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Sprache und Kultur

SPRACH- UND KULTURKONTAKTE
IN EUROPAS MITTE.
STUDIEN ZUR SLAWISTIK
UND GERMANISTIK 7

Andrzej Kątny / Izabela Olszewska /
Aleksandra Twardowska (eds.)

Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Language Miscellanea



PETER LANG

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The collection of articles chosen by the editors presents a broad variety of issues connected with Jewish languages (Judeo-Spanish, Yiddish) and co-territorial languages used by Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews in different places and periods. Thus, the book contains both strictly linguistic and sociolinguistic descriptions (including the aspects of evaluating language, language in contact or linguistic identity), the presentation of languages in literary works (and their translations) from different periods, as well as lexicographical and cultural observations. This thematic variety shows opportunities for the research into the languages of both Jewish groups and inspires other scientific projects in this field.

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Herausgegeben von
Andrzej Kątny und Stefan Michael Newerkla

Band 7



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Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available online at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Reviewed by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Michail L. Kotin,
David Malcolm, Ivana Vučina Simović, Krinka Vidaković-Petrov

Published with financial support from the University of Gdańsk
(Institute of German, J.G. Herder Foundation) and the Nicolaus
Copernicus University in Toruń (Departemnt of Balkan Studies,
Faculty of Languages)

ISSN 2192-7170

E-ISBN 978-3-631-77514-1 (E-PDF)

E-ISBN 978-3-631-77515-8 (EPUB)

E-ISBN 978-3-631-77516-5 (MOBI)

DOI 10.3726/b14945

PETER LANG



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Peter Lang – Berlin · Bern · Bruxelles ·
New York · Oxford · Warszawa · Wien

This publication has been peer reviewed.

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Jonna Rock

Sarajevo Sephardim and Their Linguistic Identification¹

Abstract: The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent rise of national states in the Balkans led to an increase in exposure to Western-style modernization and ultimately to two World Wars. This article highlights issues pertaining to linguistic identification within the Sephardic community in Sarajevo today. The article recalls memories of Sarajevo Jews from the post-World War II Yugoslav state (1945–1992). The text clarifies which language the Sephardi Jews opted for after the Yugoslav experiment collapsed in the 1990s, a period that saw the beginning of the disintegration of Serbo-Croatian as a language, at least in a sociolinguistic sense. Moreover, this article explores the interviewees' conceptions of Judeo-Spanish, the language that was spoken by Jews in Sarajevo until the Holocaust. The aim of the article is to analyze how ideological preconditions have affected identity formation as it expresses itself in linguistic behavior.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, Contemporary Sarajevo Sephardic Culture, Nationalistic language Ideology, Language Use

1 Introduction and Empirical Analysis

In this case study of the Sephardim in Sarajevo, I first elaborate on my empirical analysis, my methodology and the key research question. Thereafter I provide an historical context, and the relevance of the findings of this research. I then concentrate on the Jews in the second iteration of Yugoslavia and in present-day Sarajevo – followed by my empirical findings.

In terms of sources, apart from secondary literature, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with Sarajevo Sephardim of different generations in April 2015 and in March 2016. Explaining my understanding of the deceptively straightforward term ‘multigenerational’ is only prudent. The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1990: 37) maintains that a generation is a group of persons whose formative years have been shaped by same or similar major experiences, big changes and events. It is therefore not about one’s age *per se*, but about the social experiences that are decisive for certain persons – for example, in the case

1 This work was supported by the Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Scholarship Fund.

of my subjects that these individuals have all lived in one or more different political systems that were or are in force within the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Of course, the individuals of a generation can hold different interpretations of the same experiences because they (the individuals) do not necessarily comprise a homogenous group.

The analysis of my interviews is not about objective ‘facts’ – which in turn are also more or less constructed – but rather about memory and the role of memory in creating meaning (cf. Zahavi 2003: 9, 42). In this connection, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1985) writes that it is by constructing narratives that people contribute to a process of culture building and that by the same token a personal identity is a ‘narrative’ of the self. I interpret perceptions of identity from a phenomenological viewpoint and the goal is for me to narrate about how my interview subjects actually conceive of the world around them, rather than interpolating their experience from ready-made theories, in order to produce new knowledge. Writing about national identity practices among Jews living in Germany today, the sociologist Judith Gerson (2001: 180) asks in what way do people experience identity formation. This question may imply that we are constructing cultural patterns independently. With hindsight, however, we know that values can be constructed by ‘others’ and therefore imposed upon the individual’s process of self-formation.

Needless to say, I can describe an identity conception of my informant but I cannot know how it comes that his/her conception is what it is, in other words, I cannot reconstruct – at least not fully – the motivation(s) behind his/her behavior. Nevertheless I endeavor to map both spoken and unspoken parameters for identity conceptions that frame interviewees’ narratives. The reason for this is to identify any latent content of the statements whenever possible, and to demonstrate the general as well as the specific structure of the subjects’ conceptions of identity.

