Negotiating Tradition and Change: Sephardi Jewish Life Cycle Practices in Istanbul (1960 - 2020)

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The intellectual content of this dissertation, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.

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Abstract

Negotiating Tradition and Change: Sephardi Jewish Life Cycle Practices in Istanbul (1960-2020)

Belin Benezra Yensarfati, Doctoral Candidate at the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University, 2025

Profs. Asım Karaömerlioğlu and Judith Frishman, Dissertation Advisors

This dissertation examines how life cycle rituals—namely Brit Milah, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and Jewish weddings—have transformed in meaning, form, and function within Istanbul's Sephardi Jewish community between the 1960s and 2020. Framing these events as a "field" in the Bourdieusian sense, the study investigates how ethno-religious cultural and communal identity is co-produced through the interaction of three key agents: religious authorities, Jewish-owned event companies, and community members themselves.

Drawing on over forty interviews, archival research, and participant observation, the study reveals how these rituals are shaped by competing forms of capital (economic, cultural, symbolic), and how different actors strategically deploy these resources to influence the definition of "proper" and "ideal" Jewishness. While religious authorities emphasize continuity and modesty (Kayadez), companies introduce global trends and market sensibilities, and community members negotiate visibility, belonging, habitus, and status within a shifting socio-political landscape.

Special attention is given to how rituals reflect broader dynamics, such as antisemitism, gendered expectations, and class dynamics, in connection with the transformation of communal infrastructure. Life cycle events emerge not merely as religious traditions but as dynamic arenas where power, identity, and representation are continuously negotiated.

93,576 words

Özet

Gelenek ve Değişimin Müzakeresi: İstanbul'da Sefarad Yahudi Yaşam Döngüsü Pratikleri (1960-2020)

Belin Benezra Yensarfati, Doktora Adayı, 2025
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Prof. Asım Karaömerlioğlu ve Prof. Judith Frishman, Tez Danışmanları

Bu tez, İstanbul Sefarad Yahudi Cemaati'nde yaşam döngüsü ritüellerinin—Brit Milah, Bar/Bat Mitsva ve Yahudi düğünlerinin—1960'lardan 2020'ye kadar geçen süreçte anlam, biçim ve işlev açısından nasıl dönüştüğünü incelemektedir. Bu ritüeller, Pierre Bourdieu'nün "alan" (field) kavramı çerçevesinde ele alınmakta ve etno-dinsel kültürel ve topluluk kimliğinin nasıl üç temel aktörün etkileşimi yoluyla ortaklaşa üretildiği araştırılmaktadır: dini otoriteler, Yahudi ortaklı şirketler ve cemaat üyeleri.

Kırkın üzerinde görüşme, arşiv araştırmaları ve katılımcı gözleme dayanan bu çalışma, söz konusu ritüellerin ekonomik, kültürel ve sembolik sermaye türlerinin rekabetiyle nasıl şekillendiğini ve farklı aktörlerin bu kaynakları "uygun/doğru" ve "ideal" Yahudiliğin tanımını etkilemek için nasıl stratejik biçimde kullandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Dini otoriteler süreklilik ve tevazu (Kayadez) vurgusu yaparken, organizasyon şirketleri küresel trendleri ve piyasa hassasiyetlerini ritüellere taşımakta; cemaat üyeleri ise görünürlük, aidiyet, habitus ve toplumsal statü arayışlarını değişen sosyo-politik bağlam içinde müzakere etmektedir.

Ritüellerin, antisemitizm, toplumsal cinsiyet beklentileri ve sınıf dinamikleri gibi daha geniş yapısal etkenlerle—özellikle topluluk altyapısının dönüşümüyle bağlantılı olarak—nasıl ilişkili olduğu da çalışmada özel bir dikkatle ele alınmaktadır. Yaşam döngüsü ritüelleri, yalnızca dini gelenekler değil; aynı zamanda iktidarın, kimliğin ve temsiliyetin sürekli olarak müzakere edildiği dinamik alanlar olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

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To my son Lio,

Wishing him to grow up in a world in peace…

Table of Contents

List of Tables *xviii*
List of Figures *xviii*
Glossary of Non-English Terms *xviii*
Acknowledgements *xxi*

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Studying Turkish Jewish Community in Istanbul/ Turkey 3
1.2 Life Cycle Events as Windows into the Sephardi Jewish Community in Turkey 6
1.3 Research Aim and Central Questions 11
1.4 Outline of the Dissertation 14
1.5 State of the Art 16

2 METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES 25

2.1 The Scope of the Study 25
2.2 Interviews 28
2.3 Participant Observation – Fieldwork 32
2.4 Sampling and Access to the Jewish Community 33
2.5 Archival Work 36
2.6 Data Analysis 38

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 45

3.1 Bourdieu's Conceptual Tools 45
3.2 Life Cycle Events From the Gender Perspective: Bourdieu and Butler's Concept of 'Performativity' 61
3.3 The Key Agents in the Life Cycle Celebratory Event Field: Family/ Community Members, Companies (the Market), and Religious Authority 64
3.4 The Concept of Rite of Passage 73

4 HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE JEWISH SEPHARDI COMMUNITY IN (ISTANBUL) TURKEY 75

4.1 Demographic Information on the Jewish Population of Turkey 80
4.2 The Institutions of the Jewish Community 83
4.3 Shifting Narratives: The Representation and Public Presence of the Sephardi Jewish Community in Turkey 90

PART 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CURRENT POSITION OF THE TURKISH JEWISH SEPHARDI COMMUNITY AND LIFE CYCLE EVENTS FESTIVE EVENTS FROM 1960 TO 2020 107

5 LIFE CYCLE FESTIVE EVENT: BRITH MILAH 109

5.1 Religious Ceremony and the Meaning of Brith Milah in Turkish Jewish Society 109
5.2 Historical Change of Brith Milah: Venues, Receptions and Religious Ceremony 115
5.3 Concluding Remarks 131

6 LIFE CYCLE FESTIVE EVENT: BAR MITZVAH AND BAT MITZVAH 133

6.1 Religious Ceremony and the Meaning of Bar and Bat Mitzvah in Turkish Jewish Society 131
6.2 Historical Change of Bar and Bat Mitzvah 137
6.3 Regulations for Shabbat and Kosher/Kashrut and Its Application 157
6.4 Concluding Remarks 166

7 LIFE CYCLE FESTIVE EVENT: JEWISH WEDDING 169

7.1 Religious Wedding Ceremony and the Meaning of Jewish Wedding in Turkish Jewish Society 170
7.2 Historical Change of Jewish Weddings 176
7.3 Concluding Remarks 222

PART 2 – CONCLUDING REMARKS 223

PART 3. THE FIELD OF LIFE CYCLE FESTIVE EVENTS: THE PRACTICE OF JEWISH LIFE CYCLE EVENTS IN ISTANBUL JEWISH COMMUNITY AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND (JEWISH) COMPANIES 229

8 THE FIELD OF LIFE CYCLE FESTIVE EVENTS: HABITUS, CAPITAL AND GENDERED PRACTICES WITHIN COMMUNITY MEMBERS 231

8.1 The Practices of Community Members and Families in the Life Cycle Events Field 231
8.2 Looking at the Life Cycle Events Field From a Gender Perspective: Gendered Experiences and Social Reproduction 253

9 NAVIGATING THE MARKETPLACE: COMPANIES, TASTE AND GENERATIONAL DYNAMICS IN LIFE CYCLE FESTIVE EVENTS FIELD 269

9.1 The Role and Influence of (Jewish) Companies in the Life Cycle Events Field and the Internal Jewish Economy 269
9.2 Same Habitus and Different Paths: Generational Shifts in Professional Formation 274
9.3 Transmitting Skills, Marking Boundaries and Maintaining Distinction in the Field: The Term of “Vedre” 292

PART 3 – CONCLUDING REMARKS 296

PART 4. CONCLUSION 299

10 CONCLUSION 299

BIBLIOGRAPHY 311

List of Tables

Table 5.1 The distribution of the number of Brith Milah by years from 1980 to 2020 114

Table 5.2 The line chart of the Brith Milah numbers between 1980 and 2020 115

Table 5.3 The Brith Milah venues distribution between 2000 and 2020 120

Table 5.4 The Brith Milah percentage distribution between 2000 and 2020 121

Table 7.1 The distribution of the number of Jewish weddings by years from 1960 to 2020 173-174

Table 7.2 The line chart of Jewish wedding numbers between 1960 and 2017 175

Table 7.3 The Jewish wedding venues' percentage distribution between 2014 and 2019 197

List of Figures

Figure 5.1 Reshut Milah document (birth certificate) from 2022 111

Figure 7.1 Ketubah document from 2022 172

Figure 7.2 Compulsory pre-marriage seminar kit from 2015 186

Figure 7.3 Warning letter at Neve Shalom Synagogue from 2016 202

Glossary of Non-English Terms

Aparar Ashuar	Dowry Showing
Banyo de Novya	Bridal Bath
Bogo de Novya	Sending Bridal Package
Bonbonyer	Wedding Candy
Haham	Rabbi

Hahambashi	The Chief Rabbi
Hamsa	The Hand of Fatima
Kama de Novya	Preparation of Bridal Bed
Ketubah	Jewish Marriage Contract
Ladino	Judea-Espanyol/Spanish
Mezafranga	Living in the Bride's House
Noçe de Alhenia	Henna Night
Shabbat Hatan	Groom's Shabbat
Sheva Berachot	Seven Blessings
Vedre	The Color Green

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1

Introduction

The study aims to shed light on the transformations in the meaning and practice of life cycle celebratory events as a field among the Sephardi Jewish Community of Istanbul from the 1960s to 2020. It will do so by tracing the social and religious celebratory events of Brith Milah (circumcision), Bar/t Mitzvah ceremony, and Jewish wedding. Brith Milah[1] is a religious rite of male circumcision performed by a *mohel*[2] on the eighth day of a Jewish baby boy's life. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony marks the transfer of responsibility for one's deeds from the father to the male child at the age of thirteen. According to Orthodox, Conservative, and (some) Reform Jews, a Jewish girl becomes a Bat Mitzvah at the age of twelve.[3] The Bar and Bat Mitzvah rituals celebrate the reaching of adolescence and maturity. After reaching their Bar or Bat Mitzvah age, it is accepted that they become responsible for their actions. Third, a Jewish wedding[4] is a ceremony that allows two people of

1 See: Goldberg (2003: 38-63).

2 A religious official who performs the Jewish rite of circumcision.

3 In some Reform congregations, girls celebrate their Bat Mitzvah at the age of thirteen.

4 See:https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/marriage-in-judaism?utm_content=cmp-true (Accessed, July 5, 2024). See: Goldberg (2003: 144-161).

opposite sexes to unite their lives by following Jewish law, traditions, and rituals.[5]

The main aim is to display the historical changes in the content of the Sephardi Jewish ceremonies in Istanbul by invoking the family members/couples, religious institutions, and the event sector/market. The three active agents will be introduced in detail in Chapter 3. This dissertation views the life cycle event arena as a negotiation arena and a Bourdieusian field among these three agents, as well as within the agents themselves. As claimed, they negotiate in the arena of rituals and are thereby involved in the process of the cultivation and formation of ethno-religious cultural community identity. The life cycle events have the dynamics of change over time, and this study will provide details on these dynamics and show how actors take their positions over the decades in this celebratory event field.

Weddings, Brith Milah, and Bar/t Mitzvah ceremonies are the sites and moments of negotiation for various agents. Three agents in particular struggle to influence and determine the formation of ethno-religious communal identity in this field: family members/couples, the market and religious institutions. Community institutions and religious institutions (lay leaders) determine the rules of celebration and have the authority to ease the rules from time to time in the arena of festive events. The second source of influence is the private companies, including event and party planners, music and video companies, choreographers, photographers, and caterers. Over the last four decades, private companies, which are relatively new actors in this field, have become visible at all levels of the festivities in the Istanbul Jewish community. They are perceived as "knowing" the proper way to conduct and celebrate these ceremonies. The third and last agent, the central part of the study, are ordinary community members who practice and celebrate these rituals. They will be referred to as community or family members, and sometimes as couples, during this dissertation.

While doing it, in these rites of passage celebratory events, these agents' positionings will be studied within the context of social and economic

5 In addition to these life cycle events, *Vijola* (religious naming ceremony for girls), *Faşadura* (*bez kesme*, baby shower), and *Pidyon* (redemption of the firstborn boy) could be counted as social and religious ceremonies.

changes in society, gender, and economy within the historical context. This dissertation will try to answer four main questions listed below. First, do life cycle events change and transform historically, and if so, in *what way.* While this change is taking place, *which actors* take roles in this arena and ensure this change, and *how* do these roles contribute to the ethno-religious communal identity? In this negotiation arena, what steps are taken and what are the actors' primary motivations for taking these steps? Second, *how* is the economy and social dimension of life cycle events shaped, and what roles do community authorities, the market, and community members play among their team and in this field? Third, when viewed from a gender perspective, *how* are the roles of femininity and masculinity distributed in life cycle events? Finally, the background question, which can be seen in different parts of the dissertation, is *how* antisemitism, the issue of security, and, in addition, Turkey's social and economic transformation affect life cycle events as a minority group in Turkish society?

§ 1.1 Studying Turkish Jewish Community in Istanbul/ Turkey

While this dissertation focuses on the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community, first, it is meaningful to look at the Turkish Jewish community in a broader sense. The Turkish Jewish community is an extremely small minority group whose population includes some 14,000-15,000 members[6] and ninety-six per cent of whom are Sephardi Jews. The dominant culture in daily life and at the institutional level is also Sephardi. The Jews live in Istanbul, Izmir, Antakya,[7] Ankara, and Bursa. This small size increases internal competition within the community in every sense and also makes connections with the (Jewish) outside world indispensable. At the same time, living in the diaspora means not losing contact with the Jews around the world and also Israel,

[6] Sept. 2021 - https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/jewish-population-by-country (Accessed, December 3, 2022).

[7] Two 7.7 and 7.6 magnitude earthquakes centered in *Kahramanmaraş* occurred on February 6, 2023. Surrounding provinces, including *Antakya*, were affected, and life came to a near standstill. After this earthquake, important names from the Antakya Jewish community also lost their lives, and Jewish families living in the city had to relocate.

which means following global patterns and being informed about the new developments. Especially since the 1990s, with the help of digitalization, it has become easy to follow trends in life cycle events outside of Turkey, thanks to connections with the United States, Israel, and Europe in the 1990s and 2000s.

Beyond all of this, Jewish people in Turkey additionally struggle because of antisemitism[8] and the frequent confusion between the concepts of anti-Zionism and antisemitism in Turkey, as in many other countries. The lives of Jews in Turkey and the diaspora in other countries are occasionally impacted by the conflict between Israel and its neighbors as a result of geography. It is nearly impossible to take positive action in response to Turkey's rising antisemitism. A critical survey has been conducted repeatedly over the years, which amply reveals Turkey's general perception of Jews. In the Kadir Has University's 2021 Turkey Trends Survey, 37.1% of the participants indicated that they do not want a Jewish neighbor.[9]

This dissertation focuses on the Istanbul Jewish community, which constitutes almost 95% of the total Jewish community in Turkey, has different customs from those elsewhere and has a very close relationship with the bureaucracy of the Jewish community. The Jewish community is a minority community in a Muslim country, and like all the other minority groups, it has a specific and unique relationship and history with the Turkish state. The congregation is numerically tiny and is also shrinking, making it more insular than other minority groups, which is one of the challenges for this study. Istanbul is the capital of Turkish Jewish life today, and all official institutions and relations with the state pass through this city. The state recognizes the Chief Rabbinate, and there is also a secular, lay and communal administration, all of which are located in Istanbul.[10] Furthermore, both of these actors

8 https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/spelling-antisemitism (Accessed, February 20, 2024).

9 https://www.khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/turkiye-egilimleri-web-basin.pdf (Accessed, June 7, 2023).

10 The lay/communal administrations of other cities are different from those in Istanbul. However, all cities are under the rule of the Chief Rabbinate in Istanbul.

stand relatively in the background in the political arena, and remain as the *les bon citoyens*[11] for the Turkish Republic and have very limited political engagement.[12] The cultural arena in the community is, therefore, primarily the place where its members represent themselves.

Weiker (1992) stresses in his descriptive study of Jews in Turkey, covering the period from the Ottoman Empire until 1992, that Turkish Jews express their religious identity through celebrating holidays and rites of passage, namely weddings, Brith Milahs, and Bar Mitzvahs. Despite the decrease in the number of people in the community, these occasions are still well-attended and still serve as a meeting point and a place where identity is expressed. According to him, in the 1990s, lavish rite of passage ceremonies became more popular among the Jews living in Turkey. Predictably, this phenomenon corresponds to the rise of the middle class in Turkish society (Ayata, 2002; Işık, 1995; Uner & Gungordu, 2016). Additionally, the increase in the number of big hotels and the growth of the party sector facilitated these types of festive events in Istanbul in the 1990s. The consumption patterns of the Jewish minority group in Turkey are not different from those of the non-Jewish Turkish community[13] and similarly grant insight into the financial situations of both groups. Some minority groups have become prominent in specific sectors, particularly in the event market. In addition, due to the expansion of the party and event sector and cultural rituals in Istanbul, which differ from those in other cities in Turkey, it makes sense to analyze this city alone in a more detailed study.

11 *İyi, makbul vatandaş*.

12 Rıfat Bali. (2009) Newspaper Gazetevatan. https://www.gazetevatan.com/arsiv/rifat-bali-vatana-konustu-728713 (Accessed, May 18, 2022). He emphasized to be a well-behaved child. Turkish term is *uslu çocuk*.
See, Chapter 4.

13 The Jewish community refers to the non-Jewish Turkish community in Turkey as *Geniş toplum*.

§ 1.2 Life Cycle Events as Windows into the Sephardi Jewish Community in Turkey

Due to the dissolution of the old spatial neighborhood life, which mainly took place in *Galata-Kuledibi*, *Balat,*[14] *Hasköy*, and *Kuzguncuk*, one can no longer talk about the existence of spatial unity or neighborhood life. Moreover, the demise of *Ladino* (Judeo-Spanish) as the community's language,[15] the decrease in population and the dwindling attendance at the events organized by the Jewish cultural associations, have led to the reduction in the number of occasions where members of the Turkish Sephardi Jewish community come together socially and religiously. This field is a place for meetings where many people come together just because of their Jewish identity. One of the most critical and surviving areas that brings people together is that of rituals, traditions, and life cycle events. In her recent study on the historization of identity strategies among Turkish Jews from the beginning of the Turkish Republic to the present (Yıldız & Yücel, October 2015, Yıldız, 2015), Yıldız argues that religion serves more as a cultural identity and that identity becomes more religion-driven. As Yıldız and Yücel also state:

> Our respondents think that religion has become more important because Jewish people have experienced a deep assimilation process; they have lost key aspects of their cultural identity, the most significantly the Ladino language as the distinctive characteristic of Turkish Jews. When cultural identity factors are eroding, religion becomes more important even if the level of piety stays the same. In other words, when you lose your language, you find comfort in your religion (Yıldız & Yücel, 2015: 580).[16]

14 See: Şaul (1999).

15 For a general discussion, see: Hualde and Şaul (2011); Şaul (2013); Romero (2012); Harris (1982, 71-97); Özkan (2016).

16 The original text reads: "Görüşmecilerimiz, dolaylı olarak ya da açıkça, din unsurunun öne çıkmasını; 20. yüzyıl boyunca Yahudilerin derin bir asimilasyona girmelerine, bu süreçte birçok kültürel değeri, mahalle hayatını ve Türkiye Yahudilerinin en ayırıcı ve kimliklerinin en

In their study, Yıldız and Yücel (October, 2015: 580) stress that for the Jewish community in Turkey, religion brings out more as a cultural identity. Identity becomes more religion-driven, which does not mean that the practitioners are necessarily religious. Therefore, these life cycle events are essential tools to understand and make sense of the role of religion in cultural identity. Furthermore, as Benbassa and Rodrigue (2000) discuss in their study of the Jews of Turkey and the Balkans, the significance of the concept of tradition in Sephardi communities outweighs the importance granted to religious requirements and necessities. One of the main arguments is that the cultural transmission materializes through these religious occasions. While some members of Jewish society describe their identity through these life cycle events, others join and perform them because they feel a religious and social obligation to do so. Rituals and traditions occur in social and religious ceremonies, most expressly in the rites of passage that also serve to form the community's identity.

These religious and social festivities are the places where the small, introverted, and insular Turkish-Jewish community preserves its traditions. In other words, these occasions become sites for the ontological (re-)affirmation of the Sephardi Jews in Turkey. They could also be seen as a connecting tool or a unifying place where social, religious, or cultural life and identity are reproduced.

Moreover, these ceremonies are the only "compulsory" events in which Jews must participate if they desire to be recognized as "proper" Jewish individuals in the community.[17] The family members and couples need to take part in all the required seminars, obey all the rules laid down by the (religious and secular) authority, and execute all the economic obligations demanded by the community administration. Despite all these obligations, they are entirely motivated to perform these ceremonies to remain part of this congregation. This situation provides the religious and lay/communal authorities with the opportunity to produce and reproduce the habitus of being a "proper" and "good"

temel unsurlarından olan Ladino dilinin büyük oranda kaybetmiş olmalarına bağlamaktadırlar. Din, kimliğin diğer belirleyici unsurları aşınınca, dinsel pratik ve dindarlaşma artmasa da hatta bazı görüşmecilere göre azalsa bile, kültürel değer olarak daha fazla önem kazanmaya başlıyor. Başka bir deyişle, dil yitirilince din daha fazla önem kazanıyor."

17 If not being a child of mixed marriage or not being a side of a mixed marriage.

Jew as well as gain control of practices and rituals in a cultural, religious, and traditional sense. These are, in fact, the sole spaces where the community administration and authority become agents. In this study, the religious and social festivities arena will be taken as a field, referring to Bourdieu and his concepts, such as social, symbolic, cultural, and economic capital, will be discussed in the chapters below.

The centrality of Jewish holidays and *rites de passage* in the Jewish community of Turkey is not new. Weiker (1992), in his well-known descriptive study of Jews in Turkey, notes that already in the 1980s, religious identity was mainly expressed in terms of celebrating holidays and rites of passage, i.e. weddings, Brith Milahs, and Bar Mitzvahs. These events were well-attended occasions. He states that the number of synagogues and the size of the community decreased over the years. Moreover, religious education and the attendance at cultural associations' activities also declined (Weiker, 1992: 310-311). However, he also states that "rites of passage also continued to draw large attendances" (Weiker, 1992: 324). Weiker (1992) adds that

> In recent years it has also become more popular among the Jews to hold lavish Bar Mitzvahs, weddings and other celebrations in major Istanbul hotels, and to have these reported in the social columns of the Turkish press, to the point where this conspicuousness was sometimes reported to be a topic of general public amusement (Weiker, 1992: 325).

In this quotation, he summarizes the situation very well and while the study is not up to date, it is equally applicable to the current position of the Jews in Istanbul.

These ceremonies are significant to study because they are not routine but rather moments of rupture in daily life. In these critical moments of short duration, all the cultural, social, and economic capitals are presented (Bourdieu, 1986) by community members, as well as companies (see Chapters 8 and 9). These events, whose preparation takes months, are, so to speak, a carnival—a mood of celebration—and also a theatre stage where religious rituals and traditions are enacted. At the same time, these festivities provide

a connecting tool and a place that unifies community members. It also serves for their social life and its reproduction.

Additionally, these festive religious events also function as the "collective effervescence" as defined by Durkheim (1912) in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, his last major work. Durkheim claims that religions are never just constituents of belief, they always involve ceremonies, rituals which allow the group to come together and also increase group solidarity. Rituals allow a group of people to come together, to have heightened feeling of energy created in group gatherings and events. The foundation of Durkheim's theory relies on functionalism, so that he focuses on how beliefs and practices work in a society and contribute to the unification of a single moral community. Durkheim calls this phenomenon collective effervescence –a heightened feeling of energy created in group gatherings and events. Ceremonies take people away from their everyday concerns and transpose them to a different emotional level where they connect with higher forces. These higher forces, according to Durkheim, are, in fact, the society within the individual–the expression of the collectivity's influence on the individual. In religions, the real object of worship is the society itself. Ceremony and ritual are essential in binding people together, and they are found in events such as births, deaths, and marriages. They reaffirm solidarity at a time when people are faced with major changes in their lives. From a functionalist perspective, it highlights the ties between community members and serves to social integration and coherence.

From a functionalist perspective, without denying that these ceremonies are an arena that brings society together, strengthens social integration, and even presents communal identity from time to time, it is claimed that this arena not only serves integration purely but may also contain some negotiations and disagreements within itself. The Sephardi Jewish community's life cycle festive events are fields negotiated by these different agents. Not only are cross-generational differences observable in the approaches to these ceremonies, but market and religious institutions are also actively defining the field of life cycle ceremonies. Religious institutions are instrumental in defining the field of ceremonies, but the market also has a great influence on the field of ceremonies and changes in generations' perceptions of celebration. In other words, it is argued that ceremonies and rituals are considered an

arena where family members/couples, the market, and the religious institution struggle with each other and influence one another in the formation or cultivation of community identity. That is precisely why the community administration and religious authority become agents, thanks to their role in rule-making in the arena of festive events. Community and religious institutions are among the agents of this process, with their rule-making position and authority to occasionally loosen the rules. Looking at all these actors is crucial for gaining a deep understanding of the dynamics of change over time for the events as of the 1960s.

All in all, due to the dissolution of the spatial old neighborhood life, the demise of Ladino as the community language, the decrease in population, and the decline of attendance at the cultural associations' events, there are relatively very few occasions left for members of the Turkish Sephardi Jewish community come together socially and religiously. For the Sephardi Jewish community, as a community whose bonds are loosening, ceremonies are also the most critical places for socialization. Thus, it is a good opportunity to observe and study one of the most essential areas that bring people together: the rituals and traditions that take place in social and religious life cycle ceremonies, which also serve to form the ethno-religious cultural community's identity.

Last but not least, as mentioned above, the focus of this dissertation will be on the life cycle events of the Sephardi Jewish Community of Istanbul, including Brith Milah (circumcision), Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, and Jewish weddings, from the 1960s to 2020. This study will not just focus on the religious ceremony in a synagogue but will examine the events and ceremonies as a package that includes the whole process of preparation for and celebration of the rite. For weddings, that package includes a proposal, visiting the bride's household to ask for her hand in marriage from her parents, an engagement party, a bachelor party, a civil marriage, a compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar on married life, a *mikveh*[18] ceremony, a religious

18 *Mikveh* is a pool with full of rainwater which is used (by mostly woman in Turkey) before the religious wedding ceremony for purification ritual (and also after their every menstrual cycle for the purification ritual).

wedding ceremony, and a wedding reception. For a Bar/ Bat Mitzvah ceremony,[19] it includes, the *Bar/Bat Mitsva Club*, religious ceremonies, receptions, or birthday parties. For a Brith Milah ceremony, it includes preparation stages, a religious (Jewish) circumcision ceremony, and a reception.[20]

§ 1.3 Research Aim and Central Questions

The dissertation's main aim is to study the transformations in the meaning and practice of the life cycle celebratory events among the Sephardi Jewish community of Istanbul from the 1960s to 2020. After I started studying the literature and the field, my research question took shape. My main goal is to shed light on the transformations in the meaning and practice of the life cycle celebratory events among the Sephardi Jewish Community of Istanbul. In addition, referring to Bourdieu's theoretical approach, which will be elaborated on in Chapter 3, I call the arena of the life cycle events as a "field" in Bourdieusian terms, which serves to the formation of the ethno-religious and

19 See: Hilton (2014).

20 For detailed information: Dalven's book (1990) titled *The Jews of Ioannina* could be a reference resource for these events. It is a comparison of the situation of Jews in the nineteenth century with the times of WWII. Dalven concentrates on the historical changes in family life, education, bethoral, marriage customs, circumcision, the content of dowries, etc., historically. She elaborately describes the religious traditions practiced in Ioannina in the past, because, as she states, there are now only sixty-five people in the Jewish community.
Juhasz's descriptive study (1990) of the material culture of the Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire contains written documents, pictures, dresses, examples of *Ketubas* (Jewish marriage contract), family albums, bedding for childbirth bed, Elija's chair, amulets for newborn infants, circumcision clamps and knife, circumcision tools. Juhasz also briefly describes the contents of marriage, childbirth, henna night, dowry, etc. This study is meaningful to see the use of these material cultural aspects and their evolution throughout history and to think about their transformation today.
Marcus (2004) has a study entitled *The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of passage from Biblical to Modern Times*. The content is constituted by applying Van Gennep's concept of "rites of passage" and its components. It includes four steps: Brith; Bar/Bat Mitzvah and confirmation; engagement, betrothal, and marriage; and lastly, aging, dying, and remembering. Marcus focuses on how Jews celebrate life cycle events throughout history, referencing rabbinical teachings, and demonstrates the transitions between periods of life experience.

cultural communal identity of the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community. Therefore, the main question became this: "What key agents and actors are involved in constructing the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity of the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community in the period 1960-2020 in the arena of life cycle events, how has this identity evolved over time, and how can the dynamics of these roles be analyzed using Bourdieu's framework of social fields"? When the theoretical approach became apparent, it became necessary to formulate concrete questions for the dissertation parts.

In the first place, in Part 2, these questions will be focused on and tried to be answered. The first aim is to explain and elaborate on the transformation and its meaning to the community and in the context of Turkish society. So, "Do life cycle events change/transform historically, and if so, in *what way?"* The second one is, "While this change is taking place, *which actors* take roles in this arena and ensure this change and *how*?". The third one is "How do these three actors become agents for years, and what are their roles in this field?" Sub-questions will be answered. "In this negotiation arena (life cycle events), what steps are taken, and what are the actors' main motivations for taking these steps? *Who* controls the ideal definition of the "proper" and "good" Jew identity, and who has control of the practice in the field? Who gives power or authority to the Rabbis or the community leaders, and why does it happen?

While focusing on all these questions, these two important questions will be in the background: "*How* do antisemitism and the issue of security affect life cycle events as a minority group in Turkish society?" and "*How does* the socio-cultural change in Turkish society affect the life cycle arena of Jewish society?"

In Part 3, the focus will be on power relations, different types of capital, and habitus, referring to Bourdieu, among the Jewish community in the field of life cycle events. The questions can be listed as "*How* is the economy of life cycle events shaped, and what roles do companies and community members play in this field?" "How can the dynamics of these roles be analyzed using Bourdieu's framework of social fields?" Here, it is not just focusing on the Sephardi Jewish community, the aim is to show how they shape their ethno-religious communal identity by referring to the non-Jewish Turkish

community in Turkey. Focusing on community members and companies aims to answer the question of how two different groups position themselves as individuals or companies within their group and how they use and improve their capital in this field among each other. Then, sub-questions will be answered. "*How* do the symbolic, social, economic, and cultural capitals take a role in celebrating a rite of passage in a Jewish community, especially by the market and community members?". Lastly, "Does the field of life cycle event have an *internal economy*, if so, how does it work?". In addition, the other main focus is understanding how gender roles are disseminated between different actors and how they learn these roles within and from the community. So, the main question is: "When viewed from a gender perspective, *how* are the roles of femininity and masculinity distributed in life cycle events?". The concept of "performativity," which will be elaborated on more in Chapter 3, referring to Butler, will be used to analyze. All these questions presented above will help to answer the main research question, which is "What key agents and actors are involved in constructing the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity of the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community from 1960 to 2020 in the field of life cycle events, and how has this identity evolved over time?".

