artistic exhibition of emotions and a record of the most difficult moments from her imprisonment. When, at the end of the 1980s, at the urging of Danilo Kiš, Lebl began to write down her memories from the time, she included the poems as

the partisan movement, allowed Milan Nedić (1878–1946) to form a new government. This new government, formed at the end of August 1941, maintained continuity with the previous Council, with many commissioners, including Aćimović, continuing their roles. The newly established institutions were modeled after those in Nazi Germany, as the collaborators aimed to create a "New Serbia" with a new political order (see Milosavljević 2006; Škodrić 2012–2013: 16, 18).

[24] Ženi Lebl was imprisoned in several prisons and camps during this period. I am using the name Goli Otok symbolically here.

[25] For more on the poetry addressing the experiences of Goli Otok, see Dušanić 2024.

an integral whole. However, the memories and poems were many years apart. Reading the poems, attached only as an annex, without any broader commentary,[26] allows us to feel the weight and strength of the emotions that accompanied her in the 1950s, when she wondered: "*Hoće li biti života / posle ove smrti?*" [Will there be life / after this death?] (from the poem *Snoviđenja*, see Lebl 2009: 155). The key to this experience is the word *Golokaust* in the title, which is a combination of the words "Holocaust" and the name of the island "Goli Otok".[27] For many prisoners, both women and men, including Jews, who first went through the prisons of World War II and then the prisons for political opponents in Yugoslavia, the time of "re-education" and "serving administrative punishment" is remembered as something worse even than Auschwitz, as the worst blow dealt by the resurgent state.[28]

I have discussed the circumstances of Lebl's isolation at Goli Otok, and her role in the discourse on these events in my earlier publications (see Taczyńska 2016). Here, however, I would like to draw attention to the important elements of identity that are revealed when Lebl recalls the experience. First of all, as Paul Gordiejew, an anthropology professor, noticed during an interrogation at Glavnjača prison in 1949, one of the interrogators uttered the following words to Lebl: "'*Ti si Jevrejka?' – čula sam jednoga od njih, ili mi se to samo pričinilo. Pitanje ili konstatacija?*" [*You're Jewish?* – I heard one of them say, or maybe it was just my imagination. Was it a question or a statement?] (Lebl 2009: 40). This question brings back the worst memories of World War II as Lebl wonders how to answer this question. Ultimately she admits: "*Ne mogu da poreknem: Jevrejka sam, ali to mi je poslednji put uzeto za zlo 1941. godine*" [I can't deny it: I'm Jewish, but last time that this was held against me was back in 1941] (ibid.: 41). The interrogators wondered how she managed to survive World War II, accused her of sexual contact with the Nazis, and said that she should not have been in Yugoslavia, but should have gone to Palestine. At the end they said that with the Jews everything is possible, using the contemptuous word *čivut*.[29] That moment, when "being Jewish" was used as an argument against her during interrogation, and was again used when she was called out of her cell, stayed in her memory for a long time. It returned many years later when Ženi was conducting research in Israel. It also remained part of a never-realized research idea about Jews as prisoners of Goli Otok and antisemitism at that time (Singer 2013: 44–46).

[26] Some of them were later published separately in literary magazines. For example, the poem *Automortografija* in *Stig: časopis za knjizevnost, umetnost i kulturu* 2004, 91: 29. Lebel was also certainly a reader and translator of poetry, as evidenced by the poems of Dina Katan Ben Zion, selected and translated from Hebrew to Serbian by Lebl (see Katan-Bencion 2002).

[27] The Holocaust narrative has become an important point of reference for discourse around the Goli Otok prisons and camps (see, e.g., Marko 2024). Although the article omits some earlier publications, the author proposes an interesting way of reading the camp memories of Eva Grlić and Ženi Lebl.

[28] The experiences of prisoners of the Goli Otok prisons and camps continue to inspire researchers and artists in their works. In 2024, during the 71st Martovski Festival – Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival, the documentary *Šagargur* premiered, directed by Nataša Nelević, presenting the experiences of Đina Markuš, a former prisoner from Montenegro (see V. Đ. 2024).

[29] The word comes from Turkish (see Vujanić 2011: 1483).

The interrogation at Glavnjača inspired Lebl to reflect on who she was: "*Nikad nisam mislila išta drugo nego Jugoslovenka*" [I never thought of myself as anyone other than a Yugoslav woman] (Lebl 2009: 116). After a difficult period of recovery and looking for a job, Lebl finally found the support that allowed her to recuperate. However, despite her new job and studies at the Faculty of Law, the need to leave Yugoslavia constantly accompanied her. Even though she considered herself a Yugoslav, she saw no place for herself in Yugoslavia: "*Ali sada ovde više ne pripadam*" [But now I don't belong here anymore] (ibid.).

