

VIVENCIAS DE LOS JUDÍOS SEFARDÍES TURCOS EN LA ESPAÑA ACTUAL/EXPERIENCES OF TURKISH SEPHARDIC JEWS IN CONTEMPORARY SPAIN

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España, que hasta hace aproximadamente veinte y cinco años era más o menos un país desconocido para la mayoría de los judíos sefardíes de Turquía, ha pasado a tener hoy en día un lugar importante en la visión de muchos de ellos. Sin duda las distintas leyes que ofrecen la ciudadanía española a los sefardíes han jugado un papel importante en este cambio; pero, como las entrevistas de abajo mostrarán, otros factores también jugaron un papel. En este trabajo, he querido explorar la naturaleza de este re-encuentro después de más de 500 años de ausencia psíquica y física a través de 10 entrevistas a sefardíes turcos que se han establecido en España o han tenido contactos extensivos con este país en las últimas dos décadas. Mi idea original era contar mi propia experiencia (soy sefardí turco y desde 1992 vivo en España) pero he juzgado que tendría más sentido ponerla en el contexto de otras experiencias similares. Esto es sólo una primera aproximación al tema; por lo tanto, no es un trabajo científico pero podría ser ampliado en el futuro para convertirse en uno.

Se hicieron las siguientes preguntas a los entrevistados:

- 1- ¿Cuál era su conexión con la cultura sefardí mientras crecía? ¿Se hablaba judeoespañol en su familia? ¿Hasta qué punto estaba presente la cultura sefardí? ¿Cuál era el grado de religiosidad de su familia? ¿Se hacían referencias a España en su ámbito?
- 2- ¿Cómo fue su primer contacto con España?
- 3- Al llegar a España, ¿se encontró usted con aspectos (comida, indumentaria, expresiones etc...) que le recordaban a la cultura sefardí de su origen?
- 4- ¿Cuál es su percepción general de la España contemporánea?
- 5- ¿Ha sido objeto o ha presenciado instancias de antisemitismo en España?
- 6- ¿Qué piensa usted de la oferta de nacionalidad española a los sefardíes?

10 entrevistas no son muchas para sacar conclusiones generales. Aun así, se pueden observar algunas ideas comunes interesantes. Todos los entrevistados provienen de familias no muy religiosas y han sido expuestos a algo de cultura sefardí y al judeoespañol en su infancia/juventud. Las referencias a España como origen eran muy pocas, casi inexistentes, en su ambiente. El primer contacto con España para la mayoría de ellos ha sido a través de las leyes de nacionalidad, pero no para todos: también jugaron un papel el creciente interés en la cultura española generado sobre todo por las actividades del Instituto Cervantes y el deseo de algunos de salir de Turquía. España – sobre todo por el idioma- les pareció el sitio idóneo para satisfacer este deseo.

Al llegar a España por primera vez, todos tuvieron la misma experiencia de ver a señoras y señores mayores paseándose por las tardes en las calles e identificarlos con sus abuelos/abuelas judíos en Turquía: por la manera de vestir, de hablar, por los gestos, por “algo” en su forma de ser. Fue el signo más importante de continuidad que experimentaron

todos los sujetos entrevistados. En segundo lugar, muchos también reconocieron en España algunas comidas tradicionales sefardíes que se cocinaban en sus casas.

Sin embargo, este sentimiento de continuidad desaparece para todos los entrevistados mientras pasa el tiempo y se incorporan más a la vida actual en España, hasta el grado de que - a partir de un momento dado- ninguno piensa ya en España como un lugar en que en el pasado vivieron sus antepasados. Ven a España más bien como un país Mediterráneo-Europeo donde se puede vivir de forma cómoda y agradable, sin mayores problemas, pero que no tiene muchos vínculos con el judaísmo.

Casi ninguno de los entrevistados (con la excepción de una persona) ha experimentado antisemitismo personalmente en España. Sin embargo, todos se quejan de la cobertura negativa de Israel en los medios de comunicación, que achacan a un antisemitismo encubierto. Algunos han oído anécdotas de antisemitismo (la mayoría no muy graves) de segunda mano, a través de conocidos etc.

Como última observación, parece que los que son – o se han vuelto- más religiosos tienen más dificultad en adaptarse del todo a la vida en España. La falta de una comunidad/cultura judía visible y variada, la ignorancia general del español medio sobre los judíos, e algún incidente antisemita parecen molestarles más que a los que no son muy religiosos; la posibilidad de emigrar algún día a otro país siempre existe en su mente.

Para poner estas historias en perspectiva, añado al final la versión en español de un artículo mío recién publicado en *La enciclopedia de vidas judías desconocidas*” (Estambul, Libra Kitap, 2016) narrando la experiencia de un familiar que emigró desde Turquía a otro país hispanohablante (Uruguay) en 1950. Creo que vale la pena contrastar las causas y las circunstancias de aquella emigración con las de nuestros sujetos, cuyos traslados fueron en fechas mucho más recientes.

Spain, which up to about twenty-five years ago was a total unknown for most Sephardic Jews of Turkey, has now a place on the mental map of many of them. Whereas it is clear that the various laws offering citizenship to the descendants of the Sephardim have played an important role in this change, it is not the only factor, as the interviews below will show. Given this situation, one wonders about the nature of this re-encounter with Spain after about 500 years of spiritual and physical absence. The work below is just a first, non-scientific approximation towards exploring this question. It includes 10 interviews with Turkish Sephardic Jews who have come to live in Spain or have had extensive contact with Spain and/or Spanish culture in the past two decades. My original idea was to talk only about my own experience (I moved here in 1992 and have been living here since) but eventually I thought it would make sense when put in the context of the stories/perceptions of people who traveled on a similar path.

I asked the interviewees the following questions:

- 1- What was your family background growing up in Turkey? Was Ladino spoken? To what degree was Sephardic culture present? How religious was your family? Were there any references to Spain as a place where your family had its roots?
- 2- What caused your first contact with Spain? How did it develop?
- 3- When you first came to Spain, were there any aspects of the country/culture which reminded you of your own Sephardic culture? What were they? Did you have any intense experiences which made you feel you were re-discovering a lost past?
- 4- What is your general perception of modern Spain?
- 5- Were you exposed to any anti-Semitism in Spain?
- 6- What do you think of the citizenship offer to Sephardic Jews?

My own experience, put into the context of the rest of the answers:

Alber Sabanoglu Segura- 56-years old. Lives in Madrid. Professor of mathematics and finance. Originally from Istanbul (born in Izmir).