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, my methodology begins with inductive methods and then turns into the deductive method. The dissertation also serves to explore and examine how the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community whether becomes more insular when they feel themselves under threat (because of antisemitic actions) in the Turkish community. However, in the Sephardi Istanbul Jewish community, despite the trauma of the terror and antisemitic attack in different periods, a greater openness to the outside world is discernible, and this flashiness in ethno-religious communal identity, which is shown in the field of life cycle events, did not become plain. What this attitude serves will be underlined by referring to Bourdieu. This hypothesis will be discussed in relation to the firm and long-known tradition of *Kayadez,* which will be examined more in Chapter 4.

§ 1.4 Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of four parts, including the introduction and conclusion. Parts 2 and 3 are organized according to data from the field. Part 1 starts with the Chapter 1, namely "Introduction," which covers the significance of the study, research aim and central questions, identification of life cycle events, outline of the dissertation, and state of art. It continues with Chapter 2, "Methodology and Sources," which provides information on the scope of the study, interviews, participant observation, archival work, sampling, and data analysis. Then, Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework, which covers Bourdieu's framework, the concepts of "field," "capital," "habitus," and adds the gender perspective referring to Butler's concept of "performativity." In addition, this chapter describes the three main agents—namely family members/couples, the market (companies), and religious authority—on which the dissertation's argument is based. Lastly, the concept of "rite of passage" is introduced. Chapter 4, namely "Historical and Contextual Framework: The Jewish Sephardi Community in (Istanbul) Turkey," presents the historical background, current situation, the historical communal identity of the Sephardi Jewish community in Istanbul, and the concept of *Kayadez*.

Part 2, namely "Historical Context and Current Position of the Turkish Jewish Sephardi Community and Life Cycle Festive Events from 1960 to 2020," presents the three different Turkish Jewish Sephardi Community's festive events historically in three different chapters. The historical change in religious ceremonies of life cycle events from the 1960s to 2020, with the help of field data and interviews, is examined by exploring three main religious life cycle events: the Brith Milah, Bar/t Mitzvah and Jewish wedding. Besides, these three main rites of passage, Chapter 5, "Life Cycle Festive Event: Brith Milah," also focuses on antisemitism, which affects the daily life, assets, and sometimes the existence of Jews in Turkey and the security measures taken in rites of passage celebrations. It also affects how they perform their celebrations, the choice of venue, and other factors. Chapter 6, "Life Cycle Festive Event: Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah," also focuses on the issue of *Shabbat* and *kashrut*. Chapter 7, "Life Cycle Festive Event: Jewish Wedding," only focuses on Jewish weddings as its

scope is extensive. In addition to this, Part 2 is focused on how ethno-religious communal identity is shaped by the different actors in the life cycle events field. Especially, the agent of religious authority will be at the forefront as a playmaker by referring to different cases over the decades. These chapters discuss the Jewish community living as a minority group in a country and elaborate on how this fact historically affects their life cycle events, celebrations, and the way the architecture of the places as well. Both understanding these specific antisemitic practices and examining/writing them down one more time are essential for this dissertation because antisemitism and its practices have had heavy results for the Turkish Jewish community throughout history. Needless to say, living as a minority community also does not exempt the Jewish community from the consequences of social and economic changes in Turkey. It is possible to trace these effects by looking at the life cycle events field and how they perform/ play the game during these distressed years.

Entitled "The Field of Life Cycle Festive Events: The Practices of Jewish Life Cycle Events in Istanbul Jewish Community Among Community Members and (Jewish) Companies," Part 3 addresses the economics and social dimensions of these rites of passage, as a field, from 1960 to 2020. This part is one of the central parts of this dissertation, which covers the interviews and the field data and analyzes the rite of passage field by focusing community/family members and market/companies. In Chapter 8, entitled "The Field of Life Cycle Festive Events: Habitus, Capital and Gendered Practices within Community Members," family/community members will be analyzed and focused on how they use and improve their different types of capital in this festive events field and among each other. Section 8.2**,** entitled "Looking at the Life Cycle Festive Events Field From a Gender Perspective: Gendered Experiences and Social Reproduction," dives into these life cycle events through the gender perspective and addresses changes in the position of women and men during these *rite de passage* events over time. Butler's concept of "performativity" will be used to analyze the data in this chapter. The aim is to examine how women and men position themselves in the preparation stage and practice this rite of passage and how they face degrading labels while having these gendered roles. Chapter 9, titled "Navigating the Marketplace: Companies, Taste, and Generational Dynamics in Life Cycle Festive Events Field," focuses on how the market/sector

has positioned themselves in this field and in their group (among the other companies) since the market is one of the primary information sources and an important player in this arena. It examines the players in the market's story about how they entered this event sector. In addition, this part raises questions such as "Is that an internal economy which means money circulates in the community thanks to the Jewish companies in the sector?". It focuses on how they started to learn their skills and business in the Jewish cultural associations, and it is valuable to trace the transmission dynamics of their skills and capitals to the next generation.

Lastly, Part 4, entitled "Conclusion," is the chapter in which the main arguments of the dissertation are discussed and the study's main findings are presented. The findings will be analyzed by referring to the questions raised and bringing together the results discussed during the chapters, by referring to the contextual background and theoretical framework. It also covers suggestions for further research in the area.

§ 1.5 State of the Art

The literature on Jewish culture and the Jewish community in Turkey is limited yet very diverse in the range of disciplines, including history, oral history, language, sociology, ethnography, cultural anthropology, and gender studies.[21] All literature related to this dissertation goes hand in hand with the histography in Turkey and the critical turning point of academia. The literature is also aligned with the global trends in social sciences, and not specifically in Jewish studies, but also by multidisciplinary approaches. The political, economic and

21 Before beginning this part, the absence of the department of Jewish Studies in Turkey should be emphasized because it prevents having more scientific and comprehensive research on this issue. As of 2013, a Jewish Communities Studies Unit (*Yahudi Toplulukları Çalışma Birimi*) was established under the Center of Cultures of Turkey at Istanbul Bilgi University. This unit, of which I am one of the founders and where I have worked for seven years, aims to bring all young researchers who work on different cultural groups and conduct more research on the topic. In addition, religious studies in Turkey are more focused on the Sunni Muslim Communities and Islam.

social context in Turkey and Turkey's relation to international politics are relevant to this study as well. In a nutshell, the literature and the framework of this dissertation are influenced by local academic shifts, global social science trends, and political dynamics.

The literature on the Jewish community in Turkey begins around the 1990s, mostly in the area of history. While the Turkish academia has started to address different social issues[22] and started to follow new trends in worldwide academia, it took time to develop the writings on Jewish history in Turkey. Here, the outstanding works will be briefly outlined from this literature. In this decade, the focus has been roughly and mostly on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this field and in this decade, Akar (1992), Aktar (2000), Avner (1996), Benbassa and Rodrigue (2000), Bora (1995), Dalven (1990), Galanti (1995), Gerber (1994), Güleryüz (1993 & 2012), Juhasz (1990), Karmi (1996), Levi (1996), Lewis (1984), Rodrigue (1997), Sevilla-Sharon (1992), Shaw (1991), Weiker's (1992) studies are the best-known researchers and researches to describe the history of the Jewish Community in Turkey. Rıfat Bali (1999) has also conducted several studies in the 1990s, but he would be a more prolific researcher in academia during the 2000s. While, Akar (1992), Aktar (2000), Bali (1999), Levi (1997) and Rodrigue (1997) focus more on political issues and significant events related to the Jewish Community as a minority group, Turkification politics, modernization and the relations with the state; Bora (1995), Dalven (1990), Galanti (1995), Gerber (1994), Güleryüz (1993) and Karmi's (1996) studies are more descriptive, institutional, historical and broad in scope. While Juhasz's research (1990) focuses on Sephardi Jews based on the material culture of Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire, Benbassa and Rodrigue's study (2000) is the first and the most prominent research on Sephardi Jews and offers in-depth information on the Sephardi community. Their study of Sephardi Jewry delineates the historical background of Sephardi Jews from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century and covers a wide geographical area, namely the Iberian Peninsula. Their aim is to write the history of these transplanted Judeo-Spanish communities and to analyze the

22 After the neoliberal transition, the effect of the feminist perspective, the rise of urban studies, and the focus on culture and discourse.

community's social structures, political positioning, cultures and relation with religion. This study also touches upon the subject of emancipation, assimilation, nationalism, antisemitism, secularization and migration. Therefore, Benbassa and Rodrigue's study (2000) could be seen as instructive and enlightening in the area of Sephardi historiography. In addition, Lewis (1984), Shaw (1991), and Weiker's studies (1992) examine the Jews by referring to the Ottoman Empire. In this term, the main aim is to identify the group of Jews, to examine the issue under the umbrella of the modernization phenomena (i.e., Alliance schools), and to criticize and reflect on several important events in the context of Turkish history.

With the 2000s, the popularity of identity politics, minority politics, and the concept of citizenship has increased in academia. Identity politics has had a considerable impact on the literature on minorities in Turkey as well. The "cultural turn", which has affected Turkey's academia relatively late, is also a turning point for this development and the increase of these types of research. It also helps to place the "culture" in the center position in their work, and the cultural processes and features have become more of a research object in academia. As a methodology, (social) anthropological tools and fields have become more popular, and in the Turkish academic context, oral history has come onto the scene and has been expanded, unfortunately, slowly. As Neyzi (2010) stresses that

> To date [written in 2010], oral history and memory studies remains weakly institutionalized in Turkish universities. Courses, in so far as they are available, are offered by a small number of academics based in a variety of disciplines (Neyzi, 2010: 4).

In addition to that,

> …the existence of a new environment in the academia and the civil society in Turkey with the start of questioning particularly the official historiography in Turkey with the second millennium, the increase in the work for facing the history, and besides the arising interest in subjects such as oral history, memory, and recollections. Accordingly, we have seen the questioning of former experiences in Turkey, the introduction of research on evident or obscure subjects and the reflection

> of these on pages of newspapers, projects of non-governmental organizations, and theses and papers in the academy. These years, during which I think the political environment was also important, was a period of harmonization during which many adaptations were made specifically in accordance with the opening processes and Turkey's desire to European Union full membership (Benezra Yensarfati, 2020: 61). [23]

About the oral history, Neyzi (2010) adds that "Oral history's introduction to Turkey was as late as the 1990s. Is it a coincidence that practically all academics working in the field of oral history and memory studies in Turkey are non-historians and women?"(Neyzi, 2010: 2). In Turkey, while it is possible to see the valuable contributions of Ozturkmen (2002),[24] Neyzi (1999) and Danacıoglu (2001), during that period, Abrams (2010), Caunce (2001), and Thompson's (1999) inspiring works could also be followed in the international arena. This theoretical debate will be elaborated deeply in the methodology part of this dissertation (see Chapter 2). The interest in oral history is also going together with memory studies,

> which moved beyond oral history interviewing to develop its own theoretical tools and was enriched by discussions in history, psychiatry, literature, anthropology, sociology, and women's studies (Neyzi, 2010: 2).

The 2000s was the decade for the rise of facing history and discovering the unspoken memories about the past. It creates an alternative to official history writing. It gives a voice to ordinary and voiceless people in society and challenges the top-down history writing. Examples of studies that use the perspectives of history from below will be given below. Moreover, Neyzi stresses that oral history also helps in facing history. Neyzi underlines that

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23 This book is printed as a part of the Civil and Ecological Rights Association's (SEHAK) project called *Basic Rights and Democratic Values Education through the Life Story of Anne Frank* financed by the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey.

24 "Arzu Ozturkmen played an important role in making Istanbul the venue for the XIth International Conference of the International Oral History Association in 2000" (Neyzi, 2010: 2).

> Early practitioners celebrated oral history as a means of giving voice to the silenced or subaltern, and oral history methodology resembled anthropological fieldwork in providing a bottom-up view of society (Neyzi, 2010: 2).

Before providing several examples of studies from this decade, it is worthwhile to start with Rıfat Bali, who was mentioned earlier in the 1990s section. He has made a significant contribution to the literature on Jewish society in Turkey. Bali's works[25] are the best-known studies to describe the history of the Jewish community in Turkey. In addition to Bali, several studies focus on identity and minority issues, including those by Bal (2006), Okutan (2009), Ovadia (2002), Toktaş (2008), and Demirel's (2010). Moreover, this development in the literature has not just occurred in and about the Jewish community.[26] These studies do not specifically focus on social/religious occasions. Nevertheless, they are significant works that provide a wider understanding of Jewish community culture and politics in Turkey.

When the 2010s arrived, more comprehensive and multidisciplinary studies were seen in academia. Anthropological tools are still being employed, and field research is also significant. The facing of history and the trend in history from a below perspective could still be traced. In this decade, Abrevaya Stein (2016), Altaras (2020), Atlas (2022), Bali (2013 & 2017 & 2022), Brink-Danan (2012), Bora (2017), Canefe (2014), Cohen (2014), Demirel (2020), Derya (2016),[27] Erol (2016), Kayır (2017), Kaymak (2017), Kaymak and Beylunioğlu

25 See: Bali (2001); Bali (2004a); Bali (2004b); Bali (2009).

26 It has also affected the work on the other minority groups. For instance, Kaya and Tarhanlı (2005), Kaya (2011), and Ozdoğan et al. (2009) are outstanding examples of studies from this decade. Last, the studies that employed oral history are Demirel (2010), Erselcan (2009), Margulies (2006), and Saul's (1999) studies, and the examples could be diversified. These studies are comprehensive examples, both in context and methodology, that help us understand how a minority group can be studied then and now.

27 This study is an undergraduate thesis written by Derya (2016). She elaborates on the positionality of (Turkish) Jewish women in the household by referring to the concepts of marriage, kinship relations, parenthood, girlhood and motherhood, being a minority in society, and identity. She applies anthropological research tools to gain a better understanding of the positionality of women in everyday life and the changes in positionality from one

(2020), Meseri and Kuryel (2017), Oktem and Yosmaoğlu (2022), Ozkan (2016), Samlıoğlu (2013), Yıldız and Hakan (2015), and Yıldız's (2015) works could be given as examples. Brink-Danan's study was the first English-language ethnography about the contemporary Turkish Jewry. While all the studies mentioned above will nourish this dissertation, they also broaden its scope and will be referenced throughout the dissertation as necessary.

Finally, here are a couple of critical studies that will be mentioned briefly. Two comprehensive, prominent, and outstanding studies belong to Cohen (2014 and April 2014) and Abrevaya Stein (2016). While Cohen focuses on (Jewish) imperial citizenship in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, Abrevaya Stein's history of Ottoman Jews in the twentieth century discusses the concept of citizenship. In addition to this topic, Kandiyoti and Benmayor (2023) recently published an edited book that focuses on the concept of citizenship related to Spain and Portugal. Moreover, Altaras's study (2020) focuses on Spain and Portugal's "Law of Return"[28] and how community members receive EU citizenship. In addition, three significant studies by Atlas (2022), Canefe (2014), and Oktem and Yosmaoğlu (2022) focus on diaspora and Israel, referring to different periods. Additionally, Demirel (2020), Kaymak (2017), and Kaymak and Beylunioğlu's (2020) studies focus more on the daily life of Turkish Jews by using anthropological research tools. While Demirel (2020) discusses Sephardi cuisine culture through interviews with the Turkish Jewish community members, Kaymak and Beylunioğlu's study aims to compare and find out the effects of mixed marriage on different minority groups in Turkey. Lastly, the focus of Ozkan's (2016) and Samlıoğlu's (2013) research is language, *Ladino* (Judea-Espanyol/Spanish), and they utilized anthropological research tools as well.

In summary, studies on the Jewish Turkish community in the 1990s presented the Jewish minority community as part of a historical and descriptive

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generation to another. Although this study lacks a theoretical background and the research field needs development, it provides a valuable snapshot of the women's positionality in specific life passages, such as birth, marriage, and motherhood, across different generations.

28 According to that law, Sephardi Jewish descendants are eligible to obtain Spanish or Portuguese citizenship if they prove that to the authorities. This law refers to the years of 1492 and 1496 when they were expelled from the territory of the Iberian Peninsula.

narrative or as part of the state's aim of Turkification. In addition, extensive and valuable research conducted abroad has focused on the history of Sephardi culture, and these studies have been carried out on a broader geographical and historical spectrum. There has been a lack of micro and anthropological studies in recent years. Of course, all of these studies were very valuable and paved the way for the work of the new scholar's work. However, the shortage remained. Then, in the 2000s, among the most prominent issues were identity politics, minority politics, and the concept of citizenship. In addition, as the trend of confronting history increased, oral history studies began to appear. In the case of minorities or Jews, the unfortunate events that happened to these communities were told from their perspective, accepting the minorities as agents. In the 2010s, broader geographies began to be examined in more detail through the concept of citizenship. At the same time, daily life began to take center stage, leading to increased anthropological studies and extending the microphone to ordinary people.

This dissertation recognizes ordinary people as agents, without overlooking the internal dynamics of the community and the power relations within it. While situating these dynamics in Turkey's broader historical context of economic and social change, the study focuses on a specific and often overlooked domain: life cycle events.

My aim is to contribute to a shift from institutional and state-centered narratives toward everyday lived experiences. During the research process, I also observed a transformation within the community—from the quiet ethic of *Kayadez* to the more visible and critical voice of *Avlaremoz*. These shifts became especially visible in festive and ceremonial settings, where I encountered subtle negotiations, symbolic expressions, and moments of power that are often overlooked by top-down approaches. Discussions of the Jewish community in Turkey have mainly overlooked everyday life, instead focusing on institutions and political frameworks. This gap led me to approach life cycle events not just as rituals, but as dynamic spaces where identity, belonging, and power are actively produced and contested.

Using a multi-method qualitative approach—centered on ethnography, oral history, and Bourdieu's field theory—I explored how life cycle events function as a "social field" where various actors interact, compete, and shape

communal identity. These events are not merely religious or cultural practices; they are also sites of emotional labor, symbolic struggle, and adaptive creativity.

This research contributes to our understanding of minority life as fluid and negotiated, rather than static or passively inherited. It challenges dominant narratives of Jewish identity in Turkey by revealing how community members, religious authorities, and markets co-construct identity through both harmony and tension. Ultimately, this study invites us to rethink minority agency—not just in terms of resistance, but also through improvisation, negotiation, and symbolic work. In the life cycle events of a small, often insular community, we find broader questions of tradition, representation, and belonging.

2

Methodology and Sources

In this study, ethnographic research methods, namely in-depth interviews and participant observation, have been employed as the primary sources of information about the cultural, social, and economic aspects of Jewish life cycle events in Istanbul. The main sources of the data are the interviews—with family and community members, private companies/market and the religious authority—conducted in 2017-2018 and the participant observation made between 2013 and 2019. The qualitative analysis of these sources has been supplemented by archival work in order to contextualize the changes in these events historically. Briefly, my data collection through interviews and participation observation and my data analysis started with inductive methods, which enabled me to understand the arena of life cycle events and historicize the transformation. Then, it continued with deductive methods, which allowed me to think about the study in a clear theoretical framework and caused me to rewrite my research question. Lastly, the whole data collection and data analysis process was iterative.

§ 2.1 The Scope of the Study

The focus of this study is on the Turkish Sephardi Jewish community, especially that of Istanbul. There are several reasons for focusing on the city of Istanbul: First, Istanbul's Jewish population is the largest in Turkey and as

such the Istanbul Jewish community is the most vibrant of the Jewish communities in the country. The cultural codes and ritual practices of the Istanbul community differ from those of other Jewish communities, especially those in Izmir[1] and Antakya. Second, the central politics and governance of all Turkish Jewish communities are determined and run by the offices of the Istanbul Jewish community. These include the Chief Rabbinate, all Bet-Din members, and lay leaders all of whom are involved in making the most important decisions and representing the Turkish Jewish community. Therefore, Izmir, Bursa, Antakya, and Ankara – cities where less significant Jewish populations are located – have not been included in this study.

As mentioned in the "Introduction," ninety-six percent of Jews in Turkey are Sephardi. In addition, the dominant culture in daily life and at the institutional level is Sephardi. The Ashkenazi Jewish community has its own cultural codes and social/religious ceremonies as far as weddings are concerned. However, because of intermarriage and the decrease in the number of Jews living in the country, the cultural differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities have become less prominent. Currently there are no significant differences between the religious rituals and ceremonies of Brith Milah and Bar/t Mitzvahs as celebrated by the two Jewish communities in Turkey.

Jewish life cycle events usually[2] start with Brith Milah (for boys), followed by Bar and Bat Mitzvah at the ages of thirteen and twelve for boys and girls respectively. The next major event is marriage. This dissertation focuses on the celebration of Brith Milah, Bar/t Mitzvah, and marriage by the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community. Death and mourning, the final events of the cycle, have not been included in this dissertation. Besides focusing solely on celebrations, there are several reasons not to include death. The first reason is that the emotions involved in death and mourning are far more complicated than the joy experienced at the other life cycle celebrations. Therefore, the researcher would require a different set of skills to conduct and analyze

1 The second-largest Jewish population is located in Izmir. While it is under the governance of the Chief Rabbinate, it has its own board and lay leaders.

2 Although both are very rare, the *Pidyon* ceremony marking the birth of the first born male child and *Vijola*, the Jewish naming ceremony for baby girls are held.

the requisite interviews. Second, this thesis is based on the experiences and narratives of individuals who lived the events directly. As for the subject of death, the related rituals are naturally experienced and given meaning not by the person but by their relatives. The events discussed within the framework of life cycle events in this dissertation include transitions directly experienced by the individual and shaped by social and personal transformations. The last reason is that the theme of death and mourning requires further research in the context of institutional services and as well as different literature and resources in social science.

The period of the events under discussion is between 1960 and 2020. The most significant reason for choosing the year 2020 as the *terminus ad quem* of this study is the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, which had a momentous impact on the life cycle celebrations. The biggest factor in selecting the year 1960 as the *terminus post quem* is the fading memory of those events held by those interviewed. Collecting sufficient and reliable data for the pre-1960 period was not possible.

This study includes neither mixed marriages[3] nor the offsprings of such marriages. Mixed marriages are never performed in the synagogue, nor does the religious authority recognize them. A boy born in a mixed marriage may not undergo the Brith Milah ceremony in the synagogue.[4] Over the course of years, regulations concerning the status of these marriages and their offsprings have been challenged and undergone change. The issue of mixed marriages is a complex and challenging issue not only in the context of Turkish Jews, but also in general and within other Jewish communities. However, this phenomenon is relatively challenging to study, especially in a closed society where matters surrounding mixed marriages are handled mainly behind closed doors (Beylunioğlu & Kaymak, 2021).[5] Therefore, issues surrounding mixed marriages and their offsprings are discussed incidentally in

3 Marriages between Jews and non-Jews.

4 Even though the child was born to a Jewish mother, which means he is Jewish according to Jewish Law, the venue of the Brith Milah is pointed to by the religious authority as the hospital in practice.

5 Beylunioğlu and Kaymak (2021) have studied the issue of mixed marriage from the perspective of individuals, not from the perspective of the institution.

this dissertation and taken as supportive data from the field but are perforce never of primary concern in this dissertation.

§ 2.2 Interviews

As mentioned above, the historical changes and the negotiations between family members/couples, the market and the religious institution are studied employing ethnographic research methods, the foremost being in-depth and semi-structured interviews. A total of forty-four interviews have been conducted which includes twenty-two interviews with family members/couples (reached forty people in total), thirteen interviews with private entertainment/ events company owners and nine interviews with religious and secular authorities. The questionnaires and focus of these three groups of interviews are different, and this will be detailed below. With only one exception, all of the interviews have been conducted by me, face-to-face in Istanbul, Turkey, during the years 2017 and 2018.[6] Almost all interviews have been audio-recorded and the duration of the interviews varies from forty-five minutes to two and a half hours. After each interview, I spent approximately twenty minutes taking notes, in which I wrote down the main topics discussed, the interviewee's emotional state, and the points that were emphasized. These notes proved to be very useful for my data analysis.

Not all of the thoughts of those interviewed have been explicitly reproduced in this dissertation. In order to protect the confidentially of individuals involved in this study, pseudonyms have been chosen for all. These pseudonyms have been culled from among Turkey's most common Jewish names. When greater confidentiality was needed, I made use of the gender-neutral plural pronoun "they."

2.2.1 *Interviews with Family/Community Members and Couples - Life (Oral) History*

I interviewed twenty-two family members/couples (forty people in total) belonging to the Sephardi Jewish community of Istanbul who had celebrated at

6 One of the interviews was held online.

least one of these life cycle events and had gone through all the necessary steps to be taken. In practice, I have interviewed forty people because members of some families could not to be interviewed together for various reasons, such as full agendas. Attention was paid to eliciting an equal number of interviews per decade with those who had celebrated life cycle events between the years 1960-2020. Gender, class, cultural, economic and educational background were taken into account in the selection of the interviewees. Oral history was employed by collecting interviewee's life stories, focusing mainly on these religious life cycle events and festive occasions. The interviews with the family members are semi-structured and include a detailed questionnaire. The latter was sometimes an open-topic list, enabling those interviewed to articulate their stories in detail and in their own way. As a member of the same minority social/religious group I could develop a "rapport" with those interviewed relatively easily and gain access to their unique personal histories including the accounts of their religious ceremonies.

Listening to life histories helps to give voice to ordinary people and respect their patterns of narratives and their wording as Caunce (2001: 15-16) and Thompson (1999) stress repeatedly in their studies. According to Neyzi, "life history research on youth is a useful means of exploring how the past is reconstructed in and for the present" (Neyzi, 1999: 3). Caunce (2001: 8) stresses another aspect, stating that oral history uses personal memoirs as a source and generally composes a complementary and alternative history to traditional history writing. For Thompson (1999: 74) oral history is not just an alternative historiography but can also be seen as a valuable individual source of history. In addition to this, Ozturkmen (2002: 115) supports oral history as a data collection method and claims that the rise in the usage of oral history allows us the possibility to reach knowledge beyond the power of authorities and their narratives.[7] Since this dissertation entails an intergenerational dimension, gathering historical data through life stories by applying oral history methods is of great value. Semi-structured interviews are to capture the expressions, emotions, and meaning attributions of life

7 As an example in a different context; Neyzi (1999).

stories, especially religious events. Danacıoglu (2001: 24), in her book on oral history, mentions suitable themes that could be serve as subjects for oral history, pointing to fetes, fairs, religious rituals, spring festivals, funerals, wedding ceremonies and circumcision feasts in the countryside and city. Her warning (2001: 200) against getting carried away by feelings of nostalgia and the sense of the past, is especially relevant to this study. I collected a lot of anecdotes about the past and comparisons between the past and today, especially from people and couples I interviewed over the age of fifty. I tried to purify these comparisons from emotions and also put aside the expectations of the interviewees from the future generations, which was a difficult task to distinguish, and I reflected this in the dissertation.

2.2.2 *Interviews with Private Companies / The Market*

To have a better grasp of the broader context, socio-cultural, religious and economic factors are also significant for this study. To gain insight into the economic aspects of the life cycle events, I interviewed the private companies—those with Jewish owners or Jewish partners—active in Sephardi Jewish ceremonies in Istanbul. Thirteen interviews with the actors in the market have been conducted. The actors are the ones who work for these private companies involved in event planning and party organization, music and video, photography, dance, choreography, catering, and venues a.o. big five-star hotels. The private companies that play active roles in the configurations of these ceremonies have been considered agents of the ceremonies. The interviews with the private companies are semi-structured. The interviews focused on their company's founding story, the changes in their way of service through the decades, and the negotiations between the different agents observed during these years. The interviews included a detailed guide and sometimes made use of an open-topic list.

Here, too, the identities of all the interviewees have been kept confidential, especially since it is a small community and a small sector/market. The companies interviewed are referred to as Company A, B, C etc., in every section. In some parts, when necessary for the context or when the identity of a representative of a company is obvious from the context, real names rather

than pseudonyms are used with the permission of the person involved (used as RN).

2.2.3 *Interviews with Representative of Religious Authority*

In studying the role played by the religious institution as an agent in life cycle events, I interviewed ten people who represent the religious/secular authority/institution. These include two Rabbis who are members of the Beth-Din,[8] three officials at the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey, one official responsible for Bar/t Mitzvah and wedding ceremonies, and two employees at the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*,[9] which provides knowledge concerning the fundamental steps and processes involved in life cycle events. Additionally, I interviewed with Karen Şarhon,[10] the coordinator of the Sephardi Center of Istanbul, and Aron Saltiel,[11] a renowned Sephardi musician (both of them have given me explicit permission to use their real). I had recourse to the photo collection of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews.[12] Lastly, Nisya Isman Allovi,[13] the director of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews, has been an essential resource for this dissertation. The identities of all the interviewees (save for

8 The Beth-Din is the rabbinical court.

9 Founded as part of Turkey's Chief Rabbinate, *Hegkom* is the responsible governing body for all non-formal educational activities (such as training, seminars, planned courses, interactional and facilitated activities, etc.) within the community under the authority of Turkey's Chief Rabbinate. *Hegkom* is short for Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission.

10 Karen Şarhon is also the editor of *El Amaneser* which is published monthly in Judaeo-Spanish as a section of *Şalom* newspaper. In addition, she was the first to establish a Sephardi music band (*Los Pasharos Seferadis*) in Turkey.

11 Aron Saltiel is one of the most important persons in the field of Sephardi Jewish music. He has produced an album called *BODA* (2011) on which he collected all the traditional Sephardi wedding songs and recorded them with their stories. These songs were played at engagement ceremonies, the dowry ceremony, gift ceremony, at the ceremony in synagogue. The CD also comes with a booklet of 110 pages that includes explanations, translations, and historical photos.

12 Old photos of old ceremonies and synagogues from the museum have been studied.

13 Nisya Isman Allovi has been the director and curator of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews since 2001.

those who have given me explicit permission to use their real names as is) have been kept confidential, the religious and secular authority interviews are referred to as Rel. and Sec. Authority A, B, C etc., in every section. In some parts, when necessary for the context, real names are used with the permission of the person involved (used as RN).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a focus on the negotiation arenas, and the moments when decisions to make changes were made. The emphasis is on the way how those interviewed represent the religious and secular authority and the official discourse of the institution. As Marcy Brink-Danan[14] stresses in her study *Jewish Life in 21st-Century Turkey* (2012), it is beneficial to look into the "awkward relationship between discourse analysis and ethnography" (Brink-Danan, 2012: 49). She concentrates on the discourse created by the institution and the existing tension between this discourse and the Turkish Jews' lived experience.[15] In this dissertation, similarly, it is assumed that there is a tension between the Jewish identity experienced by the individual Jews and the Jewish identity that the religious authority tries to fill. Religious institutions are one of the agents of this field with their role in rule-making whose authority could occasionally be challenged by the community and the market. The ritual spaces are delineated by the tension, differences, and challenges between the various agents in this arena.

§ 2.3 Participant Observation – Fieldwork

Between 2013 and 2019, I employed participant observation methods in the three life cycle ceremonies, as well as in the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar, the Bar/Bat-Mitzvah Club,[16] and the *Collective Bat Mitzvah*

14 Brink-Danan studied the minority Jewish society in Turkey from an anthropological perspective, focusing mainly on the current situation in the Jewish community in Istanbul.

15 In her studies on the Turkish Jewish community, Marcy Brink-Danan underlines that it makes sense to look at this discourse and practice tension, the two which in her words have an awkward relationship (Brink-Danan, 2012: 49).

16 The Clubs educate children aged twelve and thirteen before they have Bar/t Mitzvah. Girls are educated for one year, boys for two years. Approximately fifty girls and ninety boys were

Ceremony, which form part of the study. Moreover, my involvement in Jewish weddings, Bar/t Mitzvah, and Brith Milah ceremonies in Istanbul as a team member of a Turkish-Jewish joint venture wedding management company between 2016-2019 was fruitful, as I was able to act as a participant observer in more than a hundred events in that three year period. I took various roles in the preparation stages of numerous life cycle events. I participated in the preliminary and coordination plans meetings with the event hosts. I set up and decorated the halls with the other companies in the hotel's ballrooms. I also worked at the reception of the events. From time to time, I was at the welcoming desks of the events, and I assisted with coordinating the night reception or the show. On several occasions, I also met the immediate needs of the event owners. The duration of the observations varied according to the content of the ceremony and event, lasting between thirty minutes to eight hours. After each event, I spared the time to write short versions of the observation reports. Afterward, I expanded them and wrote more descriptive ones.