It was then that she decided to join the Jewish community, but only so that she could leave Yugoslavia. The greatest number of Jews from Yugoslavia came to Israel in the years 1948–1952.[30] Unlike other countries of the communist bloc, Yugoslavia generally allowed its Jewish citizens to emigrate, although certain restrictions and conditions also applied here (Ivanković 2017: 61–62; Brandl 2023: 348–358). After 1952, emigration to Israel was allowed on an individual basis, under the same conditions as organized emigration, until June 13, 1967, when diplomatic relations between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Israel were severed (Lebl 2001). Nonetheless, Ženi Lebl's request for aliyah was rejected six times. Only after gaining external support from an old friend, at the age of 27, did she receive a legal passport from the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.[31] She packed a typewriter, among other things, and with the financial support of her family she went to Israel via Italy, starting a new stage in her life. The presence of the typewriter can be interpreted symbolically, as writing would become one of the most important activities for Lebl in her new reality. Thus, the author fulfilled one of the resolutions she had made after leaving Goli Otok, when, in a moment of crisis, she decided to live despite everything: "*Kako bih mogla jednoga dana, bilo kad, da svedočim o onome što sam videla i doživela na sopstvenoj koži, o brutalnom kršenju ljudskih prava*" [So that one day, at any moment, I could bear witness to what I saw and experienced firsthand, to the brutal violation of human rights] (Lebl 2009: 113).

A NOMADIC INTELLECTUAL

Like many immigrants, Ženi Lebl had difficulties at the beginnings of her life in Israel: "*Doživljavala sam, kao i mnogi drugi, traumu promena: nova zemlja, novi krajolci, nova klima, nov jezik, novi običaji, novi ukusi jela i pića, nov način odevanja*" [Like many others, I experienced the trauma of change: new country, new landscapes, new climate, new language, new customs, new tastes in food and drink, new way of dressing] (ibid.: 123). For Lebl, her time in Israel was a period of many challenges facing the *olim hadashim*, but also a new beginning or – as she assessed it in her memories after many years – a happy

[30] Between 1948 and 1952, over half of the Yugoslav Jews who had survived the Holocaust opted to establish residency in the recently established nation of Israel (see Radovanović 2022).

[31] The name remained valid until 1963, when it was changed to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to reflect a shift in the country's political and ideological direction as a non-aligned, independent socialist state with a more decentralized and self-managed political and economic system.

ending, i.e. "happylogue" (ibid.: 122).[32] In Israel, she published all her books, both historical works and autobiographical texts. Her writing and publishing in Israel reveals the constant overlap between the author's personal experience (and the need to express herself through text) and her social involvement in activities to commemorate the Jews of Yugoslavia.

An important aspect in understanding Lebl's activities in Israel is language. Hebrew was the first huge challenge that Lebl had to face in Israel. On the one hand, it was a language necessary for life in the newly established country, but it was also a language of expression, an important medium of communication for the author. Although Lebl was exposed to Hebrew as a girl, little of it remained in her memory and she began to learn it anew in Israel. In her memoirs, Lebl talks many times about the ease of learning languages, and how she learned some of them almost "by accident", e.g. while staying in the same camp with prisoners of different nationalities. It was different with Hebrew. Her poor understanding of Hebrew at that time was demonstrated in her recollection from the ship to Israel, where she struck up a conversation with one of her travel companions, sharing her own concerns about the language. She asked the man she was talking with to say a few words in the "Jewish language". The man started speaking Yiddish, which Lebl didn't recognize, and she was sure she was hearing Hebrew: "*Taj jezik ličio mi je na čudni, pokvareni nemački, na neki nemački dijalekt*" [That language sounded like a strange, broken German to me, like some German dialect] (ibid.). Over time, however, feeling a strong need to master the language, and no doubt also thanks to her own talent, she completely adopted Hebrew. Not just enough to study and work in a new profession (more on this later), but also to translate Hebrew literature in the future and provide linguistic and literary consultations to renowned specialists in Yugoslav Jewish literature and culture, such as Predrag Palavestra (see Palavestra 1998: 5, 154–155; 2013: 263–271), Zvi Loker[33] and David Albahari.

Let us focus for a moment on the outstanding writer David Albahari (1948–2023) and his intellectual relationship with Ženi Lebl. Their unpublished correspondence from the late 1980s and 1990s, kept in the Eventov Archive in Israel (Lebl 1999: 48–49), is an interesting source of information for several reasons (Eventov-2430). Regarding Ženi Lebl, it is worth noting that Albahari willingly used her help. First, as a philologist, when Lebl proofread Hebrew transcriptions for him; second, as a specialist in Israeli realia, when he asked for an explanation of, for example, toponyms characteristic of Israeli culture (Lebl 1989); and third, as a translator. Albahari valued Lebl's language skills, encouraging her to share her completed translations and asking her to indicate the authors she thought were worth translating.

Their conversations also reveal the tastes and needs of these writers embedded in two different cultural realities. Albahari planned to publish in Yugoslavia the classics of Israeli

[32] In this neologism, Lebl combined the English word *happy* with the Greek word *epílogos*, meaning the final part of a literary work.