Ladino, French and Turkish were spoken interchangeably by my parents as I grew up in Istanbul. Me and my sister have a better understanding of Ladino than the average person of our age because my grandmother, who spoke Ladino most of the time, lived with us. She spoke to us in Ladino and we answered in Turkish. My family wasn't very religious but we did the High Holidays properly and we had a strong sense of our Jewish identity. Quite a few traditional Sephardic dishes were cooked. My grandmother especially knew a lot of *refranes*, traditional stories etc... in Ladino. No songs, however. There was no mention whatsoever of Spain being part of our tradition or our roots.

My first contact with Spain didn't happen because of the citizenship offer, unlike most of the other respondents. I came to Spain through my interest in the language. While I was living in the USA, I came to extensive contact with Latin Americans and also relatives in Latin America (I have relatives in Uruguay, Argentina, Brasil etc.. The immigration story of one of them is annexed at the end of this work) and I was pleasantly surprised to discover that my old grandmother's language could make it possible for me to speak with millions of people and understand (with some effort) their wonderful literature. So I learned the modern language basically by reading like crazy and by talking to people, and that in its turn made me want to live in a Spanish-speaking country. At that point, two practical factors made me decide for Spain: its proximity to Turkey and the citizenship offer.

There was also a Spanish consul involved in my case – just like in B.L.'s story, or similar to V's Spanish teachers in Salamanca- who told me that Spain needed us, that we would be welcome etc...The year was 1992 and we were at the peak of the commemorations of the Spain-Sepharad tie.

I didn't have any special difficulty in getting the citizenship. I was working in a multinational company as an engineer (and later on at the Carlos III University) so I became a resident immediately and after two years of residency I applied. After waiting two more years for an answer, I was given the citizenship.

The reader will note that there is an observation which is common to *all* of the interviews below: each of the respondents, upon first coming to Spain, were shocked to see their grandmothers and grandfathers going for a *paseo* or having their *meriendas* in the afternoons in Spanish cities. The physiological resemblances of those old Spanish women and men to the old Sephardic Jews back home, as well as the similarities in their gestures and speech, drove many of the subjects to point to them and say jokingly: "There is Uncle Shimon", "Here is Aunt Rebecca" etc...or imagine them praying in Hebrew. This happened to me, too. I think I *tripped* a little further. I imagined a stronger connection (especially in the old neighborhoods of Sevilla, Cordoba, and some other cities) with some past life of my ancestors which I somehow knew from somewhere, which was within me somehow and whose remnants I could sense here as well. I even wrote a story about that (a copy of which, unfortunately, I haven't been able find).

I did come across food which was similar to some of the traditional food back home, too. The *mazapan*, which is very similar to the *mogados* in Izmir, *buñuelos* (although they are slightly different here), *almodrote*. There is a special drink made out of melon seeds that only my family and some other families from Izmir drink only on Yom Kippur. Here, I found it under the name of *horchata*, made out of *chufa*. The taste and the texture are the same.

As with all the respondents, after a few years here I too lost the sense of a common past as I got immersed into modern Spain. In my daily life now, I hardly ever think that Spain has to do anything with my roots or ancestors or the Jewish past.

My vision of Spain is both positive and negative. It includes a little of what every one of the interviewees said. I do agree with B.L., H.L., J. K. etc... that it's an easy place to live, culturally rich and pleasant, with very little xenophobia, and at times (not always) with a good balance between work and pleasure. But I also sympathize with E. S.'s claim that relationships are mostly superficial, for example. I find it a culturally fine, but intellectually hard place to live in.

As with most respondents, I experienced no anti-Semitic act or discourse directly aimed at me during all these years. Again as with almost all of them, I have been disturbed by the general anti-Israel bias in the press and in some political parties, which often is a disguise for anti-Semitic prejudices, I think. I have sort of been more exposed to this kind of bias than the other respondents, because I was following the press for the Anti-Defamation League exactly at the time of the biggest anti-Semitic/anti-Israeli surge of the past decades here- that is in the beginning of the 2000s, at the time of the second Intifada. The atmosphere created at the time by most of the media and some political parties made it hard to breathe for a Jew here. Individual instances of anti-Semitism remained rare, however. I did once witness a crowd, mostly made of well-off older ladies and of students which would have lynched the Israeli ambassador if they were given the means to do so (this was in an Amnesty International meeting!). And all of that, because of a conflict thousands of miles from here and of which they had next to no idea! Some of my academic friends were harassed or prohibited from voicing pro-Israel opinions in some university faculties.

But this has died down, and I would say that the level of anti-Semitic, even anti-Israeli discourse has been very low in recent years, even in the press. I do not know the reasons for this change. Perhaps the economic crisis made people look more inwards. Or the rising Islamic terrorism changed the target of ire. Or perhaps there was a change in generations and younger people don't have the basic anti-Semitism inculcated to people who grew up under Franco. I don't know.

I do find quite a few people who know about Jews; they may be exceptions, but there are quite a few of them. Academicians, anyone who is interested in their history and culture (even if they grew up in a village, like some friends), many people who are in fields related to science and technology eventually do come in contact or at least know something about Jews.

[In this context, I would like to cite a hidden treasure that I discovered in my first years in Spain in the form of a group of Spaniards (musicians, folklore ..., teachers, historians etc..) who had grown up with almost zero exposure to any Jewish presence but who later in their lives took such a deep, genuine interest in Sephardic culture that it almost became part of their own identity. Their leader, Jose Manuel Fraile Gil – one of the most eminent living oral historians of Hispanic culture- had grown up hearing stories of Jews having horns at his local Church and was thirty years old when he met a flesh-and-blood Jewish person for the first time. He is now a living encyclopedia of Sephardic culture; I know few people who have deeper knowledge of Jewish traditions and thinking, who have come to understand and feel them so deeply. The main inspiration for this group of people has been Prof. Susana Weich-Shahak, eminent Israeli musicologist who has done a gigantic work in the unearthing and preservation of Sephardic music and other traditions and whom I also met and became friends with here in Spain]

Most of the interviewees are grateful about the citizenship offer but some complain about the delays, imprecisions etc... of the process. I share both opinions.

[Finally, for future thought, one could ask the question: in what important sense is today's Spanish culture divergent from the Jewish culture that it split from five centuries ago? I would say that lack of intellectual curiosity (on the part of modern Spaniards) is an essential difference. . In Spain, I find a tendency to not question things, to take the easy way out, to accept and "sell" other people's opinions as if they were one's own. And I find this not only in the common man on the street, but also in academic and so-called intellectual circles. However, these types of generalizations being shaky and this not being a scientific article, I will not pursue this line of thought here and leave it as a footnote.]

Experiences of Turkish Sephardic Jews with/in modern Spain.

A. H.- *37 years old. From Istanbul. Lives in Madrid. Came to Spain in the beginning of the 2000s. Married to a Brazilian Jewish woman. Works as a “cultural tourism” guide for Jewish tourists who come to visit Jewish sights in Spain.*

My family wasn't religious. We only did the High Holidays and sometimes Shabbat, if they caught me at home. We somewhat observed kosher but not strictly. Being in Turkey made it easier to get kosher meat etc.