2 Methodology and Research Question

I have chosen a qualitative approach anchored in the method of participant observation to be able to grasp more fully wide spectrum of identity conceptions among my subjects. My search for interviewees began when I contacted the Sarajevo Jewish Community Centre – specifically its president, Jakob Finci, and its non-residential rabbi, Eliezer Papo, in 2013. I am aware that because I sought informants through a Jewish institution, they would most probably identify as Jews. Still, I want to find out how such interviewees understand

Jewish identification. Moreover, I do not assume that because such subjects have Jewish roots, they affirm Jewish identity *a priori*. My attitude towards the interview situation was characterized by openness and flexibility. I did not anticipate any particular research results and did not direct the informants to select or otherwise furnish ready-made answers. I conducted the interviews in Bosnian with the use of video camera or iPhone. A local translator and two cameramen assisted me during the interviews. When I needed clarification, I communicated with the interviewees in English. One of my interlocutors, Yehuda Kolonomos, had lived in Oslo, Norway for 12 years so he spoke Norwegian and I Swedish (my mother tongue). I informed all interviewees about the research and its objectives, and they freely decided whether they wanted to participate. Nowadays, Judeo-Spanish is hardly spoken among Sarajevo Jews, which is why the interviews were not conducted in Judeo-Spanish.

With regard to the reference group in Sarajevo, I assume that because of the early immigration from Spain took place long ago, in the wake of 1492, the first language of my subjects is Serbo-Croatian or another ex-Serbo-Croatian language and not Castilian or some other Iberian language, I also suppose that the issue of language choice became vital for my subjects when Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s and establishing one's relationship to the emergent post-Yugoslav politics became imperative. The Sephardim, who had been classified as Yugoslavs in Yugoslavia, had to build a new identity from predetermined labels and categorizations that the successor states presented to them. I therefore asked my interviewees:

What language do they choose – considering the fact that they do not follow the usual language division between Orthodox Christians (who often speak Serbian), Catholics (Croatian), and Muslims (Bosnian)?

Underlying this question is my suspicion that an individual's language choice is most likely a core element in his or her identity creation, and is presumably linked to the subject's notions of what it means to be both the member of a religious and ethnic minority as well as a citizen alongside members of the ethnic and religious majorities.

Moreover, the Sarajevo Sephardim have long reflected the complex relationship between language, religion and ethnicities in their own loyalties. Therefore, they seem to be uniquely positioned to analyze the contemporary language situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the three highly intercomprehensible varieties of a single regional language has transformed into three distinct national standards (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian).

3 A Historical Overview

In 1492, the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella forced Sephardic Jews to either convert to Christianity or to leave Spain. The expulsion in Spain resulted in some 60,000² Sephardim moving to the Ottoman Empire – especially to Constantinople and Salonica. By the second half of the 16th century, they started to migrate to northern parts of the Ottoman Empire, i.e., to for instance cities like Belgrade, Bitola, Sarajevo and Sofia (see Benbassa/Rodrigue 2000: 7–10; Kerkkänen 2001: 24). The Sephardim brought with them the Romance languages that they had spoken in Spain before their expulsion. In their new, exilic environments, this language developed into Judeo-Spanish (see Astrologo-Fonzi 1992: 128).

The Ottoman Empire did not fall until after the World War I when the Turkish Republic was established. In 1878 Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina still remained nominally Ottoman, but under the terms of the Congress of Berlin, Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by Austria-Hungary (which in 1908 annexed the province, thus *de jure* ending the Ottoman rule). During the Austro-Hungarian occupation from 1878 to 1918, Ashkenazi Jews emigrated, although to a lesser extent than the Sephardim. Under Austria-Hungary, many Sephardim underwent a period of westernization with the standardization of education through the Alliance Israélite Universelle.³ However, this process did not benefit the population equally, since there was no Alliance school in Sarajevo, as well as other places (see Kerenji 2008: 32–33).

Moreover, the majority of the Sephardic elite in Austria-Hungary sent their children to study in f. e. Vienna. The westernization of life during this time also prompted the Sephardic communities to switch to the majority national languages and/or to French (also because of the influence of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in some centers), which contributed to that Judeo-Spanish being spoken less. In Bosnia German was introduced in Jewish schools along with Serbo-Croatian so that the shift to a state school would be easier (see Benbassa/Rodrigue 2000: 91, 151).

2 According to other sources more than 100,000 Sephardim came to the Ottoman Empire, i.e., between 100,000 and 200,000 (Birri-Tomovska 2012: 35).

3 The Alliance Israélite Universelle was a Paris-based Jewish organization founded in 1860. One of the missions of the organization was to promote a more advanced and Westernized Jewish educational system with French as the language of instruction (Birri-Tomovska 2012: 89, 152).

Ashkenazi Jews in Zagreb promoted the Yugoslav Zionist movement after World War I. They had been educated in the West, in Berlin and Vienna, and imported Zionist ideology into Yugoslavia in order to respond to growing antisemitism in Europe (see Birri-Tomovska 2012: 163). Zionism was essential in uniting the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews of Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, only 1.5 % of Yugoslav Jewry had left for Palestine by the time of World War II (see Kerckänen 2001: 23, 27). The reason why so few Jews emigrated to Palestine was possibly because they were treated well in Yugoslavia. Immigration to Palestine increased during the 1930s, but it was only in 1940 that the first anti-Jewish laws were adopted (see Birri-Tomovska 2012: 163, 169).

During World War II, Germans and their Slavic collaborators killed more than 80 % of Yugoslav Jews, some 82,500 persons. Before the war, the Jewish community of Sarajevo had 10,000 Jewish members, 10 % of the city's total population. Only 1,400 Jews survived the war (see Greble 2011: 12).

After the World War II, six major *aliyot*⁴ took place between 1948 and 1952. After the first two *aliyot*, Yugoslav Jewry had already been reduced by 60 %. On emigrating to Israel, Yugoslav Jews lost their property ownership rights. However, many Yugoslav immigrants were not happy with their lives in Israel and decided to return to Yugoslavia (see Ivanković 2011: 150).