§ 2.4 Sampling and Access to the Jewish Community

The snowball sampling method has been employed to select those interviewed throughout the study. Family members/couples do have common features, but they are also diverse and therefore, the dimensions of class, gender, socio-cultural and socio-economic differences should be taken into account when trying to understand the whole festive event atmosphere. To avoid interviewing those belonging to only one socio-economic and cultural stratum, the selection of interviewees has been made through approximately five different channels in different veins, especially for family members/couples' interviews. For the market pillar, interviews have been conducted with almost all private companies. To avoid repetition, if there were many companies specialized in a certain field, a minimum of two companies per field were interviewed. However, if the data obtained was not sufficient,

enrolled in 2016. Lastly, a collective religious Bat Mitzvah ceremony was held on June 5, 2016.

interviews were also conducted with other companies, as well. For the pillar of religious authority, interviews have been conducted with people who have a say and responsibility in life cycle events, who occupy decision-making positions, and who accepted the interview requests.

The Sephardi Jews living in Turkey form a small and closed community, which raises several difficulties in working with them. The first one of them is access. It is tough to reach and get answers especially from religious authorities and hear about the issues which they are responsible. The hardship I encountered is recounted well by Brink-Danan who reflects on her experience when studying this insular Turkish Jewish community:

> Jews in Turkey consider self-censorship a way of protecting themselves from both social discrimination and physical harm. Accordingly, everyone seemed to have an opinion about what I should (and should not) publish. Each time I took out my notebook at a community event, a local Rabbi insisted on playing censor, delivering a humorless imperative couched in a question: "You'll make sure to give me a copy of your articles before you publish them, right?" (Brink-Danan, 2012: 145).

Here, my Jewish identity and my trustworthiness as far as posing no threat to the Jewish community is concerned, have opened some doors. Growing up and working in this community has allowed me to be known by people in certain positions within the community. As for family members/couples, since snowballing was the primary method, the effect and the emotions they had when I left the interview granted me entrance to the next home. It is a bit like walking on eggshells. Those interviewed were reluctant to be the ones to reveal the societal secrets, nor did they want to be responsible for someone else doing the same. If one can overcome the first difficulty of gaining access, the next one would be waiting just around the corner: getting the information from them. Reaching out to a person does not guarantee that they will be sincere and disclose every detail about the subject at hand. As implied by the

phrase *Kayades,*[17] (Ovadia, 2002: 194)—roughly translated as "be quiet,"—this community tends to keep its internal affairs as private as possible. However, the access enabled by being a member of this group, also entailed difficulties as I am neither a complete insider nor an outsider. I am an insider in a sense because, first of all, I was born in Izmir to Jewish parents. I grew up and socialized in the Izmir Jewish community until I was seventeen. I had my Bat Mitzvah ceremony when I was twelve. From the age of seventeen to thirty-one, I lived in Istanbul, close to the Jewish community, and worked voluntarily and professionally in several community institutions. In 2015, I married my Jewish husband in the Neve Shalom synagogue. At the same time, I have been a guest at countless life cycle events from childhood to adulthood as a Turkish Jewish community member. I returned to Izmir in 2019 and had a Brith Milah ceremony for my baby boy in Izmir. Finally, I worked professionally for a couple of years in the Izmir Jewish community. All these rites of passage and the habitat where I socialized constitute a part of my identity, not all of them; I define my identity in a broader way than Judaism. The closeness that came with growing up in this community also made me more question and have a critical eye on the details of the institutions and the relations between members. However, by maintaining my critical perspective towards the community and its practices, I carry the habitus of the Jewish community, which I tried to emphasize in my thesis, and it enables me to examine and understand it better than an outsider. While I have been brought up and lived in this Jewish community, I have also established a relative distance, particularly concerning the control mechanisms deployed in the closed community thanks to 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959). According to Mills, "The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals" (Mills, 1959: 5). The task and its promise of sociological imagination is to "enable(s) us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (Mills, 1959: 6). It is essential to keep in mind the distinction and the relationship between personal experiences and the public issue of

17 Ovadia writes the last letter of the word *Kayadez* with an "s," but I prefer *Kayadez*, which is the more common spelling in literature, throughout the dissertation.

social structure or the history of broader society. This critical thinking, sociology education and academic background have allowed me to question the structure of the society in which I live and examine it from different perspectives. Most importantly, during the research stage and writing stage, I was aware of my positionality and I have tried to reflect this in this dissertation as much as I could. I was aware that it was fieldwork "at home" (Anderson, 2021:1), and I did not go "elsewhere" (Anderson, 2021:1) to conduct my research. During the interviews and the fieldwork, I was accepted as Jewish, and my pre-existing relationships in the field have provided me with ease of access and acceptance. Yet, sometimes it was assumed that many details were already known to me. However, my gender and age (accepted as being young women) sometimes prevented me from getting some information, detailed conversations, and "to take others' knowledge" (Anderson, 2021: 2).

§ 2.5 Archival Work

Besides applying ethnographic tools, I carried out archival work in the Neve Shalom (Sephardi) Synagogue registers[18] and the Chief Rabbinate in Turkey between 2017 and 2023. This archival work is vital for a historical understanding of social change in the Jewish Community of Istanbul. The Chief Rabbinate Office registers are also beneficial for finding community members representing different age groups and diverse backgrounds whose positions and experiences are relevant to this study.

Additionally, all written materials pertaining to the *Bar and Bat Mistva Club* have been collected, including weekly curricula, the program and videos for the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* from different years, songs composed, as well as all the distributed booklets and flyers. Moreover, all the educational materials of the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar and books given as presents to the groom and bride-to-be were collected and studied. When relevant, the texts found on the websites of the institutions and some relevant newspaper articles have also been included.

18 Besides documents, the registers include photographs and videos.

DATA FOR ALL LIFE CYCLE EVENTS

I collected the data used in this dissertation through the Chief Rabbinate Office between 2018 and 2022. Unfortunately there is a gap in the data for the years 2021-2022. At this time the Chief Rabbinate Office relocated from Galata to another district, making it hard to procure all handwritten data. Moreover, the lack of digitization of the records made it very hard to collect all the information relevant to the time span of this dissertation.

DATA FOR BRITH MILAH

It was challenging to obtain clear data to establish the number of circumcisions carried out between 1960 and 2020. The Brith Milah numbers between 1980 and 1990 were deduced by counting the number of boys registered in the Istanbul Jewish community and estimating that they had a Brith Milah ceremony. For this reason, no additional data, which means the details of the venue, etc., can be provided regarding Brith Milah events held in those years.

The data between 1990 and 2008 was taken from the relevant written records of the Chief Rabbinate. No additional data is available regarding where the Brith Milah events were held between 1990-2000. Records from the years 2000-2008 provide venue details of the events. Digitized records between 2008-2020 were also obtained from the Chief Rabbinate Office. For these events, venue details are available except for the period 2009-2013. For the period 2009-2013, only the total number and Neve Shalom events can be distinguished.

When the venue details in the records after 2000 were examined, it appeared that events held in Izmir, Ankara and Adana were included. I have subtracted these from the total number to arrive at the number of circumcision ceremonies in Istanbul. In addition to various synagogues such as Ortakoy, Kuzguncuk, Caddebostan and Neve Shalom, institutions such as Balat Hospital, The Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center – Or Yom and Göztepe Cultural Association have hosted Brith Milahs. Brith Milahs were also held in homes and hotels.

DATA FOR WEDDINGS

More clear data on weddings are available than for other life cycle events. These data between 1960 and 2020 were obtained through the Chief Rabbinate Office and accessed both digitally and from handwritten wedding record books.

DATA FOR BAT MITZVAH

Records from 2007 were taken from the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom* and the Chief Rabbinate Office. Although it is known that the first Bat Mitzvah was held in 1967, a precise number has not been obtained for the years 1967-2003. Between 2003 and 2007, the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* was held at Ulus Jewish School, but the numbers of the b'not mitzvah were not available. After 2007, statistics were readily available because the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* was held in Neve Shalom Synagogue.

DATA FOR BAR MITZVAH

It is difficult to access records prior to 2005. Each synagogue keeps its own records, some of which are still not digitized, especially the records of Bar Mitzvah events. The fact that no central record has been maintained and the sketchy state of the records has made it impossible to access the data. Because the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony numbers are fragmented and lack continuity, I intentionally decided not to use them, as they would not be a healthy examination.

§ 2.6 Data Analysis

As stressed by Marshall and Rossman (1995: 114), the data analysis of the qualitative research is "the most intellectually challenging phase" of this dissertation. In this research, I first employed the grounded theory approach to analyze my data from the field, which is currently the most common form of qualitative analysis used by researchers (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). It is also compatible with and supports the oral history and ethnography methods. As Charmaz points out, "Grounded theory is an inductive, iterative, interactive,

and comparative method that provides systematic guidelines for gathering, synthesizing, analyzing, and conceptualizing qualitative data for the purpose of theory construction" (Charmaz, 2015: 402). Grounded theory is first inductive because of how the data collection is used to develop substantive theory, followed by an iterative process, which refers to going back and forth during the data collection and analysis periods. This approach led me to look repeatedly at my early analysis, thereby providing clues for further data collection. During this recursive process I delved into the data, coded the interviews, created categories, and then applied theory. After working on the data from the field and the coding process, the relation with the theory became clear. It then became necessary to look at the data from the field from a theoretical perspective that mostly relies on a deductive approach to fill the interview and data gaps for the analysis. My early analytical findings led me to conduct additional interviews. When I reached the data saturation point, my interviews had become repetitive I will explain below how this approach was realized in this dissertation.

My main goal is to shed light on the transformations in the meaning and practice of the life cycle celebratory events among the Sephardi Jewish Community of Istanbul. Initially, what caught my attention most, which was so visible, was the economic dimension of the celebrations. Later, when I looked at this phenomenon more historically, I discovered that present practices also existed in the past; however, some undergone transformations of various kind or reshaped by the society. For this reason, I commenced by interviewing family members/community members who were the hosts of the events by applying the oral history method as mentioned above. This granted the interviewee the opportunity to explain his or her own world of meaning instead of answering questions inspired by a preconceived theoretical framework. My purpose in starting with the most recent events, which I could participate in or have already witnessed, was that it would be easier to understand the dynamics since I could experience the current industry myself. Then, I continued my interviews with those who had completed life cycle events in the recent past followed by and those who had celebrated at least one of the life cycle events as far back as could be recalled. My purpose was to see how far back I could go historically, especially in the field of oral

history. The last period for which details of events or even the events themselves could be recalled was the 1960s. Through an inductive approach, the main question took on its final form and broadened, not only focusing on the economics of the event: the transformations in the meaning and practice of the life cycle celebratory events among the Sephardi Jewish Community of Istanbul from the 1960s to 2020.

The most critical questions in my mind as I set out were whom would a person or a couple consult when desiring to celebrate any of the life events and how the flow of information was ensured. For a long time, I tried to understand the changes in the shape of community's celebration of the life cycle event over the years with interviewing family/community members, primarily through their life stories. After these interviews, I started to arrange the data into categories and to search for themes and patterns within each decade. In order to work with the descriptive data, I listened several times to the interviews, then highlighted and added codes, comments, and categories arising from the repeated patterns. Here, it is important to stress that I chose manual data analysis instead of using the benefits of a technological approach. Both approaches have pros and cons (Mattimoe et al., 2021). However, although selecting manual coding is time-consuming and requires more labor-intensive work, it prevented me from missing nuances in the interviews.

The market's significant role, which was my initial discovery, was surely confirmed by the interviews I had conducted, led me to include interviews with market participants. Including the market also means that they are very significant actors for the transformation of the life cycle events. The main research question started to be more specific and I began to look for "the key agents and actors" in this arena.[19] In addition to the interviews, participant observation was another tool to observe how the family members and the market acted, especially during the preparations and receptions of the events, through the market leg. When I started conducting interviews with the employees or owners of the companies in the market, giving me a

19 With the help of the question of "key player," religious authority is also added, will be discussed below.

broader perspective in understanding the similarities, differences and transformations between the celebrations during the six decades of life cycle events. During interviews, I noticed common characteristics among companies in the market, which gave me insight into how similar their company stories were and how they played this game over the years. I used some codes and categorizations here, such as burden, status, skills, strategy, rules, etc..

However, after having more interviews with the agents, I found out that, the transformation of these events also helps the construction of the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity. Then, the main research question became more specific: "What key agents and actors are involved in constructing the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity of the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community from 1960 to 2020 in the arena of life cycle events, and how has this identity evolved over time?" Afterward, I explored some case studies and negotiation points between 1960 and 2020 from individual and company stories. Some pivotal events, such as permission granted for holding the first beach wedding and stories behind the establishment of the *Bar and Bat Mistva Club,* will be presented in this study. A thematic approach to qualitative data has been employed here (Braun & Clarke, 2006), helping to identify, analyze, and code the themes, i.e., "something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning from the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 80).

While considering all these (transformation or alteration) cases, such as the permission of a beach wedding, the establishment of the *Bar and Bat Mistva Club,* the beginning of the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar, etc., I looked at who had the "leading role" in the decision-making process and how the power was distributed among the actors in this arena. Then, I realized that the religious authority is a powerful rule maker in this arena and, at the same time, an actor trying to maintain the (main) discourse it has already established when opposing the changes brought by time. Given all this information, I called these decision-making moments or changes and transformations in life cycle celebrations and area of life cycle celebratory events as the negotiation arena. At this point, I discovered that while the

religious authority desires to take the lead in terms of establishing "proper" Jewish communal identity, this arena's dynamics are fed by the actions of not one but three agents in the field, i.e. (community/family members, market & companies and religious authority & lay leader). I returned to the three agents/ key players and continued my observations through cases and breaking points.

During this period, thanks to the connection I established with the religious and secular authorities, I was able to do archival work in the synagogue, thereby enlarging my corpus. The connection also granted me the opportunity to do participant observation in some areas, particularly those areas utilized by religious authority to produce the discourse/definition of Jewish identity in the arena of life cycle events. Here, coding and analysis became clear, and an iterative process delivered results. At that point, the deductive approach was applied. The data driven from the field pointed to the concrete theoretical approach and some hypotheses that could be tested. The main question became: "What key agents and actors are involved in constructing the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity of the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community in the period 1960-2020 in the arena of life cycle events, how has this identity evolved over time, and how can the dynamics of these roles be analyzed using Bourdieu's framework of social fields"? Once the theoretical approach became apparent, it became necessary to go back to the data and establish relations between the data and the theoretical concept. At that moment, the relationship between my hypothesis and the topics of the chapters of this dissertation became clear. My main claim is that the definition of "ideal" Jewishness / the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity is not established top down. Three agents have a role in creating the communal identity referring to the Bourdieu's concept of "field." Three agents in the life cycle events arena actively continue to establish ethno-religious cultural and communal identity, and I discovered that life cycle events are one of the most prominent channels for the struggle over identity formation. I focused more on how these three actors become agents over the course of years and what roles they play in this field referring by means of Bourdieu's approach. Attempting to answer the "how" question,

led me to understand the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the rite of passage events.

Another aim was to point out and refer how the Istanbul Jewish community constructed its identity within the context of minority identity construction in Turkey. As opposed to the tradition of *Kayadez*, which will be detailed in Chapter 4 by referring various scholars concerning Turkish Jewish community, the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community has not become more insular when they have the life cycle events. They do not hesitate to display their cultural identity through life cycle events held in the public sphere. Despite the huge trauma caused by the 2003 terrorist attack[20] and feeling threatened by antisemitism, a greater openness to the outside world is discernible.

As a result of all these questions and hypotheses the whole process of applying a deductive approach commenced anew, going back and forth between data and theory. At this point, some new codes inspired by the theoretical framework were added to old ones. By combining deductive and inductive methods I did not miss the data that did not fit the theoretical framework.

All these resulted in a three-layer focus: First, I focused on historicizing the relevant transformations in the arena of life cycle events over decades. Among the things I looked at were rituals, customs, education, dress, places/venue, economy, decision-making moments, discourse, practice, and attitude. Second, this "how question" attempt helped me discover three agents' roles and positions in this arena: family members, market, and religious authority. Then, by applying Bourdieu's approach and concepts, I came to understand how ethno-religious communal identity was and has been constructed by different agents in the field of life cycle events with the mutual influence of the rite of passage events.

20 Additionally, the 1986 terror attack will be discussed as well.

3

Theoretical Framework

§ 3.1 Conceptual Tools: Bourdieu's Framework

The structure-agency debate, which has been ongoing in the field of social science for years, is also relevant to this dissertation. Particularly, while constructing the theoretical framework for this dissertation, I would like to draw attention to the fact that this entire process of establishing an ethno-religious communal identity is neither a top-down process nor a bottom-up process alone. At the same time, the relationship of Sephardi Jews with the non-Jewish Turkish community affects the formation of communal identity construction. This study deals with the life cycle event arena, which includes religious and cultural arenas as a field in the process of ethno-religious communal identity. In this regard, I will elaborate on the theoretical framework and concepts of Bourdieu, who brought another perspective to this discussion. Then, these concepts and analytical tools will be used to discuss the data from the field.

As mentioned in the Chapters 1 and 2, three active agents have been briefly introduced: religious institutions, the market, and family members/couples. While each generation of community members contributes to the habitus of Jewish life cycle events and their taste (and trends), other agents, including religious institutions and the market, also make their own moves in this game. These three agents are not only information sources for

the couples getting ready for these events, but they also negotiate with each other during the festive events, both before and during them. They are considered the key players in that domain of struggle in this study. These life cycle events are considered an arena of negotiation between these three agents. They contribute to forming, meaning, and shifting the balance of authority by constructing control mechanisms or challenging them. As discussed above, first, the central part of the study is the community members/ordinary family members who practice and celebrate these rituals. The second source of influence and the agent is private companies or the market. The third and last agent is the community and religious institutions, including religious authorities and lay leaders, who determine the rules and have the authority to occasionally relax or tighten the regulations in the arena of festive events. These three agents are in this field, which will be elaborated on more below.

Bourdieu's framework is fruitful and helpful in understanding the life cycle events arena within the Sephardi Jewish community in Istanbul and the power relations within the Istanbul Jewish community. These three actors that contribute to the formation of an ethno-religious communal identity will be discussed in the context of the *field*, as well as with the help of the well-known football field analogy. While doing this, not only will Bourdieu's concept of the field be addressed, but also his other conceptual tools, such as habitus, types of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic), distinction, and doxa. Furthermore, to supplement this theoretical framework, this chapter touches upon a gender perspective through Butler's concept of *performativity*.

3.1.1 *Beyond Subjectivity and Objectivity & Agency and Structure*

Bourdieu (1930-2002), one of the most influential French sociologists of the twentieth century,[1] builds his theoretical framework on the criticisms of the

1 His most famous work, titled Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, published in 1979, was selected by the International Sociological Association as one of the ten most essential sociology books of the twentieth century. https://thegreatestbooks.org/lists/397 (Accessed, October 18, 2024).

theories of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Claude Levi Strauss. Bourdieu made a significant step in social science with his epistemological approach, combining phenomenology and structuralism. He is interested not only in production but also in consumption, action, and practice; in addition, as expected, he focuses on the dynamics of power in society. Power is mostly associated with a single institution or agency and is often trapped within the dichotomy of the powerless and the powerful. However, Bourdieu's conceptual tools which mainly concentrate on the relationality of different agents and structures, are useful to understand the roles of reproduction of the social order in relation to power. As the quote below states, he also adds "social space," which is a key element of his approach.

> According to Bourdieu, an analysis of social space meant not only locating the object of investigation in its specific historical and local/national/international and relational context, but also interrogating the ways in which previous knowledge about the object under investigation had been generated, by whom, and whose interests were served by those knowledge generation practices (e.g. Bourdieu 1993a; 1994d; 2001c) (Thompson, 2008: 67).

While Bourdieu focuses on the social space that hosts events and interactions, he also focuses on the source of the knowledge produced and the returns of this knowledge. According to him,

> There could be no better time to recall that the truth of the interaction is not to be found in the interaction itself (a two-way relation that is always in fact a three-way relation, between the two agents and the social space within which they are located) (Bourdieu, 2005: 143).

Therefore, in this dissertation, focusing on the interaction and power relations in these life cycle events as a social space provides a new perspective on understanding the Istanbul Jewish community.

Notably, as mentioned above, the theory of practice and the concept of habitus that he brought to the discussion of agency and structure constitute

an essential part of this dissertation for understanding the arena of life cycle festive events. According to Swartz,

> Bourdieu is among the first of the post-World War II generation of sociologists to make the agency/structure issue central to his sociology. He proposes connecting agency and structure in a 'dialectical relationship.' He argues against conceptualizing human action as a direct, unmediated response to external factors, whether they be identified as micro-structures of interactions or macro-level cultural, social, or economic factors (Swartz, 1997: 8).

It is necessary to clarify where this issue of agency and structure, or, as called by other names, subjectivity and objectivity, and where theory and practice are based. Bourdieu's approach is called constructivist structuralism or structuralist constructivism. Grenfell (2008: 45) says that Bourdieu's understanding of culture is based on the objective and subjective aspects of his theory of practice. As mentioned above, he criticizes two traditions: the structural tradition and the functionalist one (Bourdieu, 1968). As Grenfell says,

> The structuralist tradition sees culture as an instrument of communication and knowledge, based on a shared consensus of the world (for example, the anthropology of Levi-Strauss). The functionalist tradition, on the other hand, is formed around human knowledge as the product of a social infrastructure. The sociology of both Durkheim and Marx would form part of this second tradition, as both are concerned with ideational forms emergent in the structures of society - material, economic, organizational - one being positivist and the other critical-radical (Grenfell, 2008: 45).

In this quotation, Grenfell tells how Bourdieu reconciles these two approaches.

> The first tradition is too static for Bourdieu: structured structures taken as synchronic forms, and often based on primitive societies. While the second tradition reifies ideology - as a structuring structure – in imposing the ideology of the dominant class in the critical tradition, or maintaining social control in the positivist one. Bourdieu

> attempts to reconcile these two traditions by taking what has been learnt from the analysis of structures as symbolic systems in order to uncover the dynamic of principles, or logic of practice, which gives them their structuring power (see Bourdieu 1971b); in short, a theory of structure as both structured (opus operatum, and thus open to objectification) and structuring (modus operandi, and thus generative of thought and action) (Grenfell, 2008: 45).

3.1.2 *Habitus*

In that sense, Bourdieu concludes this discussion by introducing a new concept to the literature: "habitus," along with the concept of "field." Habitus is also used as an internalized disposition. The main aim is to bring the structure and the individual together. Maton (2008: 50) says,

> In other words, Bourdieu asks how social structure and individual agency can be reconciled, and (to use Durkheim's terms) how the 'outer' social, and 'inner,' self-help to shape each other (Maton, 2008: 50).

Objective and subjective come together in his theoretical approach. Maton (2008: 53) mentions that

> Habitus is the link between past, present and future, the social and the individual, the objective and subjective, and structure and agency. As this list suggests, a lot rests on its conceptualization - habitus aims to overcome a series of dichotomies that are worth briefly exploring in turn (Maton, 2008: 53).

According to Maton (2008: 53), habitus is a link between social and individual, the objective and subjective, or "outer" and "inner." Here, it is essential to understand how social facts become internalized. The experiences of an individual "are also shared in terms of their structure with others of the same social class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, nationality, region and so forth" (Maton, 2008: 53). Then he adds, "Habitus is, Bourdieu states, 'a socialized subjectivity' and 'the social embodied' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992a: 127, 128); it is, in other words, internalized structure, the objective

made subjective" (Maton, 2008: 53). Here, it is important to underline the combination of the objective social structure and subjective personal experience. Bourdieu summarizes it as "the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality" (1977: 72). So, the concept of power is not something that comes from up to down. In this dissertation, religious and secular authority and as well as religion as an institution, are not only resources for determining the habitus but also for ethno-religious communal identity. Community members also have influence and agency in this identity formation process, but without ignoring the strength of the institutions and social structures, as will be seen in Part 2. Again, according to Bourdieu (2005: 211),

> In so far as he or she is endowed with a habitus, the social agent is a collective individual or a collective individuated by the fact of embodying objective structures. The individual, the subjective, is social and collective. The habitus is socialized subjectivity, a historic transcendental, whose schemes of perception and appreciation (system of preferences, tastes, etc.) are the product of collective and individual history. Reason (or rationality) is 'bounded' not only, as Herbert Simon believes, because the human mind is generically bounded (there is nothing new in that idea), but because it is socially structured and determined, and, as a consequence, limited (Bourdieu, 2005: 211).

In addition, it is essential to note that habitus brings a package of actions in the field, which are reactions; this means that they need to be understood in the context. These actions, in other words, reactions, are not just rational moves. Bourdieu underlines that

> Habitus is in no sense a mechanical principle of action or, more exactly, of reaction (it is not a 'reflex'). It is conditioned and limited spontaneity. … The action is not simply an immediate reaction to a brute reality, but an 'intelligent' response to an actively selected aspect of the real (Bourdieu, 2005: 211).

Lastly, to understand continuity and discontinuity, as Wacquant says, looking into habitus could be a helpful tool.

> Habitus is also a principle of both social continuity and discontinuity: continuity because it stores social forces into the individual organism and transports them across time and space; discontinuity because it can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues (Wacquant, 2008: 268).

3.1.3 *Field and Doxa*

Based on all of the abovementioned, it must be said that habitus cannot exist alone and must be discussed together with the concept of field. In other words, habitus cannot be set out alone; when it is combined with the field, it becomes a practice. Maton (2008: 61) summarizes it as: "To talk of habitus without field and to claim to analyze 'habitus' without analyzing 'field' is thus to fetishize habitus, abstracting it from the very contexts which give it meaning and in which it works." Fields are arenas, domains of social interactions and social life in which habitus becomes practicable. According to Maton (2008: 51-52),

> Formally, Bourdieu (1986c: 101) summarizes this relation using the following equation: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice
> This equation can be unpacked as stating: practice results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field). This concise formulation highlights something of crucial significance for understanding Bourdieu's approach: the interlocking nature of his three main "thinking tools" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1989d: 50): habitus, field and capital. Practices are thus not simply the result of one's habitus but rather of relations between one's habitus and one's current circumstances (Maton, 2008: 51-52).

As stated above, habitus cannot exist or act alone, and practices are the result of "an unconscious relationship" (Bourdieu 1993a: 76) between habitus and field (Maton, 2008: 51-52). Habitus contains "our ways of acting, feeling, thinking, and being." While it is an ongoing active process, it has also carried

our history and our choices to act and to believe in specific ways (Maton, 2008: 52). Maton summarizes it as:

> This range of choices depends on our current context (the position we occupy in a particular social field), but at the same time which of these choices are visible to us and which we do not see as possible are the result of our past journey, for our experiences have helped shape our vision (Maton, 2008: 52).

Bourdieu defines the field concept as "a small and relatively autonomous social world, a micro-cosmos, inside a larger social world" (Bourdieu 2001: 41). Social fields can be exemplified as academia, politics, the economy, and religious fields. Each social field has its own rules, elements, agents, strategies, and forms of capital. As Thomson (2008: 68) says, ".. *le champ* (field) which is used to describe, inter alia, an area of land, a battlefield, and a field of knowledge." Individuals and others can move and maneuver within these social fields to enhance or preserve their positions. The field is taken as a spatial metaphor which helps us understand the relational interactions in this specific spatial area. Swartz (2014: 398) summarizes what it does as follows:

> For Bourdieu, field is an abstract concept—a heuristic tool—that permits one to construct methodologically a space of activity that emerged historically and is structured by opposing positions in function of specific types of capital (power resources) and by a dynamic of struggle between the occupants of those positions (Swartz, 2014: 398).

It is essential to note that it is not fixed and immutable; it is dynamic, evolving, and changeable, so it is possible to see changes over the decades and how they take on new positions in this social realm. As Swartz (2014: 397) emphasizes in his article, "FM (Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam) see fields as historical constructions." Mostly,

> Bourdieu often uses the analogy of a game and the notion of 'strategy' to emphasize the active, creative nature of practices. Each social field of practice (including society as a whole) can be understood as

> a competitive game or 'field of struggles' in which social agents strategically improvise in their quest to maximize their positions (Maton, 2008: 54).

As Harvey et al. (2020: 3) state;

> According to Bourdieu (1993a, p. 135), 'what defines the structure of the field ... is also the principle of its dynamics.' Bourdieu (1984, p. 94) argues that 'dispositions constituting the cultivated habitus are only formed, only function and are only valid in a field, in the relationship with a field.' Positions within individual fields are 'positions of possibility' (Oakes, Townley, & Cooper, 1998, p. 288), because they are not stable but reflect relations of power (Harvey et al., 2020: 3).

They learn how to do, behave, and act in this field. "They learn the tempo, rhythms and unwritten rules of the game through time and experience" (Maton, 2008: 54). Although Bourdieu has been criticized for oversocialization in his theory (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; they called it an iterational dimension), it is probable to be socially mobile thanks to the strategies learned by being in the field. Moreover, Bourdieu's agency, which he defines as more than an average actor, —that is, a good player— is the person who has been able to put this learning and experience into practice. Therefore, in that sense, the internalization process and socialization process of community members and individuals are essential keys for this field, and the habitus, which will be discussed more in Parts 2 and 3 (examples of 'good player').

According to Bourdieu, the field is where the game is played, and it is a struggle in which social positions with various types of capital can be demonstrated. Fields are the domains of social life; habitus becomes practicable in this arena. All fields have their own rules, regularities, and patterns. In the field, people can learn how to play the game according to the rules. In this game or social space, the rules of the game are learned over time and become a habit. The habitus both shapes individuals and is shaped by them. Habitus and the field are interrelated. According to Bourdieu and his student Wacquant,

> A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 16).

The most popular analogy is the football field analogy to understand the concept of field. According to Thomson,

> A football field is a boundaried site where a game is played. In order to play the game, players have set positions - when the football field is represented in visual form, it is as a square with internal divisions and an external boundary, with the set positions marked in predetermined places. The game has specific rules which novice players must learn, together with basic skills, as they begin to play. What players can do, and where they can go during the game, depends on their field position. The actual physical condition of the field (whether it is wet, dry, well grassed or full of potholes), also has an effect on what players can do and thus how the game can be played (Thomson, 2008: 68).

If this analogy is applied to social space, which is the arena of life cycle events in this dissertation, the text continues as follows:

> The idea of a social field being a football field is not so far-fetched. Bourdieu did discuss social life as a game. He frequently referred to it as a football game, perhaps because this was the game he knew well himself (in fact, as a young man, he was a keen rugby player). He suggested that, just as in football, the social field consisted of positions occupied by social agents (people or institutions) and what happens on/in the field is consequently boundaried. There are thus limits to what can be done, and what can be done is also shaped by the conditions of the field. Just like a football field, the social field does not stand alone. Bourdieu developed the notion of social field as one part of a means of investigating human activity (Thomson, 2008: 68-69).

As Thompson underlines, social fields are competitive. In this study, the arena, which contains three agents, is considered as a social field in which ethno-religious identity is also constructed. There are intense negotiations among these three agents in this field, and occasionally, agreements and reconciliations are possible. This social field also contains space for conflict and competition. These three agents will be profoundly defined below, but it should be added here that they compete not just among each other but also among themselves. In other words, community and family members play the game competitively and try to become prominent, while companies compete in the market with different strategies as well. As Thompson underlines,

> According to Bourdieu, the game that occurs in social spaces or fields is competitive, with various social agents using differing strategies to maintain or improve their position. At stake in the field is the accumulation of capitals: they are both the process within, and product of, a field (Thomson, 2008: 69).