My parents both spoke Ladino. I understood a bit but didn't really know it. People in my generation didn't know Ladino anymore. My parents could communicate well with people in Spain in Ladino but there were some comical incidents at times because of the peculiarities of the language. Once, C. H.'s father (*C. H. is another Turkish Jew who lives in Spain*) went into a pharmacy and said “¿Puedo demandarle algo?” The pharmacist was in panic. “¿Para qué me iba a demandar? ¿Que he hecho yo?”

My first interaction with Spain was when I got to know about the citizenship law; I was in Orta III then (*last year of Junior-High*). I always wanted to get out of Turkey, I don't know why. I explored ways to go to Spain. When I graduated from university, my father said he had a connection, a Moroccan Jew in Madrid who needed low-qualified workers to help him. I jumped to the opportunity. I didn't think about it twice. I got a visa for a month's stay with great difficulty. Then I worked for a year and a half illegally. My situation was normalized with the passing of the Amnesty law for illegal immigrants in 2002. Still, I had a lot of trouble getting the citizenship. I applied both ways (through residence and through “carta de regularización”). My years of residence before the Amnesty didn't count. The petition by “Carta de Regularizacion” was frozen for years. Finally, I got it both ways only a year ago. 15 years after I got here! I studied engineering and I am doing less qualified jobs but I don't regret it for a minute (leaving Turkey, that is).

I wasn't religious in Turkey. Here, I became more and more religious. Maybe it's because of living abroad, the need to belong to a community, I don't know. My theory is, because of the secular pressure of Ataturk's Turkey, Jews (like all other religions) were alienated from their own religion, they didn't bother learning about it. Even the Talmud Torah was prohibited for many years.

Yes, I did find amazing similarities between Spanish culture and the Sephardic one back home in the beginning. When I saw the old women in the street, they reminded me of the “viejas” in Buyukada, los *fostan*, the Jewish neighborhood in Goztepe (we used to live in Goztepe). As if they were my relatives. Not much in the way of food, though. The Masapan, yes, in Pesah.

“Calavasucha” that my mother did, something similar exists here. (Other dishes in the family like: “armi” a mixture of smashed tomatoes and rice, doesn’t exist in Spain. Not that I know of).

My relationship with modern Spain? Not too many problems. But I don’t see myself living here till the end of my life. The Jewish community is small. I am looking for bigger community. My biggest complaint about Spaniards is their laziness and indolence. *(Shows me a video made by a German TV which pokes fun at Spaniards’ laziness. “The video is rude, even insulting but I must say the Spaniards deserve it”)*. In general, I got used to life here.

No big anti-Semitism but I don’t expose my Jewishness much. I seldom go with the kippa. *(At home, he wears the kippa)*. Vandalism of the stones with Hebrew captions in Toledo. Some positive experiences as well. People who saw me with the kippa and told me how they liked and admired Jews. But also people saying “Why do Jews need police protection? They all have a lot of money to protect themselves” upon seeing the police cars protecting the Jewish meeting places. Small things in general. Nothing really big.

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M. N.- 60 years old. Doesn’t work. Lives in Istanbul.

(M. N. has a very special sense of Sephardic identity, very seldom seen in people his age anymore. He speaks good Ladino with a rich, old vocabulary. About 14 years ago, he started getting interested in modern Spain and convinced a group of his friends to take Spanish classes at the Instituto Cervantes, and also meet once a week to speak about Spanish culture, history etc.. The group still meets, though M.N. doesn’t go to Spanish classes anymore. He keeps reading extensively on Spanish history, culture, politics and is continuously in touch with current events, political developments etc... in today’s Spain)

I have a very strong Sephardic identity. When I was still a child, I wondered why “we spoke Spanish”, and asked my father about it. Since then, I have been very much involved in preserving/learning about my identity, including Spanish culture.

In Madrid, the old women reminded me of old Jewish women. They were very much alike, their physiognomies, the way they talked. It was like walking in the Jewish neighborhood in Sisli. The men, too. They were like our *granpapas* (grandfathers). You have the impression that, if you put a *takke* (kippa) on their head, they will start reciting *Baruch Ata Adonay*.

There was nothing about the food in Spain which reminded me of the food back home. It’s Mediterranean food, that’s all.

I was very moved by Girona, especially in the Jewish museum there. I met many people in Spain who told me they had Jewish roo.

I see Spain as part of my own culture. This got enhanced when in 1992 the King of Spain officially apologized to Jews. I was moved to tears then. It’s a great gesture. It reconciles me with the Christians. Even more with the citizenship offer. *(He will get the passport in a few*

months). I am aware that this is a two-way street, it is also in Spain's interest to welcome the Jews. (*"Bize de ekmek cikar bundan"* - "We will also earn our bread from this"-in Turkish)

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N.H.-68 years old. Engineer. Lives in Istanbul.

(N.H. belongs to the circle of M.N.'s friends who started getting interested in Spanish culture about 14 years ago. He still goes to the Cervantes Institute classes/activities)

I grew up in Kuledibi, where the Jews spoke Ladino and still had a very traditional lifestyle. I understood Ladino very well and I even made imitations, called up people for *entrevistas* of matchmaking etc... I went to the Jewish School. We weren't very religious. We only did the High Holidays. But I always had a sense that we had a special tie to Spain. I think it was also because we never felt totally integrated here (i.e.Turkey), hence the search for our roots somewhere else. The language bond is very important, of course.

My wife is a Jew from Nisantas (*a more upscale neighborhood where wealthier and more "modern" Jews live*), where people sort of look down on Ladino. She doesn't understand my interest in it.

My first contact with Spain was when I went as a tour guide there with a group of Dutch tourists. At that time, I felt like a superhero because I could speak Spanish so well (because of my Ladino background), I thought! Now I understand I didn't know Spanish well at the time. I've been going to Spanish courses at the Cervantes for 14 years now. M.N. is the person who convinced a group of us to go to the Cervantes, because Ladino had been degenerating lately with the addition of Turkish words etc. so we wanted to learn good Spanish. Also, we became interested in Spanish culture.

It happened to all of us. When we went to Spain, the old women on the streets were exactly like the older Jewish people that we knew. In fact, we used to see old women on the street and call them: "Here is Aunt Suhula, here is Aunt...." jokingly. The type of atmosphere where old Jewish people with similar appearances speak only Ladino among themselves can still be found in a few pockets in Istanbul, like the Anadolu Kulubu in Buyukada. They speak with the same "music" as people in Spain.

But I think that, from the very beginning, we went to Spain with positive prejudices.