[33] See the correspondence between Zvi Loker and Ženi Lebl, stored in the Eventov Archive (P258-61 Locker, Zvi – Private Collection). Ženi Lebl also participated in the writing of *Pinkas HaKehilot – Yugoslavia* (see Loker 1988).

prose at that time, the writers of the so-called mainstream (Amos Oz, AB Yehoshua), while Lebl tried to redirect Albahari's attention to authors who were less popular and not so obvious to the dominant culture in Israel (such as Tirza Atar, David Avidan, Miriam Eitan, and Maja Bejerano) (Lebl 1992). Moreover, their correspondence is a source of knowledge for researchers analyzing the process of improving relations between Yugoslavia and Israel, which resulted in the renewal of diplomatic relations in 1991 (Albahari 1989); the issue of the growing nationalism in Yugoslavia, which Albahari observed as the chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, having held the position since 1991; and finally the phenomenon of emigration; Albahari emigrated to Calgary, Canada in 1994, and in his letters sought understanding of his sense of foreignness in the eyes of emigrant Ženi Lebl (Albahari 1994).[34] Their epistolary conversation is a testimony to both the exchange of information and cooperation, as well as reflection on the difficult times of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. We also see that Albahari highly valued Lebl's opinion and her research work, primarily because, as a person rooted in Israeli culture and knowing Hebrew, she had access to materials that were inaccessible to him. Lebl therefore became an agent of Israeli culture in Yugoslav literature.

However, when we look at Lebl's fate in Israel, her involvement in the study of history is not obvious. At the beginning, she did the simplest jobs, which she was ashamed to admit to her father. He was unaware of her situation in her new country, and for him it was a kind of declassation (Lebl 2009: 125–126). Once she had mastered Hebrew sufficiently, she began studying at a college for X-ray technicians in Haifa. She worked at the Poriya hospital in Tiberias for four years, and in 1961 she moved to a newly opened hospital in Tel Aviv. Over time, she became the head of the school and taught radiography in Tel Aviv. Professional work marked a completely new path in her life and was quite distant from her previous ambitions. But even then, she fulfilled her need to write to some extent. For example, while undergoing specialization studies in Sweden in 1963, at the insistence of her superior, she sent weekly reports on her stay, which were very popular among her colleagues. She wrote them reluctantly, knowing that her Hebrew was not yet perfect (ibid.: 127). Thanks to this activity, she gained more self-confidence. And with her move to Tel Aviv, where HOJ had its headquarters, came – as she wrote – "the beginning of a new era" (ibid.: 128). In parallel to her professional work, she started working on the Historical Committee of HOJ, where her work found support among her colleagues and gained momentum. It is clear that she was looking for places to develop in Israel in the humanistic space, which she did not abandon until her death.

She began publishing her first historical texts in the late 1970s, first in Hebrew. She also wrote journalistic texts and appeared on radio and television. Her first monograph, *Ge'ut va-shever: Perakim be-toldot Yehudei Makedonia ha-Vardarit* [Tide and Wreck: Chapters in the History of the Jews of Vardar Macedonia], the result of many years of collecting testimonies, interviews and archival research, was published in 1986, also in Hebrew. Over

[34] Ženi Lebl was also involved in helping immigrants coming to Israel during the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (see Steiner Aviezer 2013: 75).

time, she began publishing in Serbo-Croatian in Yugoslavia.[35] Thanks to her knowledge of several languages, she was able to conduct research on source texts in archives in Yugoslavia and Israel, often self-financed (Steiner Aviezer 2013: 74). Some of her works are available in English.[36] She was honored many times for her writings by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia and later of Serbia, and following her death, the Ženi Lebl Award was established in her memory (Taczyńska and Twardowska 2020–2021: 135). I should add, however, that – as Yitzchak Bezalel pointed out – none of her works have received such recognition in Israel, outside the community of Jews from the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Bezalel 2013: 92).[37] Lebl was self-taught in history, she lacked academic historical training, and for this reason her works can sometimes be criticized for methodological shortcomings. She was aware of this and did not feel comfortable in all the circles, and encountered difficulties in publishing her works (Kerem 2013: 84; Bezalel 2013: 92; Winkler 2013: 99), although she never stopped working (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Ženi Lebl delivering a speech at Yad Vashem

[35] In the article, I use the term "Serbo-Croatian" to refer to the language as it functioned until the collapse of Yugoslavia. The complex language politics that emerged afterward were not a topic she discussed in her texts.

[36] E.g. Jennie Lebel, *"Until the Final Solution": The Jews in Belgrade 1521–1942* (2007); Jennie Lebel, *Tide and Wreck: History of the Jews of Vardar Macedonia* (2008).

[37] Even though, for example, the book *Ljubičica bela…*, which was published in translation into Hebrew in 1993 by the renowned publishing house Am Oved, was a text that enjoyed considerable popularity, see Iveković 2013: 22. Also see interview recordings with Lebl conducted in Israel (P483-101 Eventov collection).