So, the field is not a structured space, but it is also historically dynamic and flexible, and is influenced by the use of capital. Before moving on to the concept of capital, it is crucial to define and mention the most commonly used terms —"feel for the game," "strategy," and "doxa"— in Bourdieu's framework. It is mainly defined as the ability to understand the rules, regularities, and expectations in the social field. This ability comes from their habitus or embodied cultural dispositions. As Maton says (2008: 54), "their 'feel for the game' is a feel for these regularities. The source of this practical logic is the habitus… (1994d:63)." This ability is mainly associated with the intuitive action, a kind of practical sense, or coming from the source of habitus they have. As Harvey et al. (2020: 4) underline that

> Habitus, as a system of lasting, transposable and socially constituted dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990), lends actors 'a feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 25). Habitus 'resides in codes of behavior that strategists learn and internalize (encompassing their beliefs and rituals); it is something tacit and unspoken but yet well understood and followed' (Rasche & Chia, 2009, p. 718).

So, with the help of "feel for the game," one can know what is appropriate and what is not. Here, the interview is conducted by Lamaison with Bourdieu (1986), who says that "feel for the game" should be thought of in conjunction with the concept of strategy. As Bourdieu says,

> In order to escape this danger, one needs to bring into the theory the real principle of strategies, that is, a practical sense of things, or, if one prefers, what athletes call a feel for the game (le sens du jeu). I refer here to practical mastery of the logic or immanent necessity of a game, which is gained through experience of the game, and which functions this side of consciousness and discourse (like the techniques of the body, for example). Notions such as habitus (or system of dispositions), practical sense, and strategy are tied to the effort to get away from objectivism without falling into subjectivism (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 111).

What Bourdieu says in this quotation is essential to understand that the "feel for the game" is gained through experience of the game. So, being in a minority community and attending or having these life cycle events is a way of learning how to have the "feel for the game." Then, when the question is how the concept of strategy is defined and functions, Bourdieu answers it in the same interview as follows:

> The notion of strategy makes possible a break with the objectivist point of view and with the agentless action that structuralism assumes (by appealing for example to the notion of the unconscious). But one can refuse to see strategy as the product of an unconscious program without making it the product of a conscious and rational calculation. It is the product of a practical sense, of a particular social game. This sense is acquired beginning in childhood, through participation in social activities, and particularly—in the case of Kabylia, and no doubt elsewhere as well—through participation in children's games. The good player, who is as it were the embodiment of the game, is continually doing what needs to be done, what the game demands and requires. This presupposes a constant invention, an improvisation that is absolutely necessary in order for one to adapt to

> situations that are infinitely varied. This cannot be achieved by mechanical obedience to explicit, codified rules (when they exist) (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 112).

As Bourdieu underlines here, childhood, family, and participation in the game are essential components for learning, understanding, and embodying the game. Here, improvisation is a crucial point and not being mechanically obedient to the game. The strategies that individuals and institutions produce generally include improvisation, but since it is also part of the game, it has a certain limit. Bourdieu refers to this as follows:

> But this freedom of invention and improvisation, which enables one to produce the infinity of moves made possible by the game (as in chess) has the same limits as the game. Strategies appropriate for playing the game of Kabyle marriage… (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 113).

In the field, as mentioned, there are several rules which are known by every player in that field, called "doxa." The function of "doxa" is to determine the rules in the field and draw the line for different actions, reactions, and practices in the field, exemplified by other cases in Part 3. All agents in the field agree upon these boundaries and rules. According to Deer (2008: 122),

> In a field, the doxa takes the form of a misrecognized unconditional allegiance to the 'rules of the game' on the part of social agents with a similar habitus. Doxa creates, in contrast to the notion of rules accepted by a majority, which posits the emergence of a field of opinion where different legitimate answers can be given to an explicit question about the established order.
>
> Extended in this way, the concept of doxa can come in many empirical guises in modern societies, as it relates to the habitus and power structure of relatively autonomous social fields which have their own specific logic and necessity. Doxa is embedded in the field whilst helping to define and characterize that field (the artistic field, the religious field, the economic field).

As Maton (2008: 59) adds, "Moreover, by virtue of field-habitus match, social agents share the 'doxa' of the field, the assumptions that 'go without saying' and that determine the limits of the doable and the thinkable." Bourdieu treats the concept of doxa as a set of established dominant opinions in the field. In any field of society, it is doxa that motivates players in the field to act by following the rules of the field. Doxa legitimizes the structure of the field by taking it 'normal,' for granted and a "natural attitude of everyday life" (Wacquant, 2008: 270) in the eyes of social agents.

3.1.4 *Different Forms of Capital*

Different forms of capital are the resources that make it possible to exist and practice in the field. These capitals that an agent possesses, in other words, the means, determine one's power and position within a field. Bourdieu, in his influential article *The Forms of Capital*, introduces his framework for understanding the various forms of capital that individuals and groups possess. He presents three different types of capital: economic, cultural, and social. After that, he introduces the concept of symbolic capital in his book, *The Logic of Practice*. Like Marx, Bourdieu defines capital as "accumulated labor" and "takes time to accumulate" (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). However, Bourdieu distinguishes himself from Karl Marx by adding cultural, social, and symbolic capital. He does not just focus on economic possession, which differentiates him from the other class analysts (Crossley, 2008: 87). Because, "Power and dominance derive not only from possession of material resources but also from possession of cultural and social resources" (Crossley, 2008: 88).

According to Bourdieu, "It is what makes the games of society-not least, the economic game- something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle" (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). So, power and the position of the agent are not determined solely by economic capital in a field; with the help of other forms of capital, positions are determined in the field. Moore puts it that way,

> capital can be understood as the 'energy' that drives the development of a field through time. Capital in action is the enactment of the

> principle of the field. It is the realization in specific forms of power in general (Moore, 2008: 105).

Bourdieu defines economic capital as "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). It contains financial assets, wealth, shares, and property. Cultural capital can be seen in three forms. The first one is the embodied state, which refers to "the form of long-lasting disposition of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1986: 243) or in the form of what is called culture. Moore (2008: 106) explains it as "cultivated gaze, poise taste, desire for the recognition of distinction." The second one is the objectified state, defined as "in the form of cultural goods" (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). It can contain books, instruments, machines, pictures, a collection of paintings, writings, material objects, etc. The last one is the institutionalized state, which is "a form of objectification" (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). It could be educational qualifications, extensive knowledge of classical art, proficiency in other languages, etc. Moore (2008: 106) adds "formal education" to this category. The most essential principle of cultural capital is the possibility of transmission through family and socialization processes. As Bourdieu stresses, "The initial accumulation of cultural capital, the precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every kind of useful cultural capital, starts at the outset, without delay, without waste of time, only for offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986: 246). Social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986: 248) and "made up of social obligations (connections)" (Bourdieu, 1986: 243). It contains social networks, the size of the network of connections or relationships, acquaintances, and opportunities. Bourdieu adds that economic capital is its root, but it cannot be sufficient to perform the functions that the other capitals can. "The fact that economic capital could be seen at their root, in other words but only in the last analysis—at the root of their effects" (Bourdieu, 1986: 252). The last one is symbolic capital, which mainly focuses on recognition. It is related to how to be perceived by the members of the society (Bourdieu, 1989: 22). Swartz (1997: 43) underlines that "Symbolic capital is a form of power that is not

perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others." According to Wacquant (2008: 268), "… symbolic capital, designates the effects of any form of capital." Therefore, the power of the symbolic capital derives from the other capitals and serves to gain recognition, prestige, and legitimation. As will be seen in Chapters 8 and 9, these capitals were used by the community members and companies in the life cycle events field.

Bourdieu also highlights the dynamic nature of capital, which means all forms of capital can be convertible into one another. The transformation of one capital into another requires time, effort, and specific labor (Bourdieu, 1986: 253). According to Bourdieu,

> The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and the position occupied in social space) by means of the conversions east costly in terms of conversion work and of the losses inherent in the conversion itself (in a given state of the social power relations) (Bourdieu, 1986: 253).

In addition to its convertibility, it is also developable, as Harvey et al. (2020: 3) state; "The power stemming from command of such resources is ever varying in quantum, because capital formation is an ongoing, dynamic process, subject to both accumulation and attrition (Bourdieu, 1985)."

Lastly, different forms of capital are exemplified by different cases in Parts 2 and 3. Here, I describe Bourdieusian field theory and his concepts in detail because they help to interpret the data from the field. In addition, these conceptual tools, especially habitus, field, and capital, become meaningful when discussed together, and they help to examine the Jewish life cycle of festive events (in Istanbul) and their transformation over time.

Last but not least, it should be noted the main criticism of Bourdieu's theory and concept. He made significant contributions to social theory, methodology, and empirical analysis, and especially after he died in 2002, devoted several volumes and special editions to Bourdieu (such as Swartz and Zolberg, 2004; Grenfell, 2008; Silva & Warde, 2010). As Silva and Warde (2010) emphasize in their edited volume, there are several different positions

against and for Bourdieu and one of the position taken is to expand his theory and to defend his legacy, among which are Grenfell and Swartz, whom I refer to frequently in this chapter (Grenfell, 2008; Swartz and Zolberg, 2004). The second position is characterized as partial appropriation, which is also found in Silva and Warde (2010). In another article, Silva (2005) emphasizes that habitus is a practical analytical tool to explain the reproduction of class inequalities and the behaviors that individuals develop in relation to their class. However, he argues that Bourdieu is weak in explaining individuals' capacity to transform their lives and change (Silva, 2005; Reay, 2004).

At the same time, Warde (2005), in parallel with Silva, emphasizes that the concept of habitus is strong in explaining the repetitive form of behaviors. Still, it is weak in explaining how practices transform, mainly when rapid changes occur in the field of consumption. Finally, a frequently encountered criticism is the centrality of the concept of class. For this reason, in forming cultural identities, categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, and cultural identity should also be included (Wacquant, 2013, and see more Hall, 1990). Wacquant (2013), who has made significant efforts to extend Bourdieu's theory, underlines that the analysis cannot be reduced to class relations or cultural capital. For this reason, I carry out the analysis by referring primarily to cultural elements, religious identity, ethnic, and historical group characteristics. Moreover, Skeggs (2004) also criticizes Bourdieu for lacking a gender perspective and worries about how richness could be created through engagement with feminist theory, as seen in the section below.

§ 3.2 Life Cycle Festive Events From the Gender Perspective: Bourdieu and Butler's Concept of 'Performativity'

The life cycle events field is discussed in terms of the gender dimension in Chapter 8.2. One of the points that Bourdieu receives criticism for is that he establishes the gender dimension of his theoretical framework through binary oppositions. Skeggs (2004) summarizes the situation as follows:

> For Bourdieu, the embodied gendered dialectic is strongly structured through hierarchical relations of difference, symbolized by binary

> oppositions (high/low culture; strong/weak fields; dominant/dominated classes; masculine/feminine; public/private), by which in a very traditional manner, masculinity exists in the public (via the economic) and femininity in the private (via forms of cultural reproduction; in which women's bodies are 'sign bearing' carriers of taste (Skeggs, 2004: 22).

This criticism is one of the most prevalent ones, which is directed at Bourdieu in terms of the lack of gender perspective by feminists. In the following sentences, McCall (1992) explains that feminists criticize Bourdieu for discussing from an androcentric perspective. "Investigations by feminists into these complex manifestations of gendered social life likewise suggest many criticisms of Bourdieu's less than rigorous and often androcentric treatment of gender in the formation of social structural positions (via forms of capital) and dispositions (habitus)" (McCall, 1992: 839).

At the same time, McCall criticizes Bourdieu's perspective, which is based on a secondary position of gender, accepting gender as hidden and gendered dispositions are misrecognized (Skeggs, 2004: 23). As Skeggs (2004) summarizes;

> As McCall points out embodied gender capital is symbolic according to Bourdieu because it is the most hidden and universal form of capital: 'therefore, gender as a principle of division is secondary because it is hidden and it is hidden because it appears to be universal and natural' (McCall, 1992:844). Gender operates as a hidden form of cultural capital, but also as a disposition, an asymmetric form of capital (Skeggs, 2004: 23).

According to Skeggs, while gender is a hidden form of capital, Bourdieu takes women as a maker of taste and is responsible for converting the economic capital into a symbolic one for her family with the help of displaying taste (Skeggs, 2004: 28). This argument will be broadly discussed by applying different cases in life cycle event arena in Chapter 8.

Besides, the focus will be on how and in which shape women and men take positions in the field of life cycle events. It will be discussed that these all gendered roles, as Butler and Bourdieu agree upon, are learned and

embedded into the body. Hence, the concept of "gender performativity," which is introduced by Butler in her famous work called *Gender Trouble* will be applied as a supplementary analytical tool. As Lovell argues (Lovell, 2000: 27), while Butler and Bourdieu agreed upon the issue of the body, "The weight of emphasis of postmodernist feminism falls, rather, upon agency, fluidity, the instability of subject positionings and identities which contrasts at times very starkly with the durability of Bourdieu's dispositional subject" (Lovell, 2000: 28). Salih (2002) in her book called *Judith Butler* explains that;

> All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means that there is no "natural body" that pre-exists its cultural inscription. This seems to point towards the conclusion that gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a "doing" rather than a "being" (GT: 25- Gender Trouble, 1990) (Salih, 2002: 55).

According to Butler, "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (Butler, 1990: 25). In other words, gender is not stable, but rather, it is performed through repeated acts. These repetitions can create an illusion of a stable identity. While Bourdieu underlines that individuals' actions are shaped by their habitus in the field, Butler also stresses the importance of shaping gender identity through social norms and power relations. Butler, unlike Bourdieu, emphasizes the possibility of subversion more strongly. According to Lovell (2000),

> Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit, like that of Butler, draws on J.L. Austin's concept of 'performativity' (Austin, 1962; Bourdieu, 1991; Butler, 1990; 1997). Performatives (utterances which enact or instantiate or bring about social statuses, as in the authorized declaration of marriage) are also always performances, but they have the force of social institutionalization behind them which mere performances lack. They are embedded in the social structures and norms which authorize them. For Butler, socially embedded performatives may be dislodged, their meanings transformed, by inspired performances which transgress with authority… (Lovell, 2000: 28).

As a result, in this context, this study also looks at how gender roles are distributed in the field of Jewish life cycle events.

§ 3.3 The Key Agents in the Life Cycle Celebratory Event Field: Family/Community Members, Companies (the Market), and Religious Authority

Referring to Bourdieu's theoretical approach, this dissertation takes the arena of life cycle festive events as a field and shows how ethno-religious community identity is constructed in this field. Wacquant (2008: 268) underlines that what Bourdieu calls fields as "the various sphere of life, ….., tend to form distinct microcosmos endowed with their own rules, regularities and forms of authority." This life cycle festive arena is vibrant, social, lived-in, and dynamic, just like the field. As Wacquant says, "It follows that fields are historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape and sometimes wane or perish over time" (Wacquant, 2008: 269). In this field, all community members, religious authority and the market can exist as players and use their different types of capital to play this game and contribute to the ethno-religious communal identity of Istanbul Jews. It is possible to follow power structures, the reproduction of these power structures, and the challenges in this field. This life cycle festive event arena, as Wacquant says, is

> a field is an arena of struggle through which agents and institutions seek to preserve or overturn the existing distribution of capital (manifested, in the scientific field, by the ranking of institutions, disciplines, theories, methods, topics, journals, prizes and so on): it is a battlefield wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed (Wacquant, 2008: 268).

So, the three actors use their different forms of capital and habitus to first contribute to the ethno-religious communal identity, second, to gain social mobility, and to position themselves within both Jewish society and the wider society. Part 2 addresses how the three agents constructed the ethno-religious communal identity over the years by focusing on three life cycle events. Part 3 focuses on how particularly companies and community/family

members get positions for themselves by using different forms of capital within society and the market. As a result, examining these two dimensions —first, change over the years, and second, focusing on the two agents separately— aims to portray the broader context of communal identity construction. Why the religious authority, as an agent, is kept out of Part 3 will be explained below, by referring to Bourdieu.

The concept of field helps us understand the economic, cultural, and social dimensions of life cycle events and the symbolic meaning of these events at the same time. Referring to Bourdieu's framework, as seen in the following chapter, Istanbul's Jewish life cycle festive events field has its own rules, doxa, habitus, and different types of capital used in this arena. This life cycle event field also contains competition, negotiation, strategies, and sometimes compliance itself. Therefore, not all changes come from the top down, and three agents have the strength to affect changes, as well as ethno-religious community identity formation.

These three agents are the actors of changing or preserving traditions of life cycle events, resorting to various strategies such as confrontation, rule-breaking, rule-making, regulation, and institutionalization, as needed. In particular, the religious authority agent displays active agency by using all the means at its disposal to create discourse and rules on how to celebrate the rite of passage within the Jewish community. In addition, this life cycle festive event field is one of the last remaining areas where religious authority reproduces the "Jewish identity." Wacquant (2008) puts these actions into words while explaining the field, as such:

> Every field is thus the site of an ongoing clash between those who defend autonomous principles of judgement proper to that field and those who seek to introduce heteronomous standards because they need the support of external forces to improve their dominated position in it (Wacquant, 2008: 269).

While the other agents have power in constructing the ethno-religious identity, the religious authority embraces the dominant position. The dominant position is generally held by the one who sets the norm, while others mostly focus on challenging and change it. As Wacquant stresses,

> Also, position in the field inclines agents towards particular patterns of thought and conduct: those who occupy the dominant positions in a field tend to pursue strategies of conservation (of the existing distribution of capital), while those relegated to subordinate locations are more liable to deploy strategies of subversion (Wacquant, 2008: 269).

The dominant position of the religious authority could not be ignored in this field. Its capacity, competency, and skills allow it to maneuver more flexibly and play successfully in the field. It is also the one who (possesses and) produces religious knowledge. Additionally, as an agent which has played the game for a long time, it has an advantage over other players. For this reason, Part 2 primarily focuses on the religious authority's move and its intention to institutionalize, as well as their efforts to constitute the norm (also habitus) while recognizing that the religious authority does not solely possess power. Then, Part 3 mainly focuses on the other agents, namely, family members/couples and companies (the market), and their practices within their field.

Based on conducted ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, the agents are divided into three categories. As discussed in the methodological chapter, after using the inductive method, three agents become clearer with the help of the deductive methodology by referring to Bourdieu. They serve as players in the field, shaping the Jewish event culture in the community.

3.3.1 *Family/Community Members and Couples*

The first agent is "family/community members and couples," which includes ordinary people who practice and celebrate these rituals and ceremonies as parts of the Jewish community. The term includes family members and couples who had these rituals, as well as the older generation of these couples. Mannheim's definition has been adopted as the definition of generation in this study. According to Mannheim, a generation is a group that shares

> a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing

> them for a certain characteristic model of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically-relevant action (Mannheim, 1927/1928: 291).

In this context, the older generation becomes an agent and a source by orally transferring cultural values and rituals to the younger generation. Especially older generations, including mothers, fathers and grandparents, are seen as information resources to help practice these events. In addition, it is a type of transmission of knowledge and also habitus in this field, particularly "tradition" among generations. The younger generation also becomes an agent by collaborating with the event organizers and challenging or adjusting to the authority of religious institutions by using their different capitals.

At this point, it is crucial to stress the significance of the concept of tradition and cultural Jewish identity in Sephardi communities rather than the religious aim. While Benbassa and Rodrigue (2000) underline the importance of tradition in Sephardi society, Yıldız and Yücel (2015: 580) stress that religion brings out more as a cultural identity, and the identity becomes more religion-driven (this does not mean that they are necessarily religious). As they continue, the atmosphere for practicing culture has been trapped only in religious settings, and religion becomes more of a cultural issue than being related to faith (Yıldız & Yücel, 2015: 580-582). However, it should be underlined again that younger generations often act differently according to their generation, cultural values, and trends. They have limited power to change the setting/the rules and to challenge their older generation, but they are one of the agent in this field which they play the game with their different forms of capital. Negotiation is one of the key elements during this preparation period of rite of passage events.

In a similar vein, generations and the field have several transitions, preservations, changes, and continuities (similarities) within the Jewish community and it could clearly be observed by following the rituals and traditions decade by decade. As Wacquant (2008:270) says,

> This conceptual triad also allows us to elucidate cases of reproduction – when social and mental structures are in agreement and reinforce each other – as well as transformation – when discordances arise

> between habitus and field – leading to innovation, crisis and structural change, ... (Wacquant, 2008: 270).

Here, this conceptual triad refers to habitus, field, and capital. Thus, looking through Bourdieu's conceptual tools makes it easy to see these continuities, reproductions, discordances, and discontinuities in this arena. Lastly, it is essential to touch on the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. The older generation has a powerful impact on these religious occasions by passing on knowledge of tradition which enables them to transfer Sephardi Jewish cultural values and rituals to the younger generations. In addition, they participate in almost all decision-making processes with the help of their cultural and economic capital.

The source of information does not just consist of the older generation. In a sense, it shows that these religious and festive events are not just about tradition and religion. It is also about competing with the cohort, and at the same time, it is a communion with the fellow. As Stella and Yusuf said, "We learned all the details about the event from our friends who recently had these events before us" (Stella and Yusuf, May 11, 2017). As seen, they did not ask for advice or consult their parents. As a result, it is emphasized that the source of information (here, family members and couples, except for the synagogue and the market) consists not only of the older generation but also of intragenerational fellows and their social capital. Information flows vertically and horizontally. In other words, the know-how (accumulated cultural knowledge) or cultural capital is co-nourished by the elders and the generation with whom they live now. Therefore, the younger generation has the power to erode and reshape the setting and rules, as well as customs, making the process more dynamic in this field.

3.3.2 *The Market and Companies*

The second agent is the market, which includes private companies such as event planning and party organization companies, music and video companies, photographers, dancers, choreographers, caterers, and big five-star hotels. Over the last four decades, private companies, relatively new actors in this field, have become visible at all levels of the Istanbul Jewish community's

festivities. They are often owned or co-owned by Jews themselves. These companies have the know-how and follow new trends in social/religious life cycle events. These companies also have a lot to say in these celebrations and always have new ideas as expected. They are perceived as "knowing" the proper way of conducting and celebrating these ceremonies, whereas the other (non-Jewish) companies may not, in the eyes of the community (see Chapter 9). In addition, it is important to examine the market's growth and how private companies position themselves as a player in this field. Although the life cycle events have become more visible and open to the non-Jewish Turkish community, this growing economy is still embodied in the Jewish community (see Chapter 9).

The pillar of the market is also a vital information source for families and an agent in this life cycle event field. They have considerable know-how not just related to their sector, but also for the whole detailed steps of the religious ceremony. They are competent in all rituals and know what needs to be done and showcase their skills (and cultural capital) to community members. They follow all the upcoming events and agendas of the (religious) institutions. As a representative from Company D said:

> We do not just do our job, we also play a part to help them plan every little steps and detail and inform them if they do not know some rituals. In addition, we guide them to organize every small detail step by step according to the appropriate schedule (Interview with Company D, June, 2017).

One interviewee, Roza, also supported that "When the occasion was set and the place was confirmed, they just showed up and told us what we needed to do" (Roza and Moris, May 7, 2017).

Examining the historical changes in the market component and differences between generations of companies is essential to understanding how this ceremony and event culture is a field within the Jewish community. To follow the route of companies in the market, their establishment stories, their progression, and their placement in the event sector of the Jewish community reveal many power relationships in the festive event arena. The relationships and interactions established between other agents, as well as non-

Jewish companies, show how they maintained a presence as players in the field.

3.3.3 *Religious Authority – Istanbul Jewish Community's Institutions, Religious and Lay Leaders*

The third agent and the most powerful/dominant one among the other agents is the religious authority, including community institutions, religious institutions, religious leaders and lay leaders. Religious authority sets the game, determines the rules of celebration, and has the authority to loosen or strengthen the regulations of the game. It is also a powerful information source for the community members because of having religious capital which is gained by "religious labour" (Bourdieu, 1991: 5). During the preparation phase of the events, community members have many questions about the traditions and the steps to be taken in the arena of the festive events. The religious authority holds an authoritative position and has the ability and knowledge to answer questions about events, such as "what's next" and "how it should be done." Moreover, Bourdieu uses the term "administration of the goods of salvation" to describe religious capital (Bourdieu, 1991: 9). As expected, community members or couples must apply to the religious authority to complete the compulsory bureaucratic process. In addition, Bourdieu (1991: 9) notes that ordinary people are "dispossessed of religious capital." However, here, religious capital will be discussed in terms of cultural and sometimes symbolic capital because this dissertation is not just focusing on religious practices and ceremonies; it focuses on the social and festive events of these rites of passage as well.[2] In addition, Verter (2003: 159) adds that spiritual capital can also exist in three forms, like cultural capital, namely embodied, objectified, and institutionalized state. It contains knowledge, abilities, explicit education, material and symbolic commodities, etc. (Verter, 2003: 159-160) which all is possessed by religious authority. Besides all, the religious authority is a powerful actor and, needless to say, an institution

2 Verter (2003) criticizes Bourdieu's work on religion in his article, *Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu*, in terms of focusing too much on the institution (the Church) but not giving enough agency to the laity.

with a mission to preserve and transmit the traditions from generation to new generation, which could not be conserved with the transfer capacity of the individuals. Community and religious institutions (or lay/communal and religious authorities) determine the rules and have the authority to relax the rules from time to time in the arena of festive events. In parallel, Swartz (1997: 79) compares Bourdieu with Foucault and says that Bourdieu focuses more on the institutional setting in terms of power.[3]

> Thus we find not only economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, but also family, religious, political, moral, and state capital, to mention but a few. However, with the increasingly refined identification of forms of power as capital, there emerges a tendency to see power everywhere and, in a sense therefore, nowhere an extreme diffusion of power that Bourdieu himself rejects (Swartz, 1997: 79).

In the footnote, he continues: "Indeed, he distinguishes his work from that of Foucault on precisely this point; he sees power more concentrated in particular institutional settings than does Foucault (Wacquant 1993b)" (Swartz, 1997: 79). That's why I proceed in the theoretical framework with Bourdieu, because it is possible to accept having more power as a religious authority, instead of saying "power is everywhere" (Foucault, 1978: 93).

In this dissertation, religious authority is viewed in a broader context, encompassing Rabbis, lay leaders, secretaries, officers, *mashgichim,*[4] and educational staff working for the *Bar/Bat Mitsva Club* and the other educational activities.[5] In other words, they are in charge of the community and the

3 Verter (2003) also underlines the focus on the institution while Bourdieu works on religion.

4 A *Mashgiach* is a person responsible for checking the appropriateness of food/service according to kosher rules. Plural – *Mashgichim*.

5 One point I would like to highlight in particular is that, throughout the dissertation, religious authority is consistently referred to as a single voice and a homogeneous entity. It stems in part from the exceptional efforts these institutions make to act together, and their voluntary presentation to the public as a homogeneous entity despite their inherent heterogeneity It has become possible to read the issues that have sometimes become so multi-voiced within religious authority, particularly between the lines of interviews or in the facial expressions of individuals, or, more recently, to hear them through the gossip mechanisms within the community, without the approval of the relevant authorities.

decision-makers of the whole process. It does not mean that institutions are the one and only powerful agents in this field; family members/couples and the market also have the power to distort the rules, traditions, and priorities of the religious authority. In addition, the Jewish community authority has a direct relationship with money (economic capital), which is used to organize all other activities in the community. Religious ceremonies are a field to mobilize resources to defray all other expenses for the community, and it brings to authority another dimension/relationship with money and how it governs.

According to religious authorities, the main issue is finding a balance between preserving traditions (and habitus) and adopting new trends, as they associates the idea of being flexible on (religious) rules with the concept of assimilation. The religious authority/synagogue's responsibility is to circulate the discourse and, most importantly, to pursue the practice. Therefore, the pillar of the religious authority, as a rule maker, will also be associated with control mechanisms (such as for *Shabbat* and kosher rules), assimilation, adaptation to a new area, standardization, institutionalization, and professionalization. The authority takes lots of steps in these areas. The control mechanisms, regulations, and rules help the community administration and religious authority become agents and one of the rule-makers in the field of festive events. Besides, the changes and transmission in these events are also related to the role of leaders and changes in the community administration's leadership (see Chapter 4).

In this theoretical framework, three active agents have been introduced above, which are not only information sources but also negotiate with each other during festive events, both before and at the moment of life cycle events. They are the key players in that domain of struggle. These rites of passage events are considered an arena of negotiation between these three agents. They all contribute, with the help of their disposition (habitus) and different forms of capital to the formation of the ethno-religious communal identity.

§ 3.4 The Concept of Rite of Passage

Before discussing main data of the dissertation, it is crucial to refer to the term "rites of passage," which refers to the life cycle events focused on in this dissertation. Arnold Van Gennep (Van Gennep, 1960),[6] a French scholar and the coiner of the word, and Victor Turner's (Turner, 1969) works are the primary resources for ritual studies. In this context, the word "passage" means transition. First, Van Gennep stresses the rituals, which are occasions of reaching a new stage of life, in cultural rather than biological steps. In other words, Van Gennep is considered a functionalist anthropologist who focuses on the change in social position. He divides ceremonies into three major phases: separation, transition (marge), and incorporation (aggregation). He focuses on not just what the stages are but also on how and why (Van Gennep, 1960, Kimball, pg. viii). According to him, the first stage of "separation" refers to the removal of the group or identity in which they were up to this point. The second one, the "transition" or "liminal" stage, refers to the stage in which they do not belong to the first group anymore and are not yet a part of the new stage. The third stage, "incorporation," refers that they take a step into their new stage of life (Marcus, 2004: 19). According to Marcus, "his schema explains how at each stage of development a person stops being what he or she was, travels along a path of change, and then adjusts to living in a new pattern of living" (Marcus, 2004: 19). Lastly, Turner (1969) extends Van Gennep's concept and philosophical debate on "rites of passage," and focuses on the concept of liminality and adds that liminality is not just to identify the in-between period, it also helps us to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences. Turner stresses the "involving a passage through a threshold state or limen into a ritual world removed from everyday notions of time and space; a mimetic enactment of some dimension of the crisis that brought about the separation" (Turner, 1969, Roger, pg. ix).[7]

6 The original book, *The Rites of Passage*, was published in 1909.

7 Roger, D. Abrahams has a foreword in Victor Turner's book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.

So, every rite of passage, which contains birth, circumcision, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death, is a symbol of transition from one defined social position to another social status in society (Van Gennep, 1960: 3). As here, rituals, the main studied area of this dissertation, also appear as an example of rites of passage. Brith Milah is seen in many Jewish societies as "initiation ceremonies," "the notion of alliance," a "sign of the covenant," or it is described as an emblem of Jewish identity. It is a ritual that marks the moment when a Jewish man steps into the Jewish community for the first time and is also given his name. At the same time, the Bar/t Mitzvah ceremony is also according to Jewish law; a thirteen-year-old Jewish boy (twelve-year-old girl) becomes accountable for his actions. Their responsibility to God transfers from their father to themselves. It is the kind of step in adulthood. And finally, as in many societies, marriage is seen as a new chapter of life. It is all about the change in social status and the meaning given by the particular society.

4

Historical and Contextual Framework: The Jewish Sephardi Community in (Istanbul) Turkey

The presence of Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire began with their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, present-day Spain, in 1492 and from present-day Portugal in 1497.[1] With an edict published by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, Jews were offered two options: conversion or emigration. Many Jews emigrated to, settled in Ottoman lands, and began living under Sultan Bayezid II's rule. The discourse of being a guest[2] and being tolerated,[3]

1 Original one: Benbassa and Rodrigue (2000); Translated one: Benbassa and Rodrigue (2010); https://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/history/did-you-know (Accessed, November 27, 2023).