4 State of the Art

A great deal of research on the Sephardim has dealt with linguistic aspects, more precisely with Judeo-Spanish, that some Sephardi communities preserve until today. Among the many topics that have been explored are phenomena of language contact, language mixing as well as attrition and obsolescence (see Astrologo-Fonzi 1992; Shewmon Seitz 2008). In the present study of the Sarajevo Sephardim I shift the focus from the dominant research paradigm (i.e., Romance Studies and contact linguistics) to the linguistic and sociolinguistic status of former Serbo-Croatian.

Questions of linguistic and ethnic identity formation in European minority groups have been studied in different settings. In this section, I will present a few illustrative cases drawn from several recent studies in order to shed light on the related phenomena that I explore among Sarajevo Jews of loyalty towards the

4 When one immigrates to Israel it is termed to go on *aliyah* from the so called diaspora to Israel.

‘mother tongue’⁵, ‘vitality’⁶, and ‘revival’⁷. The role of a ‘linguistic nationalism ideology’⁸ is central in all cases as national preconditions clearly affect the linguistic identity formation.

The shift in language from Arvanítika to the national Greek language was based, among other things, on the widely-held cultural assumption that Greek is the power code and that non-standardized and oral Arvanítika is no longer a pure but rather a bastardized language (see Tsitsipis 1998: 18, 120, 122). In her classic work on language death, the linguist Nancy Dorian (1981: 4) focuses on the fisher-folk’s East Sutherland dialect of Scottish Gaelic having English as its ‘competitor’, i.e. a language of wider currency. This case resembles the previous in the way that it highlights a generational language shift from the low status Gaelic to the high status English (see Dorian 1981: 40).

Le Page/Tabouret-Keller (1985: 5) highlight three shared characteristics of the many different Caribbean communities and their descendants in London. Firstly, the vernacular of these groups is stigmatized in relation to the majority language. Secondly the group members’ language use is unpredictable and thus different from that of the monolingual speakers; and thirdly, the linguistic standards of the Caribbeans and their progeny are ‘in the making,’ and therefore controversial. The result of these dynamics is a generational split: the elderly tend to be linguistic nationalists whereas the younger generation relies on other categories (Creole, Mixed and Belizien) (see Le Page/Tabouret-Keller 1985: 220–221).

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- 5 The generally accepted definition of the mother tongue – i.e. the language spoken in an individual’s home – is obviously not always accurate (since the language spoken at home not always is the first one) and this is why first and second languages might be preferable.
 - 6 With a loyalty towards the ‘mother tongue’, I have the liveliness of the mother language in mind, i.e. the level of spokenness and various generations’ different competencies. The first time I heard Michael Studemund-Halévy speak about Sephardi and Ashkenazi culture (Wrocław, 09.05.2016) he quoted sentences from Isaac Bashevis Singer’s speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1978: “Yiddish may be a dying language but it is the only language I know well. Yiddish is my mother language and a mother is never really dead”. In this article, I approach the concept of the vitality of a mother language with a similar attitude, i.e. that the dying of a mother language is a long and transformative process and not the same as a language that no longer exists.
 - 7 A revitalization of a language is typically a process that aims to rescue a dying language as in the case of Welsh.
 - 8 A ‘linguistic nationalistic ideology’ represents a meeting point of nationalism and language, wherein nationalistic ideology is formed by language (Stukenbrock 2005: 35).

According to the political scientist Burcu Ellis (2003: 2, 4--5), the Şehirli-Ottoman way of living was a unique and alternative situation where identity formation is not reducible to the assertion of any minority element (the Albanian or the Turk). The author describes how multiple Muslim identities face a challenge from the growth of nationalism, since these identities were not primarily *national*, and nationalism dictates that the national identity, one associated with the Christian majority, be manifested and valued above all others (see Ellis 2003: 89).

In light of the cases I have discussed above, my hypothesis with regard to linguistic choice in ethnic identity formation is the following: despite a shift to a second language, the first language is not necessarily dead but takes a new form related to self-identification and to the politics of ethnicity. In the context of my case study of the Sephardim, this transformation, can be explicit by the fact that the reference group may refer to its (second) language as 'our language' in opposition to the government-furnished, formal language classification that is at hand.

5 The Jews in the Second Yugoslavia (1945–1992)

In Tito's Yugoslavia (1945–1992), the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia – a group of 42 Jewish communities – was re-established in 1945 (see Kerkkänen 2001: 42).⁹ More than 90 % of married Jews in Yugoslavia were parties to mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews (see Kerkkänen 2001: 169), and after World War II intermarriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were also common (whereas before the war intermarriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were rare) (see Birri-Tomovska 2012: 183, 187). To be sure, Kerkkänen (2001: 49) maintains that intermarriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, were unusual even after the war, and that it was only the earlier,

9 In the second Yugoslavia's constitution, there were two official categories of nationality: *narod* and *narodnost*. In the constitutions of the federal republics there was another category: *etničke zajednice*. *Narod* were people from one of the Yugoslavian republics, i.e. Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims, Serbs and Slovenes. Serbs and Croats had two homelands in Serbia/Croatia and in Bosnia. *Narodnost* were national minorities whose 'home' was situated outside of Yugoslavia, the largest being Albanians and Hungarians (see Ellis 2003: 69). *Etničke zajednice* were those groups of people considered geographically scattered, i.e. Jews, Greeks, Russians and others (Blum 2002: 29). The categories of nationality attributed to these groups were, however, shifting and the Romani people were recognized as a *narodnost* in 1981 both in the Bosnian, Croatian and Montenegrin republics (Matasović 1989: 119).

official distinction between the two ethnic communities that Yugoslavia's Jews discontinued after 1945.

