

will. He surely believes that he is paying you a compliment. This hurt me, of course, it was the first slap in the face. I have tried to express this in some of my stories. But I did not attempt to hide the other side of things. The Aleppo boy Na'im, in the story "Na'im's Lessons" was called upon to give Arabic lessons to a Jewish woman from Germany, a doctor who has come to settle in the city. In fact, it is he who learns from her. Through her he gets to know his city, and to appreciate the community; to be proud of the legends that his grandfather tells, of the ancient synagogue, the art treasures and spiritual and cultural treasures in his city. He had never recognized them, had despised them, while she, the daughter of a collector of Judaica, reveals to Na'im the city of Aleppo with its great culture. In this story I point out that, in fact, our tendency to look up to everything European, we have carried with us from childhood in our bundles of possessions; it is a tendency acquired through the education we received from French cultural imperialism. We brought this attitude with us to Israel, before we had ever heard the term Ashkenazi, and here it was reinforced. The solution therefore is not in the hands of any outside person. The way people regard us is certainly important, but more important and decisive is how we regard ourselves.

The story "Pictures from the Elementary School", a partially autobiographical work, begins with the words "I forbade my mother to speak to me in Arabic in the street". My problems were mainly in school, with my teachers and classmates, whether older or younger than myself, who were full of good intentions "to make a human being out of me". I knew I was already a human being, without their assistance. One of the teachers once looked at my card and asked me when I immigrated from Russia. I looked more Russian than Syrian to him. The blood rushed to my head in anger: should I tell him?! I replied: 'Almost a year ago'. Then I stood up again (I was always laughed at for standing up. I was used to standing when speaking to a teacher), and said: "You made a mistake, sir. I didn't immigrate from Russia, but from Syria." He stared at me and said: "It's not possible!"

My mother's family is connected to the Ibn-Yehia family which achieved greatness in Andalus in Spain, and which included ministers, and biblical exegetes, and important philologists. Some members of the family insist that we have a family tree, and others merely smile. At any rate, when we are called up to read the Torah in the Synagogue, our full name, Cabasso-Ibn-Yehia is used. The name Cabasso was apparently added later. For generations the family were famous as men of learning and culture, principally in the fields of Judaica and Hebrew language. But since the beginning of this century there has been a sharp turn toward business and trade. One small example: my mother's nephew who was born in Mexico, studied architecture. He showed me beautiful buildings, real works of art that he had built in Mexico City. Later we sat down and talked. He told me that he had left architecture: "I hung my framed diploma on the wall and went into business," he told me. "Since then I have been earning ten times as much, if not more."

Let us return to Israel, to the problems that surround us. I mentioned earlier the hurt and the insult. I want to clarify this: The insult was not personal. I personally got on well with the other kids. The insult was to the group. Without noticing what they were doing, my best friends more than once insulted the group to which I belong, for better or for worse. The question of belonging was not at all simple. Here is an extract from the story I mentioned earlier:

"My feet were drawn, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, my soul was drawn to the "Ohei Mo'ed" Synagogue, an attractive Sephardi synagogue not far from our home in south Tel Aviv. My mother convinced