In the context of work and life in Israel, we should pay attention to another dimension of Ženi Lebl's writing – her autobiographical texts. Many of her friends emphasize the passion with which she performed historical research (Kuentzel 2013: 57), and some of them believe that in the absence of family in Israel, her research and writing were her whole life after her retirement as a radiologist.[38] Lebl was a sociable person with her own circle of friends and colleagues, but she did not build her identity on family roles. While she maintained close contact with her family in Yugoslavia (later Serbia), where her father and brother lived, she never married or had children in Israel, as if that sphere was too limiting for her. In fact, she only learned ordinary household chores such as cooking, at a basic level, and only at an advanced age (Lebl 2023). She was not religious, but had great respect for Jewish religion and traditions (Kerem 2013: 83). She did not eat kosher,[39] did not celebrate Jewish holidays, and visited the synagogue only on exceptional occasions. Every year on March 11, she visited the Yagel Yaakov Synagogue, the synagogue of Monastir Jews in Jerusalem, to honor the memory of the Macedonian Jews who died in Treblinka.[40] Lebl was an important voice in the Macedonian Jewish community, which is why she was asked to speak during the anniversary celebrations, even though as a non-religious woman she did not meet the requirements typical of Orthodox Jews. Over time, by publishing autobiographical texts, she also became an important and audible voice of another group – women prisoners of Goli Otok. This dimension of her writing, described further below, significantly complements her identity and portrait as a woman writer.

For a long time, autobiography was not a genre traditionally open to women. While the diary is one of the dominant genres in women's prose in the history of Serbian literature, particularly among modernist authors (Koch 2007: 158), a significant increase in the publication of women's personal documents only occurred during and after World War II (Ubertowska 2009: 224–225). By the second half of the 1980s and later, when Lebl wrote her autobiographical texts, texts of this type written by women were not nonexistent. However, writing autobiographical texts did not come easily to Lebl and was in contrast to writing historical texts, which she wrote with great passion, encouraging others to write as well, and she willingly shared the results of her archival discoveries (Kaspi 2013: 94). In relation to autobiographical texts, Lebl said that it was difficult to write in the first person singular, writing about herself not only "does not calm the spirits, but most often wakes the devil from a deep sleep" (Lebl 2008b: 3–4). Writing memoir prose forced her to face her own traumatic experiences. We can only speculate whether she would have ever written *Ljubičica bela…*, if not for the encouragement and persuasion of Danilo Kiš, who made the film testimony *Goli život* [Barren Island] about women prisoners from Goli Otok, recognizing the importance of women's voices in the story about the Yugoslav gulag. I already studied the content, meaning and pioneering role of the text *Ljubičica bela…* in other texts

[38] Taking on family roles was typical of many women living in emigration (see Karwowska 2016: 40).

[39] According to Ana Lebl, Ženi was very happy when butcher shops selling pork appeared after the arrival of Russian aliyah in the 1990s (Lebl 2023).

[40] For more, see Grandakovska 2011.

as the first published testimony of a former female prisoner (Taczyńska 2014). Here, I want to add one more comment on the social and gender dimension to complement this image.

Apart from the importance of Lebl's story presented in her autobiographies, which is crucial for building the discourse of the Goli Otok camp, we must remember that in the 1980s it was still a taboo topic, especially regarding women's experiences. When she started to write, the difficulty was not only the topic that was personally harrowing for her, along with the issue of writing an autobiographical text, but also the social context of publicly discussing the topic of imprisonment at Goli Otok. Before agreeing to participate in Kiš's documentary, Lebl consulted her family in Belgrade about whether she should take part in the film, fearing for their safety (Lebl 2023). As a former prisoner of that camp, from time to time she felt reluctance or ostracism in contacts with the Yugoslav embassy in Israel. She wrote the book *Ljubičica bela…* originally in Serbo-Croatian, so with an audience in Yugoslavia in mind. Writing down these memories should be considered an act of heroism, because Lebl was faced not only with her own traumas, memory limitations, and autobiographical convention, but also with a real fear of whether she could and should speak out about women prisoners at all. Perhaps it was a strong awareness of the topic's importance and physical distance, as Svetlana Slapšak suggests, that enabled Lebl to speak out about that time, including what was hidden by a kind of collective agreement of silence (Slapšak 2013: 34). Lebl felt an obligation to testify, which required a departure from the fictionalization of memories in favor of factual literature focused on details (Katan Ben Zion 2002: 284).