2 In his highly acclaimed book published in 2020, Marc David Baer explains how the myth of being a guest and living in tolerance has spread and how it has been historically supported and reproduced by specific individuals and institutions in particular. He offers considerable criticism, particularly addressed to Jewish historians and Jewish lobbyists. Some of the points he criticized are: Jews existed in these lands before 1492; Turks had displayed tolerance toward Jews for five centuries; togetherness; Turkish-Jews friendship; the myth of great Jews and tolerant Turks; and the narrative of harmony. As Baer points out that the role of the tolerated 500-year-old guest stands in shrill contrast with a citizen with rights in the country.

3 For detailed information, see Brink-Danan (2012).

which existed especially in the Ottoman and later Turkish lands, stems from this historical event. This discourse was also reiterated by some political leaders and the Quincentennial Foundation, established in 1989.[4]

The word "Sephardi," literally meaning Spain or Spanish in Hebrew (Gerber, 1994), refers in first instance to Jews of the Iberian Peninsula but is sometimes also applied to Jews from the Middle East and North Africa (presently referred to by the acronym MENA).[5] However, before the Sephardi Jews set foot in the Ottoman Empire, Romaniote and Karaite Jews were living in these lands (Bora, 2017; Benbessa & Rodrigue, 2010). Although there is no consensus in the academic literature about the date of Jewish presence, it could be indeed said that Jewish life in these lands existed for more than five centuries (Güleryüz, 2012; Galanti, 1995; Bora, 2017). While Galanti (1995), relying upon archeological evidence, claims a Jewish presence in Anatolia as early as the fourth century BCE, Bora (2017) dates their presence as early as the sixth century BCE. Those who constitute the Iberian congregation are Jews in Macedonia, Sarajevo, Serbia, the Balkans, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Turkey (Istanbul, Edirne, Izmir), and, lately, Israel. It is claimed by consensus in the literature that over time, the culture of the large Sephardi population of Anatolian Jewry became dominant in these lands (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2010; Bora, 2017; Gerber, 1994; Shaw, 1991; Lewis, 1984).

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923), the Jews suffered many misfortunes which were also related to the Turkification efforts (Akar, 1992; Akar, 2009; Aktar, 1996; Aktar, 2000; Bali, 1999). An overview of the following may serve as a brief history of antisemitism and significant events

4 The original text reads: "1992 yılında Türkiye'de, 1492'de ya dinlerini feda etmek veya 'bir daha ne sebeple olursa olsun geri dönmemek' üzere ülkeyi terk etmek zorunluğunda bırakılan İspanyol Yahudileri Sefaradların Osmanlı İmparatorluğuna buyur edilmelerinin ve burada kendilerine yeni bir vatan yaratmalarının 500. yıldönümü kutlandı."https://www.muze500.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=121&lang=tr (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

5 The Sephardi usage, which encompasses this vast geography, is also a subject of controversy, and not all scholars and communities agree on the terminology. Mizrahi, literally meaning "eastern," is used for the Jews of Middle Eastern origin (Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Morocco, etc.). Mizrahim have different traditions and customs from Sephardim.

in the Turkish Republic Era. The most studied and known ones are the murder of Elza Niyego and Repercussions, 1927;[6] Citizen, Speak Turkish!, 1928 (Bali, 1999); the Thrace Pogroms, 1934 (Demirel, 2010); the Twenty Classes, 1941–1942 (Bali, 1999); the Wealth Tax, 1942 (Akar, 1992 & Aktar, 2000; Bali, 1999); the Sinking of the Struma, 1942;[7] and the September 1955 Pogroms.

After 1955, several antisemitic and significant events happened in the Turkish Republic Era. Here, more detailed information of the events covering this dissertation's time scope will be given below. Still, all these tragic events and their consequences for the Jewish community will be discussed in the related years in Part 2. Some of them were repressed or remained unspoken, but they greatly affected the Jewish community in Turkey. In addition to the events examined in academic literature above, several other noteworthy occurrences have changed not only Jewish rites of passage events but also daily life: First, on September 6, 1986, international terrorists attacked and bombed the Neve Shalom Synagogue. Twenty-two individuals died during the *Shabbat* prayer as a result. The website of the synagogue notes:

> The synagogue was promptly rebuilt and reopened for worship with a large ceremony on Wednesday, May 20, 1987, attended by prominent dignitaries. As a memento of that traumatic day, the bullet and bomb holes in the marble piece in the upper left corner of *Ehal*[8] were not repaired. [9]

This particular incident led to increased security measures at synagogues in the following years, will be discussed more in Part 2. Subsequently, on March

6 https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplumsal-cinsiyet/237322-elza-niyego-cinayeti-1927-den-bir-erkek-siddeti (Accessed, June 12, 2023).

7 https://www.yadvashem.org/exhibitions/struma.html?gclid=CjwKCAjwhJukBhBPEiwAniIcNU1izXXoDkOTaBalVgoKb2ok-YpxtLd_4WawViigvlHkgFIb1Z9fYhoCAEMQAvD_BwE (Accessed, June 12, 2023).

8 A cabinet where the *Torah* scrolls are stored.

9 https://www.nevesalom.org/teror.html (Accessed, June 7, 2023). "Sinagog kısa sürede onarılarak 20 Mayıs 1987 Çarşamba günü devlet büyüklerinin de katıldığı kalabalık bir törenle tekrar ibadete açıldı. Ehal'in sol üst köşesindeki mermerde bulunan kurşun ve bomba izleri onarılmayarak o acı günün unutulmaması için aynen bırakıldı."

1, 1992, a grenade was hurled again into Neve Shalom Synagogue, in yet another terrorist attack. One bystander was hurt, luckily there were no further casualties. The attack happened just three days after the ceremony at the Neve Shalom Synagogue commemorating the 500th anniversary of Sephardi Jews' arrival in Ottoman lands.[10]

Third, the murder of Yasef Yahya, a thirty-five year old Jewish dentist from Istanbul that took place in his practice on August 21, 2003. The murderer admitted to killing Yahya with antisemitic motives after being apprehended in March 2004.[11]

The synchronized terrorist attacks on two synagogues in 2003 were the fourth and, arguably, the most significant incident as it has scarred the Jewish community most heavily. During a Bar Mitzvah ceremony on Saturday, November 15, 2003, a bomb-loaded truck exploded at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. Two minutes later, at the dedication of a new section of the structure, a second bomb-laden truck blew up in front of the Şişli Beth Israel Synagogue in *Osmanbey*. The Neve Shalom incident claimed the lives of eighteen people, including congregation members and nearby business owners. The Şişli Beth Israel attack resulted in a total of five fatalities.[12] Over 600 people were hurt in the attacks as a whole. The Jewish Community in Turkey has been significantly impacted by all of these incidents.[13]

In addition to this, the daily lives of Jews in Turkey and the worldwide diaspora are impacted by foreign politics, particularly the wars in which the State of Israel is engaged, associated developments, and the Middle East's political environment.[14] Turkey maintains close ties with many of the Arab

10 https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/neve-saloma-ilk-saldiri-degil-38514164 (Accessed, June 7, 2023). "1992'deki tarihten üç gün önce Neve Şalom Sinagogu'nda Sefarad yahudileri Osmanlı topraklarına gelişlerinin 500'üncü yıldönümü dolayısıyla şükran duası töreni yapılmıştı."

11 https://www.gazetevatan.com/gundem/musevi-diye-oldurduk-24483 (Accessed, June 7, 2023).

12 https://www.nevesalom.org/teror.html (Accessed, June 7, 2023).

13 https://www.cnnturk.com/video/turkiye/saldiridan-18-yil-sonra-neve-salom-sinagogunda-ilk-roportaj-cnn-turkte (Accessed, June 12, 2023).

14 Aliyah (in this case; migration from Turkey to Israel) numbers reflect this situation.

countries. Consequently, conflicts in the Middle East give rise to anti-Zionism that in turn takes on forms that are often indistinguishable from antisemitism. Examples of such events since the 2000s include the Israel-Lebanon War in 2006, the Gaza War in 2008–2009,[15] and the so-called *Davos Crisis* at the World Economic Forum[16] in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2009. In 2010, the *Mavi Marmara*[17] events and the long-lasting media repercussions that followed are the fifth and final prominent examples.

Apart from these global changes, other events in Istanbul have made Jews feel uncomfortable and altered their way of life from time to time. On November 7, 2014, an anonymous person placed a placard stating "Building to be Demolished" on the door of the Neve Shalom Synagogue.[18] Additionally, on March 19, 2016, a terrorist attack at *Taksim* (Istanbul) was directed at a group of Israeli tourists.[19]

After all the tragic and unsettling events that happened and with the recognition of the significant effects on the Jewish community and their social and cultural life, it is necessary to stress the considerable question from Moris Levi, the Deputy Chairman of the Turkish Jewish Community since 2010.

> What happened that the Jewish population, which was around 80,000 at the founding of the Republic, is now 15,000, although demographically, it should be around a few hundred thousand? This development cannot be explained only by the establishment of the

15 While the State of Israel labeled it as Operation Cast Lead, Muslim World called it the Gazza Massacre.

16 https://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/davostaki-kavga-dunya-basininda,6G-lX587WEW-cLbx_rYbQUw (Accessed, June 9, 2023).

17 https://www.bbc.com/news/10203726 (Accessed, March 21, 2023).

18 https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber/92941/neve-salom-sinagoguna-tehdit (Accessed, June 7, 2023).

19 https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/istiklal-caddesinde-patlama-1143787/ (Accessed, June 9, 2023).

> State of Israel. I leave the answer to this meaningful question to historians (Yılmazcan Simonetti, 2022: 94).[20]

So, the decrease in the Jewish population in Turkey is not just due to the natural population decrease or *Aliyah*[21] waves to the State of Israel. It is also related to what happened in the Turkish Republic and sometimes with safety concerns. Moreover, the direction of the migration is not just to the State of Israel (Bali, 2003; Bali, 2018; Kurt, 2022) but also includes Europe, Canada, and the United States.

§ 4.1 Demographic Information on the Jewish Population of Turkey

To better understand the Jewish community in Turkey, it is meaningful to start with the population and its changes over the years and compare it to the total population of Turkey. The first census of the Turkish Republic (1927) shows that the Jewish population in Turkey was 81,872,[22] half of whom lived in Istanbul. At that time, Turkey's total population was 13,5 million.[23] According to the second census (1935), the Jewish population was 76,965[24] out of

20 The original text reads: "Ne oldu da Cumhuriyet'in kuruluşunda 80,000 kadar olan Yahudi nüfusu bugün, demografik olarak birkaç yüz bin seviyesinde olmalı iken, 15,000 oldu? Bu gelişme sadece İsrail'in kuruluşu ile izah edilemez. Bu manidar sorunun cevabını tarihçilere bırakıyorum" (Yılmazcan Simonetti, 2022: 94).

21 The definition of the Hebrew word is rise, and it means to emigrate from diaspora to the "homeland – Israel."

22 http://www.rifatbali.com/images/stories/dokumanlar/nufus_sayimlari-yla_ilgili_arastirma.pdf (Accessed, December 28, 2022).

23 https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Population-and-Housing-Census-2021-45866#:~:text=Cumhuriyetin%20ilk%20y%C4%B1llar%C4%B1nda%20yap%C4%B1lan%201927,680%20bin%20273%20ki%C5%9Fiye%20ula%C5%9Ft%C4%B1 (Accessed, August 22, 2024).

24 http://www.rifatbali.com/images/stories/dokumanlar/nufus_sayimlari-yla_ilgili_arastirma.pdf (Accessed, December 28, 2022).

16,2 million.[25] Year by year, the population of Jews in Turkey has decreased due to emigration, the establishment of the State of Israel, decreasing birth rates, and mixed marriages.[26] By 1955, the population of Jews decreased to 40,345.[27] There are no official data after 1960.[28] Estimates made by the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Agency indicate some 38,000 for 1965 and about 20,000 in 2005: ca. 17,000 in Istanbul, 2,000 in Izmir, and smaller groups in Ankara, Adana, Çanakkale, Bursa and Kirklareli.[29] The estimates of Hebrew University demographer Sergio DellaPergola's 'World Jewish Population, 2016,' which monitors the Jewish population in all countries, shows that "Turkey is home to between 15,500 and 21,000 Jews."[30] According to the same institution and its report called 'World Jewish Population, 2019', the numbers show that 14,800 Jews live in Turkey.[31]

25 https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Population-and-Housing-Census-2021-45866#:~:text=Cumhuriyetin%20ilk%20y%C4%B1llar%C4%B1nda%20yap%C4%B1lan%201927,680%20bin%20273%20ki%C5%9Fiye%20ula%C5%9Ft%C4%B1 (Accessed, August 22, 2024).

26 According to Kaymak (2024), the reasons behind the rise of the mixed marriage summarized as four factors. Demographic factors, spatial mobility, social-economic mobility and gender equality and secularization and pluralism.

27 https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/turkey (Accessed, December 3, 2022).

28 Since 1960, the official Turkish census commission has not complied statistics by religion.

29 https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/turkey (Accessed, December 3, 2022).

30 https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/TR (Accessed, December 3, 2022).

31 "The world's twenty-second largest Jewish community". https://www.jewishdatabank.org/content/upload/bjdb/2019_World_Jewish_Population_(AJYB,_DellaPergola)_DataBank_Final.pdf. (Accessed, December 18, 2024).
In 2015, total population of Turkey was 78,7 million. In 2021, the total population of Turkey was 84,7 million. https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Population-and-Housing-Census-2021-45866#:~:text=Cumhuriyetin%20ilk%20y%C4%B1llar%C4%B1nda%20yap%C4%B1lan%201927,680%20bin%20273%20ki%C5%9Fiye%20ula%C5%9Ft%C4%B1. (Accessed, August 22, 2024).

Currently approximately 14,500 Jews[32] are living as an officially recognized minority group in Turkey.[33] 12,500 reside in Istanbul including the majority of the fifty-one Karaite Jews (Levi, 2016: 32). There are smaller Jewish communities located in several cities outside of Istanbul i.e. Izmir, Adana, Ankara, Antakya, and Bursa. The Jewish population of Izmir is approximately 1,200 people,[34] and several families reside in Ankara, Bursa, and Antakya. According to the European Jewish Congress, "Sephardim make up 96% of the community, with Ashkenazim accounting for the rest."[35] Despite its diminishing numbers, according to 'World Jewish Population, 2016' report, the Turkish Jewish community has the largest remaining Jewish community in the Muslim world.[36]

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32 Sept. 2021, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/jewish-population-by-country (Accessed, December 3, 2022).
In 2021, the total population of Turkey was 84,7 million.
https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Population-and-Housing-Census-2021-45866#:~:text=Cumhuriyetin%20ilk%20y%C4%B1llar%C4%B1nda%20yap%C4%B1lan%201927,680%20bin%20273%20ki%C5%9Fiye%20ula%C5%9Ft%C4%B1 (Accessed, August 22, 2024).

33 The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, accepted non-Muslim groups as minorities. Articles 37-45 of the Treaty of Lausanne guaranteed the rights of minorities in Turkey. In Turkey, three non-Muslim groups are officially accepted only as minorities: Jews, Armenians, and Rum Orthodox Christians (Greeks).
In addition, "Although they are a Christian minority, they cannot benefit from the rights granted by the Treaty of Lausanne, which Turkey has restricted to Armenians, Jews, and Greeks. This has denied Assyrians and other non-Muslim minorities their rights to education in their native language. Up until the establishment of a single kindergarten in 2014, Assyrians had no schools… In 2014, Assyrians in Turkey opened their first kindergarten in nearly 90 years, following a legal battle and a June 2013 court ruling granting them the right to open schools. Mor Efrem Kindergarten was built in Istanbul without any financial support from the government."
https://www.assyrianpolicy.org/turkey. (Accessed, December 18, 2024).

34 The numbers are taken from the Izmir Jewish Community Foundation.

35 https://eurojewcong.org/communities/turkey/ (Accessed, December 3, 2022)

36 https://www.jewishdatabank.org/api/download/?studyId=1185&mediaId=bjdb%5C2021_World_Jewish_Population_AJYB_(DellaPergola)_DB_Public.pdf (Accessed, December 18, 2024) Pp.19.

The Jews in Istanbul generally live in specific neighborhoods, particularly *Sisli, Taksim, Besiktas, Ortakoy, Ulus, Etiler, Sariyer, Kemerburgaz/Gokturk,*[37] *Kadikoy, Caddebostan, Suadiye, Bostanci and Princes' Island* as a summer place. Although these areas are generally neighborhoods where the middle class and upper middle class reside, neighborhoods like *Taksim* and *Sisli* are among the cosmopolitan settlements where minority groups have lived for a long time. The population also has different class dimensions and different social and educational backgrounds. Undoubtedly, there are several Jewish institutions that help different families with supplies for their daily life needs, with packages for Jewish holiday, and sometimes education grants.

§ 4.2 The Institutions of the Jewish Community

The Chief Rabbinate (*Hahambashi)* of the Jewish community of Turkey, located in Istanbul, is recognized by the state as the religious and official head of the community.[38] During the course of my research, the position of Chief Rabbi was held by Rabbi Isak Haleva.[39] The Chief Rabbi officially represents the Jewish community before the state.[40] The community is also represented

37 For detailed information see Kolluoğlu and Bartu Candan, 2008.

38 Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II created the position of the Chief Rabbi to represent the Jewish Community in 1453 under the Ottoman Empire. This position has remained intact in the Republic of Turkey (Karmi 1996).

39 Turkey's Chief Rabbi Isak Haleva passed away on January 14, 2025. Rabbi David Sevi is currently serving as the interim Chief Rabbi until the rabbinical elections to be held on September 28-29, 2025.

40 "In 1953 and 1967, seventy men over the age of twenty-one (over half of whom had a 'religious' appointment in the communal structure) formed a committee to nominate Rav (Rabbi) Rafael Saban and Rav David Asseo, respectively, as their leaders" (Kastoryano 1992; Brink-Danan, 2012: 110). Rav Asseo served as Chief Rabbi until his death in 2002. On October 24th, 2002 elections were held and Rabbi Isak Haleva was chosen. The significance of a community-wide representative democratic vote was the subject of Marcy Brink-Danan's article (2009) called *I Vote, Therefore I Am: Rituals of Democracy and the Turkish Chief Rabbi*. She investigates the issue of democracy in her ethnographic fieldwork, and concludes that "Through description of the rituals, symbols, and interpretations surrounding the election and investiture of Turkey's Chief Rabbi, I have shown that Turkish Jews envision democracy

by several lay leaders whom the community members elect. The president and vice president of the Turkish Jewish Community are Ishak Ibrahimzadeh and Moris Levi respectively. The Jewish community in Turkey is officially an Orthodox[41] community. Members must meet the criteria of the Chief Rabbinate as far as Jewish status is concerned: "A Jew is any person whose mother was a Jew or any person who has gone through the formal process of conversion to Judaism."[42] Members of the Jewish community have a right to practice their religion and hold life cycle events in the community.

One of the major sources of income of the Jewish community is the *kisba*, the annual membership fee based on income that each Jewish community member is expected to pay. Collecting these membership dues is not an easy task for the *komünite*,[43] especially because there is no punishment or penalty

as a disappointment but, at the same time, remain committed to its potential to offer them collective representation"(Brink-Danan, 2009: 20). New elections have been held every seven years. In 2009 there were two candidates, and Rabbi Isak Haleva was re-elected. The last election was held in 2017; Rabbi Isak Haleva was the sole candidate and was reelected. The participation rate was low. According to the announcement of the Turkish Chief Rabbinate Foundation, he received 2,701 out of the 2,755 votes cast (https://www.odatv.com/guncel/yahudi-cemaatinde-secim-sonucu-115825) (Accessed, August 21, 2024).

41 The term orthodoxy refers to the traditionalist branch of Judaism in which the *Halachah*—based on both the Written and Oral law or *Torah*—is central.

42 "It is important to note that being a Jew has nothing to do with what you believe or what you do. A person born to non-Jewish parents who has not undergone the formal process of conversion but who believes everything that Orthodox Jews believe and observes every law and custom of Judaism is still a non-Jew, even in the eyes of the most liberal movements of Judaism, and a person born to a Jewish mother who is an atheist and never practices the Jewish religion is still a Jew, even in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox. In this sense, Judaism is more like a nationality than like other religions, and being Jewish is like a citizenship." http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/history/did-you-know (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

43 The word "*komunite*" (community) is an expression used by community members to define the administration of the Jewish Community. While in some contexts it implies the Neve Shalom Sephardi Synagogues Foundation, in other situations it refers to other institutions. While it implies a structure with one center, some institutions and synagogues have different funds and independent funding.

if the annual monies are not paid. However, if a religious ceremony has to be held or an official document issued certifying that a person is a Sephardi Jew, the first step taken by the *komünite* is to check whether there are any arrears in membership dues. A community member with community debt does not have the right to receive any official document. The latter are currently in great demand thanks to Spain and Portugal's enactment of the *Law of Return*[44] that grants EU citizenship to Jews who can prove their Sephardi descent (Abrevaya, 2016; Altaras, 2000; Corte-Real and David, 2019; McDonalds, 2021). In addition to this, the only way to prove that a person is Jewish to other Jewish communities around the world or sometimes to the universities, is a document issued by the Rabbinic authority.

These three life cycle events—Brith Milah, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Jewish wedding—which are the main topic of this dissertation, can only take place if all membership debts are paid off. Thus, a person who applies to the religious authority to organize any of these events is responsible for fulfilling their duties to community finance as a community member. Until this is completed, no event takes place. During the interviews, interviewees who were forced to pay arrears in dues, complained and were often annoyed about these conditions. Especially because celebrating a life cycle events is quite an expenditure without these additional fees. While the vast majority of the community members lead secular lives, they are anxious to celebrate these three life cycle events, meaning that they must maintain good relationships with the religious authority, follow its rules religious authority and fulfill all obligations.[45] In other words, it is also the community/family members themselves who recognize the religious authority and help to ensure that it remains in power.

While Karaites, Mizrahi, Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews live in Turkey, Sephardi culture is dominant in terms of traditions, rituals, and customs.

44 This law was enacted as compensation for the expulsion of the Jews in from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 and 1496.

45 While the formal wedding ceremony performed by the government gives all rights to the man and woman related to marriage within the borders of Turkey, Jews still want to have a Jewish wedding. Jewish weddings clearly have special meaning beyond the legal formalities.

Although it has lost dominance among the younger generation in Turkey, the language historically spoken among Sephardi Jews is Ladino, also known as Judeo-Espanyol/Judeo-Spanish.[46] Demirel (2020),[47] who has interviewed members of the Turkish Jewish society regarding Sephardi cuisine culture, says:

> Sephardi cuisine, considered by many sources as a nostalgic element and in danger of disappearing, continues to exist today in homes and, more importantly, wherever the tradition is kept alive, as a very important part of both Sephardi culture and tradition. While Sephardi cuisine continues to be included in the tables set on holidays and Shabbat evenings, as well as many milestones such as weddings, deaths, births, and transition ceremonies, what needs to be noted is that the cuisine has not been forgotten but it is not daily life habit anymore (Demirel, 2020: 239-240). [48]

Several institutions and associations in Istanbul provide a lively and active Jewish life. There are eighteen active synagogues[49] run by the Chief

46 In addition, French culture has been the cornerstone of the Jewish community of Turkey that has been multilingual until the second half of the twentieth century (Rodrigue, 1997: 181).

47 Demirel's study (2020) focuses on food culture of Sephardi community and Sephardi cuisine in Istanbul. She examines the Sephardi cultural identity and more specifically Sephardi culture through food with the help of anthropological research tools.

48 The original text reads: "Pek çok kaynak tarafından artık nostaljik bir öge olarak ele alınan ve kaybolma tehlikesi ile yüzyüze olduğu belirtilen Sefarad mutfağı, aslında hem Sefarad kültürünün hem de geleneğin çok önemli bir parçası olarak bugün hala evlerde ve daha önemlisi geleneğin yaşatıldığı her yerde varolmaya devam etmektedir. Düğünler, ölümler, doğumlar, geçiş törenleri gibi pek çok dönüm noktasının yanı sıra bayramlar ve Şabat akşamlarında kurulan sofralarda da Sefarad mutfağı yer almaya devam ederken belirtilmesi gereken mutfağın unutulmaktan öte gündelik bir yemek alışkanlığı olmaktan çıkmış durumda olmasıdır."

49 Namely; Neve Shalom Synagogue (Galata), Sisli Bet Israel Synagogue (Şişli), Şaar Asamayim Synagogue (Kemerburgaz), Burgazada Ohel Yaakov Temple (Synagogue), Heybeliada Beth Yaakov Synagogue, Italian Synagogue – Kal De Los Frankos (Galata), Ortakoy Etz Ahayim Synagogue, Kuzguncuk Bet Nissim Synagogue, Kuzguncuk Bet Yaakov Synagogue, Haydarpasa

Rabbinate, nine cemeteries,[50] one hospital (Ora-Hayim Hospital), one Jewish School (Ulus Jewish School),[51] two cultural associations (Alef and Goztepe Cultural Association), a Jewish Museum (The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews - 2001), a Sephardi Center (of Istanbul - 2003) and a brand new center called Naim Guleryuz Research Library[52] (*Naim Güleryüz Araştırma Kütüphanesi*), a nursing home (The Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center / Matan Baseter- Or-Yom- 1928), several kosher butchers, an active newspaper (Şalom - 1947) and a Ladino/Judea-Espanyol newspaper (El Amaneser - 2005, the monthly supplement of Şalom).[53] Additionally, there are twelve foundations in Istanbul.[54]

Hemdat Israel Synagogue, Bet El Synagogue (Caddebostan), Buyukada Hesed Le Avraam, Yanbol Synagogue (Balat), Ahrida Synagogue (Balat), Maalem Synagogue (Hasköy), Yenikoy Synagogue, Kal Kadoş Çorapcı Han Synagogue (Sirkeci). These seventeen synagogues are Sephardi. There is one Ashkenazi synagogue, the Bet Ha Kneset H'Aşkenzai (Galata) and one independent, Karaite synagogue in Hasköy.

50 Kilyos Cemetery, Haskoy Çıksalın Cemetery, Ulus Ashkenazi Cemetery, Ulus Sephardi Cemetery, Italian Jewish Cemetery, Ortakoy Cemetery, Kuzguncuk Nakkastepe Cemetery, Baglarbasi Cemetery, Kadikoy Acibadem Cemetery.

51 It provides kindergarten, primary, secondary and high school education.

52 https://www.salom.com.tr/salomTurkey/haber/123788/meaningful-ceremony-at-the-museum-of-turkish-jews-naim-a-guleryuz-research-library (Accessed, December 21, 2022). Naim Güleryüz was the founder and vice president of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum. He played a pivotal role at the opening of the Turkish Jewish Museum in 2001 as well.

53 When the monthly newspaper supplement in Judeo-Spanish was first published in March 2005, it contained eight pages, but now has around thirty two pages. The editor-in-chief is Karen Şarhon.

54 Namely Neve-Shalom Foundation (*Neve Şalom Seferad Sinagogları Vakfı*), Hahambasilik Foundation (*Türkiye Hahambaşılığı Vakfı*), The Quincentennial Foundation – 1992 (*500.Yıl Vakfı*), Haskoy Mealem Jewish Synagogue Foundation (*Hasköy Mealem Musevi Sinagogu Vakfı*), Galata Yuksek Kaldirim Ashkenazic Jewish Synagogue Foundation (*Galata Yüksek Kaldırım Eşkenazi Müsevi Sinagogu Vakfı*), Sirkeci Jewish Synagogue Foundation (*Sirkeci Musevi Sinagogu Vakfı*), Balat Or-Ahayim Jewish Hospital Foundation (*Balat Or-Ahayim Musevi Hastanesi Vakfı*), Balat Ahrida Jewish Synagogue Foundation (*Balat Ahrida Musevi Siangogu Vakfı*), Buyukada Hased Leavraam Jewish Synagogue Foundation (*Büyükada Hased Leavraam Musevi Sinagogu Vakfı*), Ortakoy Musevi Etz-Hayim Synagogue Foundation (*Ortaköy Musevi Etz-Hayim Sinagogu Vakfı*), Kuzguncuk Bet-Yaakov Jewish Synagogue Foundation (*Kuzguncuk Bet-Yaakov Musevi Sinagogu Vakfı*), Kadikoy Hemdat Israel Synagogue

Another component in this community is the *mikvehs*, and there are two active *mikvehs* in two different synagogues.[55] They are in Bet El Synagogue (Caddebostan—built in the 2000s) and Sisli Bet Israel Synagogue (Şişli—built in the 1980s, renewed after the 2003 terror attack). 2021 is the last active year for the Neve Shalom Synagogue's *Mikveh*, and now it is inside the Naim Güleryüz Research Library and is on display.

The two main synagogues hosting life cycle events are the Zülfaris Synagogue and the Neve Shalom Synagogue. Zülfaris Synagogue, aka Kal Kadosh Galata,[56] is named after the street on which it is located, Zülf-ü Arus. This synagogue, opened in 1823, has been home to many meaningful ceremonies. After being repaired in 1890 with the financial support of the Camondo Family, the synagogue was completely renovated in 1904 by the Galata Jewish Congregation, presided over by Jak Bey Deleon. "After the last wedding in 1983, it closed down as the Jewish community of the area had mostly left. In 1992, the building was appropriated to The Quincentennial Foundation to be used as a Turkish Jews Museum by its owner Neve Shalom Synagogue."[57] Having served as a museum between 2001 and 2015, the building is now a venue for special exhibitions and receptions for the non-Jewish Turkish community.

The other prominent synagogue is the Neve Shalom Synagogue in *Galata/Taksim*. "In the 1930s, with the increase in Jewish population living in

Foundation (*Kadıköy Hemdat İsrael Sinagogu Vakfı*) and Haskoy Turk Karaim Jewish Foundation (*Hasköy Türk Karaim Musevi Vakfı*). There are several foundations outside of Istanbul, namely, *Ankara Musevi Sinagogu Vakfı*, *Çanakkale Mekor Hayim Musevi Sinagogu Vakfı*, *Bursa Türk Musevi Cemaati Vakfı*, *İskenderun Musevi Havrası Vakfı*, *Antakya Musevi Havrası Vakfı*, *İzmir Musevi Cemaati Vakfı*, *Kırklareli Musa Sinagogu Vakfı*.

55 There is one more *mikveh* in the Büyükada Hesed Le Avraam Synagogue. The synagogue is located in one of the Istanbul Prince's Islands. It has been used actively in summer times.

56 https://www.muze500.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=123&lang=en (Accessed, December 10, 2022).

57 https://www.muze500.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=123&lang=en (Accessed, December 10, 2022).

the *Galata* and *Beyoğlu*, the community needed a new place of worship."[58] According to the Neve Shalom Synagogue's website,

> In the 1937s, the Knesset (Apollon) and Zülfaris Synagogues were not able to meet the needs of the rapidly growing Jewish population of *Galata* and *Beyoğlu*. Various venues were rented out and, by special dispensation, used as temporary sanctuaries, especially on high holidays such as Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. [59]

Neve Shalom, meaning *Oasis of Peace*, was built above the building used as the first coeducational elementary school in 1938. There was a long period between its construction and usage as a synagogue. Finally, required permits were granted, and problems were solved with the help of community leaders.[60] Its architects are Eyon Ventura and Bernar Motol. The largest synagogue in Istanbul, Neve Shalom, was opened with a magnificent ceremony on March 25, 1951. With its majestic dome and chandelier, it has hosted countless happy events and ceremonies. It was the target of terrorist attacks in 1986 and 2003, which will be discussed in Part 2. The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews, which was originally located in Zülfaris Synagogue, was moved to the Neve Shalom Synagogue complex in 2015. Still actively used, Neve Shalom Synagogue has a capacity of 640 seats and can host events with up to 1,000 people (Pinhas et al., 2002: 98). Weddings, Brith Milah, and Bar/t Mitzvah ceremonies are performed in this synagogue, which is still the largest synagogue in Istanbul.