I applied to the Spanish citizenship 10 years ago under the special law of then. I only got it a year ago.

My general opinion of Spain – and the opinion of all the Jewish people around me – is very positive. We see it as one of the two possible places where we could begin another life if it were necessary.

I have traveled extensively in Spain. I see it very positively. However, you can never have an objective view of a place when you are only traveling. I follow the Spanish press, listen to the National Radio every day. So I get a more realistic point of view. I follow the politics. Actually, I am at a loss of who to vote for, because of all the political mess recently. I know what demonstrations there are every day in Madrid.

I am grateful for the citizenship, but at the same time a bit angry. I think it came too late. Spaniards had visited Turkey 100-150 years ago and had already noted the presence of the Sephardis. Primo de Rivera had already passed a citizenship law. So, this is coming a bit late. I see it as a right that we have, not as a favor bestowed upon us.

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E. S.- 57 years old. Tour guide. Lives in Izmir. Has lived on and off between Madrid and Izmir during several years in the 90s.

My Sephardic roots are strong. I speak Ladino. Ultimately, that's how I got the citizenship. By demonstrating my knowledge of Ladino. I got a certificate from the Universidad Hebraica.

I got in contact with Spaniards very early in my life, when I was studying in Israel. After that, I had constant contacts with Spaniards through my work as a tour guide. That's how I got interested in modern Spanish and in getting the Spanish nationality.

I don't feel any cultural closeness to the Spaniards except for normal-Mediterranean-ties. I actually think they are quite superficial ("lah di dah")- as opposed to for example the French, who are hard to make friends with but once you establish a friendship it's lasting.

I have no special feeling for Spain. I don't think anyone here feels anything special for Spain. Nothing like what you feel for Israel. People are only interested in Spain because they want to get the passport, that's it.

I didn't feel that the Spaniards had especially positive or negative towards Jews. They are somewhat warmer towards the Arabs.

J. K.-52 years old. From Istanbul. Ex-executive of Avon Cosmetics. Has traveled extensively to Spain because of work (she was also responsible for the Spanish division of Avon) and family ties.

Ladino was spoken by my parents and grandmother, mixed with French and Turkish. I grew up understanding Ladino because my grandmother lived with us and she spoke mainly Ladino. But I couldn't speak it, we usually answered in Turkish.

We weren't very religious but had a strong Jewish identity. We did do the High Holidays properly.

My first contact with Spain was through my brother, who lives there.

When I first went to Spain, I was amazed by the resemblance of especially old people – especially the *gramamas*- to old Jewish people that I knew back in Turkey.

There was nothing special about the food, however. On the contrary: The Sephardic cuisine in Turkey has a lot of vegetables in it, whereas in Spain I couldn't find many vegetables. Later when I started going to Spain for work purposes, I dealt more with younger people and I was more centered on the Mediterranean characteristics of the country –which have a lot in common with Turkey- than on its Jewish heritage.

We are more than thankful for the citizenship. It saved us. Though it came a bit late.

Usually I found that Spaniards know nothing about Jews. People that I worked with learned about Jews through me. Now they are very concerned about us (because of the situation in Turkey), they call a lot etc.... I don't think the general population knows much.

My overall view of Spain is very positive. It's a civilized country where people strike a good balance between work and living well, there is a lot of culture, it's Mediterranean and European at the same time. It's a very nice place.

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B. L.- 50 years old. Consultant. Lives in Madrid. Originally from Istanbul.

I had very little Jewish sentiment conveyed to me from my family while I grew up. My mother spoke Ladino with her mother, but at home my parents spoke French and Turkish among them. I didn't understand Ladino. We did Pessah etc...with traditional foods but I only learned the meanings of those rituals many years later, only about 10 years ago.

My grandaunt told me that our family was from Andalucia. So I had some idea that we had come from Spain. In primary school, when we were asked to do a study of a country in the world, I chose Spain-maybe it was my unconscious. But my first real contact was through the citizenship law. When I was living in the States, I got very angry once when on the way to the US I wanted to stay for a day in the UK and they didn't let me (they had just put visa requirements for Turks, I was unaware of it). So I decided to be a European citizen. I remembered then having heard about the Spanish citizenship law in Turkey. I went to the Spanish Consulate in Boston. The Consul was a very nice man. "Spain needs you" he told me "Please go back. But you must get a job first". I started to look for a job in Spain. Proctor and Gamble in Turkey told me that if I worked for one year in Turkey for them, they'd send him to Spain. But I was impatient. Through my father I got contacts in the Jewish community here, met some people, went to a Jewish wedding my first day here etc...Nothing came out of it. Finally, I did it through Proctor and Gamble.

The Spanish government rejected my petition at first, though I fulfilled the requirement of having resided here for two years. My last names weren't sufficiently Spanish. Then Jakob Hassan (from the CSIC) interviewed my mother in Ladino, he even made her sing Sephardic songs. He wrote a document to the Government saying that she was completely Sephardic, that being a Sephardi was a cultural, not a genetic trait. I think that this document was key to my finally obtaining the nationality.

The women on the streets are exactly like my grandmothers. There is a special physiognomy, I think, a certain "*ademán*" (*B.L. often uses modern Spanish expressions while speaking Turkish. Though he knew no Spanish when he came to live here, he speaks a perfect Spanish with no accent since almost his first year here.*) which is common to older Jewish people and Spaniards.

There were also some foods that I recognized. *Buñuelos*, for example. My mother used to make *turrón duro* in Pessah. I hadn't associated them with Spain before. Also, some Jewish names that I used to find meaningless and alien in Turkey started to sound good to me when I encountered them here in Spain. Names like Raquel etc..

In my first years, I used to tell everyone that I was Sephardic because it gave me a sense of belonging here, it gave me roots. I was moved when I saw things like the "Yuda Levi Street" in Cordoba for examples. But over the years I stopped saying it because I became aware that the average Spaniard either doesn't know anything about the Sephardic Jews or mixes them with the Moros, the Moslems etc...

With the exception of a couple of incidents, I never experienced anti-Semitism. Those two incidents involved anti-Israel attitudes which really were a cover-up for anti-Semitism. One was in the airport. When a Spanish employee of some airline was having some routine problems with the people of El Al over some organizational issue, I heard him say: "*A los judíos ni agua!*". The second incident was when we went with a group of friends to see a documental in Conde Duque about Jews who had escaped the Holocaust during the WWII, only to get stuck in Portugal. Eventually they had become Portuguese and set up a little circle there, with Portuguese friends. I cried because I recognized my own grandmother's story there (they used to play canasta, bridge every day). She had escaped from Bulgaria only to get stuck in Turkey and finally had settled there. When we got out of the movie, a girl who was with us started saying angrily that she had had enough of these documentaries about Jews, that it was a waste of money, that the money should be spent to help the plight of the Palestinian people. It hit me hard at that emotional moment for me. I had a discussion with her. I told her I knew about the plight of the Palestinians but that the two things had nothing to do with each other.