Anthropologist Svetlana Slapšak,[41] when describing Lebl's life, characterized her as a "nomadic intellectual". This phrase encapsulates, on one hand, Lebl's existence at the intersection of diverse cultural spheres (the Balkans and Israel), and on the other hand, the singular nature of her accomplishments on a global scale as a writer and historian who succeeded in transforming her own experience of camp trauma into text. For this reason, Slapšak compares Lebl's figure and achievements to those of Primo Levi. However, unlike Levi, Lebl traversed the threshold of death, esteeming new life as the paramount value (Slapšak 2013: 32–34). As Slapšak writes: "No one could confine Lebl anywhere, not even within herself" (ibid.: 33), she felt compelled to write, and perhaps it was this compulsion that enabled her survival. For Lebl, writing became the predominant activity around which she oriented and dedicated her life. In Israel, she once again started anew, opening – as she wrote, using a book metaphor – "*novu stranicu knjige svog života*" [a new page in the book of her life] (Lebl 2008b: 118). Without a doubt, writing played a special role in her life. Once, using the well-known phrase "*Radim za gušu, pišem za dušu*" [I work for my throat, I write for my soul], she explained that writing was her way of seeking validation, both for herself and in the eyes of the world (Weiss, 1991: 68). Writing is the aspect of

[41] Interestingly, Slapšak, a researcher with Jewish roots who analyzes various female archetypes in culture, has never delved deeper into the figure of a Jewish woman from the Balkans (see Slapšak 2021: 13).

identity that dominated her social position in Israel (within the HOJ environment), but also in Yugoslavia, as evidenced by her cooperation with Kiš, Palavestra and Albahari. Research and writing historical texts were also an introduction to consciously taking another, new narrative position, when Lebl decided to describe her experiences and put herself in the center of the story. In her case, we are dealing with a clear transposition of her own experience. When interpreting Lebl's work, it can be concluded that two strategies overlap in her actions: writing with herself and writing herself (to use Ryszard Nycz's phrase) (Nycz 2001).

Interestingly, although Ženi Lebl's memoir texts constitute an important voice in reading history from the perspective of women, the author herself does not mention any inspirations from women's and feminist circles in any of her texts. Even the figure of her aunt, Paulina Lebl Albala (1891–1967), does not appear in her writings. Paulina Lebl Albala was a teacher, translator, literary critic, and theorist. In 1923, she co-authored (with Katarina Bogdanović) the standard high-school textbook *Teorija književnosti* [Theory of Literature]. But more importantly, Paulina Lebl Albala was primarily recognized for her active participation in the women's emancipation movement in Yugoslavia and was the first president of the *Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena* [Association of University-Educated Women].[42] Aleksandar Lebl financed the publication of Paulina Lebl Albala's memoirs in 2005, and Ženi Lebl was also involved in obtaining the manuscript (Palavestra 2013: 264–265).[43]

CONCLUSIONS

The numerous influences that have contributed to the formation of Jewish culture indicate that it should not be regarded as a single entity today, but rather as a diverse array of cultural expressions within Jewish communities. Therefore, it is important to examine its local manifestations (see Biale 2002; Hyman 2009). The case of Yugoslav Jewish women complicates the picture of Jewish relations and differentiates Jewish identities even further, adding more layers of binary opposition, juxtaposing Jews and non-Jews, men and women, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, traditional and secular Jews, indigenous people and emigrants.

In my article, I present a comprehensive picture of Ženil Lebl, whom I analyze as a representative of a minority group existing on the borders of many different divisions. Based on her texts and cultural activities, I reconstruct the process that expressed Lebl's identity as it changed over time. Lebl does not express clear self-identification in her texts. I describe Lebl's presence in literature, both from the inside perspective of their practices, and from

[42] The Association was founded on 11 December, 1927.

[43] Paulina Lebl Albala wrote her autobiography in Serbo-Croatian, titled *Tako je nekad bilo*, probably between 1944 and 1945 or after WWII. However, it was not published until 2005. For more, see Koch 2023.

the outside perspective**,** by considering her activities in a broader context as part of a larger cultural phenomenon dependent on historical and spatial context, i.e. the political and social situations at a given moment in history, which includes measures necessitated by that specific time, as well as contemporary gender related-issues (Fox Keller 1985). I read a corpus of her texts diverse in genre and form, created at subsequent stages of her life, under the influence and as a result of various experiences. I investigate how the issues central to both general and Jewish ideological movements are expressed in her works and analyze how she defines her own boundaries – in the process that includes taming "herself" through narrative, as well as self-attribution and exclusion. I examine the characteristic ways of creating such narratives, and the particular discourse that shaped them in the local Yugoslav and Israeli reality.

My analysis is a critical reflection on the literary tradition of a region that shapes the image of various groups – national, ethnic, religious, cultural and gender-specific. In Lebl's texts, three main categories play a key role: Jewish, Yugoslav, and Woman. The first two interact strongly in her case. Growing up in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Lebl did not feel closely connected to Jewish culture, but she was embedded in this identity by the country's socio-political system. This imposition, along with the reinforcement of an oppressive context (WWII, Cominform resolution), imposed her Jewish identity as dominant. However, Lebl, externally defined as a Jew, does not deeply reflect on this issue at ideological, political, or cultural levels. Over time, it seems she accepts and embraces Jewishness as part of her identity. In Israel, there is a process of familiarization through a series of research and writing activities, where local history takes center stage – the history of Jews in or from Yugoslavia. Texts on the history of Yugoslav Jews, published in both Hebrew and Serbo-Croatian, and primarily worked on in Israel, serve as an expression of her connection with both Jewish and Yugoslav (and later Serbian) culture. The question of Jewish participation arises in many of her research projects, even those seemingly unrelated to Jewish presence, such as the prisons on Goli Otok. As a woman writer and former prisoner of the Goli Otok concentration camps, Lebl becomes an important voice for women, yet she does not explicitly articulate her position based on gender in her texts.

