

## **Alec Nacamuli**

I know that my grandmother told me she got very upset at one point because one of her sons, one of my uncles, wanted to marry an Ashkenazi girl but I think that broke off. There were more Ashkenazim in Cairo, in fact the Ashkenazim had their own synagogue there, whilst there was no sort of Ashkenazi temple or oratory in Alexandria.

We were very strong Jewish identity. We did not keep a kosher home. In fact, my parents would not eat pork, but they ate shellfish. At home also. But my father was a regular synagogue-attender, would go every Saturday to synagogue and we obviously held all the festivals, Pesach and Yom Kippur and all that and even, because we were members of the main Alexandria Synagogue, Eliyahu Hanavi, but on Yom Kippur we would go to a smaller synagogue which was within walking distance as my father would not drive on Yom Kippur.

I've got a personal question: Am I a Sephardi or, if you look at my parents' family who come from Corfu, and originally from Venice, was my family Sephardim, who actually came from Spain, or would we have been Italian Jews who came with Titus as slaves? Of course, my mother's family, Aleppo, they were pure Mizrahim.

Mizrahim is the Jews from... Mizrachi means 'The East' in Hebrew... so generally speaking Mizrahim are referred to as the Jews who never went to Spain. They scattered after the destruction of the temples but remained in North Africa or Iraq or Persia or wherever. Strictly speaking Sephardim are the ones who actually went to Spain.

## **Nadia Arditti**

Well, I have to tell you that I was brought up in the family until I was 9 years old and then we went to Switzerland, and I was in a Catholic boarding school until 19 years old. So, my tradition was to come back home for Pesach or Yom Kippur, or days like this, and we used to cook some Sephardic cooking. My mother used to cook. But in fact, I was not brought up in the really Jewish tradition. I feel Jewish but I think I was also lucky to be brought up in Switzerland in that school and when I came back to Turkey, because I knew all about Christianity. And then I came back to Turkey when I got married and then saw the Muslim world, I feel like I know about different religions quite well but I'm not a religious person. I feel Jewish but not especially the Sephardic tradition.

My Jewish identity is connected with that because I was a Turkish Jew who was representing Turkey abroad, I represented Turkey in the United States, in England when I did this monument

here in the Cass Business School. The Turkish ambassador came for the opening. I was introduced to the Queen. It doesn't happen to a Jewish artist in Turkey, and there are not so many, especially women, Turkish Jewish to have so many exhibitions abroad and monuments abroad and some honours here and there. I felt quite proud of that.

### **Haim Algranati**

I'm not involved, with none of them. Because you see involvement requires kind of, belonging to, like a synagogue - I used to belong to the Masorti, but I find religious activity very tedious and very precise spirituality, and it doesn't satisfy me to be in a community that reads books that they don't even have an understanding of what they're reading. Sorry. I mean how can you...how can you do it and think that this is holy? So, I find the services very tedious and, in a way, a waste of time. Sorry. But... but, saying that, I mean, obviously, not obviously, I mean, my life is very full of musicians, and full of music, and lots of my friends are performing musicians, and that includes my wife. She's a professional pianist. So, through the music, I get a lot of Jewish Middle Eastern fusions. I think I belong a little bit out of the box, where my perceptions are... I'm not conventional in the world. In my world I'll try to introduce as much of infinity as possible, and to acknowledge it, and that increases my respect and awareness. So... and, add to this, this Hillel's famous saying, 'Don't do to others what you hate most.' Then you're sorted. Do this and you have Heaven. Infinite inspiration. Cause it's infinite.

### **Ralf Arditti**

My Turkish allegiance, my Turkish loyalty, my Turkish identity, has declined, unfortunately. Today, I follow very closely four countries: Britain, where I'm living; Turkey, where I used to live, Israel because I'm very much connected with Israel. I've always had "*ahava l'Yisrael*" for a long time, I will tell you more about it; and France, where my daughter now lives. So, you know, it's in between these four countries and all that. I've got maybe less allegiance towards Turkey, but I still love Turkey very much – food; culture; people there are still very hospitable, as you probably found out in your trips. People in Turkey, generally, are still naïve and good-natured. They are good-natured, except that their leaders sometimes want not to take them to other directions. So, you see, my philosophy in life was in that respect quite balanced.

Let me tell you the following: After the war, the Jewish community in Turkey numbered about 80,000. It was a big community. I mean, this was the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, of course. At the time of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey had 200,000 Jews – but these included the Jews in Greece and some of the Jews in Palestine, of course. But 80,000 Turkish public after the war. Now during the war, I wouldn't say that the Jews suffered tremendously except one incident of the Wealth Tax. I don't know if people are aware of this Wealth Tax.

When the Nazis occupied Greece and they were on the Turkish border, Bulgaria and Greece, in 1942, the Turkish Parliament made a wealth tax. The subject of this wealth tax were the minorities, but mainly the Jews. It was very arbitrary wealth tax; there was a very small committee who said, 'Okay, Moshe, we will give him 50,000 liras, that he's got to pay.' 'No, Moshe – I saw him yesterday, he has got a very nice coat; let him pay 80,000 liras!' 'No, let him pay 100,000 liras!' Completely arbitrary, and the Jews were subject to this Wealth Tax. Most of them went bankrupt because they couldn't sell their belongings, they couldn't sell their property during wartime in 1942 and many Jews had to go in 1942, to the Eastern region of Turkey to a stone quarry to break stones. It wasn't a concentration camp. It wasn't a death camp, but the people who went there, 90 percent were Jews, 10 percent were Armenians and Greeks, mainly it was against the Jews to show to the Nazis that they were not tolerating the Jews in Turkey when the Nazis were killing them all over Europe. So, this went on for about nine months, the Wealth Tax. This is an imprint on the Jewish mind in Turkey tremendously. The Wealth Tax destroyed the belief and the confidence that Jews had in the new Turkish republic. That's why, right after Israel's foundation in 1948, about 50,000 Jews left Turkey to go to Israel, and they are mainly established in the south of Tel Aviv and everywhere.

When I grew up, there were about 25,000, 30,000 Jews in Turkey but we had our hospital, we had our newspaper, we had our clubs, youth clubs and all that; we still could marry with other Jews – you could have enough Jewish partners and all that. Now, unfortunately, the Jews in Turkey have declined to about 11,000. Of course, in the past 10 years, with rising anti-Israelism, antisemitism, many Jews have migrated to France, Israel mainly, of course, North America and Britain, and also Germany, quite a few to Germany. So, this is probably one of the last important Jewish communities in the Islamic world.

### **Raya Brody**

I think, like it or not, over the years people either became Israeli and immersed in Israeli culture or British or wherever they are and the whole issue of being Sephardi has taken a very back step. I think, maybe, now with Brexit, people suddenly are going to be discovering their Sephardi roots because I've heard of people who are applying in Israel and even here in the UK for a Sephardic passport and suddenly that's coming to the fore. I think until then I don't know how many people raised their children in Ladino. I think there is less and less who do. I didn't. My main concern was to raise my children speaking Hebrew. They obviously knew English but I wanted them to speak Hebrew so Ladino wasn't a consideration. I think that's part of the sad story. It's like dying as far as I'm concerned. To be honest, a truly Sephardi living being was my grandmother. I think she was the last one. My father over the years, you know, moved on. And so, we did so.