In the beginning, I was like in a dream. Every moment in Spain seemed like magic. "I am here, I am here!" I idealized the country. Now it's just normal, I live here, I'm a part of it. I see the good sides and the bad sides. Probably the way the Spaniards themselves see their country has worsened too, because of the last decade's happenings (the crisis, mainly).

I never felt any discrimination because of being foreigner. I've sold houses, bought houses, been in many jobs etc.. here and nobody ever treated me differently because I was Turkish. Not only in Madrid. My sister's husband is from a small town near Placencia and his parents are very very Catholic, but there were never any problems.

My general impression of Spain is positive. I was grateful to Spain for the citizenship, though I got upset at them a bit for the first rejection and the delay (it took four years overall).

H. L.- *In his sixties. Businessman. Lives in Madrid. Originally from Istanbul.*

My father spoke Ladino with his circle, but my mother didn't speak Ladino. Mostly they spoke French at home. I could understand some Ladino if I concentrated, but it wasn't automatic. We weren't religious at all. We just celebrated the big holidays.

My family's ties with Spain go back to World War I. At that time, a group of Jews who lived in France but had the citizenship of the Ottoman Empire immigrated to Barcelona, because they felt uncomfortable staying in a country which was at war with the Ottoman Empire. They included some relatives of ours. Lluís Bassat (famous businessman and member of the board of directors of FC Barcelona in the past), for example, is a second cousin of mine. There was always talk about this in family. My mother's father immigrated to Barcelona in the 30s. He had a store which sold textiles there, on the "Calle Cal", we have a photo. It was said that when the Civil war broke, he used to go around wearing a worker's overalls so that he wouldn't have problems with the Republicans who ruled in Barcelona at the time. After the Civil War, he was joined there by my grandmother. The children, who already had their own lives in Turkey, stayed there. But he died of a heart attack in the 40s. My grandmother, who was left alone there, returned to Turkey.

Then my sister went to live there for a while in 1975. More than a sense of being descendants of Jews who were expelled from Spain, in all these movements the main factor was the ease of knowing the language, or at least of having heard it throughout one's life.

I met my wife Raquel while I was studying in the university in Israel. Raquel was the daughter of Argentinian Jews who had settled in Madrid, so she had studied high-school in Madrid. She always talked about it and wanted to go back there at some point. In 1974 we settled in Istanbul, where I ran my business. In 1986, we moved to Spain.

The fact that Spain gave citizenship to Sephardic Jews played no role in this whatsoever. In fact, up to two years ago I was still only a resident here. There were some positive aspects about the resident status that I preferred to having full citizenship. Only two years ago did I become a citizen.

I recognized few things of Sephardic culture here in Spain. Bits and pieces. Once, I remember I was in Menorca and I tried a local dish. I was very moved to see that they had used some very

special spices that my mother used while cooking traditional dishes. I even took my mother (who was quite old at the time) to Menorca to see it by herself.

For a long while here I kept asking myself the question “What am I doing here?” Then, slowly I started to see it as my second home, the one place where I feel more comfortable than in any other country in the world (except possibly Turkey). My overall impression of Spain is totally positive. I have no problem whatsoever with the people. I love the cultural life, the food, the wine....I feel at home. I know the customs, I have my circle of friends here.

I was never the object of an anti-Semitic act in all my years here. Same with my wife and daughter (my daughter was born and grew up here). Very occasionally, you hear indirect stories which are impossible to confirm. A Jewish person tells that another Jewish person’s son was made the object of mockery at school because he was Jewish etc... The only thing that bothers me are biased stories in the Spanish press. Not only do they treat Israel very unjustly but they often have anti-Semitic components as well.

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V.-40 years old. Lives in Madrid. Works in a multinational maritime shipping company. Originally from Istanbul.

In my family, Ladino was spoken. My father and grandmother were Balat folk (*Balat is an old traditional Jewish neighborhood in Istanbul which declined in the 20th century. At present, only very few poor Jewish people live there, though lately there has been a renovation of the area*). When I was very young, my great-grandmother took care of me. She hardly spoke any Turkish. She spoke Ladino. So I grew up understanding Ladino, but I answered in Turkish. “*Violet háblame en español*”, she used to tell me. And I used to answer in Turkish: “Speak Turkish, this is Turkey”. If she only saw me now! She lived until she was 99. My father was a traditional Jew, he believed in God, he was mildly religious. As we grew up, he started getting more religious, he started doing Kiddush, eating kosher at home (though this wasn’t strictly followed. The meat was kosher but we children had pastrami pizzas along with it sometimes). He became very keen on Jewish identity. It became especially stronger after the death of his own father. But he never imposed anything on us. We (my sister and I) didn’t go to Jewish school, for example, though he wanted us to. But he was an old-fashioned type of guy; he would have really not accepted it had I married a non-Jew.

I first came to Spain in 1999. A friend of mine at the university in Turkey (I was studying translation-interpretation) got very interested in learning Spanish and registered herself and me for a three-month Spanish course in Salamanca. At the last moment, she backed out and I went with my sister. The teacher who was testing our levels of Spanish was amazed to see that I could understand everything but that I couldn’t reply. When I told them the story about my roots, the people there were so moved! “You are the living history! We owe you a big apology!” That warm welcome made me want to return and live here. I was firm about it. I worked for three years to save money and in 2002, despite the opposition of my father, I came here.

The citizenship offer didn’t play any role in my coming.

I was surprised to encounter here some of the dishes that my grandmother cooked. *Tortilla de patatas* and *Porrás* for example. When the older ladies go out to take their *meriendas* in the afternoons, that reminds me of the Jewish atmosphere in Buyukada in the afternoons. When my parents come, they have fun labeling these ladies like : “Look, there’s Aunt Ceni” etc...

In the beginning, I had a crazy life, went out every night etc... Then I saw that it led to nothing. I had a Spanish boyfriend for four years but I never could visualize having a life here with a non-Jew, it just didn’t seem to make sense. We broke up. At Yom Kippur one year, I missed the plane home and had spent it all alone. I felt a big void. So I made a decision to reorient my life here towards the Jewish community. I met my present husband there. He is much more religious than I am, so I’ve had to adapt to his rules, especially after the children were born. Especially after my younger son came up with a dangerous stomach illness when he was one-year old. I thought that God was punishing us because we hadn’t observed a very strict kosher diet. We eat kosher, don’t mix milk products with meat, we say Kiddush, we send the children to the Jewish School, we celebrate the Holidays in a deeper way than when I was in Turkey. We do not strictly observe Shabbath.