Almost all Yugoslav Jews lived in urban centers (as in Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb). Less than 5 % lived in rural areas where organized communities did not exist (see Birri-Tomovska 2012: 149). Because of their concentration in the big cities, most Jews were active in trade and banking rather than in agriculture (see Birri-Tomovska 2012: 148; Ivanković 2011: 132). Additionally, regime-loyal Jews held high positions in the state-administration, as diplomats and in the army (see Kerkkänen 2001: 98). Tito's right-hand man, Moša Pijade, who was Jewish, came to function as a middleman between Jews and Yugoslav authorities. Pijade was engaged in migration issues and ensured that it became easier to migrate from Yugoslavia than it was from Eastern European countries (see Hofmeisterová 2016: 270; Kerkkänen 2001: 100). According to Ivanković (2011: 134), the Yugoslav authorities were supportive of Zionism. After the foundation of the Israeli state, Yugoslavia was one of the first countries to officially recognize Israel (see Ivanković 2011: 150).

It should be noted, too, that discussions were ongoing whether the Yugoslav Jewish federation should be considered ethnic or religious (see Hofmeisterová 2016: 271–272, 275; Ivanković 2011: 134). These debates prompted the government to issue a new law on the legal status of religious communities in 1953. It granted the right to conduct religious activities but political activities by religious communities were not allowed. Consequently, the Jewish Federation's collaboration with Israel was suddenly problematic (see Kerkkänen 2001: 89). In the same year, the Communist Party also promulgated a new law emphasizing that atheism was one of its basic principles. This meant, of course, that one could not be a member of a religious organization and the Communist Party at the same time. In order to get around this problem, the Jewish Federation deleted the word religious and renamed its Jewish constituency as a national minority instead. A separate religious section of the Federation was founded that came under the law on religion. Moreover, the new atheist principle of the Communist Party – stated as anti-religious clause introduced in the constitution – pushed Jewish members of the party to boycott Jewish holidays (see Hofmeisterová 2016: 278). According to Ivanković (2011: 144) however, religious activities (such as the services in the synagogue) were never explicitly discouraged. Although, in reality religious practice was considered taboo and as a result many Orthodox Jews migrated to Israel (see Ivanković 2011: 143; Kerkkänen 2001: 69).

On one hand, one could argue that Jews were treated well in the second iteration of the Yugoslavian state, by the mere fact that they were equal to others by law; in other words, Jews did not have any special status or constitute a group set apart in

order to be protected (i.e., by being recognized as an official minority with special governmental support). As the political scientist Dejan Jović (2011: 122) writes: “The Yugoslav system was based on the idea that nobody could be treated as a minority, but as equal to the majority” (Jović 2011: 122). On the other hand, one may argue on the basis of the large numbers of Jews who decided to leave the country and undertake *aliyah* from the 1940s to the 1960s, that the second Yugoslavia in fact did not present such good conditions for Yugoslav Jews (see Ivanković 2011: 150).

6 The Jews in Sarajevo Today

During the siege of Sarajevo, which lasted throughout the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia, the Sarajevo Jewish Community organized eight convoys for people to leave the city. The organizers were very welcoming to every person who wanted to leave, regardless of his or her religion. During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, a majority of Yugoslav Jewish Community members fled to Israel as well as to other countries (e.g. Canada, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom). The evacuation was financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Kerckänen 2001: 177; Kerenji 2017: 246).¹⁰ When the war in Bosnia ended in November 1995 (this was when the Dayton peace agreement was reached) many Bosnian Jews who had fled to Israel returned to Sarajevo. They were often highly educated, though often could not find work in Israel. Moreover, it was expensive to live there, and many of them still had apartments in Sarajevo to which they could return.¹¹

After the Yugoslav wars, the Yugoslav Jewish confederation emerged as five separate entities in Croatia (approximately 1,700 community members), Serbia (approximately 3,200 community members), Bosnia-Herzegovina (approximately 1,000 community members), Slovenia (approximately 100 community members) and Macedonia (approximately 200 community members). In Montenegro, there were only 25 Jews. They were registered in Belgrade’s Jewish Community (Kerckänen 2001: 186). From 2012 on, there has been an independent Jewish community in Montenegro with around 100 members.

The Jews in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as other small minorities in the country, faced the special situation of having three major ethnic groups dominating the country: Muslims, Serbs and Croats. In Sarajevo however in 2003, Muslims constituted 80.5 % of the city’s total population, the Serbs constituted 7.5 % and the Croats 12 % (Sundhaussen 2014: 352). Therefore, Serbs and Croats

10 The information was also confirmed by Eli Tauber from the Institute for Researching Crimes Against Humanity during the interview with him on the 4th of April 2017.

