

KALEIDOSCOPE OF IDENTITIES

TALES OF LADINO BY SEPHARDIC JEWS IN BULGARIA

„I remember the way I felt exceptional when I realised that I knew a language which was not typically spoken in Bulgaria.“

„My sense of being an heir to this language is special. It enthuses and empowers me with a kind of primary and fundamental force. I think that the significance of being different changes, i.e., from originally being a disadvantage it has now become a huge advantage. We seek our sense of uniqueness and find it in this language. It is a symbol, a token of our otherness.“

Who said that? To whom? When? What language are they talking about?

I am warmly inviting you to a session where, I hope, you will find answers to these and many more questions.

The session itself, I guess, will be, multilingual. We shall look into the languaging and lived experiences of Sephardic Jews in Bulgaria over almost a century. Hundreds of moons ago their forebears from the Iberian peninsula settled in what are now Bulgarian lands. Upon arrival, the newcomers spoke different Iberian Romance dialects mingling them with Hebrew and with the languages of the peoples they happened to meet and live with on their way to more settled lives. Over the centuries, a new Romance language – Ladino / Judesmo – emerged.

I belong to the generation who are no longer using this language as a means of daily communication and thus bear responsibility for setting it on the road to oblivion. And yet, there came the time when my linguist curiosity woke up. Encouraged by family and friends, collaborating with talented colleagues, I studied what role Ladino / Judesmo played in the lives of my parents and their contemporaries. Through the Ladino-framed narratives of members of this community, I have learned how they drew, and continue to draw, upon their diverse linguistic and cultural resources to define themselves, to articulate their various identities, and to communicate within and beyond Bulgarian society.

In order to connect these insights to current discussions of interculturality, and as informed by intercultural thinking, I offer to your attention a five-zone framework of intercultural identity play and would appreciate your response to my ongoing work and also,

to the book (translated from Bulgarian into Spanish) which marks the completion of this part of the road.

Dr Leah Davcheva is an intercultural consultant and facilitator at AHA Moments, Centre of intercultural learning, education and research based in Sofia, Bulgaria. She works with educators, young people and business practitioners to assist them in developing routes for personal and collective achievements. She is interested in the intercultural agenda of mobility (both historically and in present day terms), linguistic and cultural diversity on the Balkans, mutuality, and inclusion.