My general impression of Spain is grim. I think the people who welcomed me seventeen years ago saying “You are walking history” would probably not have the same positive attitude today. I see a lot of anti-Semitism, especially on the part of people with left-wing tendencies. I myself have witnessed several incidents of anti-Semitism in my own company, which is an international company and is always announcing that it is open to all kinds of people or tendencies. During the Gaza war two years ago, one of my officemates came to work with a huge Palestinian flag and called on other people at work to go to an anti-Israel manifestation. Once, when I had come back from a trip to Israel, I brought chocolate to the people at work. One of my workmates refused to eat, saying “I don’t eat Israeli chocolate.” Eventually, I became good friends with one of the pro-Palestinian women at work, but one day she said to me: “It’s strange. You are the first Jewish person that I like. In general, I don’t like them, Israel is an oppressive State”. When I asked her how many Jews she had known, she answered that I was the only one. Another time, a workmate who was giving a presentation said “*hay que tirar estos contenedores como perros judíos*” (“We have to get rid of these containers as if they were Jewish dogs.”) She repeated it twice. She didn’t know I was Jewish. When I mentioned it to my boss afterwards, she was very sympathetic with me.

(At this point, I asked her why she hadn’t stood up and told that person that she was Jewish and that her words offended her. Violet said that she was used to keeping a low profile as a Jew in Turkey, like most Jews there.)

I can see that a Jewish person who is very religious would have a hard time living here. Even we think of going somewhere else sometimes, but it’s just thoughts. In Turkey, I used to say to people “I am a Turk who is also a Jew”- I felt Turkish first. Most of the Jewish people I know here feel Jewish first, and only after that come the other identities.

JACO BONOMO

Una noche helada del invierno de 1983 sonó el teléfono de mi casa en la pequeña ciudad del noreste de EEUU donde cursaba mis estudios universitarios. Era la policía de la universidad, quien quería hablar conmigo. Me asusté.

“Hay aquí alguien que ha venido a verle desde muy lejos” dijo la voz al otro lado del aparato.

Hubo un silencio; luego otra voz, muy tranquila, dijo:

“Hola, soy Jaco Bonomo.” en turco.

¿Era una broma? ¿Acaso la melancolía del invierno había empezado a hacerme imaginar cosas?

Jaco Bonomo! Aquel nombre que tenía un lugar tan importante en mis primeros recuerdos, que yo había llegado a asociar con sobres estampados con sellos grandes y coloridos que lucían la palabra “Uruguay”, con la expresión juvenil y feliz que aparecía en el rostro de mi padre al recibir aquellas cartas, con países lejanos y luminosos...Era el primo de mi padre y su amigo de la juventud; había emigrado a Sudamérica antes de que yo naciera y se decía que se había hecho rico como Midas. Cuando yo era niño no había sabido distinguir si aquella historia era verdadera o si se trataba de una leyenda. Al crecer, había decidido que no podía ser cierta, llegando a dudar siquiera que el personaje existiera; luego se me había olvidado completamente.

¿Qué podía hacer Jaco aquí, en una ciudad olvidada de EEUU en medio del invierno, con una temperatura de -10 grados fuera?

Fui a la comisaría de policía. Me esperaba con su hijo Jaime, que tenía más o menos mi edad. Me saludó, me abrazó como si nos conociéramos desde siempre. Luego me contó: al haberse diagnosticado a su hijo un cáncer, se habían venido a EEUU. Después de haber estado en varios hospitales, se le habían dicho que los mejores médicos para el tipo de cáncer que padecía su hijo estaban en esta ciudad. Entonces Jaco se había acordado vagamente de que el hijo de Eli, su amigo de la juventud, estudiaba en una ciudad de nombre parecido. Me había encontrado.

Mi compañero de piso y yo tratamos, el resto de aquel invierno, de ayudar a Jaime en la medida que podíamos mientras su tratamiento seguía. Jaco y su mujer se turnaban, viajando desde Uruguay para pasar cortos períodos de tiempo en la ciudad. Las veces que le tocaba estar, Jaco a menudo pasaba por casa o nos invitaba a cenar fuera y nos hacía preguntas sobre

Turquía en un turco ornado de palabras antiguas, pero muy correcto. La primera vez que vino a casa nos preguntó:

“¿Cómo va el CHP (*)?”

El CHP ya no existía. Había sido cerrado por los militares que en aquel entonces mandaban en Turquía.

Tampoco importaba mucho, ya que el CHP por cuya salud Jaco se preocupaba era un partido que no tenía nada que ver con el que había existido en las últimas décadas. Él se había quedado en el CHP de los 40 o a lo sumo de los 50.

En otra ocasión, le llamaron la atención los libros del poeta Nazim Hikmet que teníamos en casa. Pensamos que Jaco, que en toda apariencia era un próspero negociante, nos iba a reprender o por lo menos decirnos alguna palabra irónica al respecto; ¡Cuál fue nuestra sorpresa cuando, emocionado, empezó a recitar de memoria varios poemas del gran poeta! En sus ojos se veía una gran nostalgia.

Hacia la primavera, al acabar el tratamiento de Jaime, Jaco me invitó a ir a quedarme un tiempo con ellos en Uruguay. En aquel entonces yo ya había acabado todos los cursos que me faltaban para graduarme en junio, ya no tenía mucho que hacer allí. Acepté la invitación. Volé a Montevideo unas semanas después de ellos.

Al aterrizar en el verano sudamericano, a 8500 km. del duro invierno norteamericano, tuve la impresión de haber llegado a un lugar muy conocido. La geografía, las calles, los edificios y el clima de Montevideo, así como la forma de vida y las relaciones de los Bonomos me hacían sentir que había vuelto al Izmir de mi niñez, del cual tenía un recuerdo borroso.

Jaco Bonomo era un hombre acomodado. Había algo de verdad en las leyendas que circulaban en Turquía. Tenía casas en el mejor barrio de Montevideo y en Punta del Este, iba de paseo en yates, jugaba al golf o al tenis en clubs de élite.

Juntando lo que me contó Jaco en nuestras conversaciones durante aquel viaje y en otra visita que le hice años más tarde, con lo que escuché de otros miembros de su familia y de mi padre, pude trazar las líneas principales de su historia.

Había nacido en Tire, en Turquía, en el año 1925. Era el segundo de cuatro hermanos, una chica y tres chicos. Su madre, Joya Uziel, era la hermana de mi abuela paterna. Su padre iba de pueblo en pueblo vendiendo pólizas de seguro. Había vivido en tiempos en que la gente

enterraba su dinero o su oro por miedo a los bandidos que controlaban el campo en las afueras de Tire y de Odemis. Su familia era pobre. Su situación empeoró al morir joven su padre. Tuvieron que emigrar a Izmir.