11 The information was given by Jakob Finci on the 12th of December 2016.

were (and remain) clearly minorities in Sarajevo, at least in terms of numbers, too. The Muslims, Serbs and Croats are however recognized as the constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina whereas Jews and other official minorities are 'Others'. Post-Yugoslavia it was impossible for Jews to continue declaring themselves 'Yugoslavs'. According to the political scientist Ari Kerkkänen (2001: 194), Jews' identification either with only one of the post-Yugoslav constituent Muslim, Serb or Croat peoples was not an interesting option. Thus, after the fall of Communism in the 1990s, according to Kerkkänen (2001: 109), young Jews started to declare themselves Jews.¹²

According to the 2016 Bosnian Questionnaire – that is requested by the European Commission to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the preparation of the Opinion on the application of Bosnia Herzegovina for membership of the European Union – information from the State Council for National Minorities in Bosnia must be provided regarding the number of people belonging to minority groups according to the latest census in 2013. Only recently has the number been made public. There were 282 declared Jews. The paradox of this outcome of the survey is that the organized Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina has 880 members in total.¹³ Jakob Finci, in his personal statement, comments in this regard:

“We have a list of Jewish Community members in all six communities in Bosnia. All together we are around 880 people. Even nowadays [like in former Yugoslavia when Jews declared themselves Yugoslavs] Jews hide that they are Jewish. On the 2013' census, we were 282 Jews – because why be a minority if you can be the majority? Especially, having in mind, that everything here is divided into the three ethnic groups [Bosnians, Croats and Serbs]. You can hardly reach any position in the government, in the economy and so forth, if you say you belong to a minority.”

Currently, there is no law on Return of Property in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finci thinks the Bosnian government should follow the example of Serbia by adopting such a law.¹⁴ Since 2006, the Serbian law, requires that the Serbian

12 According to the 1995 Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a distinction between the three “constituent Bosniac (Bošnjaci), Serb, and Croat peoples’ and the ‘others’”. The ‘others’ are members of ethnic minorities and persons who do not declare affiliation with any particular group. As a matter of fact, only persons declaring affiliation with a ‘constituent people’ are entitled to run for the House of Peoples and the Presidency. Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be a candidate for the membership of the European Union until the constitution is amended.

13 The information was given by Jakob Finci on the 6th of June 2017.

14 The information was given by Jakob Finci on the 12th of December 2016.

government gives the Belgrade Jewish Community 950.000 Euro every year (with the first installment in 2017) as compensation for the Community's property-losses during World War II (cf. Ivanković 2009: 73).

There are no Jewish day schools and kindergartens and therefore it is the private educational and recreational activities organized by the official Jewish Community in Sarajevo, all of them extracurricular, that function as a Sephardic hub.¹⁵ "La Benevolencia"¹⁶ in Sarajevo of today is a non-governmental organization based in the same premises as the Jewish Community and which is operating in close cooperation with the Jewish Community. One of "La Benevolencia's" humanitarian projects is to provide support to Bosnian Holocaust survivors.

7 The Second Yugoslavia and Linguistic Sephardic Identification in Sarajevo Today

I posed pre-formulated questions to my interviewees, but also asked relevant follow up questions that were spontaneous. In this way, the pre-formulated questions served more as an initial basis for discussion and a way for my interviewees to freely elaborate on them, rather than as strict boundaries of the responses. The interviewees belong to three generations. First, there are those who had lived in Yugoslavia and had lived most of their lives there. Secondly, I spoke to people who had lived in both Yugoslavia and Bosnia and, finally, to people who had lived only in Bosnia. I conducted most interviews at the Sarajevo Jewish Community facilities or at the Viennese Café in Hotel Evropa, also in Sarajevo. I spoke to three Community members under the age of 30. One of these, Tea Abinun, was born in Sarajevo in 1998 and is a M.A. student in music in Sarajevo. She can speak English, Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian-Montenegrin and a little Spanish. She has no self-reported connection to Israel. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity, and that her mother tongue is Bosnian.

My second source, Vladimir Andrlje, was born in Sarajevo in 1986 and is a coordinator of humanitarian and cultural activities; he has completed a B.A. degree in music in Sarajevo. He speaks English, Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian-Montenegrin and a little German and Spanish. He has been to Israel once in his life for a weeklong leadership-program. In the latest census in 2013, he declared

15 The information was given by Jakob Finci on the 6th of January 2017.

16 The educational, cultural and humanitarian association "La Benevolencia" was established in 1892 by well situated Sarajevo Jews who wanted to support talented students who were not able to afford their studies.

himself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that his mother tongue is Bosnian.

My third source, A.A., did not wish to be named. She was born in Sarajevo in 1994, and is a M.A. student of musicology in Sarajevo. She can speak English, Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian, and has no self-reported connection to Israel. In the 2013 census, she declared herself as Jewish by religion and Croatian by ethnicity, and noted that her mother tongue is Bosnian.

All families of my three sources from this generation lost property during World War II that was never returned to them or compensated for. Statements from this generation younger than 30 years old show that they are amused when they speak about the emerged national languages. It seems in this meta-lingual way that they have developed transnational or translanguing views on the national language (i.e. their mother language). Tea Abinun expresses the following:

“My parents are nostalgic. They wish Tito would still be alive. According to them the times were better then [...] And they still call themselves Yugoslavs. Of course, they also identify as Bosnian and Herzegovinians but in a broader sense they are still Yugoslavians. Our parents spoke Serbo-Croatian with us and they still call their language Serbo-Croatian but we say Bosnian, or Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian [Laugh].”

This girl from the younger generation says she speaks ‘Bosnian’ or ‘Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian’ because she was raised in the new Sarajevo. However, at the same time she laughs when she talks about the new language-classifications. Her attitude, to my mind, reflects identity perceptions ‘beyond the Sephardic community’ meaning, that she is willing to look in- and outside of the community to construct her concept of a linguistic identity. This is of course *novel* that this younger generation can choose a language or choose to laugh whereas their parents did not have any choice and automatically spoke Serbo-Croatian in its Bosnian-Herzegovinian sub-variant. A.A. from this same generation expresses:

“It’s funny to me because you don’t know what language you’re actually talking. My parents ironically say: ‘Bosnian’ what should that be? It’s Serbo-Croatian! They’re confusing me with all this. But logically: If I live in Bosnia, I speak Bosnian.”