Lebl emerges as both a representative of the affluent upper class in the pre-WWII era, and a female author transcending social boundaries and identity constructs, forging her unique path and significantly contributing to the preservation and dissemination of Jewish tradition in the Balkans. Departing from established norms in her homeland and country of residence, she established her own forms of writing, validated by her narrative as both a non-professional yet qualified researcher, and developed her framework and authorities (Belenky Field 1986: 134). By integrating her personal experiences with acquired knowledge, Lebl created cultural texts reflecting her complex, fluid, and historically variable identities, which hold significance for the histories of both Jewish and Yugoslav communities.

LITERATURE AND SOURCES

Albahari, David. 1989. *Letter to Ženi Lebl*, 6 March. The Eventov Archive.

Albahari, David. 1994. *Letter to Ženi Lebl*, 5 October. The Eventov Archive.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2004. *Identity*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press.

Belenky Field, Mary et al., eds. 1986. *Women's Ways of Knowing. The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Bezalel, Yitzhak. 2013. "Znanje i marljivost bez titule". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 91–92.

Biale, David, ed. 2002. *Cultures of the Jews. A New History*. New York: Schocken Books.

Brandl, Naida-Michal. 2023. *Židovi u Hrvatskoj nakon Holokausta*. Zagreb: Leykam international.

Bulska, Dominika and Mikołaj Winiewski. 2017. *Powrót zabobonu. Antysemityzm w Polsce na podstawie Polskiego Sondażu Uprzedzeń 3*. Warszawa: Centrum Badań nad Uprzedzeniami.

Degler, Joanna, Agnieszka Jagodzińska and Marcin Wodziński. 2024. *Literatura autobiograficzna Żydów polskich. Tradycja, nowoczesność, płeć*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Dušanić, Dunja. 2024. "The poetry of Goli Otok". *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny* 71/4: 594–612. https://doi.org/10.24425/kn.2024.154213

Fox Keller, Evelyn. 1985. *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Freidenreich Pass, Harriet. 1992. "Jevreji Beograda između ratova". *Studije, arhivska i memoarska građa o istoriji beogradskih Jevreja* 6: 365–371.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. California: Stanford University Press.

Goldstein, Ivo. 2022. *Antisemitizam u Hrvatskoj. Od srednjeg veka do danas*. Zaprešić: Fraktura.

Gordiejew, Paul Benjamin. 1999. *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry*. Albany: State University of New York Press. https://doi.org/10.1353/book10483

Grandakovska, Sofija, ed. 2011. *The Jews from Macedonia and the Holocaust. History, Theory, Culture*. Skopje: Euro Balkan Press.

Hyman, Paula E. 2009. "Does Gender Matter? Locating Women in European Jewish History". In *Rethinking European Jewish History*. Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman, eds. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 54–71. https://doi.org/10.3828/liverpool/9781904113560.003.0004

Ivanković, Mladenka. 2017. *Brodovi nade. Alije jugoslovenskih Jevreja u Izrael*. Beograd: HERAedu.

Iveković, Violeta L. 2013. "Slike o Ženi Lebl. Biografija, in Ženi". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 13–23.

Jagodzińska, Agnieszka. 2008. *Pomiędzy. Akulturacja Żydów Warszawy w drugiej połowie XIX wieku*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Janjetović, Zoran. 2021. "Školstvo nacionalnih manjina u Jugoslaviji 1918–1991". In *Bez škole šta bi mi?! Ogledi iz istorije obrazovanja u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji od 19. veka do danas*. Aleksandra Ilić Rajković and Sanja Petrović Todosijević, eds. Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Institut za pedagogiju i andragogiju Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu, 219–258.

Jovanović, Nebojša. 1992. "Pregled istorije beogradskih Jevreja do sticanja građanske ravnopravnosti". *Studije, arhivska i memoarska građa o istoriji beogradskih Jevreja* 6: 115–167.

Karwowska, Bożena. 2016. *Kobieta – Historia – Literatura*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.iblpan.6793

Kaspi, Dan. 2013. "Skromnost, jednostavnost, direktnost, iskrenost". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 93–95.

Katan-Bencion (Ben Zion), Dina. 2002. *Vremena u nama*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

Katan Ben Zion, Dina. 2002. *Presence and Disappearance. Jews and Judaism in Former Yugoslavia in the Mirror of Literature*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press (in Hebrew).

Kerem, Yitzhak. 2013. "Imala je karakter". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 79–85.

Kerenj, Emil. 2008. *Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia. Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944–1974*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History) at The University of Michigan. Available at: https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/60848 (accessed 8 May 2024).