En las mismas fechas, varios de los once hermanos de la familia Saban, cuya situación económica era relativamente mejor por tener el padre un negocio de textiles en Tire, se habían también trasladado a Izmir, a una casa grande en el número 430 de la Avenida Mithatpasa en Salhane. Aquella casa se convirtió en poco tiempo en una especie de sitio de reunión, de “casa del pueblo” para muchos familiares, amigos y vecinos. Todavía hoy, los asiduos de aquella casa que siguen vivos no paran de contar historias de ella. En aquel entonces había una población importante de judíos en Salhane. Los más humildes entre ellos solían vivir en *cuarticos* (también se les llamaba *hanezicos con cortijos*) que consistían de habitaciones alrededor de un patio y baños comunes. Desde las casas en la costa se podía entrar directamente al mar.

Los Bonomo se instalaron en una pequeña casa en la misma calle que los Saban. La amistad entre Eli Saban y Jaco se hizo fuerte entonces. Según lo que cuenta Eli, había días en que los Bonomo no tenían suficiente comida y les ayudaba Rejina, la madre de los Saban, que era también la hermana de Coya.

Mucho después, en Montevideo Jaco veía las condiciones difíciles de su niñez desde una perspectiva diferente:

“Cuando crecía en Tire no me daba cuenta de mi pobreza”, diría, “Cuando eres niño, si tienes una pelota para jugar, eres feliz. Mira, yo había pensado toda la vida que fui miserable cuando era pequeño pero ahora cuando vuelvo atrás sólo me vienen recuerdos buenos. Es verdad que siempre había problemas en comprarme zapatos nuevos etc.. pero en aquel entonces eso para mí no tenía importancia. Luego murió mi padre y nos fuimos a Izmir. A los 13 años, pedí una bicicleta como regalo de Bar-Mitzvah. No me lo compraron. En cambio, a mis dos primos (Eli y Jak Abuaf) sus familias les compraron bicicletas. Creo que fui consciente de ser pobre por primera vez entonces.”

Jaco y Eli experimentaron el antisemitismo creciente en Turquía antes de la Guerra cuando eran alumnos en la Escuela de Comercio. El profesor de matemáticas, que era un antisemita, nombró delegado de su clase, compuesta mayoritariamente de judíos, a un alemán llamado Hans perteneciente al partido nazi. Este alemán hizo todo tipo de maldades a los alumnos

hasta que un día, un alumno llamado Robert Goldenberg le dio dos bofetadas. Goldenberg era el único sionista de la clase y pronto emigró a Palestina.

“Más tarde me enteré de que aquel alemán había muerto en el frente”, me dijo Eli una vez, “No sé porque, me dio pena.”

A pesar de la abundancia de anécdotas como esta, el Jaco que se graduó de la Escuela de Comercio era un joven idealista que quería hacer cosas buenas para su país. Era socialista. Algunas tardes se reunía con amigos que pensaban como él y leían a Nazim, a Sabahattin Ali y a otros escritores prohibidos.

Mientras tanto su hermano mayor, ya cansado de las condiciones en las que vivía, se había marchado a Uruguay a probar suerte al lado de un familiar del cual se decía que era dueño de una azucarera. Jaco tuvo que encargarse de su madre y de sus hermanos pequeños.

En aquel entonces, a los ojos de la comunidad judía de Izmir América Latina era una especie de El Dorado, de tierra encantada donde todo el que llegaba se hacía rico enseguida. Uno de los primeros que se lo había creído había sido Solomon, el hermano mayor de los Saban. A pesar de tener una situación buena en Izmir, donde era conocido por las fiestas extravagantes que daba en su casa grande, se había dejado seducir por las promesas de un comerciante judío que había conocido en Italia y se había marchado a Brasil para meterse en el negocio del café. Cuando las cosas no fueron como había esperado, él también acabó en Montevideo y pudo recuperarse gracias al comercio marítimo durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Sería, en sí mismo, el tema para otro artículo.

Frente a la necesidad de proveer a su familia, Jaco consiguió un empleo al lado del fabricante de bobinas de hilo Rabenu Politi, uno de los industriales más conocidos de Izmir. En poco tiempo ascendió en la empresa. Sin embargo, justo cuando estaba a punto de enderezar su situación el Estado impuso el notorio Impuesto de Bienes (**) a muchos judíos. A pesar de no ser una persona rica, se le pidió a Jaco pagar una cantidad desorbitada. Como no pudo pagar, se le embargaron todos los bienes. Eli Saban se acuerda: “Una mañana llegaron los funcionarios de Hacienda a la casa de los Bonomos. Se llevaron todo. Daba mucha pena ver a todos los muebles en la calle.” Si bien en Montevideo Jaco me comentó que unos años después de aquel acontecimiento el Congreso de los Diputados turco le había escrito en persona para disculparse, no creo que pudiera recuperar sus pertenencias jamás.

Justo después de que le quitaran todo, el Estado le llamó a hacer el servicio militar. Mientras tanto, llegaban noticias buenas de su hermano en Uruguay: se había hecho rico y esperaba que el resto de la familia se reuniese con él en cuanto antes. Jaco consiguió embarcar a su madre y a sus dos hermanos en un barco con destino a Uruguay y se marchó al ejército.

Era el año 1946. El regimiento de Jaco recibió la orden de trasladarse a la frontera rusa. Al enterarse de aquello Cako sobornó a un oficial que conocía, quien le escondió dentro del cuartel. Salió de su escondite tres días después de haberse marchado el regimiento. Como ya no lo podían enviar a la frontera, acabó haciendo su servicio militar en condiciones relativamente cómodas cerca de Izmir (es probable que el oficial que conocía le haya ayudado en esto, también). En cuanto acabó el servicio, se compró un pasaje de barco para Uruguay con el último dinero que le quedaba.

Un día primaveral del año 1950 se subió al barco en el puerto de Izmir para no volver nunca más. Sus amigos del alma Eli (Saban), Jak (Abuaf) y Josef (Uziel) estaban allí para despedirlo. Ninguno de ellos jamás olvidó aquel día. En aquellos tiempos, el adiós era definitivo: volver era casi imposible, no había ni conexión telefónica. Sus destinos se separaban por causas que no estaban en sus manos.

El viaje incluyó una larga parada en Italia, donde Jaco tuvo que luchar durante días para conseguir que el Consulado de Uruguay le diera el certificado de “no ser Nazi ni Comunista”, que le permitiera entrar en el país. Dos meses después de salir de Turquía, llegó a Montevideo. Allí le esperaba una sorpresa: su hermano mayor no era un rico socio de la azucarera tal y como había declarado en sus cartas. Era un simple empleado en una tienda de dulces. Había modificado los hechos para poder atraer allí a su familia. En breve, Jaco seguía siendo pobre en Uruguay también. Iba a tener que empezar de cero.