Again, data from this generation younger than 30 years old show that the Sephardim have internalized the official national Bosnian language-classification. When discussing the significance of language more broadly, Vladimir Andrlje is giving voice to his powerlessness in relation to Ladino-maintenance, i.e. regarding the ability to learn Judeo-Spanish since opportunities do not exist. At the same time, there is also a lack of interest among the younger generations for the Sephardic language, since it has no function in the society:

(Vladimir Andrlje) “Very, very few people. I think that there are only two or three elderly people in Bosnia who speak Ladino, and I also think that this language will become extinct in Bosnia.”

The same person clarified in a Facebook-message on another occasion (2015–04–05) under what premises Spanish, not Judeo-Spanish, was taught in the Sarajevo Jewish Community:

“We were 8 people aged 22–50 years old that attended a Spanish course at the Jewish community. It was between November 2013 and July 2014 but the group fell apart so we couldn’t continue.”

Tea Abinun comments:

“My grandfather spoke Ladino and of course we must work for the preservation of Ladino, but nobody speaks it and it’s impossible to study Ladino.”

According to this youngest generation there is moreover a need for separation between the other groups of people. The Bosnian language politics reflects this need. At the same time, A.A. expresses a wish not to hurt anyone or to point the Muslim influence and dominance in the Bosnian language out:

(Tea Abinun) “Shmahala instead of mahala [...] There is a need of separation for peoples and their languages and yes, yes, yes, certainly an Islamization is taking place in the Bosnian language!”

(A.A.) “I would not call it an Islamization just because more Turkish originated words are coming up. I think Bosnian has always had these words. People coming from outside Sarajevo, from Mostar and other places come with an accent and a different mentality. Anyway, it doesn’t sound nice to say that Bosnian is Islamized or to point at this. Actually, in Serbian there is also many Turkish words.”

(Vladimir Andrlje) “Croats and Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina are neglecting the existence of the Bosnian language, politicians, even ordinary people. Bosnia-Herzegovina exists now as an independent country so why wouldn’t we have the Bosnian language as well?”

My interviewees between the ages of 30 and 55 appeared to demonstrate a more ambiguous relationship towards the mother tongue. Yehuda Kolonomos was born in Sarajevo in 1968 and is a university lecturer who has completed a M.A. degree in music in Oslo. He speaks English, Croatian, Macedonian, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Italian, Hebrew and Ladino. He has been in Israel a few times as a tourist. In the future, he would like to do *aliyah* and settle down in Israel. In the latest census in 2013, he declared himself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that his mother tongue is Croatian.

Igor Kožemjakin was born in Sarajevo in 1980, and is a counselor whose work involves ethnic-religious cooperation. He has completed one year of Jewish

Studies in Stockholm and has also studied law and economics in Sarajevo. He speaks English, Russian, Hebrew, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian-Montenegrin, Bulgarian and Macedonian. He made *aliyah* in 1994 and returned to Sarajevo 2001. In the latest census in 2013, he declared himself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that his mother tongues are Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian.

Tina Tauber was born in Sarajevo in 1982 and works as a tour guide. She completed one year of Jewish Studies in Stockholm and has studied English in Sarajevo. She speaks Hebrew, English, the Yugoslavian languages, and a little Russian. She made *aliyah* in 1992 and returned to Sarajevo in 2004. In the census in 2013, she described herself as Jewish by religion, Bosnian by ethnicity and that her mother tongues are Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian.

All my sources from this demographic bracket lost property during and after World War II that was never returned to them nor did they receive compensation.

Igor Kožemjakin makes preference to a Jewish experience in Yugoslavia and also a multifaceted relationship towards the mother tongue:

“My parents were really positive towards Yugoslavia. Life was easier with more social security. I was a pioneer. We were Yugoslavs with a Jewish background and we celebrated Jewish holidays at home. It’s difficult today to talk about a mother tongue [...] Judeo-Spanish¹⁷ was spoken at home when I was a child, not Ladino. My [...] very difficult question, knowing the fact that there have been linguistic disputes. I don’t know how to call it anymore [...] ‘mother language’. So, I speak Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. I really don’t know how to [...] Sarajevski (the ‘Sarajevo language’) would be the most appropriate name. Sarajevski.”

“For us it’s the question of how to call it. So we often call it the way the person we’re talking to is calling it. For me it’s one language but I would try to speak “our language”. That’s how I ask at the airport if I hear someone speak my language: Vi govornite naš jezik? [Do you speak our language?]”

“I am not a speaker of Ladino, unfortunately it’s a language which is falling out of use. Here in Sarajevo in particular this was a community where Ladino was spoken at homes, until the World War II. For example, my grandmother didn’t speak our language well enough, because her native language was ‘Djudeo-Espanjol’ Judeo-Spanish.”

17 Ladino has traditionally been characterized as the written language of Eastern Sephardim, and Judeo-Spanish the name of the spoken lingua franca. Nevertheless, in the interviews the reference group is not holding on to these traditional classifications but they use Ladino as a term for the spoken language, too.

Yehuda Kolonomos contemplates upon Yugoslavia:

“Because we Jews were living in Yugoslavia relatively free, nobody persecuted us because of our religious beliefs. Some religious communities did go through persecution, but we didn’t, ever. Yugoslavia was a country created on the basis of respect for the freedom of religion, at least nominally.

I was raised in a sort of a mixed marriage, where my mother was, let’s say, relatively neutral to the regime, and my father, being a Croat, didn’t think highly of it because of our property was nationalized after the World War II, so [...]”