Koch, Magdalena. 2007. *…kiedy dojrzejemy jako kultura… Twórczość pisarek serbskich na początku XX wieku (kanon – genre – gender)*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego. https://doi.org/10.1163/1872471x-bja10058

Koch, Magdalena. 2023. "Gender and Memory in the Work of Serbian-Jewish Writer Paulina Lebl Albala (1891–1967)". *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 17: 86–103.

Koljanin, Milan. 1992. *Nemački logor na beogradskom Sajmištu 1941–1944*. Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju.

Koljanin, Milan. 2008. *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*. Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju.

Kuentzel, Matthias. 2013. "Prkosna Srpkinja". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 56–58.

Lebl, Aleksandar. 1998. Interview conducted on 2 April. Belgrade: he USC Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education.

Lebl, Aleksandar. 2001. "Prekid odnosa SFRJ-Izrael 1967. godine". *Tokovi istorije* 1-4: 39–75.

Lebl, Ana. 2023. Interview conducted and stored by the author, 19 October. Belgrade.

Lebl, Ženi. 1989. *Letter to David Albahari*, 16 July. The Eventov Archive.

Lebl, Ženi. 1990. *Dnevnik jedne Judite*. Gornji Milanovac: Dečje novine.

Lebl, Ženi. 1992. *Letter to David Albahari*, 3 May. The Eventov Archive.

Lebl, Ženi. 1996. Interview conducted on 24 December. Tel Aviv: The USC Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education.

Lebl, Ženi. 1999. *Juče, danas. Doprinos Jevreja sa teritorije bivše Jugoslavije Izraelu*. Tel Aviv: Udruženje Jevreja iz bivše Jugoslavije u Izraelu.

Lebl, Ženi. 2005. "Drug iz detinjstva. Moj *Zid plača*". In *Mi smo preživeli… Jevreji o Holokaustu*, 3. Aleksandar Gaon et al., eds. Beograd: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije i Crne Gore, 467–490.

Lebl, Ženi. 2008a. *Da se ne zaboravi*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

Lebl, Ženi. 2008b. *Odjednom drukčija, odjednom druga*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

Lebl, Ženi. 2009. *Ljubičica bela. Vic dug dve i po godine*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

Loker. Zvi, ed. 1988. *Pinkas HaKehilot. Yugoslavia*. Yad Vashem: Jerusalem.

Marko, McKenna. 2024. "Remembering Gendered Histories of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia and Goli otok in Eva Grlić's *Memories* and Ženi Lebl's *White Violets*". *Slavic Review* 83: 527–540. https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2024.497

Milosavljević, Olivera. 2006. *Potisnuta kolaboracija*. Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji.

Nedeljković, Saša. 2015. *Zadužbine Društva Kneginja Ljubica*. Available at: https://jadovno.com/zaduzbine-drustva-kneginja-ljubica/#.V-5VxtSLQ_7 (accessed 8 May 2024).

Nycz, Ryszard. 2001. "Osoba w nowoczesnej literaturze: ślady obecności". In Ryszard Nycz. *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej*. Kraków: Universitas, 51–87.

Palavestra, Predrag. 1998. *Jevrejski pisci u srpskoj književnosti*. Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost.

Palavestra, Predrag. 2013. *Nekropolje. Biografski eseji*. Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, Dosije studio.

Petrović, Jelena. 2018. *Women's Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00142-1

Radovanović, Milan. 2022. *The Covert Push-Factor. How the Yugoslav-Soviet Conflict of 1948 Influenced Organized Jewish Emigration from Yugoslavia to Israel (1948–1952)*. Available at: https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/83707 (accessed 8 May 2024). https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.107084

Rothberg, Michael. 2014. "Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects, and the Question of Israel/Palestine". Available at: https://profession.mla.org/trauma-theory-implicated-subjects-and-the-question-of-israel-palestine/ (accessed 8 May 2024).

Singer, Aca. 2013. "Neostvarena želja". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 44–46.

Škodrić, Ljubinka. 2012–2013. "'Horizontalna kolaboracija'. Intimne veze žena sa nemačkim okupatorom u Srbiji 1941–1944". *Istorija 20. veka* 31/3: 105–122. https://doi.org/10.29362/ist20veka.2013.1.sko.105-122

Slapšak, Svetlana. 2013. "*Ženski – Ženin smeh*". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 32–34.

Slapšak, Svetlana. 2021. *Moj mačkoljubivi život*. Beograd: Štrik.

Steiner Aviezer, Miriam 2013. "Ženi i Hitahdut". In *Ženi*. Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 74–76.

Taczyńska, Katarzyna. 2014. "Ženska slika logora Goli otok. Pokušaj rekonstrukcije. Istorijski pregled". *Književenstvo* 4. Available at: http://www.knjizenstvo.rs/magazine.php?text=130 (accessed 8 May 2024).

Taczyńska, Katarzyna. 2016. *Dowcip trwający dwa i pół roku. Obraz Nagiej Wyspy w serbskim dyskursie literackim i historycznym końca XX i początku XXI wieku*. Warszawa: Bellerive-sur-Allier, Wydawnictwo DiG.

