

My father's family belonged to that section of the community known as the *Musta'rim* who had developed within the Arabic culture and had become part of it. Over the generations a symbiotic relationship developed between them and the local Arabs. They were joined by waves of immigration of Sephardi Jews whose ancestors had come from Spain. The first wave followed the expulsion from Spain, but the largest wave was in the eighteenth century, this was the "*Francos'* migration." These were Jews whose ancestors had come from Spain and tried to settle in Italy, France, Turkey, and even Vienna, all the countries to the north of the Mediterranean, and who ended up migrating to Aleppo in the east, on the commercial crossroads between Europe, India and Persia. They were called *señores francos*. They were regarded as being of a higher class than the *Musta'rim*, these men who came from afar and brought with them the culture of the great world outside. They were great merchants, protected by the Capitulations and relying on omnipotent foreign consuls such as those of Austria, France or Italy. When they first arrived in Aleppo there were serious clashes between the veteran *Musta'rim* and the recently arrived *Francos*. There were disputes which inflamed the community such as whether a young married woman should be allowed to walk in the public gardens. The Sephardim said "It is most seemly", and the locals said "It is forbidden! A Jewish woman should stay indoors." There are still in existence stories and judgments and rabbinical responsa from this period. It is interesting to note, however, that after a generation or two the friction disappeared and the community became amazingly cohesive.

My mother's family were *Francos*. Even the names bear witness to this. Her family name was Cabasso, and on her mother's side, Nehmad. If we take these three names: Shamosh – the Hebrew term in the Arabic form; Cabasso – pure Spanish; and Nehmad – pure Hebrew, we find an interesting blend formed by the meeting of three cultures – the Hebrew, Arabic and European. The European influence became, in the course of time, purely French, especially following the establishment of the Alliance Israélite Universelle network, not to mention the period of the French mandate.

The Alliance was, in fact, the agent of a dictatorial culture. Its cultural missionary purpose was obvious in all its activities. On the one hand one may marvel at the fantastic things they did, for they indeed brought culture and education to the Jews of the Orient, but on the other hand, being the faithful agent of French cultural imperialism, they brought this culture with a Levantine nuance.

I remember myself in Aleppo constantly running away. When Arab children threw stones at us, instructions from home were not to respond but to run away. Otherwise we would bring disaster on us all. Even if you could hit back, and there were such situations, don't! You only get into trouble, and drag your family into trouble and danger. We looked down on the Arabs, the natives. At the same time we looked up to the French. They were the rulers, representatives of Western culture and the enlightened world. Anything French was admired. Jewish children would salute the French officers passing in the street and cry: "Vive la France!" They treated us as efficient and active tools at their disposal, particularly in the cultural realm. With the Arabs we had good neighborly relations, tempered by "respect him, but suspect him", and also "you can't trust a gentile". If we lived in Jewish neighborhoods, these were ghettos by choice.

There were joint business ventures and polite day to day contacts. There were good relations between our intelligentsia and theirs. As a child, I knew good friends of my older brothers, Muslims and Christians of position in the Arab world of politics, culture and society. There was no Jew-hating