When speaking of the mother tongue he reflects:

“Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina today claim that they speak the Croatian language, Serbs say that they speak Serbian and Bosniaks Bosnian. What happened there was a political division, which is clear to us locals, and maybe not so clear to foreigners. But all of us basically speak the same language. I don’t think there’s any difference but, of course, due to political reasons, and as someone coming from a Croat area, where Croats live, and where all of my neighbors and people around me say that they speak Croatian, I also belong to that [...] environment.

I didn’t use Ladino in real life, I understood a lot, almost all of it, and I know a lot of songs in Ladino which I learned when I was a child. But very few people use Ladino for speaking, so [...] Even those of us who live in our Jewish community and who can speak Ladino almost never use it to talk with each other.”

Tina Tauber thinks about the current language situation in Bosnia:

“Every day we learn a new word. I think we are going backwards. We talk like we used to talk and we’re going backwards in all aspects mentally [...] Back to the Ottoman Empire, maybe later.”

Other impressions of the language situation from this generation are the following:

“(Igor Kožemjakin) Lahko, mehko [instead of lako, meko] [...] I have no problem with this, the important thing is to understand each other. There are archaisms in Bosnian coming up. This wish and right to be a specific group is also related to the language [...] For me personally all three languages are one.

(Yehuda Kolonomos) I would rather call it individualization than islamization. Turkish people is a narod and not necessarily Islamic. I think it’s a political rather than religious process.”

Additionally, I spoke with three persons older than 55, who are members of the “Bohorete Women’s Club”¹⁸. One of them was Matilda Finci, who was born in

18 The “Bohorete Women’s Club” consists of approximately 20 members who meet once a week, on Tuesdays, in the facilities of the Jewish community to discuss current

Sarajevo in 1935 and she studied Romance Languages (French, Italian and Latin) in Sarajevo. In addition to Serbo-Croatian, she speaks French, Italian, Russian, Hebrew and a little Spanish and Ladino. She lived in Israel during the war from 1992 to 1999. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and stated that her mother tongue was Serbo-Croatian (this was not a given option, but she asked the person asking the questions to write Serbo-Croatian anyway). She lost property in 1948 that was never returned or given compensation for.

My second source, Erna Kaveson Debevec, was born in Sarajevo in 1933 and she studied law in Sarajevo. In addition to Bosnian, she speaks English, Spanish and Ladino. She has never lived in Israel, but has family there. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that her mother tongue is Bosnian. During the communist regime, her family lost property that was never returned or given compensation for. The state has recently sold her former property to a private person.

Finally, Laura Papo Ostojić, was born in Sarajevo in 1939 and studied architecture in Sarajevo. In addition to Serbo-Croatian, she speaks English as well, as a little French and Italian. She has been to Israel once to visit her two sons who lived there during the Bosnian war but who have come back to Sarajevo after the war. In the 2013 census, she declared herself as Jewish by religion and ethnicity and that her mother tongue is Serbo-Croatian. (This was not a given option but she asked the person asking the questions to write Serbo-Croatian anyway). Laura Papo Ostojić lost property in 1948. The property was never returned and she did not receive compensation.

Matilda Finci has the following perception:

“It was very positive in Yugoslavia. I saw Tito once outside Hotel Evropa. Socialism is a better system. We were all Yugoslavs. It was good because we all spoke the same language. I taught Serbo-Croatian [...]

Let me tell you an anecdote: My mom went to the market and bought [...] as she said: ‘I’ve bought Serbian cheese to make a pie.’ And my daughter said: ‘Granny, it’s not Serbian, you should say Serbo-Croatian’ because it was the name of the language.”

On the other hand, the same person says:

“I still regret that I didn’t learn the language from my mother and my stepfather who spoke Ladino Spanish at home. And I didn’t think that was something important. Can

happenings and to socialize with each other. The name of the club refers to Luna (Laura) Papo Bohoreta (1891–1942), who was a very productive Sarajevo-born feminist writer and playwright. She wrote her works in Judeo-Spanish and cared deeply about preserving the Sephardic culture.

you imagine that I didn't know, I was a child back then, I had no idea it was Spanish. I was thinking – God, how can they speak in this way in front of me, when they don't want me to hear something? They spoke Ladino at the time.

The important thing is to maintain the tradition and to maintain Ladino, that really valuable language. I mean, there are so many sayings, so much wisdom, so many [...] well [...] it's the linguistic culture [...]"

Erna Kaveson Debevec expresses:

"In socialist Yugoslavia we spoke Serbo-Croatian, went to school and learned that language, naturally, and spoke it while communicating with friends. But for traditional purposes, let's say prayers, or anything like that, we either used Hebrew, or Ladino, 'Djudeo-Espanjol', because there are some prayers which have been translated into Spanish. Otherwise, I'm telling you, during holidays we were speaking Serbo-Croatian. It's just that, I'm telling you, parents sometimes used to mix the languages [...]"

Laura Papo Ostojić points out:

"Ladino culture is very important. I can't explain [...] I would so very much like to know [...] It would be beautiful to know. Only my mother spoke Ladino with her Jewish friends, but not with me. We spoke Serbo-Croatian. Our parents were mixing Serbo-Croatian and Ladino at home. I know very little Ladino. 'Linda, querida mia'. My mum always said it to me. There are some phrases like that still left, but it's a pity I can't speak or that I've never studied the language."