Taczyńska, Katarzyna. 2017a. "*A Scattered Mosaic of Records and Reminiscences*. Ženi Lebl's War Odyssey in Her Personal Writings". In *An Introspective Approach to Women's Intercultural Fieldwork*. Urszula Markowska-Manista and Justyna Pilarska, eds. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej, 68–102.

Taczyńska, Katarzyna. 2017b. "Pamięć matki. Pamięć o matce. O Dzienniku pewnej Judyty Ženi Lebl". *Miscellanea Posttotalitariana Wratislaviensia* 6: 217–231. https://doi.org/10.19195/2353-8546.6.17

Taczyńska, Katarzyna. 2023. "(Un)spoken Histories. The Second World War and Yugoslav Jewish Women". *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 17: 104–123. https://doi.org/10.1163/1872471x-bja10053

Taczyńska, Katarzyna and Aleksandra Twardowska. 2020–2021. "Płeć emigracji. Bałkańskie Żydówki jako mediatorki wiedzy". *Archiwum emigracji* 28: 125–139. https://doi.org/10.12775/AE.2020.009

Trajanovski, Naum. 2024. "The Rescue of the Macedonian Jews during World War II. Between Collective Agency and Individual Stories". In *The Rescue Turn and the Politics of Holocaust Memory*. Natalia Aleksiun, Raphael Utz and Zofia Wóycicka, eds. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 99–140.

Ubertowska, Aleksandra. 2009. "*Niewidzialne świadectwa*. Perspektywa feministyczna w badaniach nad literaturą Holokaustu". *Teksty Drugie* 4: 214–226.

V. Đ. 2024. Međunarodna premijera filma o ženskom Golom otoku. *Šagargur* na 71. Martovskom festivalu. Available at: https://www.telegraf.rs/pop-i-kultura/film-tv/3860629-medjunarodna-premijera-filma-o-zenskom-golom-otoku-sagargur-na-71-martovskom-festivalu (accessed 8 May 2024).

Vidaković-Petrov, Krinka. 2013. "The Ashkenazi-Sephardi Dialogue in Yugoslavia 1918–1941". In *Ashkenazim and Sephardim. A European Perspective.* Andrzej Kątny, Izabela Olszewska nad Aleksandra Twardowska, eds. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 19–39.

Vučina Simović, Ivana. 2016. *Jevrejsko-španski jezik na Balkanu. Prilozi istorijskoj sociolingvistici.* Kragujevac: Filološko-umetnički fakultet.

Vujanić, Milica et al., eds. 2011. *Rečnik srpskoga jezika.* Novi Sad: Matica srpska.

Weiss, Ljubo. 1991. "Život je život. Razgovor sa Ženi Lebl". *Danas*, 1 January: 68–70.

Winkler, Judit. 2013. "Prisutna". In *Ženi.* Aleksandar Lebl, Ana Lebl and Dina Katan Ben Zion, eds. Beograd, Tel Aviv: Čigoja štampa, 97–100.

Wylegała, Anna. 2022. "Entangled Bystanders. Multidimensional Trauma of Ethnic Cleansing and Mass Violence in Eastern Galicia". In *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe after World War II.* Ville Kivimäki and Peter Leese, eds. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84663-3_5

OD *GOLOKAUSTA* DO *HAPPYLOGUEA*: PRAKSE STVARANJA ZNAČENJA U IZGRADNJI ŽIDOVSKOG IDENTITETA. SLUČAJ ŽENI LEBL

Ovaj članak proučava životni put Ženi Lebl (1927. – 2009.), jugoslavenske Židovke, komunističke aktivistkinje, koja je preživjela Holokaust, zatvorenice logora Goli otok za političke protivnike jugoslavenskog komunističkog režima, koja je emigrirala u Izrael 1954. godine. Njezina djela (uključujući znanstvene tekstove, egodokumente, pjesme i pisma), kao i njezino djelovanje, omogućavaju nam rekonstrukciju procesa kroz koji se Leblin identitet razvijao tijekom vremena. Istraživačka pitanja su: 1) kako njezini tekstovi izražavaju pitanja židovske, jugoslavenske i ženske samosvijesti i identiteta? te 2) kada i pod kojim društvenim okolnostima autorica počinje pisati tekstove usmjerene na povijest židovskih tradicija u Jugoslaviji? Članak pruža sveobuhvatan prikaz života i rada Ženi Lebl kao predstavnice manjinske skupine koja postoji na granicama mnogih različitih podjela. Kroz kronološku rekonstrukciju njezine biografije, uzimajući u obzir povijesni i kulturni kontekst, možemo pratiti kako se autoričin identitet, sa svim svojim složenostima i dvosmislenostima, oblikovao i mijenjao. Analiza nam omogućava da razumijemo ključnu ulogu koju je Lebl imala kao spisateljica u očuvanju i prijenosu židovske povijesti jugoslavenske regije te istražimo jedinstvenu hibridnost lokalne židovsko-jugoslavenske zajednice.

Ključne riječi: Ženi Lebl, jugoslavenske Židovke, Izrael, identitet, manjina