58 https://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/history/synagogues/57-neve-shalom-synagogue (Accessed, December 10, 2022).

59 https://nevesalom.org/synagogues.html#neve-shalom-synagogue (Accessed, December 10, 2022).

60 Pinhas et al. (2002), https://hatirlayansehir.hakikatadalethafiza.org/neve-salom-sinagogu/ (Accessed, March 20, 2024).

§ 4.3 Shifting Narratives: The Representation and Public Presence of the Sephardi Jewish Community in Turkey

The tone and form of the outward representation as well as the internal discourse of the Turkish Jewish have been changing since the 1990s. A discussion of these changes is directly relevant for this dissertation as they have affected the life cycle events, as will be discussed at length in Part 2. One of the most crucial changes was the decision to celebrate and commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Jews' presence in the lands of the Ottoman Empire. This celebration initiative also went hand in hand with the establishing a new institution in motion in 1989 i.e. the Quincentennial Foundation. The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews, as the foundation was later called, was established in 2001. This Foundation exhibits the life, traditions, rituals, and history of Turkish Jews in Turkey.

The change in discourse and representation of the Jewish community is related to the change in the lay leadership of the Jewish community as well as to the conjuncture changes in Turkey. The democratization of Turkey in the 2000s and the country's efforts to join the EU elicited Turkey's embrace of its "different colors," whereby it became easier for the (minority)[61] communities to become more extroverted. The leaders, institutions, and practices of the Jewish society kept pace with this change. However, security concerns were ongoing due to the antisemitic events of past, their memory, and upcoming threats, as will be discussed below.

These changes have been analyzed by Yıldız, Bali and Brink-Danan. While Yıldız examines the Jewish community and its identity strategies in three phases, starting from the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Bali stresses the tradition of the *Kayadez*[62] and Brink-Danan singles out the concepts of

61 The term "minority" is used here not referring to the Treaty of Lausanne; it is used more broadly and represents all minority groups in Turkey.

62 In Balbuena's book (2016: 187) called *Homeless Tongues: Poetry and Languages of the Sephardic Diaspora*, he explained the difference of *Kayadez* and *Kayades* in his footnote as follows: "The indecision is likely due to the absence of a complete standard unification of the varied Ladino spellings, which are generally phonetic. The National Ladino Authority in

tolerance and cosmopolitanism. According to Yıldız (2015),[63] the period before the Quincentennial Foundation (from 1942 to 1989) was the introversion phase, and the period after the Quincentennial Foundation was the extraversion phase. This periodization, specifically the era from 1989 to the present, is a useful tool for thinking about the cultural change/shift on which this dissertation concentrates. According to Yıldız, the 1990s included an effort made by Jewish society to acquaint the Jewish identity to other groups and targeted especially the non-minority groups of Turkish society. The establishment of the Quincentennial Foundation was one means to this end. An increase in the number of "non-Jewish Turkish community"[64] attending life cycle events also attests to a community that was becoming less insular and closed to present itself to the outside world in some areas. Yıldız (2015) also points to the trauma of the 2003 synagogue terrorist attacks and the perception of the threat of antisemitism as precipitants of a new identity strategy and "traumatized the Turkish Jewish community and created a breaking point" (Yıldız, 2017) in this period. According to her, the 2003 attacks caused the Jewish community to continue its process of opening up to the outside world with "moderate/mild criticism," especially toward political issues (Yıldız, 2017). Here, regarding her interviews and their subject of interviews, it is essential to underline that the role of having "moderate criticisms" which is shouldered by leaders, administrators, active members, and opinion

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Israel and the journal Akí Yerushalaim have suggested a spelling system that is now used as the standard by different Ladino groups, but variations still occur." I prefer to use *Kayadez* if it is not explicitly written with "s" in any quotation.

63 Yıldız (2015) focuses on the changes in identity strategies of Turkish Jews during three periods: the single-party-period (from the establishment of the Republic to 1942 when the Wealth Tax was enacted); the era from 1942 to the establishment of the Quincentennial Foundation in 1989; and the era from 1989 to up until the present. Yıldız designates the first period as the phase of the Turkification efforts, the second period as a long introversion phase, and the third period as one of integration phase by identity and extroversion strategies. Her current study focuses on the third period particularly by employing in-depth interviews with administrators, active members, and opinion leaders of Jewish organizations. Although Yıldız's comprehensive historical periodization is convincing, she fails to include the voices of ordinary people in her study.

64 *Geniş Toplum.*

leaders.[65] However, the antisemitic issues limit the possibility of visibility in some cases for community members, as will be discussed more below.

Brink-Danan (2012) examines the Quincentennial Foundation's public relations campaign and concludes that all the efforts to establish the Quincentennial Foundation and the Museum served the idea of introducing Jewish identity to the public by promoting the Turkish Republic as a land of "tolerance and love" towards minority groups. In an earlier article (Brink-Danan, 2009: 18), she stresses the adoption of the role of the good minority/ boy/ child of Turkey. As she states, "In spite of their historically 'low-profile' status and their individual gestures of assimilation, in their role as representatives of Turkey's 'good minority' Jewish community officials increasingly serve in a self-conscious role as public advocates." This role contributed significantly to a cosmopolitan and tolerant image of Turkey, that was key to joining the European Union. As Turkey's model minority, Jews became living proof of the recognition of diversity and cosmopolitanism. This role became prominent with the 1992 celebration of the fifth centenary of Jewish life in Turkey.

> This campaign was built around a nation of Jewish gratitude for Ottoman and Turkish hospitality and dovetailed with warming relations with both Israel and the United States (and the "West" more generally). The QF (Quincentennial Foundation) began its activities by hiring a public relations firm, the GCI Group, to help them network with international academic institutions, Jewish organizational leaders, fundraisers, tourism offices, and museums (Brink-Danan, 2012: 36).

Bali's analysis of the establishment of the Quincentennial Foundation[66] is similar to Brink-Danan's,

> The work of re-conceptualization has been largely entrusted to The Quincentennial Foundation, an organization established by the community's leadership in 1989 for the purpose of commemorating and celebrating the 500 year anniversary (1992) of the arrival of Spanish

65 Bali calls them as Jewish community's elites (Bali, 2004b).

66 https://www.rifatbali.com/images/stories/dokumanlar/those_who_try_to_forget.pdf (Accessed, August 27, 2024).

> Jewry on Ottoman shores, as well as to be the vehicle for 'explaining' to the world the humane treatment meted out to the Jews by the Ottoman Empire and its successor, the Turkish Republic.

While examining the 1990s, Bali (2012) also adds that

> In effect, Turkey's Jewish community was being entrusted by the state with the role of Turkey's "model minority," a task that would both distinguish and distance it form the other major non-Muslim communities (Greek and Armenians). For the old guard Republican elites, the Jewish community represented a shining example of how the state could and should establish harmonious relations with the country's minorities (Bali, 2012: 447).

Bali observes this attitude as a "survival strategy,"[67] and it requires "re-conceptualized historical understanding" and "beautified" accounts of the community's past. It also needed to "learn(ing) to get along with the State" and to "be(ing) of service to the State."[68] So, to be the "most favored community" (Bali, 2012: 447) brings some results, refrainment and gains like publicly denying antisemitism and its importance (Bali, 2012: 451).

When examining the Foundation's campaign for public awareness, Brink-Danan provides some examples of these voluntary promotional activities, including seminars, establishing institutional relations, publishing and sponsoring books. Among the latter is Shaw's book (1991) *Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*. The book was dedicated to the brotherhood and friendship between the Muslims and Jewish Turks of the

67 "The community leaders' pursuit of a policy of compliance and collaboration with the state appeared to them the best— and perhaps only—way of ensuring the community's survival" (Bali, 2012: 454).

68 "The scope and meaning of 'being of service to the State' has expanded since the 1980s, when the Jewish community and its members have been 'recruited' to perform public relations worldwide—and in the United States, in particular— work in coordination with the Foreign Ministry of Turkey, which has faced increasing criticism for its human rights violations, its oppression of its Kurdish population and for the Armenian genocide" (Bali, 2005: 6).

Republic of Turkey. Additionally, the museum exhibits at this time focused on Turkish tolerance. Baer[69] summarizes all these attempts as follows:

> As the Jewish community of Turkey celebrated the anniversary, the myth of "five hundred years of friendship" between the two peoples was repeated by community leaders and prominent Jewish businessmen in the press and media, including in the Jewish newspaper *Şalom*, and books were published to disseminate the thesis to the widest possible international audience (Baer, 2020: 162).

The European Day of Jewish Culture (*Yahudi Kültrü Avrupa Günü*), introduced in 2001, consists of several activities and shows intended to introduce Jewish culture to especially the non-Jewish community in the public sphere.[70] There has also been an increase in the areas where Jews and non-Jews encounter each other with the purpose of educating the general public about Jewish identity. Brink-Danan, while examining these examples and the changed discourse, concludes that "This new politics of friendship between Turkish Jewish elites and their government allows Turkish Jews a more public role than they have previously enjoyed (or even desired)" (Brink-Danan, 2012: 59). All in all, she adds, "If historically, the modus operandi of Turkish Jews was to keep a low profile (Bali, 2007) now Jews (correctly, their officials and other prominent figures) have changed tactics" (Brink-Danan, 2012: 60).

Jewish existence, identity, and practices entered the public arena. The differences between the Jews and the majority, which were based on traditions, language, accents, rituals, beliefs, and music, started to be displayed openly. However, this visibility remained in "de-politicized venues (such as

69 Prof. Marc David Baer is a historian and works at the Department of International History at LSE. He is the author of two significant books in Jewish history: *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks (2010) and Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying Armenian Genocide* (2024). In the second book, he focuses on the Jewish people's attitude of gratitude and its roots during their 500 years of living in these lands.

70 https://www.salom.com.tr/haber/119984/yahudi-kulturu-avrupa-gunu-24-ekimde-katilimcilariyla-bulusacak (Accessed, December 11, 2022).

the museum, public concerts, and visual art exhibitions)" (Brink-Danan, 2012: 60).

Brink-Danan also discusses the difference between the official discourse and the practices of Jewish lay people. She examines what it means for Jews to live as a "tolerated minority" in contemporary Istanbul between 1992 and 2009. While the Quincentennial Foundation celebrated difference publicly, Brink-Danan discerned a tension between the public and private sphere. The Jewish community members still kept their Jewishness secret, e.g. lay people still had some concerns about affixing a *mezuzah* on their doorposts. The most crucial turning point in the propagation of what Brink-Danan calls a "tolerance trope" was the terrorist attack in 2003. She lists the precautions taken, such as marked buildings, high surrounding walls, metal detectors and trained personnel, and asks an essential question: "If Jews feel at home in Turkey, why do they place so much emphasis on security?" (Brink-Danan, 2012: 85). There were concerns about the willingness to tolerate difference in the public sphere as well as about security risks, which limited the visibility of Jews in the public sphere.

The state of extroversion has manifested itself not only in religious events but also in cultural and religious spaces in varying shapes and forms. The discourse of *Kayadez* (Ovadia, 2002: 194) —being silent and invisible—, was becoming less prominent after years of ascendancy. The word *Kayadez* in Judeo Spanish/Ladino means as Ovadia (2002: 194) explains:

> *Kayadez* (silence). It must have been one of the first commands learned in a Jewish family. And the index finger touching both lips. Hush sign. Do not talk about politics in public. Not only politics, but anything that touches water and soap[71] is not talked about, complained about, remembered or told. [72]

71 "Not touching water and soap" is a Turkish phrase which could be translated as "without stepping on any landmines."

72 The original text reads: "*Kayadez* (suskunluk). Yahudi bir ailede öğrenilen ilk komutlardan biri olsa gerek. Ve iki dudağın üstüne değdirilen işaret parmağı. Sus işareti. Herkesin ortasında siyasetten konuşulmaz. Yalnızca siyasetten değil, suya sabuna dokunacak hiçbir şeyden konuşulmaz, şikayet edilmez, hatırlanmaz, anlatılmaz."

Yet this tradition of *Kayadez* has reappeared under various circumstances relating to the political conjuncture in Turkey. This adherence to this practice is most prevalent especially among the older generations. According to Bali, *Kayadez* has two critical factors: being silent/quiet and low-profile. It mainly refers to not standing out, being invisible in the public sphere, not drawing the attention of the non-Jewish Turkish community, not leading a lifestyle too visible and remaining quiet (Bali, 2005). The interviews held for this dissertation show that *Kayadez* and keeping a low profile (in life cycle events) are practices that are still being requested of the Jewish community members by the religious authority and lay leaders and this type of behavior was mostly underlined during the interviews conducted with religious authority.

Kayadez also covers "not publicly expressing critical views of either the Turkish Republic, Turkish society or the country's history," and it is warning made "both within the family, passed down from the older generation to the younger members, and as an exhortation from the Chief Rabbi to members of the community" (Bali, 2005: 1). According to Bali, the tradition of being silent commenced during the "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" campaign held in 1928, and the tradition of keeping a low profile was a reaction to the disproportional levying of the Wealth Tax/Capital Tax on non-Muslim minorities in 1942. Lastly, Bali stresses that "this 'silent' approach is not only a method of survival; it is simultaneously an expression of a profound distrust of both the regime and Turkish society as a whole" (Bali, 2005: 3). This mistrust and insecurity were reinforced by the terrorist attacks and some political measures that took place over the years.

However, this *Kayadez* approach reshaped over the years. In her book, Yılmazcan Simonetti (Yılmazcan Simonetti, 2022)[73] reproduced an interview

73 Muteber Yılmazcan Simonetti, who works with Community Foundations Representatives, interviewed twenty-seven intellectuals and administrators representing the following minority communities with whom she was in contact:: the Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Georgian, Catholic, and Syriac Orthodox communities.

with community leader Moris Levi,[74] who offers critical insight about what it means to not stand out:

> There is a basic principle among the Jews; It is not important to be right, it is important to be smart! Being smart requires not drawing attention too much, not standing out too much, and adapting. So, this is an essential contradiction. When I look at the last 100 years, the first communists were Jews. They were accused of being terrorists in Europe, and the first capitalists were Jews. This time, they were accused of being bloodsuckers! There are many contradictions like these two very extreme contradictions, and the Jews realized that you can be declared a scapegoat under any circumstances, so be inconspicuous do not stand out (Yılmazcan Simonetti, 2022: 74). [75]

When discussing the campaign of "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" and the abandonment of the Ladino language, Levi adds:

> No, it is not fear; if you want to live well and comfortably, you must adapt! They accuse Jews of being cowards; It is true. You can call this cowardice, or you can call it the instinct not to cause trouble/provoke a quarrel or waste energy in vain (Yılmazcan Simonetti, 2022: 74). [76]

74 Moris Levi was the fourth-term Representative of Community Foundations between 2018 and 2021. He has also been the Deputy Chairman of the Turkish Jewish Community since 2010.

75 The original text reads: "Yahudilerde bir temel prensip vardır; haklı olmak önemli değildir, akıllı olmak önemlidir! Akıllı olmak fazla göze batmamayı, fazla öne çıkmamayı, uyum sağlamayı gerektiriyor.Yani önemli bir çelişkidir. Son 100 yıla baktığımda ilk komünistler Yahudi'dir; Avrupa'da terrorist olmakla suçlanmışlar, ilk kapitalistler de Yahudi'dir; kan emici olmakla suçlanmışlardı bu defa! Bu iki çok ekstrem çelişki gibi çok çelişki var ve Yahudiler fark etmişler ki her koşulda günah leçisi ilan edilebilirsin, onun için silik ol, göze batma" (Yılmazcan Simonetti, 2022: 74).

76 The original text reads: "Yok, korku değil, sen iyi ve rahat yaşamak istiyorsan uyum sağlamak zorundasın! Yahudileri kokaklıkla suçlarlar; doğrudur. Buna korkaklık da diyebilirsiniz, maraza çıkarmama, boşu boşuna enerjiyi tüketmeme içgüdüsü de diyebilirsiniz" (Yılmazcan Simonetti, 2022: 74).

So, the tradition of *Kayadez* is still there, but it has been reshaped in different periods and in various contexts. At this time, it is associated with "being smart," not "cowardice" anymore. The extraversion stage and the tradition of *Kayadez* seem contradictory, yet they go hand in hand, taking on new forms with the passing of time. It is a survival strategy and when they are accepted to be Turkey's face of tolerance, it also comes from their attitude of being a "good boy."

However, this subservient attitude started to change at a point due to both the lay leaders and ordinary Jewish community members. However, the roles played by the two were not same. For the first time, very few critical approaches and more politicized comments were discernible in the public sphere and they were not represented the religious authority or active Jewish lay leader. Two significant incidents recalled by Bali in his interview[77] with the *Gazetevatan* newspaper may be identified as turning points. The first one is noted in, Bensiyon Pinto's autobiographical book, *I Could Not Tell You More (Being a Jew in the non-Jewish Society),*[78] published in 2008. In this book, Pinto, long-term president of the Jewish community between 1989 and 2003 and later Honorary President complains publicly: "Why do you not accept the Turkish Jews as Turks?". According to Bali, this was an unprecedented action. The second incident is the letter[79] sent in 2009 by a Jewish "Turkish woman,"[80] academic Leyla Navaro, to *Radikal*, one of the most-read newspapers of the period. In this letter, Navaro asks several questions with references to the Gaza War (2008-2009):

> What does it mean when it is said, 'We are the grandchildren of the Ottomans who saved you from Spain?' Is the fact that my ancestors

77 Rıfat Bali. (2009) Newspaper Gazetevatan. https://www.gazetevatan.com/arsiv/rifat-bali-vatana-konustu-728713 (Accessed, May 18, 2022).

78 The original name of the book is *Anlatmasam Olmazdı (Geniş Toplumda Yahudi Olmak).*

79 https://t24.com.tr/haber/turkiyede-yahudi-olmak-500-yillik-yalnizlik,25861#google_vignette (Accessed, August 29, 2024).

80 In her letter, Navaro states that she was described with these two words in the academy abroad. Here, she underlines that she is not defined as a Jewish woman; instead, she is described as a Turkish woman, which Navaro wants to be accepted in her country as well.

> were accepted by the Ottoman Sultan 500 years ago still recorded in my material and moral debt? Am I still considered a guest in this land where I was born and raised, where I fulfilled my duties as a citizen, and where I actually contributed to its development? Should I walk around with my head bowed? Should I be subjected to threats? And should I stomach this situation? [81]

She adds, "The 'cultural mosaic' that is so talked and bragged about is just a touristic slogan, a misconception, an illusion..."[82]

This critical and "political" movement which started among couple of people gained momentum and by 2015 was embraced by the leadership of the Jewish community. The state of showing oneself, which was initially de-politicized, started to become politicized. Several examples reflecting this change are the Hanukkah celebration, the website of *Avlaremoz*, the new permanent exhibition in the museum, the Struma commemoration, the *Club* serial, the symposium in the *Pera* Museum, and the virtual tour in the museum. The Hanukkah festival,[83] attended by the community's political and religious leaders was celebrated in the public sphere for the first time in 2015 and Hanukkah candles were lit together with the "non-Jewish Turkish

81 The original text reads: "Sizleri İspanya'dan kurtaran Osmanlı'nın torunlarıyız" dendiğinde ne kastediliyor acaba? 500 yıl önce ecdadımın Osmanlı Padişahı tarafından kabul edilmesi hâlâ maddi manevi borç haneme mi yazılı? Doğup büyüdüğüm, bir vatandaş olarak görevlerimi yerine getirdiğim, fiilen gelişmesine katkıda bulunduğum bu topraklarda hâlâ misafir mi addediliyorum? Boynu bükük mü dolaşmalıyım? Tehdit altında kalmaya namzet miyim? Ve bu durumu sindirmeli miyim?".

82 The original text reads: "O kadar sözü edilen, gururla taşınan 'kültür mozaik'i sadece bir turistik slogan, bir yanılgı, yanılsamaymış..." https://t24.com.tr/haber/turkiyede-yahudi-olmak-500-yillik-yalnizlik,25861#google_vignette (Accessed, August 29, 2024).

83 "In order to fight against prejudice, community leaders have therefore agreed to intervene in the public space for a few years without losing a certain reserve. For the first time, in 2015, the lighting of Hanukkah candles by the Chief Rabbi took place in a square in Istanbul in the presence of Turkish officials." https://k-larevue.com/en/turkey-the-new-visibility-of-the-jewish-community/ (Accessed, December 11, 2022).

community."[84] This action clearly served the aim of publicly staging the Jewish community and its religious and cultural traditions.

The second important example of this process is the *Avlaremoz* [85] platform, which was not produced by the institutional management of the community but was created in 2016, especially by the younger generation of the Jewish community. *Avlaremoz* literally means to speak, the opposite of *Kayadez*. The members of this alternative platform evaluate all events critically and do not hesitate to criticize the necessary authorities—both Jewish and non-Jewish—aloud. The critics involved in this bottom up initiative were at time seen by the lay leaders as naughty children of the community. However, it was a very valuable initiative and for the first time, a group of youth have a voice to criticize the events in the Jewish community and out of the Jewish community, past and ongoing antisemitic incidents in Turkey.[86] While the Jewish authorities felt that there should be limits to criticism, they never voiced these sentiments aloud; warnings and discontent were always expressed behind closed doors.

The third indication of change is evidenced in the renewal of the permanent exhibition of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews "with updated content and modern exhibition technologies"[87] in December 2015 its new premises in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. In addition to the symbolic meaning of the change of place, the newly designed museum also displayed the prayer hall of the synagogue behind security glass of the highest standards. The new permanent exhibition was bolder than the previous one in confronting the Turkish historical narrative. This attitude was a new and different step for the Turkish Jewish Community. While discussing the museum, the rise of the heritage project in the Jewish community should be

84 Non-Jewish Turkish community - *Geniş Toplum*.

85 https://www.avlaremoz.com/ (Accessed, June 4, 2023).

86 This initiative's establishment story also went hand in hand with the Camp Armen Resistance (starting from May, 2015), which was against the decision to demolish the camp in Tuzla, Istanbul. Camp Armen is an old Armenian orphanage. The effects of the Gezi movement cannot be ignored as well.

87 https://www.muze500.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38&Itemid=122&lang=en (Accessed, December 11, 2022).

noted. Kaymak (2024: 7) underlines the efforts made to grow prominence in cultural heritage projects in her article. According to her, "despite the dwindling and aging population," it is also related to "break the traditional 'invisibility/low-profile attitude' of the Jewish community," "preserve minority cultures," and "transfer of Turkey's local Jewish cultural memory of future generations" (Kaymak, 2024: 7).[88]

A fourth attestation of change is the annual national commemoration of the *Struma Disaster*, initiated in 2015.[89] Fifth, in the cultural arena is the Netflix series titled *Kulüp* (*The Club*, 2021),[90] for which several community leaders served as consultants. Employing more than fifty Jewish actors and actresses, the series expressed and promoted the Jewish way of life and, through a medium with a vast audience reach, became quite the sensation in Turkey. Some have described it as "a media revolution for the Jewish community in Turkey."[91] It was the first time that ordinary Jewish life could be seen in mass media, and Ladino heard in that frequency. More importantly, the story is based on the traumatic memory of Wealth Tax and the September 1955 Pogroms. A researcher fellow, Liora Morhayim said, such visibility in the media without any negative connotations was a novum for the Jewish community.

88 The heritage projects and efforts in this arena could be another dissertation topic. Still, I want to stress here that this effort of heritization of Jewish culture is also not special to Turkey or the Sephardi Jewish community. It is possible to see it in different parts of Europe. According to During, heritage discourse is also a matter of identity construction and can be instrumentalized and commodified in branding efforts in Europe (During, 2011: 17-31). For the Jewish community in Turkey, the heritage and cultural arena is partly less risky, more open to be controlled by religious authority and lay leaders, and a good, rich resource to be in the public sphere. It also helps for the reputation of the community in the international arena.

89 http://www.tarihhaber.net/struma-ilk-kez-devlet-duzeyinde-bir-torenle-anildi/ (Accessed, March 14, 2024).

90 It was released on 5 November 2021.

91 https://k-larevue.com/en/turkey-the-new-visibility-of-the-jewish-community/ (Accessed, December 11, 2022).

> It is an incredible feeling. This is the first time I heard Ladino spoken on television. For the first time, the story of a Jew from Turkey is featured in a mainstream media outlet. We are a very, very small society in Turkey. Are we visible anymore? Then, it was a big surprise that such a good job was done. Moreover, I was surprised that it was not viewed from a cliché point of view but was actually made with every detail in mind. Furthermore, the series also has a political side. It is not just a work glossed over with cultural elements such as Ladino. The political aspects of the period, such as the Turkification policies and the Wealth Tax, are also combined with other sides of the story. Taken together, it was so surprising and so beautiful. [92]

While this was a bold step taken by community leaders, it was also a move that was greeted with both surprise and secret pride by community members.

The sixth example of a changing approach in the cultural arena is the symposium held at the *Pera Museum*. With the help of the Turkish Theatre Foundation, a two-day symposium titled *Jewish Theatre of Turkey* was organized in 2023.[93] The last example is a step taken by the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews in April 2024.[94] The institution launched a virtual museum experience.[95] Visitors in Turkey and worldwide can watch videos, collections from exhibitions, and photographs, and take a tour that

92 https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-59223909.amp (Accessed, July 17, 2024). The original text reads: “İnanılmaz bir duygu. İlk defa televizyonda Ladino konuşulduğunu duyuyorum. İlk kez Türkiyeli bir Yahudi'nin hikayesi ana akımda bir yayın organında merkezde bulunuyor. Türkiye'de çok çok küçük bir toplumuz, "Artık görünüyor muyuz?" derken böyle bir işin yapılması büyük sürpriz oldu. "Üstelik klişe bir yerden bakılmaması, gerçekten en ince ayrıntısına kadar düşünülerek yapılması beni şaşırttı. Üstelik politik bir tarafı da var dizinin. Sadece Ladino gibi kültürel öğelerle geçiştirilmiş bir iş değil. O dönemdeki Türkleştirme politikaları, Varlık Vergisi gibi politik tarafların da hikayenin diğer tarafları ile birlikte ele alınması çok şaşırtıcı ve çok güzeldi.”

93 https://www.salom.com.tr/haber/127377/istanbul-iki-gun-turkiyedeki-yahudi-tiyatrosunu-konustu (Accessed, March 14, 2024).

94 https://www.aejm.org/projects/new-virtual-museum-tour-museum-of-turkish-jews/ (Accessed, July 17, 2024).

95 https://3dtour.muze500.com/ (Accessed, July 17, 2024).

includes information on several topics. Accessibility is the main goal of this step taken by the Jewish lay leaders and the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews.

What is important here is to be able to examine who is advancing this politicization process. In addition to the courageous and controlled actions of lay leaders, it is more difficult to observe the individual actions of community members. In this sense, although the *Avlaremoz* platform has made a big splash, the point it has reached in the last period, the fact that "non-Jewish" and academic writers are in the majority or continue their lives with Jewish writers abroad, is an indication of how difficult it is to create this critical voice as a community member in Turkey.

Before concluding this part, I would like mention the internal changes of the Jewish community during these years. A seminal event for the Turkish Jewish community was the arrival of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik in 2003.[96] He is an Ashkenazi Jew from the United States and works for the Chabad Organization. Interestingly, in the notes section of her book Brink-Danan describes the conversation about Chabad that she had with a Jewish leader whom she met during her ethnographic fieldwork between 2001 and 2003:

> When I asked a local Turkish Jewish educator if he was worried about the power of Chabad to change the community, he replied: 'If one person can change our community, maybe the community needs changing.' I would argue that the Chabad Rabbi in Istanbul, far from being "one person," is an emissary of one of the most powerful Jewish organizations in the world, one that sees as its purpose the

96 Rabbi Menachem Mendel Chitrik, born in Israel, is the Chabad emissary to Turkey and Rabbi of the Istanbul Ashkenazi community. https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/23410/jewish/Mendy-Chitrik.htm (Accessed, December 12, 2022). https://www.timesofisrael.com/chabad-rabbi-tweets-unusual-3-week-jewish-heritage-road-trip-deep-into-turkey/ (Accessed, December 12, 2022). He is also "a Rabbi who oversees kosher certification in dozens of factories across the country". https://www.timesofisrael.com/chabad-rabbi-tweets-unusual-3-week-jewish-heritage-road-trip-deep-into-turkey/ (Accessed, December 12, 2022). He has been the chairman of the Alliance of Rabbis in the Islamic States since 2019. https://www.rabbisalliance.org/communities/turkey/ (Accessed, December 12, 2022).

> imposition of its particular values and interpretations of Jewish law on all Jews worldwide. …. As such, the appearance and impact of the Chabad movement in Istanbul in the twenty-first century likely deserves a book of its own, but is largely beyond the purview of this work (Brink-Danan, 2012: 177).

When we look closely at the changes that have been made, especially in religious areas and some life cycle events, Danan's claim that this person would prove to be a very powerful and potent agent in directing the changes in the community from the moment of his arrival has been confirmed. His presence has also meant the creation of relatively new institutions, but this was not due solely to his powerful influence. At the institutional level, the changes and transformations in the life cycle events are also related to the role of lay leaders in the community. Every leader has a different type of administrative style, and could potentially make a difference in this area. Relatively the younger generation group who has taken an active role in the community since the 2000s. This new group of people (mostly men), who are educated, visionary, actively participate in professional life, has held roles at the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*, *Bar and Bat Mitsva Clubs,* the Executive Committee, different positions in the line management of the Turkish Jewish community and also as Vice President and President of the Jewish Community. As modern and open-minded individuals, they have succeeded in ushering in many changes in terms of standardization and professionalization in the community.

All in all, the Istanbul Jewish Community has gained more public visibility recently than in the past, especially since the early 1990s. But just as in other countries, there is still a concern about safety in this group. Even if the community is interwoven with the "non-Jewish Turkish community" in daily life, it is nonetheless closed, guarded, and cautious in some social and religious settings. Synagogues are not as inclusive and accessible to everyone, partly due to historical occurrences like the trauma of the 2003 terror attacks. While this shift in the cultural field is happening, while the state of opening up to the outside world is so intense, even though the *Kayadez* tradition was broken in some ways, this act of keeping a low profile, frankly, the state of not showing the wealth, continued to be supported institutionally by the

religious authority, as will be exemplified in Part 2 in the discussion of decisions made regarding life cycle celebrations. These changes and how the religious authorities, lay leaders, community members, and the market positioned themselves in the face of the shifting attitudes of the community will be examined further below.

Part 2. Historical Context and Current Position of the Turkish Jewish Sephardi Community and Life Cycle Festive Events From 1960 to 2020

This part provides the ethnographic findings of the study and the results of field research and in-depth interviews are discussed in the context of historical change in religious life cycle ceremonies from 1960 to 2020. The historical changes in three festive religious ceremonies, namely Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Brith Milah, and Jewish wedding are given in three headlines. These headlines stress different categories: education, place, food, music, rules, rituals, association, and dress/costume.