Across the three generations, the master narrative is a romantic longing for ordinary life in the Second Yugoslavia and the values such as security, stability and oneness. Simultaneously (and contravening) they are longing for Ladino. In fact, the Yugoslav period that the interlocutors remember nostalgically – first hand or through their parents – is a period that simultaneously suppressed their Sephardic linguistic background – since opportunities to maintain the language did not exist. The 72-year old, already mentioned Jakob Finci contemplates in this regard:

"My grandmother spoke Judeo-Spanish. It was the secret language of the elderly. Yugoslavia was a society without religious feelings. It was a pink socialism and the state provided you with free education, good health care and an apartment. Was it efficient? The majority of us still speak Serbo-Croatian today [...]"

On the one hand, it seems like my interviewees have internalized their need to adjust so much that they do not recognize what has happened. On the other hand, their expressed grief and the mere conversation about their linguistic biographies and regarding the dying Sephardic language may provide them with a greater degree of self-understanding and the ability to grasp that they were linguistically discriminated.

8 Conclusion

Anderson's (2006) reflections upon the spread of nationalism are contradicted by the circumstance that nation-states are not necessarily homogenous in terms of cultural or ethnic affiliation (cf. Anderson 2006: 5–7; Hastings 1997: 3). The idea of mutually exclusive identities, i.e. that a person is either one thing or the other (a Serb, a Croat or a Jew) is a central aspect of a fundamentalist and extremist nationalistic narrative. This limited way of thinking creates the notion of *us vs. them*, and rejects multiple layers of identities (cf. Hobsbawn 1990: 174, 176). I argue that the intergenerational dialogue that I explore here can help to build a greater degree of self-understanding of how individual subjects negotiate multiple possible linguistic identities in order to build a sense of individual and collective belonging, which is a crucial prerequisite for constructive cultural diversity.

The language-shift from Judeo-Spanish to the national Serbo-Croatian was, just as in the cases of Arvanítika and Scottish Gaelic, based on the assumption that Serbo-Croatian is a power code (cf. Dorian 198; Tsitsipis 1998). For many Sephardim, Judeo-Spanish carried the stigma of an 'unsophisticated' language with which it was supposedly impossible to express modern ideas (Simović & Filipović 2008: 309). In my case, the younger generations are more willing to call their language 'mixed' or 'Sarajevan' than the elderly – a pattern that is prevalent in the case of the many different Caribbean communities and their descendants in London as well (cf. Le Page/Tabouret-Keller 1985). Igor Kožemjakin stated:

“My [...] very difficult question, knowing the fact that there have been linguistic disputes. I don't know how to call it anymore [...] “mother language”. So, I speak Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. I really don't know how to [...] Sarajevski [the “Sarajevo language”] would be the most appropriate name. Sarajevski.”

The elderly insist on calling their language Serbo-Croatian, and the younger rely on destabilized and less-determined language forms, or a mix of several languages.

In the case of the Şehirli-Ottomans the Christian majority expected a national identity to be manifested by them/the minority (cf. Ellis 2003). In my case, the problem with the Sarajevo Sephardim's minority membership is that they are discriminated against by the Bosnian state. Jews are 'others' who do not declare affiliation with any particular group. In 2006, Jakob Finci tried to run for President by sending a letter to the central election commission. When asked whether he wanted to candidate as a Serbian, Croatian or Bosniak person, he answered 'as a Jew', and he was told that being Jewish was a 'private matter'.¹⁹

19 The information given by Jakob Finci on the 26th of December 2016.

The discussion on linguistic identities and the sociolinguistic status of former Serbo-Croatian (i.e. *how* this linguistic category is to be classified) has become relevant since the rise of new state-structures in the 1990s (see Blum 2002: 129; Bugarski 2010: 44). The language situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina today consists of three inter-comprehensible languages. Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (based on the very same neoštokavian [ekavian or ijekavian] dialects) has emerged as three different national standard languages because of state-regulated aims and elitist (academic) ideas. Clearly not every person, obviously not every Jew, in Bosnia and Herzegovina chooses to absorb these dictated linguistic identities in his/her own self-perception. Nonetheless, these chronologically different shifting concepts of South-Slavic *nations-ethnicities-languages* during the past two centuries have definitely affected South-Slavic linguistic identities and standard languages in numerous ways. For instance, the new political order of the 1990s led to a quite different process of language differentiation in which Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian and other language-classifications and expressions emerged (cf. Blum 2002: 51; Voss 2008: 111).

In my case with the Sarajevo Sephardim, despite the shift in languages, the 'original languages' (i.e. Ladino and Serbo-Croatian) are dying but are not dead. This process is to a high degree related to the informants' self-identification in the new Bosnian context, i.e. through their thoughts regarding linguistic identification. Instead of referring exclusively to the formal language classifications, they say they still speak Serbo-Croatian, laugh, say "naš jezik" ('our language'), show grief in relation the new linguistic situation or even that they do not know what language they speak. The newly imposed standard languages clearly make the Sarajevo Jews linguistically divided.

I see the results from the nine Sarajevo Sephardim as preliminary findings, rather than as a truth-claim. Moreover, I consider my interviewees as forming a reference group rather than representing all possible responses to the question of linguistic identification. Although the interviewees represent just a small sample, I assume that they can provide the reader with a qualitatively rich idea of contemporary Jewish perceptions of linguistic identification in Sarajevo.

The second Yugoslavia period and today's situation in Sarajevo mark a particular point of departure in the Sephardic cultural experience in Sarajevo. The ambiguous mother tongue conceptions (as being reflected by the interviewees) are to my mind crucial components in the Sephardic contemporary culture of Sarajevo.

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