

## **Ladino – excerpts from oral history interviews made during the Discovering and Documenting England's Lost Jews project**

### **Raya Brody**

But both my grandfather, who came from Turkey, and my grandmother, who came from Bulgaria, spoke Ladino in their homes. So, my grandparents spoke Ladino between them and my father was raised purely on Ladino. He obviously learned over the years other languages but his mother tongue was Ladino and, when the grandchildren were raised, at least with the grandmother, that was Ladino as well.

Although I have to say when some of the words that are in Ladino, which came from Hebrew, you wouldn't say it's Hebrew, you will recognize there is some but it's not proper Hebrew. My grandmother used say kaparatavonot,<sup>1</sup> in Hebrew Kaparat Avonot meaning it's a proper word, two words in Hebrew, but for her, she used to pronounce it differently. And she never, not always understood what she was saying to me was really Hebrew. But again, only when you learn Hebrew, you start to recognize what words in Ladino are Hebrew originated and what are Spanish originated.

One word in Spanish, another one in Hebrew or two words in Hebrew, but pronounced in a way that you don't necessarily would think it's Hebrew, but it is. And some words that are Spanish, a version of Spanish. It wasn't the normal Spanish and I never realized that until I was 14-year-old and started again, when I started speaking Spanish, I realized there was differences but couldn't understand why, and only when I was 14-year-old, I understood it. We flew from Brazil to Portugal, on our way home to Israel, 14 hours flight, and someone sitting near me was a lady. And she said to me, oh, I teach. I think she was a professor of Spanish from the Academy in Spain or something like that.

That was many, many years ago. And I explained to her where I came from. She said she was very interested in hearing my story. So, for 14 hours, I told her a lot about my family. And she told me that there are studies being done, and that was many years ago in Spain, about Ladino and from non-Jewish people because they wanted ---. I asked her, why is it someone who is not Jewish would be interested in Ladino and she told me that, for people who specialise in languages like she did, it was Ladino that preserved the Spanish of the Middle Ages. So, by me talking to her, and when I was 14 I knew Ladino more than I do now, she was like she's saying to me, I was talking to her like someone who used to live in the Middle Ages. Because Spanish, like most languages, have evolved over the years. So, what you speak today in Spain, is not a same way you spoke. Ladino preserved, so some of the words I use, which were Spanish originated, were actually the words that were used in the Middle Ages, and she wanted me to speak that so she could actually evaluate, you know, and appreciate, like going back in time. So, there is a difference between Spanish of today

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<sup>1</sup> Kaparat – meaning atonement, Avonot – sins.

and Ladino. And it's not only the fact that there's Hebrew in Ladino, it's the words as well, are actually different. Some of the words are different.

### **Haim Algranati**

It's a language that encompasses a lot of mystical, kind of like terminology and like, [section in Ladino] it's the wheel of soul, it's reincarnation, it's all-encompasses in one sentence, and that was the norm, that's how they spoke, I mean, like a lot of sentences were related to the soul, to way deeper than the just normal kind of, communications of "Pass me the water." I mean like I only ask for "We'll meet next year.", so it's [Ladino]... you know like it gives you a whole sentence.

### **Ralf Arditti**

Ladino was not spoken in our house so much. It's interesting because my father and my mother spoke excellent Ladino but, right after the war, there was a movement towards French speakers, speaking families, French which was considered to be more prestigious, [with] more international connections. Ladino was identified with the lower echelons of the Jewish society – with people who were more like peddlers or small shopkeepers and all that, and who spoke Turkish with an accent that you find out they were Jews, whereas the French speaking Jews did not speak Turkish with an accent. They spoke proper Turkish. My father spoke excellent Turkish, as well as five other languages – he was really multi-lingual. but amongst themselves, they spoke Ladino when they didn't want me and my sister to find out about what was going on. They spoke with us in French. Of course, for us to understand what was going on – what secret was going on – we had to understand Ladino as well. So that's how I learned Ladino and over time, I understand Ladino quite well. The problem is that I don't speak Ladino because I never had the opportunity of speaking in the family. That was the separation between Ladino and French-speakers: French-speakers were more high-brow than the Ladino-speakers, and all that.

By the way, Ladino made a comeback in the past 15, 20 years in Turkey. How did it make a comeback? The Spaniards, 25 years ago, suddenly find out that there is a big Spanish-speaking diaspora amongst the Sephardi Jews – not only in Turkey, in Greece, in Israel, also in South America. And, especially after Franco, they wanted to connect and Ladino once again became, in Turkey also, a vibrant language – so much so that the local Jewish newspaper, which is basically Turkish, has got a Ladino page, a very very proper, very well made Ladino page, called 'Amanaser' and Ladino is now making some sort of a comeback, but unfortunately I don't speak Ladino very well.

But I will sing for you a song in Ladino, a Pesach song. It's called "*Ken Supiese.*" And it goes like this.

*Ken supiese y entendiense?*

*Alabar al Dió kriense*

*Kualo es el uno*  
*Uno es el Kriador*  
*Baruch Hu Baruch shemo!*  
*Ken supiese y entendiense?*  
*Alabar al Dió kriense*  
*Kualo son los dos?*  
*Dos Moshe y Aharon*  
*Uno es el Kriador*  
*Baruch Hu Baruch shemo!*  
*Ken supiese y entendiense?*  
*Alabar al Dió kriense*  
*Kualo son los tres?*  
*Tres nuestros padres son*  
*Dos Moshe y Aharon*  
*Uno es el Kriador*  
*Baruch Hu Baruch shemo!*

It goes like that. Quite long for about ten minutes. Let me explain to you in English what it means. It says, *Ken supiese y entendiense?* – Who knows and understands? *Alabar al Dió kriense* – Praise to God who created, so it's *God* who understands, it's *God* who hears and understands.

And it says, *Kualo es el uno* – What is One? *Uno es el Kriador*, the Creator; then it goes, *Baruch Hu Baruch shemo! Praised be His Name.*

And then, *Kualo son los dos?* Who are the two? *Dos Moshe y Aharon.*

And then, *Kualo son los tres?* Who are the three? *Tres nuestros padres son* – Our three fathers. So it goes throughout, until 11, 12, 13, and all that] and it goes quicker and quicker because to finish the song, you've got to be quick, really; otherwise, it will take a long time and the children become hungry at Pesach, they want to eat!