The structure of this part is as follows: To be consistent with the chronological order in one's life cycle, first Brith Milah, and followed by Bar/t Mitzvah, and then the wedding will proceed. The Brith Milah chapter starts with brief historical changes of the event and venues. It also touches more upon the issues of security and antisemitism and their effects on the venues and events than the other life cycle events, as it gives the background of the issue and because it is the first life cycle event to be discussed. For the Bar/t Mitzvah chapter, a brief historical background of the event is presented, and then the focus is on religious ceremonies. During this process, relevant education modules, training, and venues are emphasized. Afterward, the reception of these rites of passage is discussed. However, while doing all this, it is also discussed what kind of negotiation the three agents are in. In addition, the regulations of *kashrut* and *Shabbat* are discussed in this chapter. When it

comes to the Jewish wedding chapter, it proceeds in a different structure than the other two life cycle events. The reason why the wedding chapter is different from the others is that the information obtained from the interviews allows some generalizations to be made decade by decade unlike other rites of passage. The information collected about the past is more accumulated than the other life cycle events. In addition, the changes given consent by the religious authority and the negotiation between three agents are more powerful than the other life cycle events. Therefore, the chapter proceeds as follows: First, the focus is on the reception of the wedding and religious ceremony together because, in some areas, it is impossible to discuss it separately. Then, historical changes in the religious and celebratory event of the wedding are presented in detail decade by. Then, the official wedding reception is added to this discussion. During this chapter, the Jewish wedding is discussed in terms of education, dress, particular rituals, and music.

Several questions are answered in this Part: Do life cycle events change/transform historically, and if so, in *what way?* While this change is taking place, *which actors* take roles in this arena and ensure this change? How do these three actors become agents for years, and what are their roles in this *field* by referring to Bourdieu? In this negotiation arena (life cycle events), what steps are taken and what are the actors' primary motivations for taking these steps? Who controls the ideal definition of the "proper" and "good" Jew and who has control of the practices? While these questions are answered, it also touches on '*how* do antisemitism and the issue of security affect life cycle events as a minority group in Turkish society?' And '*How does* the socio-cultural change in Turkish society affect the life cycle arena of Jewish society?'.

For this Part, looking at the historical framework to understand and discuss the change's fluidity, transformation, and negotiations is valuable. As discussed in Part 1, the three main characters of this field, namely the family members/couples, the market, and the actors of religious institution are touched while providing examples and the changes through the years. It is a field in which three actors take different positions, applying various strategies and capital, and all of them contribute to the Jewish community's ethno-religious communal identity.

5

Life Cycle Festive Event: Brith Milah

§ 5.1 Religious Ceremony and the Meaning of Brith Milah in Turkish Jewish Society

Brith Milah has been practiced and has been central to Jewish tradition for thousands of years. By definition, Brith Milah is a ceremony, in which a *mohel* cuts off the part of a baby's foreskin, is supposed to hold on the eighth day after birth according to Jewish tradition. In fact, the circumcision operation takes a couple of minutes, and the whole ceremony lasts approximately thirty minutes, including prayers. If there is a medical reason[1] which prevents the baby boy from being circumcised, the Brith Milah ceremony could be postponed. According to Goldberg (2013: 43), "This was not unusual, because under rabbinic law, the principle of preserving life takes precedence over the observance of other commandments."

Brith Milah ceremony refers to the convenient between Abraham and God as it is written in the Bible (Genesis 17: 1-14) and was the first commandment given to Abraham and his descendants. In Turkish Jewish tradition, like other Jewish societies, the eight-day-old baby boy is laid on a pillow and

1 Such as need an intensive care or having hepatitis, etc. As it seen in Istanbul Jewish society, if sometimes medical problems such as the penis hole being in a different location may prevent circumcision from being performed.

usually held by the family's eldest male member or his grandfather sitting on the prophet Elijah's chair as a part of tradition. As believed, the prophet Elijah presents at every Brith Milah ceremony. In Turkish tradition, the first-born boy is the male's family responsibility, and the second-born boy is the female's family responsibility. This responsibility usually includes providing the economic burden of the ceremony and being named after the grandfather's name in traditional families. In traditional families, the family members typically keep the baby's name secret, and announced the name for the first time at Brith Milah ceremony. As Goldberg discusses that Brith Milah is the special character of Judaism and this ritual symbolizes Jews in Western culture (Goldberg, 2013: 28), but in Turkey, it does not create such a big difference as in Western culture. As known, Turkey is a mostly Muslim-populated country and almost every boy has been circumcised, but there is no need to say that the way Jews have it is different from a Muslim one. In addition, Brith Milah or circumcision is not seen as a threat to body integrity and has not been discussed as in Western countries. However, it should be noted that the meaning and the way of celebration differ from the Muslim tradition.

When a family has a boy, they need to inform the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey and both parents should sign the petition[2] to have a Brith Milah ceremony for their baby boy. As written before, they must complete all *kisba* payments to the Chief Rabbinate to have Brith Milah ceremony for their baby boy. After the Brith Milah ceremony, the document below is given to the family by the Chief Rabbinate.

2 This requirement has been adapted after having some problem with mixed marriage couples.



Figure 5.1 Reshut Milah document (birth certificate) from 2022.

Except for the health issues evaluated and examined by the doctor, at the end of the day, religious authority is the agent who decides whether a baby boy can have a Brith Milah or not. As Bourdieu (1991: 9) says, while ordinary people are "dispossessed of religious capital," particularly in Turkey, the religious authority and also religious capital is owned by the Chief Rabbinate. While in Europe, Jewish communities can be observed clustered around different synagogues from different movements (reformist, liberal, orthodox, etc.), in Turkey the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey, which positions itself as Orthodox, is the only trusted, monopolized and powerful information and knowledge source for the community and officially leads all forms of religious practices and rituals. In addition, religious authority also has a bureaucratic

body/apparatus to maintain these regular practices. As Bourdieu underlines, this religious capital

> can only be guaranteed by a bureaucratic apparatus, capable, like the church, of enduringly carrying on continuous action, that is, the custom or ordinary routine necessary to guarantee its own reproduction by reproducing the producers of the goods of salvation and religious services (i.e., the body of priests) and the market offered for these goods, that is, the laity (as opposed to the unfaithful and the heretics) as consumers endowed with the minimum religious competence (religious habitus) necessary to demonstrate the specific need for its products (Bourdieu, 1991: 23-24).

Religious authority is likewise inherently an agent, who holds religious competency in reserve, has mastery of practice and body of knowledge in this field. Yet, when the social and cultural dimension of life cycle events celebration occurs, different agents such as the market and family members start to have a say in this field. As Verter underlines, "In his formulation (Bourdieu), every field may be viewed as an independent game, each with its own species of capital" (Verter, 2003: 156). All agents use their capital/s as much as they can in this field. With respect to all reasons, especially in this life cycle event field, religious authority has a more advantaged position and following this, religious authority, while making decisions about the rituals and practices, by definition, has an intense influence on constructing the ethno-religious cultural communal identity. As mentioned, having a dominant decision-maker position brings the right and monopoly of the decision regarding the sons of a mixed marriage given by this institute within the borders of Turkey. Bourdieu explains the monopoly as follows:

> Conservation of the monopoly over symbolic power, such as religious authority, depends on the ability of the institution that possesses it to make known to those who are excluded from it the legitimacy of their exclusion, that is, to make them misrecognize the arbitrariness of the monopolization of a power and a competence in principle accessible to anyone (Bourdieu, 1991: 25).

During the interviews, particularly children of mixed marriages[3] have come across as a subject that is not wanted to be talked about much and avoided being brought up. There are several decisions about children of mixed marriage and donor conceived children, which covers who will stay in or out, made by religious authority could be given as an example here. One of the best examples is that children of mixed marriages and donor conceived children[4] are not allowed to have a Brith Milah ceremony in Neve Shalom Synagogue and are directed to Balat Hospital, also known as the Jewish hospital (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J, 2017). At Balat Hospital, again, a specific[5] *mohel,* which the Chief Rabbinate assigns, leads the Brith Milah ceremony. Although this decision in particular, which is not having mixed-marriage children's Brith Milah ceremony displayed in the synagogue, was avoided to put in words and not expressed directly, it is possible to read in between the lines that this decision was made because of the intention of not promoting mixed marriages as well.

THE NUMBER OF BRITH MILAH EVENTS FROM 1980 TO 2020

The distribution of the number of Brith Milah by years from 1980 to 2020 is as follows:

3 Mixed marriages and the children of these marriages are not subject of this dissertation, but this subject examined here to show the role of religious authority in drawing the boundaries of this field. This subject is broad enough to be written in another dissertation.

4 In the late 2015, one example could be shown that Brith Milah ceremony of donor conceived baby boy took place in Balat Hospital. Moreover, in some cases of the venue of the mixed marriage children's Brith Milah ceremony can vary according to the background of the family, the relationship they have with the authority and previous actions taken for their Jewish identity in the past.

5 In one of the anonym interviews, it is said that the chosen *mohel* is the one who made the "wrong" practices in time.

Table 5.1 The distribution of the number of Brith Milah by years from 1980 to 2020

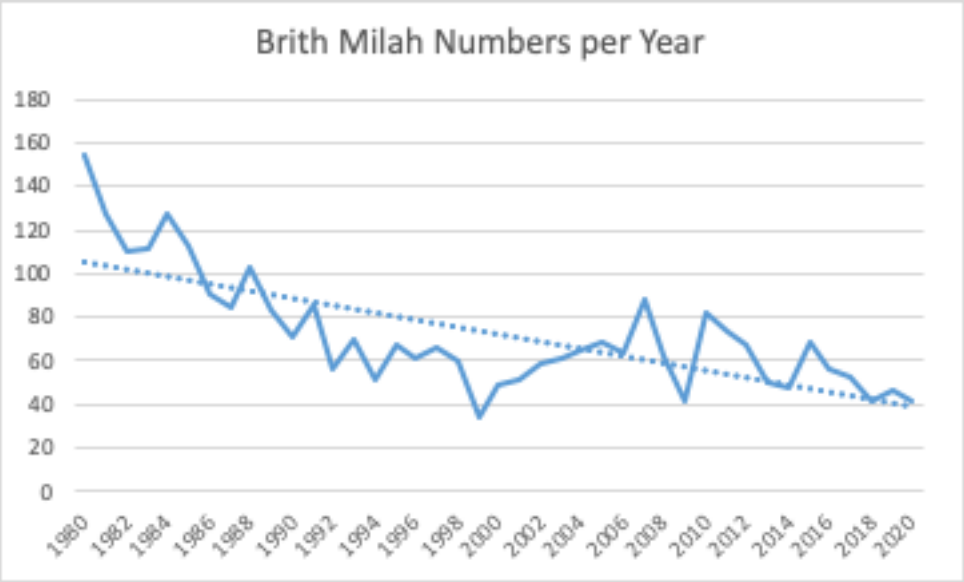
Year	Events in Istanbul
1980	154
1981	127
1982	110
1983	112
1984	127
1985	113
1986	91
1987	84
1988	103
1989	83
1990	71
1991	86
1992	56
1993	70
1994	51
1995	67
1996	61
1997	66
1998	60
1999	34
2000	49

Year	Events in Istanbul
2001	51
2002	59
2003	61
2004	65
2005	69
2006	63
2007	88
2008	62
2009	41
2010	82
2011	73
2012	67
2013	50
2014	48
2015	68
2016	56
2017	53
2018	42
2019	46
2020	42

When the data is visualized as a line chart, the downward and upward trend could be seen in the numbers of Brith Milah between 1980-2020.[6]

6 As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Brith Milah numbers between 1980 and 1990 were deduced by counting the number of boys registered in the Istanbul Jewish community and estimating that they had a Brith Milah ceremony.

Table 5.2 The line chart of the Brith Milah numbers between 1980 and 2020



According to the interviews conducted, the number of newborn boys and the number of Brith Milah ceremonies held are almost equal. During the interviews with religious and secular authority, it was stated that the reason for this small difference is that some births were given in abroad, such as the United States, Canada, etc. Therefore, the Brith Milah ceremony is also performed abroad. Another reason is several medical problems which do not allow this ceremony to be performed. The religious authority can trace both of these reasons.

§ 5.2 Historical Change of Brith Milah: Venues, Receptions and Religious Ceremony

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this section does not just focus on the religious Brith Milah ceremony in a synagogue, hospital or home, depending on the years, but it also examines the social events and religious ceremony as a package. While some components of this package are necessities to have a Brith Milah, others can be voluntary events. As might be expected, some events are expected from the parents socially and culturally. These include

the religious ceremony and circumcision, the invitation for guests to serve brunch/feast, or similar kinds of receptions. As mentioned above, this chapter also touches more upon the issues of security and antisemitism and their effects on the venues and events than the other life cycle events.

There is a historical change in Brith Milah ceremonies and celebrations. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Brith Milah ceremonies took place in hospitals. After the Brith Milah ceremony was held in hospitals, the reception either took place at home or, more commonly, in the hospital, depending on the family's economic situation. According to a representative from Company E, while talking about the mid-1970s, said:

> At that time, Brith Milah ceremonies were performed at the hospitals. The mother of a baby boy stays in a hospital room, and guests come to visit. Visitors were given a *bonbonyer*[7] [candies]. In addition to that, an open buffet was set up, and lemonade and cake were served. I do not remember exactly; maybe a few sandwiches were also served. There was an *Ocak Patisserie* in Şişli, and the family bought some food from there, and that was it (Interview with Company E, November, 2017).

Then, the effects of Istanbul's transformation under neoliberal urban policies (Keyder, 1999a) have caused the rise in the number of hotels in Istanbul (see Chapter 7). Brith Milah receptions, including religious ceremonies, started to be seen in big hotels. In the second half of the 1980s, however, again depending on the economic capital of the family, the Brith Milah ceremony was performed in a large hotel, in the hospital or the Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center – Or Yom.[8] This trend continued until the end of the 1990s. During the 1980s, as stated in the interviews, the upper class mostly preferred five-star hotels such as *Hilton* Hotel, or *Tarabya* Hotel and the stylish *Pera Palas* Hotel with impressive and elegant receptions. The most

7 The practice of giving candies to guests has become a cultural tradition in events in Istanbul. These are generally candied almonds in decorated or plain packages.

8 The Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center – Or Yom is also called *Matan Baseter* among the Jewish community members and it is under the umbrella of the Neve Shalom Synagogue Foundation.

commonly chosen hospital was the private *American* Hospital which primarily addressed rich families. The *Şişli Ataman Hospital* was also a choice for middle-income families.

In the 1990s, the *Divan* and *Swiss* Hotel could be seen as a chosen venue for religious ceremonies and receptions. In this decade, the guest list became more crowded, and the ceremony halls got bigger. A representative from Company E says that in the 1990s, it was possible to see 300 invited guests for Brith Milah ceremony in a big hotel ballroom with decorations and banqueting (Interview with Company E, November, 2017). This trend continued until the Neve Shalom Cultural Center which was built to host different cultural events (later host invitationals) in April 1998. The aim is not just to host life cycle events, it is also to bring people together in that venue with cultural events (Pinhas et al., 2002: 143-144). It takes time to adapt to take all Brith Milah ceremonies into the synagogue. According to a representative from Company E,

> At first, nobody condescended to host there [Neve Shalom Cultural Center]. It was a basement and people thought it was a closed, stuffy place. Community members considered that venue as a place where people did not have enough money to host their guests in a different venue. Volunteer women took care of the cakes and treats services. It [Neve Shalom Cultural Center] remained unpopular [compared to the other venues] (Interview with Company E, November, 2017).

As seen, the Neve Shalom Cultural Center,[9] which was built in the basement of Synagogue, did not have enough power and charm to attract community members to hold their Brith Milah ceremony in this venue in the beginning. When the ceremony hall was built within the Neve Shalom, it also included open-air space.[10] Although the information obtained from interviews was quietly vague, it appears that by 2002, the venue had been renovated to

9 This place was formerly the first mixed Jewish elementary school. In 1994, the school was moved from here (Sishane) to Ulus where it still functions. The second mixed Jewish elementary school venue turned into a nursing home. The first mixed Jewish elementary school venue turned into a Cultural Center (Interview with Company N, June, 2017).

10 Following the 2003 explosions, the structure of the space was changed.

make it more attractive for receptions with the help of professional Jewish catering companies. A lot of money was spent on it (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority G, 2017). According to Pinhas et al. (Pinhas et al., 2002: 128-130), the Neve Shalom Cultural Center consists of the museum unit, the units of religious celebration events, the cultural activity unit (exhibition hall, seminar hall, main hall) in 2002. Jewish catering companies also played a significant role as agent in this field during this construction process. Following a decision made by Rabbi David Sevi, except for a number of specific Jewish companies, no company or person is allowed to work/serve inside the Neve Shalom Cultural Center anymore.[11] Here, two agents worked together, and in fact, religious authority, as a powerful agent in this field, created more agents that belonged to the market.

A second significant decision made by the religious authority was the requirement for the food served to be kosher.[12] Especially with regard to serving kosher food, the community took two significant steps. The first one is the establishment of *Denet Gıda* Company (a kosher food company) in 2004, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.3. The second was establishing the *La Casa de Barinyurt* Company[13] on December 8, 2003, which serves especially in life cycle religious events as a catering company.[14] Thus, especially in the receptions that would take place in the Neve Shalom Cultural Center, a company is activated within the community. At the same time, the company's market share is enlarged due to restrictions put in place within the ballroom/hall of the Neve Shalom.[15] As stated in several interviews, not only catering companies but also some event planning and party organization companies started to recommend this venue to their new customers and told

11 In interviews, before this decision, a Muslim woman named Suna, who was the one who served at this venue, was mostly mentioned person in the interviews.

12 Kosher, *kashrut* in Hebrew, refers to the Jewish dietary laws. It consists of some rules about the types of meat and the proper forms of slaughter. According to *kashrut* rules, it is forbidden to eat meat and the dairy products together.

13 The financial operation of *Matan Baseter – Barınyurt.*

14 This was followed by the establishing of the *Do-Go Catering108* Company (The financial operation of *Matan Baseter – Barınyurt*) which also took on the service for Turkish Airlines.

15 "In Neve Shalom, we work with *La Casa*, but for Ortakoy Synagogue, other companies can work for the invitationals" (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J, 2017).

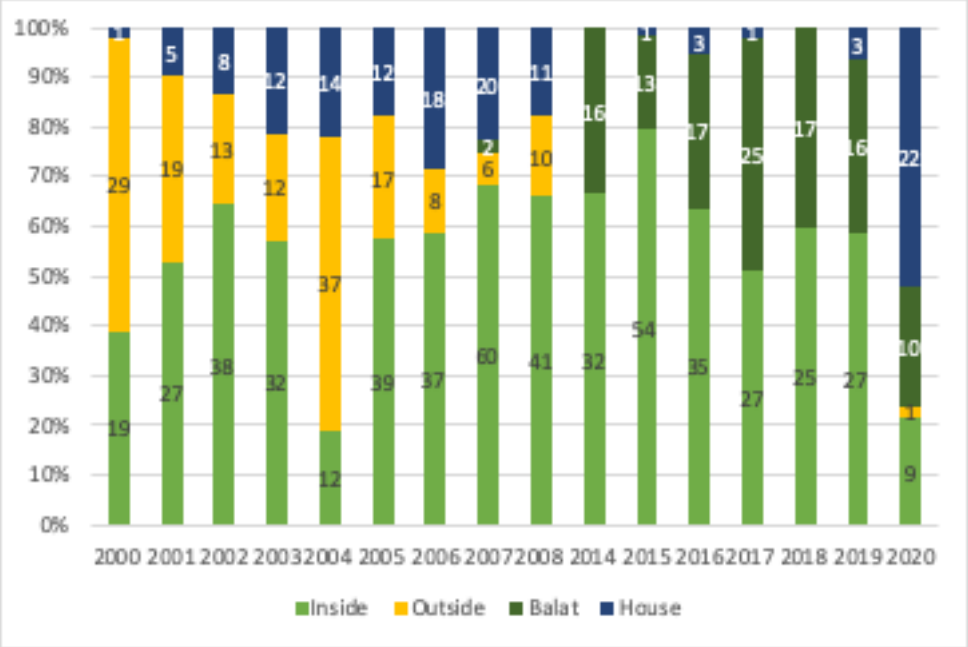
them that it was not as old and unattractive as it used to be (Interview with Company E, J, M, and, N, June and November, 2017 and interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, 2017). The religious authority thereby collaborates with the Jewish companies in this event sector to circulate money inside the community and keep the event kosher. This process and this goal set by the synagogue were reflected in the discourse evinced by some agents of markets and members of religious authority during interviews. From time to time, family members also responded this goal set by the synagogue. They preferred this venue to host their ceremonies, and the aim of the choice was obvious in the interviews. The following sentence presents an example of this. "We hosted our occasion that year at the ballroom under the Neve Shalom [Synagogue]. We wanted the money to stay in the community" (Stella and Yusuf, June 11, 2017). So, at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, newly established Jewish catering companies became prominent players in Brith Milah receptions instead of bakeries, hotel services, etc. Realizing that large amounts of money were being spent on hotels, the "*komunite"* / religious authority intervened in this situation in this field and as seen, they took several actions for it.

From the 2000s onwards, especially after the 2003 terror attack, major changes took place. The Brith Milah numbers taken from the Chief Rabbinate Office also show the increase in the number of ceremonies is being held "inside/indoor" during this period. When the venue details in the records after 2000 were examined, which will be seen below, it was seen that events were held in Izmir, Ankara and Adana and these were subtracted from the total number, so these numbers included just the numbers of Istanbul. In addition to various synagogues such as Ortakoy, Kuzguncuk, Caddebostan, and Neve Shalom, as mentioned below, institutions such as Balat Hospital, Barunyurt Old People's Home and Goztepe Cultural Association have hosted Brith Milahs. Apart from this, some Brith Milahs are held in homes and hotels.[16] In the first analysis, the events were discussed in 4 categories: Inside events, outside, home events and Balat Hospital. Inside events include events held

16 As stated before, only the total number and Neve Shalom events can be distinguished for the period 2009-2013. Since the event venue information was not detailed enough in the records, so that, this period was not taken into account in the analysis.

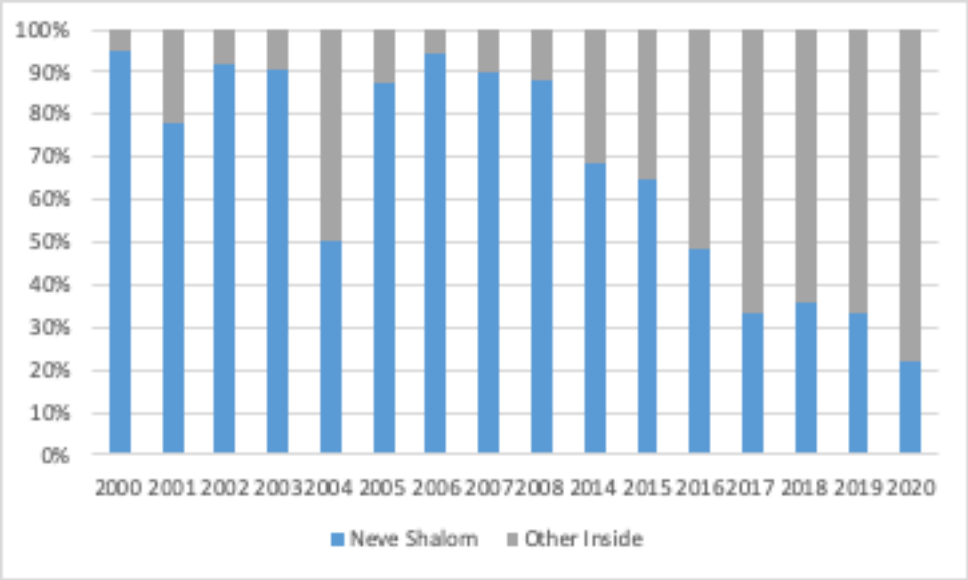
in synagogues (Kuzguncuk, Ortakoy, Caddebostan, Neve Shalom), The Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center – Or Yom and Goztepe Cultural Association. Outside events refer to hotels and the house is self-explanatory. Brith Milah of children of mixed marriage is performed at Balat Hospital. However, not all Brith Milah ceremonies performed at Balat Hospital belong to children whose families are mixed marriages. In other words, the circumcision of some children whose parents are Jewish can be performed in Balat Hospital, depending on the preferences of the families.

Table 5.3 The Brith Milah venues distribution between 2000 and 2020



Between 2000-2003, in terms of percentage, there was an increase in the number of Brith Milah ceremonies performed "inside." It could be explained by the efforts of religious authority and lay leaders put into it.

Table 5.4 The Brith Milah percentage distribution between 2000 and 2020



The second analysis shows how high percentages of the ceremonies occurred at Neve Shalom Cultural Center among the "inside" ceremonies between 2000-2003. As mentioned above, religious authority promotes Neve Shalom Cultural Center a lot.

5.2.1 *The 2000s and 2003 Terror Attacks: Transformations and The Issue of Security*

As mentioned in Chapter 4, on 15 November 2003, the synchronized terrorist attacks happened on two synagogues, namely the Neve Shalom Synagogue and the Şişli Beth Israel Synagogue. While a Bar Mitzvah ceremony was held on Saturday at the Neve Shalom Synagogue, a bomb-loaded truck exploded outside the building. As mentioned before, two minutes later, a second bomb-laden truck blew up in front of the Şişli Beth Israel Synagogue in *Osmanbey* while the community members were having a *Shabbat* prayer. This was a very significant turning point for the Turkish Jewish community. As a result of all these developments, the members of the Istanbul Jewish community, along with the Jewish communities in Turkey in general, have had to implement changes in their venues and ways of life while maintaining their presence in the country. It was sometimes necessary to relocate or even

cancel rites of passage ceremonies. At some synagogues, the feeling of vulnerability and the need for security rather than social or religious demands have also prompted some architectural alterations.[17]

Nowadays, a police cabin greets visitors as they enter each synagogue in Istanbul, and in other cities as well. After the attacks, the doors in particular received significant reinforcement. Two substantial iron doors that are bulletproof and constructed to resist huge explosions must be passed through.[18] Both in front of the synagogues and on the street, surveillance cameras continuously record everything. Once inside, standard inspections include security questioning and x-ray screening. This procedure is applicable to everyone, Jewish or not.[19] At this point, it should be mentioned that this issue is not exclusive to Turkey. Again, a representative of the religious authority clarifies the predicament, said:

> Who would like to see police cars when going to a synagogue? However, it is not only an issue in Turkey. Unfortunately, it is a worldwide issue. Some synagogues in the United States even have police protection and security procedures as airports do (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

Security teams know the fastest and safest way to evacuate a building in an emergency. They are also aware of and trained on how to respond to terrorist

17 After the 1986 terror attack on the Neve Shalom Synagogue, various physical safety measures were implemented for synagogues. An interviewee from the religious institution claimed that up until the 1986 attack, Neve Shalom Synagogue's doors were open to all. He continued, "It was almost like a mosque or a church" in describing this openness to the general public. Following the 1986 incident, "wider public" or "non-Jewish Turkish community access became almost impossible" (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J, 2017).

18 It is also called "Jewish Airlock" in England.

19 In Europe, generally speaking, a Jew actually cannot attend services as a non-member of the community unless s/he has written to the Rabbi or secretary in advance and requested permission to do so. In addition s/he needs to send a copy of your passport. When granted permission, a person is of course also questioned at the door to the synagogue by the security team. In Istanbul, a (Turkish) Jewish person can attend the service, because everyone is accepted as member of the community.

attacks. While all these safety measures protect community members, they also serve as a reminder that a new incident could occur at any time. During interviews, this unease was commonly described as a sense of unsafety. A participant in an interview who requested anonymity[20] discussed this mindset in great detail:

> Every time I enter the building, I get anxious. Going through those enormous doors, having the bags searched, going through the detector... Every time, even if the security staff is familiar with you, you must pass through these. It is impossible to forget the mental toll the explosions of 2003 left on us. The locations of the emergency exits are almost universally known. At the end of every service, statements follow, such as 'exit in groups of ten, do not linger outside the synagogue,' etc. But coming here and praying here [mentions the Neve Shalom Synagogue], is really significant to us (No name interview, 2017).

The 2003 explosions resulted in comparatively "less damage"[21] in part due to the precautions taken at synagogue buildings and their exteriors after the attack in 1986. Another significant change was the replacement of the young members of the community who had been in charge of security until 2003 by a private security firm after that year.[22] The switch to security provided by professionals is another critical turning point for the Jewish community. The selected company is a Jewish partnership firm established in

20 When the topic comes to especially security issues in interviews, interviewees generally request anonymity. So that, I intentionally use the expression "no name interview" to underline how they are misdoubt to show themselves, even if they are community members, companies or religious authority.

21 https://www.nevesalom.org/teror.html (Accessed, June 7, 2023).

22 The death of Yoel Kohen Ülçer, who was nineteen-year-old Jewish voluntary security personnel, had a one of the big impact to be taken the decision.

1995 with modest funding[23] that went on to become a leader in the field[24] in the following years. The rise in demand for its services parallels that for firms offering services for communal rites of passage events.

After the 2003 terrorist attack, some changes have occurred in the location. Until 2003, the ground floor of the Neve Shalom Synagogue building (Neve Shalom Cultural Center), serving as an indoor hall and an outdoor garden, was transformed into a covered indoor hall (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority G, H, 2017). This was a compulsory step to be taken in order to keep the community members safe during their rite of passage ceremonies or religious/social activities. In addition, the damage caused by an explosion to a portion of the Şişli Beth Israel Synagogue needed to be restored. On streets where synagogues are located, additional security precautions are taken during special events. On event days, only police-controlled entry is permitted on certain streets. The Foundation and the Chief Rabbinate inform the Governor and the armed forces, and they "politely ask that necessary precautions be taken" (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J, 2017). Another respondent who requested anonymity stated that since 2003, "the police automatically place more personnel in front of synagogues" if something negative occurs in Turkey's political context (using the *Mavi Marmara incident* as an example here) (No name interview, 2017). Additionally, since 2003, event hosts have been required to supply a guest list before events. A member of the host family is positioned at the door to confirm the identification of the guests if there is a significant number of visitors from the "non-Jewish Turkish community." This expedites entry traffic and prevents further searches and interrogations. Finally, whether they are Jewish or not, all staff members working at the event must show proof of identity.

A more radical change after November 2003 involved the transfer of rites of passage ceremonies, regular prayers, and Jewish holiday celebrations, including the Chief Rabbinates' offices, to the Barinyurt Nursing Home and

23 https://www.pronet.com.tr/haber/guvenlikte-uzmanligin-markasi-pronet (Accessed, December 5, 2022).

24 https://www.pronet.com.tr/hakkimizda (Accessed, December 5, 2022); https://www.pronet.com.tr/haber/capital-dergisi-insanlar-alp-saul (Accessed, December 5, 2022).

Elderly Care Center – Or Yom and to the other synagogues following the temporary closure of the Neve Shalom Synagogue and the Cultural Center. The facade of the Şişli Beth Israel Synagogue was restored due to the magnitude of the damage at the back, and the majority of weddings in 2004 were held there. Prior to such arrangements, a dozen weddings were held at the Ashkenazi and the Caddebostan Bet El Synagogues. The first Brith Milah ceremony after the explosions was held at the Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center – Or Yom in 2004 for the son of two of the interviewees, Roza and Moris (Roza and Moris, May 7, 2017). Some of Brith Milah ceremonies were also held in American Hospital during this period. In July 2004, the Neve Shalom Synagogue resumed its regular services after an eight-month pause (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, 2017).

The terror attacks in 2003 were a turning point for Brith Milah ceremonies as well. With this incident, there were many efforts to take all Brith Milah ceremonies into the synagogues and "inside." In the field of life cycle events, community members and the market agreed on the decision of religious authority, and most of the venue choices were made at Neve Shalom Cultural Center, except for the year 2004 (See Table 5.3). In 2004, because of the terror attack and the damage in Neve Shalom Synagogue, the majority of Brith Milah events went outside the community and houses. It took approximately eight months and was then strongly promoted as an invitational venue. The attitude taken by the religious authority on how and where to celebrate life cycle events was so repetitive in the interviews. This attitude also had security concerns, not to become too stand-out, but it was also part of a discourse carried out silently for years, called *Kayadez*. Clearly, they do not want to support the myth of wealthy Jews, as well.