Una mañana, mientras los dos paseábamos por la larga “Rambla” de Montevideo, me mostró un punto cerca del puerto viejo y me dijo: “Cuando me di cuenta de aquello me senté allí y tomé la decisión más importante de mi vida.”

“¿Cuál?”

“Suicidarme o no.”

Su decisión de seguir trajo consigo años de trabajo continuo, una lucha dura. Cuando llegó a Montevideo, Jaco no entendía el español que se hablaba en la calle a pesar de tener algunos conocimientos del judeoespañol: “Se estaba celebrando el Mundial del 1950. La única palabra

que entendía era “gol.”” En poco tiempo aprendió el idioma. Tuvo varios trabajos en el sector de textiles. Durante un tiempo fue intermediario; aunque tuvo éxito, lo dejó por desacuerdos con sus socios. Al final, fundó un taller de fabricación de ropa interior para mujeres en un ático que había alquilado. Trabajaba desde muy temprano en la mañana hasta muy tarde, a veces con instrumentos primitivos por no poder comprar todavía las maquinas necesarias. Aun así, se acordaba de aquellos días con nostalgia:

“Volviendo a casa muy cansado en la noche encendía mi pipa y gozaba de andar en el fresco de la noche. Era feliz.”

También en aquella época entendió que Uruguay podía ser de verdad El Dorado en cierto sentido:

“Los habitantes del país eran tranquilos y pacíficos. Era posible ver a gente subiéndose a los autobuses municipales en pijamas. El concepto de cuidar de su apariencia todavía no se había asentado.”

Era un mercado virgen para vender ropa interior femenina fina.

La fábrica creció. Jaco pudo construirse una vida buena. Se casó con la hija de una familia judía francesa que se había escapado del Holocausto. Tuvieron tres hijos.

Con el tiempo se dio cuenta de que Uruguay había sido una elección afortunada en otro sentido, también. Era la democracia más avanzada de Sudamérica. “El presidente de la República salía a pasearse sólo y la gente lo paraba para decirle libremente sus opiniones, sugerencias etc... sobre su gestión. Y él les contestaba sin complejos.” Era un estado laico hasta el punto de que la Semana Santa allí se llamaba “Semana del Turismo”. No había un antisemitismo palpable.

Jaco tenía una relación compleja con Turquía. Salvo algunas expresiones en turco o en ladino que usaba de vez en cuando de modo jocoso, no hablaba mucho de Turquía o de la gente que había dejado allí. Sin embargo, se captaba que bajo su apariencia calma era un hombre extremadamente emocional, con tormentas interiores: cuando, por alguna razón, el tema de conversación se volvía a sus recuerdos de la juventud y a sus amigos de entonces, uno sentía que todavía conservaba lazos muy profundos con ellos y que los echaba de menos. Sin embargo, a pesar de tener todos los medios a su disposición, volvió a Turquía muy pocas veces, sólo para viajes cortos. Parecía no querer enfrentarse al pasado. La idea de que los que había dejado atrás pudieran haber cambiado o simplemente habrían muerto le molestaba.

Su vida diaria en Montevideo era cómoda, tranquila. Giraba alrededor de su familia y de unos cuantos amigos íntimos. Se había adaptado muy bien a su nuevo país. Fuera del trabajo, su gran pasión era pintar; cuando, al avanzar su edad, empezó a dejar gradualmente el negocio en manos de sus hijos, tuvo la oportunidad de dedicarle más tiempo. Los fines de semana iba a veces a ver los partidos de fútbol de su equipo Peñarol en el inmenso Estadio Centenario.

Los Bonomo habían trasladado las relaciones familiares de Izmir idénticamente a Montevideo y las habían transmitido a las siguientes generaciones. Eran familias muy unidas, que se ayudaban mucho. Aquello creaba un ambiente cálido y protector pero también a veces un poco sofocante. Lo mismo se podía decir para la mayoría de los 40000 judíos que vivían en Uruguay entonces (en el presente el número ha bajado a 15000): hasta hace poco se consideraba raro incluso que un judío sefardí se casara con un ashkenazi. A partir de los 90 las cosas empezaron a cambiar, hasta el punto de que ahora los matrimonios entre distintas religiones son comunes.

En los años 70, Uruguay pasó por una época difícil. En 1973, un golpe militar sangriento acabó con la democracia, iniciando un régimen militar que duraría once años. Jaco y sus hijos contaban en detalle historias del estado de sitio que había durado días, del ambiente de terror que reinaba y de cómo los soldados iban de casa por casa para llevarse a los "terroristas". A pesar de no haber estado de acuerdo con el movimiento armado izquierdista que era activo antes del golpe, Jaco estaba muy molesto con el régimen militar, que entre otras brutalidades también tenía un componente antisemita. Pensó en emigrar a Israel pero luego cambió de opinión. En 1983, el régimen ya vivía sus últimos tiempos. Aun así, cuando yo empezaba a hablar de política en los lugares públicos, Jaco y sus hijos me avisaban de que el régimen tenía espías en todas partes. El año siguiente la dictadura se acabó, poco a poco se volvió a la democracia.

Con la edad, Jaco se hizo más introvertido. No mostraba mucho entusiasmo por las cosas en general; una de las pocas excepciones era cuando se hablaba de su juventud, de sus antiguos amigos. En el 2007 convencimos a Eli, que entonces tenía 81 años, a hacer el viaje de veinte horas a Montevideo en compañía de su mujer y mi familia; Jaime me dijo que nunca había visto a su padre tan feliz. Cuando Eli se fue, volvió a su introversión. Tal vez le pasaba lo mismo que a muchos inmigrantes: la vida que había conseguido fundar con mucho esfuerzo en su segundo país empezaba a parecerle irreal y pasajera. Sentía la necesidad de agarrarse a las raíces del árbol. Buscaba la felicidad en lo más sólido, en los recuerdos de la niñez.

Pocos años después de aquella visita, nos dejó. Sin embargo, los descendientes de los Bonomo nunca se olvidan del origen de sus antepasados. Al acabar sus estudios, cada miembro de la familia hace un largo viaje a Turquía para ver los lugares donde los Bonomo nacieron y crecieron y para conocer a sus familiares que todavía viven allí.

(*) CHP. Partido Republicano del Pueblo- Fundó la República turca en 1923 y estuvo en el poder como partido único hasta el 1950, cuando se pasó a la democracia y perdió las elecciones. En los años 60-70, se convirtió en un partido socialdemócrata.

(**) Impuesto especial que se aplicó en los años cuarenta a las minorías y muy especialmente a los judíos para quitarles los bienes.