> When the 2003 bomb attack happened, the Chief Rabbi said that 'we need to be insular and introverted as much as possible. Let's make it low profile.' Because the community members started to have their ceremonies in a flashy way again, like weddings, Bar Mitzvahs… (Interview with Company E, November, 2017).

In the life cycle event field, it was possible to keep being low profile in Brith Milah ceremonies which was a more restrainable arena. The religious

authority intervened, and ceremonies were held as much as possible in the synagogues. Today, no Brith Milah ceremony is held in hotels. All Brith Milah celebrations began moving to houses, Balat Hospital, or synagogues.

Before moving into timeline, I would like to touch upon the unexpired fear and anxiety felt by the community members because of the 2003 terror attacks. Over the years, it has occasionally been possible to witness the relocation or reconfiguration of events and ceremonies due to various local or international situations. Here, briefly, it will be examined exactly what these occasions and frequently entering synagogues mean for people who must do so for work purposes and for invited guests who attend ceremonies. Up to the present, going inside a synagogue and being there, whether as an employee or a visitor, makes it evident that memories of 2003—though not as intensely—remain fresh and emotions are high. It is essential to highlight the severity of the fear, trepidation, and anxiety sentiments in this setting using a few statements from various interviewees. A few statements from various interviewees may illustrate the severity of the trepidation and anxiety in this setting. The first instance came from an interview with Mois Gabay inside the Neve Shalom Synagogue during the eighteenth commemoration of the 2003 assault. Gabay made mention of a memorial board at one point in the conversation. This board honors those who died in the 2003 attack and is located at the Neve Shalom Synagogue's entrance. "Every time I come here, the 15 November 2003 is always in my thoughts," said Gabay, "whether it is the memorial board outside, or other things."[25] Özeskinazi and Sarfati, two professionals in the field, expressed overwhelming sentiments of terror:

> We are freaking out! When the bride is about to come, we go outside the door, there is silence on the street, and those announcements are made, I still get the shivers because I feel like a bomb is about to go off. Something will eventually occur when we are there; we go there every weekend, and we know this, and we are terrified. We tell our employees, 'Do not go outside,' how can we explain this to their families? What should I say? We are aware that something occurs in

25 https://www.cnnturk.com/video/turkiye/saldiridan-18-yil-sonra-neve-salom-sinagogunda-ilk-roportaj-cnn-turkte (Accessed, June 12, 2023).

> Turkey every fifteen years (Melih Özeskinazi and Mert Sarfati – RN, June 22, 2017).

Routine controls include having your belongings searched after entry and being questioned. An employee who requested anonymity outlines the experience of always having to respond to inquiries: "He even directs his gaze at me; he does it for my health and safety" (No name interview, 2017). Those interviewed frequently bring up the subject of being faced with a list of questions at the door, whether one is Jewish or not. According to photographer Belin Rodikli Seloni, this is

> Ultimately, because you are running a team, that team could change at the last minute even if they [security staff] know you. A cameraman could get sick, get replaced, it could be someone you know or not… In the end, they will go through that door and answer questions. As the team leader, you have to motivate them from the start. [You have to explain that] it is not personal. The questions are not because they are not Jewish. I get asked, too. The questions are for your protection because something might happen while you are inside… And I try to motivate them [about this issue] (Belin Rodikli Seloni – RN, June 14, 2017).

The last example will focus on having continuous anxiety. According to an interviewee who works within the synagogue and requested anonymity, said:

> I have not experienced anything particularly traumatic in terms of security. I was carefully searched a couple of times. Despite the discomfort, I refrained from becoming personally angry. I was worried because I wondered whether there was a threat or if something was happening. My anxiety level somewhat rose (No name interview, 2017).

5.2.2 *Modern Circumcision: Doctor Supervision and Hygienic Room*

After the effects of the 2003 trauma, religious authority, as mentioned above, supports not having a Brith Milah ceremony outside—specifically in

a hotel—a lot, and they also seem to think having a Brith Milah in a synagogue is more valuable than having it in a hotel. As a Rabbi said:

> In the old times, most of the Brith Milah ceremonies or all of them were performed in hotels. After that, the beauty of being in a synagogue was experienced and realized. Then, now, almost no Brith Milah ceremony is performed in hotels (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

This attitude is also a part of *Kayadez* tradition, and it includes not being actively seen in the public sphere and non-controlled venues. Here, particularly underlined behaviors are keeping a low profile and insular attitude. In addition, they also trust the security precautions taken in the synagogues, community institutions, and buildings when compared to having a Brith Milah "outside," as they experienced in 2003.[26]

Afterward, around 2013, as the interviewees from companies and religious authority tells and the numbers show that with the effects of the economic challenges in Turkey and the rising prices up, community members started to prefer to have their ceremonies in different places, like synagogues other than the Neve Shalom Synagogue and Cultural Center, their houses, and the other institutions such as the Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center – Or Yom (See Table 5.3 and Table 5.4).

As representatives from Company D, E, and J underlined the economic capital spent on these ceremonies was getting lower and guest lists for the Brith Milah ceremonies were getting smaller. In 2016, the Neve Shalom Cultural Center was again renovated to be more attractive for the ceremonies. They renovated the decoration, renewed the wallpaper, and modernized the lighting system (Interview with Company M, and Rel. and Sec. Authority H, November, 2017).

In 2015 and around 2016, the Jewish community was introduced two new innovations in Brith Milah ceremonies. One was Brith Milah with doctor supervision (2015) and the other was a *hygienic room*. These two

26 During the explosions, no community members were killed or seriously injured inside the building.

developments are caused by the request from and strong pressure from community members as an agent in this field. It should be underlined that the year 2015 was also a year in which the religious authority and lay leaders took steps towards becoming a more open and outward-looking society, such as Hanukah celebration in public place, new exhibition in the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews, the annual national commemoration of the *Struma Disaster*, etc. (see Chapter 4.3). However, the most important reason for these two changes was that some problems, which are undesirable to talk about, occurred during the circumcision. While the families who were particularly victimized by the situation preferred not to talk about the issue, religious authority expressed the decision to establish a hygienic room and doctor supervision due to these incidents years after the incident as follows:

> In case of a problem, God forbid! This is an operation after all. When a problem occurs in that operation, everyone stands up. Like, it is not hygienic, etc. All over the world, also in Brith Milah performed in Israel today, there are many problematic cases, but circumcision continues in the same way… Our community members immediately find a solution in their way after every incident/event (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

As a result of criticism and pressure, religious authority resolved it by building hygienic rooms in three synagogues. In fact, the change was due to the new generation of parents wanting a more "modern" touch to a centuries-old tradition.[27] A Rabbi told these actions as follows:

> Now, something called a hygienic room has emerged. Due to some families being anxious while the circumcision is taking place and afterward, hygienic rooms have been built in three of our synagogues. These are Neve Shalom Synagogue, Caddebostan (Bet El Synagogue), and Ortakoy (Etz-Hayim Synagogue). Since hygienic rooms are built in

27 At the same time, an ambulance keeps waiting at the synagogue gate, but this waiting ambulance is not only specific to Brith Milah ceremonies. It is waiting there at every crowded events, celebrations of Jewish holidays etc.

> those synagogues, Brith Milah ceremonies are taking place in these synagogues (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

However, as Rabbi stated, these two decisions were not made enthusiastically.

> The new youth are always very different. When we are talking about circumcision, we are talking about a 3300-year-old tradition. The same tradition has been applied for years. Medically, even though some medical scholars say that the Brith Milah we apply has medical question marks, but we have been continuing with the same method for 3,500 years. Nobody has any problems either. Sometimes the youth think very differently and say, no, it is not hygienic, etc. In my opinion, it is okay if there is no hygienic room. There is no such thing as a hygienic room in Israel or abroad (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

One of the essential points here is that family members, as an agent, took a dominant role in the field and caused the change. Moreover, while Bourdieu (1977) conceptualizes the field, he underlines that the roles and steps taken by the actors in the field are also relational and the one can lead to determining the other significant players' next steps. This decision also had the characteristics of a negotiation movement, and the pressure, especially from the new generation of parents, caused the reliance on authority to step back on this issue and take the relevant measures.

Before concluding this chapter, it is notable to mention the last temporary change from 2020. As expected, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected many daily life activities, including life cycle events. This dissertation does not include the COVID-19 pandemic area, but the numbers show a considerable change in those years. Because it is not possible to delay a Brith Milah ceremony, the decision has been made by the religious authority to keep doing so and the COVID-19 pandemic caused to transfer of the events into (Balat) hospital and houses (See Table 5.3).

§ 5.3 Concluding Remarks

During the 1970s and 1980s, Brith Milah took place in hospitals and the reception was in houses or hospital halls. Then, in the mid-1980s and the 1990s, with the rise in the number of hotels (and the middle class) in Turkey, Brith Milah ceremonies moved to big hotels' halls or ballrooms. At the beginning of the 2000s, the community leaders intervened and ceremonies were taken into the synagogues and the community built special halls or cultural centers in their buildings or renovated them to have a reception in these places with the help of professional Jewish catering companies. It has been going this way for almost a decade, and no Brith Milah ceremonies can be observed in hotels anymore. The 2003 terror attacks were the driving force for the change process. As seen, in this chapter, the topic of antisemitism and the issue of security are examined more and dominantly compared to the other life cycle events. Although antisemitism and minority identity in Turkey's history are not the main topics of this dissertation, it is necessary to acknowledge the impact these ideas have on rites of passage events, everyday life, and particularly security measures at synagogues. While some historical events in Turkey principally targeted the Jewish population, it puts extra stress on the Jewish community. Over the years, it has occasionally been possible to witness the relocation or reconfiguration of events and ceremonies due to various local or international situations, as seen above. The security issue indicates the way the event is held and the architecture of the places as well. This chapter also examined exactly how high and fresh the fear and anxiety of the community members and employees look like while having their rite of passage occasions with the memory of the 2003 trauma.

In addition, it is not just about security concerns but also about community finance and circulating economic capital on the market. One of the main arguments in this chapter is that the primary purpose of the religious and lay authorities of the Jewish community is to ensure that the money spent for the rite of passage ceremonies remains in the community and to keep the festive activities in the community. Subsequently, I provided examples of the community's efforts to autonomously decide where to hold their ceremonies and the authority's efforts to build new spaces/places and institutions to

keep these celebrations and the money involved inside the community walls. The attitude of *Kayadez*, specifically being low profile and not supporting the myth of rich Jews, is still very clearly operating in the background while they try to keep the ceremonies in the synagogues. This chapter shows how sometimes companies/market and family members/couples support the institution and the religious authority economically and go hand in hand in these decisions. So, three agents have a role in creating the communal identity. Their ethno-religious cultural, communal identity actively continues to be established by three agents in their life cycle events arena.

All in all, Brith Milah, which is one of the three life cycle events studied in this dissertation, compared to the others, is the most controllable life cycle event by the religious authority. As emphasized before, religious authority is observed more dominant in the decision-making process in the field of festive events. The agent of the family members are observed that they could actively participate in the decision-making process (in this game) by putting pressure and make the doctor supervision and hygienic room real in recent years. These negotiation movements in the field also determine how to present the ethno-religious communal identity in society. Apart from this, it could be observed from the example above how religious authority and the market have become a good team to make decisions on architectural and venue changes. Moreover, it was an important factor, which religious authority and lay leaders have great influence and efforts on the establishment of some companies, they support each other in this subject in the field.

6

Life Cycle Festive Event: Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah

§ 6.1 Religious Ceremony and the Meaning of Bar and Bat Mitzvah in Turkish Jewish Society

The most straightforward and solid ways to define Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies that is the age of halakhic adulthood for boys and girls, a coming-of-age ceremony for girls and boys, rites of passage, and rites of initiation. In Hebrew, Bat Mitzvah, which means "daughter of commandment," is parallel to the feminine, and Bar Mitzvah, which means "son of commandment," is parallel to the masculine confirmation ceremony. With these rite of passage ceremonies, the boy becomes appropriate to be a *minyan,*[1] and the girl and boy become mature enough to be responsible for all their actions under the Jewish Law (*Torah*), such as rules and precepts of the religion. It is a milestone ritual in their lives and they become an adult member of the community (Shoham, 2018: 105). As Shoham (2018: 106) clearly defines the way of practicing the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, the main element of the ritual is the thirteen-year-old boy leading the synagogue service (and reading from Scripture) for the first time and with this action, the boy would initiate to the world of Jewish literacy. It should be noted that while Bar Mitzvah is a

1 The minimum number of people (ten men) needed to perform certain parts of religious services.

rabbinical term, there are several discussions on the Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Shoham (2018: 105) summarizes as follows:

> Bat mitzvah appears in the Talmud only once. The locution comes in a discussion of a general legal principle that men and women have equal status in matters of criminal law, even though a man is Bar Mitzvah (i.e., obligated by the precepts) and a woman is not Bat Mitzvah (again, obligated by the precepts, in the feminine form). Many Talmudic commentators and halakhic authorities have interpreted this statement as positing that although adult women are liable to the same criminal sanctions that men are, they have a lesser obligation to perform ritual precepts.[2] However, because the term appears only in one place, and only in a hypothetical Talmudic exchange, it is hard to know whether this statement represents a broader position. What is clear is that there is no evidence of ceremonies that marked Jewish girls' (or boys') attainment of adulthood and full obligation by the precepts.

As seen below, when the Chief Rabbinate's website is examined, Turkish religious authority also chose to put more dominant emphasis on the Bar Mitzvah ceremony and its relation with obligation.

> Bar Mitzvah literally means 'son of the commandment' and 'Bat Mitzvah' means 'daughter of commandment.' Technically, the term refers to the child who is coming of age, but it is more commonly used to refer to the coming-of-age ceremony itself. Under Jewish Law, children are not obligated to observe the commandments, although they are encouraged to do so as much as possible to learn the obligations they will have as adults. At the age of 13 for boys and 12 for girls, children become obligated to observe the commandments. The bar mitzvah ceremony formally marks the assumption of that obligation, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading religious services, to count in a minyan (the minimum number of people

2 Shoham, Hizky (2018), reference from, "Babylonian Talmud, Bava Qama 15a."

needed to perform certain parts of religious services), to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts and to marry. [3]

According to Hilton (2014), who is a Rabbi[4] and works on the history of the change of Bar Mitzvah from ancient history to today in different geographies in his recent detailed study, while the first Bar Mitzvah was recorded in the thirteenth century in France, the first known Bat Mitzvah ceremony was held in 1817 in Berlin (Hilton, 2014: 106).[5] Then (Hilton, 2014: 106), "Since 1901 annual ceremonies for girls were held in Alexandria, Egypt, and continued every year until the Jewish community left for Israel in the 1950s." As seen, it was created in the nineteenth century/ in the late modern era, and there were no similar ceremonies or theoretical discussions for women before this era (Shoham, 2018: 106). Shoham (2018) claims in his anthropological studies that Bat Mitzvah emerged in the United States in the 1920s and the 1930s, and it was caused mainly by the synagogues' and

3 http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/judaism/100-bar-mitzvah-and-bat-mitzvah (Accessed, December 9, 2022).
It should be noted that "Many people mock the idea that a 12 or 13 year old child is an adult, claiming that it is an outdated notion based on the needs of an agricultural society. But bar mitzvah is not about being a full adult in every sense of the word, ready to marry, go out on your own, earn a living and raise children. The Talmud makes this abundantly clear. Bar mitzvah is simply the age when a person is held responsible for his actions and minimally qualified to marry."
http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/judaism/100-bar-mitzvah-and-bat-mitzvah (Accessed, December 9, 2022).

4 Dr. Michael Hilton was a Rabbi of Kol Chai Hatch End Reform Jewish Community in London between 2001-2017. Since then, he had the honorary title of Rabbi Emeritus of the community.

5 According to Shoham; "In the Jewish world, the first formal practice attached to a girl's coming of age appeared in Central Europe in the early nineteenth century in the form of group confirmation ceremonies, instituted in Germany under the influence of the parallel Protestant observance, which was itself a new development stemming from the growth of modern education in Europe"(Shoham, 2018: 107).
Paraphrase from Mordechai Eliav, Haḥinnukh ha-yehudi be-germaniya bimei ha-haskalah vehaemantzipatzia [Jewish education in Germany during the Haskalah and the Emancipation] (Jerusalem: Leo Baeck Institute, 1961), 257–270.

families'/parents' demands. However, in Israel/ the Yishuv,[6] Bat Mitzvah's development was from the grassroots, which means "at the initiative of the girls themselves, rather than of their parents or teachers, as an extension of the bourgeois cult of birthdays" (Shoham, 2015: 275),[7] and it first emerged in the 1940s (Shoham, 2015: 277). He adds, "It traces the event's grassroots development as an expanded birthday party to mark a girl's 12th birthday, copied from the bar mitzvah festivities for a boy of 13, but without the religious ritual" (Shoham, 2015: 275). According to him (2015: 275), the story of the creation also reflects the middle-class tendencies in consumer culture and "illuminates the influence of modern consumer culture on Jewish culture."

As seen above, while Bar Mitzvah has more historical background, Bat Mitzvah is likely a product of the modern era and contributes to the Jewish identity followed by (Jewish) community identity. In addition, the Bat Mitzvah could not be followed before the nineteenth century, and it is a modern invention that is modified for modern tastes day by day.

In Turkey, as might be expected, Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies are under the rule of the Chief Rabbinate. In Istanbul Jewish society, generally speaking, a Bar Mitzvah includes a ceremony of wearing *tefillin and tallit* on Monday or Thursday in a synagogue, a ceremony of reading a section from the *Torah* on Saturday morning in a synagogue and lastly, a reception given by the boy's family to their guests in a venue. Generally speaking, a Bat Mitzvah includes a *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* and a reception given by the girl's family to their guests in a venue. So, the following sections focus on the historical change in the Istanbul Jewish community in the case of Bar and Bat Mitzvah synagogue ceremonies and their receptions. It is discussed more on

6 Pre-state Jewish community in Palestine.

7 "Whose initiative was it? By way of elimination, we might hypothesize that it was the girls themselves who possibly wanted a party like their brothers had, with presents, but never demanded some accompanying rite of passage such as an aliya in the synagogue and putting on phylacteries, which did not interest them due to their diminution for the boys, too. It is probable that middle-class parents who saw the focus on the child as a sign of 'civilization' probably consented to their daughters' wishes. The bat mitzvah gradually underwent the same evolution as the bar mitzvah party, swelling to enormous proportions and moving out into the public space, where it became a social obligation even for adults who did not belong to the celebrant's close family" (Shoham, 2015: 287).

the religious authority, the institutions, the actors, and their missions of this arena.

§ 6.2 Historical Change of Bar and Bat Mitzvah

6.2.1 *Bat Mitzvah – Synagogue Ceremony*

There are several existing claims regarding the origin date of individual Bat Mitzvah synagogue (religious) ceremonies. This lack of definitive information, in fact, indicates how modest the first ceremonies held in synagogues were, often performed without the knowledge of community members. In addition, just as similarly explained above, the history of Bat Mitzvah in Turkey has not been as old as Bar Mitzvah. According to a Rabbi and B (interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority B, January, 2018) from the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom,*[8] the first Bat Mitzvah was performed under the leadership of Rabbi Avram Palti in 1967 or 1969, at the Burgaz Island Ohel Yaakov Synagogue. It was a ceremony where three or four girls came together to sing and climbed onto the *Tevah*[9] with their fathers. Karen Şarhon, one of the interviewees, also claims that she had the first Bat Mitzvah ceremony in 1970, performed by Rabbi David Asseo.[10] However, this ceremony was held at the Italian Synagogue (Kal de Los Frankos) and not the Burgazada Ohel Yaakov Synagogue. According to Şarhon, during the educational courses of the 1969 and 1970 summer months at the Büyükada Hased Le Avraam Synagogue and the winter course at the *Mahzike Torah*[11] section of the Sisli Bet-Israel Synagogue, they were informed of a new decision taken by the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey (*Hahambaşılık*) (Karen Şarhon - RN,

8 Founded as part of Turkey's Chief Rabbinate, *Hegkom* is the responsible governing body of all (non-formal) educational activities within the community under the authority of Turkey's Chief Rabbinate. *Hegkom* is short for the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission.

9 The relatively higher platform or stage that sits exactly in front of *Aron ha-Kodesh* or at the center of the synagogue itself. It is also called as *Bimah*.

10 Rabbi David Asseo was the Chief Rabbi of Turkey from 1961 until his death in 2002.

11 A structure, usually inside a synagogue, where children were taught the *Torah*, reading in Hebrew and certain prayers with the help of a Rabbi or someone who is educated on the subjects. These days they are called *Talmud Torah*.

November 2, 2017). She further described their surprise and lack of knowledge about the matter, "No one in the family had ever heard of such a thing, they had no idea whatsoever and therefore they did not invite anyone for [the ceremony]" (Karen Şarhon - RN, November 2, 2017). They were told it would be held during the *Shavuot* (religious) holiday in May at the Italian Synagogue (*Kal de los Frankos*). All girls were asked to wear white. In 1970, wearing candle-decorated crowns, eleven girls climbed onto the *Tevah* for a collective ceremony. The Chief Rabbi of the time, Rabbi David Asseo, led the girls in the ceremony. Şarhon talked in length during the interview about the disappointment and regret she felt about how her mother did not inform anyone outside their immediate family about the ceremony. Here, it should be stressed that at that time, there were no rituals and practices for the 'religious' ceremony beforehand. The absence of prayer or ritual also surfaces during the religious authority interviews. When they tell the history of the Bat Mitzvah ceremony (and prayers) in Istanbul, which is still held now, they point out that former Chief Rabbi David Asseo was the creator of the prayer of coming-of-age ceremony for girls. Afterward, as they said, they shortened it, and now it is used as the short version of that prayer (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority G, 2018).

Vivet also spoke of a *collective Bat Mitzvah ceremony* that she was a part of in 1972 at the *Burgazada Ohel Yaakov Synagogue* (Vivet, November 2, 2017). She remembers how her cohort, even though theirs was the first age group to ever organize the event. This development was also parallel to the rise of collective ceremonies in different places. While mentioning the twentieth century, Shoham states (2018: 107-108) that

> As the century proceeded, group initiation ceremonies attained great popularity in liberal Jewish circles and spread, under various names, to Western and Eastern Europe, the United States, and Italy, and from there to North Africa and Egypt.

Referring Şarhon's and Vivet's interview, it is valid for the Istanbul Jewish community. After the ceremony, a cocktail party for the guests was held at the children's summer camp (*Burgazada Tatil Evi*) next to the synagogue. A Rabbi had a few points to add:

> This ceremony should have been attractive to people, but there were not many of them. They were organized individually or sometimes with two to three girls. Between 1970 and 1980, they were performed by Rabbi Isak Haleva, the Chief Rabbi of Turkey today (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

All things considered, the Bat Mitzvah seems like a life cycle event initially started by the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey institutionally with the aim of establishing it as a particular and regular ritual. Following the period of uncertainty described above, it is possible to trace back the steps taken by the religious authority to increase institutionalization and regulation of the event. The main actor in this matter is the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*, the commission responsible for non-formal educational training operating under the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey. In addition, as mentioned above (Shoham, 2018), the evolution of the Bat Mitzvah ceremony was not from grassroots like in the Yishuv/ Israel, but it is more likely the emergence in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, which led by the synagogue. In this context, the motivation in the United States could be seen in the Turkish case. While the religious authority plays this game in this life cycle events (cf. Bourdieu), they also set the rules and sometimes invent the tradition as well. This attempt also fosters the way they desire to create the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity. Then they, all three players, go hand in hand and nurture each other in the process of establishing the Bat Mitzvah concept and ceremony in Turkey.

Before continuing to explain more about historical developments in this arena, I would like to introduce a concept here. I believe it is instrumental to understand and examine the attempts coming from the religious authority. As Kaya (2011) emphasizes in his study, namely *the Circassians in Turkey*, ethnocultural identities, which occur in the context of diaspora, are created globally by the impact of time, space, socio-economic and political conditions (Kaya, 2011:175). In Kaya's study, culture has no substance and is considered a dynamic and changeable component. Culture is a design that is defined and redefined by the social processes and transnational networks and is a continually transmutable component in a geographical context (Kaya, 2011: 31). In this context, Kaya (2011: 18-109), while working on Circassians as

a minority group in Turkey, he utilizes the concept of "invisible colleges" by referring to Diane Crane's (1972) notion. This "invisible colleges" concept stresses the importance of associations, journals, books, other publications, websites, cultural events, conferences, and exhibitions. According to him, while they function like informal educational establishments (also including non-formal ones), they also help to raise a community of sentiments by referring to Appadurai (1997).[12] So, examples of the Jewish community's "invisible colleges," such as cultural associations, the *Bar and Bat Mitsva Club*, the Cultural Center, a compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar, and educational materials will be discussed intensively below and in the following chapter (see Chapter 7). *Bar and Bat Mitsva Club* is the main point for this section. Undoubtedly, all these elements also have an influential role in identity formation through festive events, which are targeted by religious authority in this life cycle events field.

Before the establishment of the *Bar and Bat Mitsva Club,* the first official Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah training courses were organized in 2000-2001 and the institution called *YES*, a type of social club for young teenagers. However, this initiative failed in its first year, so it is impossible to trace its relations to Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, even during specifically focused interviews. After that trial, the *Annette Bat Mitsva Club* and the *Yoel Bar Mitsva Club* were founded by the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom* in 2002 and 2003, respectively. There was no coincidence that these attempts were made in the early 2000s. Especially, the changing and renewed community leadership positions in the 2000s, the relatively younger new generation, and their visionary views pioneered these changes. This period also coincides with the establishment of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews (2001) and the beginning of the European Day of Jewish Culture (2001) in public place (see Chapter 4.3). It was also a decade when the ethno-religious identity to be projected to the outside world was frequently thought about, and attempts were made to give it a form. In addition, it should not be forgotten that Turkey's political arena also allowed this to be done, with the democratization of Turkey in the

12 Appadurai gives reference to Max Weber for the concept in his study.

2000s, the country's efforts to join the EU, and the discourse of embracing of the "different colors" of Turkey, which made it easier for the (minority) communities to have a space to think about how they want to present themselves in public.

For religious ceremonies, the establishment of the *Bar and Bat Mitsva Club* in 2002 and 2003 was a breaking point for the community. This was also obviously a negotiation movement within the religious authority/ lay leaders. The establishment of the *Club* was initiated with the help of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik.[13] Thanks to his ties to the organization, Chitrik enjoys a vast network of connections and has an aptitude for securing funding for matters related to education, religion and the community. From the very start of establishing this structure, it was clear that the Turkish Sephardi religious community/ authority had a different perspective than Rabbi Chitrik, resulting in a cooperation that largely challenged inter-community power relations. Here, almost for the first time, two different players with varying points of view in the religious authority 'team' could be observed. However, the challenges they face each other or how they find a common way to walk together are just rumors going around. In the end, religious leaders found a way to work with Rabbi Chitrik and as a result, the *Bat Mitsva Club*[14] of Chabad from the United States was imported and implemented in Turkey (and the *Bar Mitsva Club* as well). The Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*, and Rabbi Chitrik worked together to set up this structure. This is a very significant and striking example of institutionalization and standardization by the religious authority in matters of education and as "invisible colleges."

Following the creation of the *Club*, *the Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony*, akin to an end-of-the-year ceremony, started at the Ulus Jewish School in 2003 and was organized there until 2007. The location of the ceremony was moved to the Neve Shalom Synagogue, *the Collective Bat Mitzvah ceremonies* have taken place in Neve Shalom Synagogue since 2007. Especially at

13 See more information in Chapter 4.3.

14 https://www.chabadrc.org/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/432916/jewish/Bat-Mitzvah-Club.htm (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

this point, it is seen as a remarkable effort given by the Chief Rabbinate to once again move to the ceremony in a synagogue.

The most important point of emphasis here is the way a life cycle event, which takes only a few hours, has been redesigned as a yearly education package, a social and intellectual activity for teenagers.[15] In a big picture where the Chief Rabbinate and the *Hegkom* are the main actors, people within the congregation who are willing to go through with the event are not only offered the event itself but a whole curriculum with dozens of lesson plans, spanning an entire academic year with its own unique regulations and rules. This was also done inside a more institutional framework in order to help new generations acquire 'better Jewish consciousness.' This undeniably also means individuals recreating the discourse by integrating it into the system. It also contributes to the ethno-religious cultural and communal identity. The program, the content, and how the *Clubs'* system works are discussed below under the title "*Yoel Bar Mitsva Club* and *Annette Bat Mitsva Club* in Istanbul."

Finally, this curriculum was originally a functioning education module imported from the United States. According to interviews conducted with the religious authority, a new education program for the *Club* was created in 2013 by Marko Slayhter, who comes from the *Bnei Akiva* movement and has produced the religion lesson content for the Jewish School. Within this whole *Club* creation process, what should be underlined is the way that the Bat Mitzvah, described as an invention of tradition, has been institutionalized.

6.2.2 *Bar Mitzvah – Synagogue Ceremony*

An age-old tradition, the Bar Mitzvah ceremonies involved the preparation of male children for the Bar Mitzvah free of charge by *Mahzike Torah*, like the Bat Mitzvah. According to B from the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*, "This was done for free at Şişhane by *Mahzike Torah* eighty-five years ago, it was also done for free sixty years ago"

15 A similar step forward in the shape of a compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar will be discussed in Chapter 7.

(Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority B, January, 2018). By this sentence, s/he means the preparation process of male children for the Bar Mitzvah ceremony that includes learning to read the weekly *Parashah*[16] in the *Torah* that corresponds to his birthday. The reason why B underlined this fact are the developments regarding preparing male children after *Mahzike Torah* years. In the following years, *Hazzan*/Cantors or Rabbis took over the job of preparing male children for ceremony which no one could give information about when exactly or in what years this attempt started. One of the reasons of the lack of information was that these individual initiatives were not run centrally. This was conducted individually, like private tutoring and the price depended on each Rabbi. A non-institutional education market without any means of control over fees and content had taken over. Here, once again, attempts like the YES and the *Clubs* should be seen as the institutionalization and standardization efforts by Turkey's Chief Rabbinate.

First, as discussed previously, the YES structure had been tried and failed. Following the YES, as told by the religious authority during interviews, in response to the increasing *Hazzan*/Cantor and/or Rabbi fees, the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom* decided to take action in order to regulate the issue (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority B, January, 2018 and Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). So, the *Annette Bat Mitsva Club* was founded in 2002, and the *Yoel Bar Mitsva Club* was founded in 2003, as mentioned previously. The intention of these centralization and institutionalization efforts aimed to standardize all the prices of the Rabbis who work with the teenagers during the preparation process for these ceremonies. So, one of the primary deciding factors in founding the *Club* was to prevent the excessive prices Rabbis were demanding. Here, it is crucial to underline that again, for the first time, the Chief Rabbinate, as a player in the field, took action to regulate its own players in the team of religious authority to make them more fair and in control.

Moreover, as Yares states in his reflection on Hilton's book (2014),

> Michael Hilton sets out ….. how bar mitzvah became a child-centered ceremony: from a blessing recited by a father freeing him from filial

16 *Parashah* means weekly *Torah* portion and called *Peraşa* in Turkish.

> responsibility for the sins of his son, to a ritual in which the son, rather than the father, reached an educational and coming-of-age milestone…[17]

As Hilton (2104) emphasizes, the focal point of this life cycle event shifted from a father's blessing onto the child. Also, in the case of Istanbul, the time leading up to the event as well as the event itself both became educational tools and the kid became a central point of the ceremony.

According to the Chief Rabbinate's website,[18] Bar Mitzvah is defined as follows:

> A boy who has reached the age of thirteen demonstrates his maturity by putting on *tefillin* and *tallit* for the first time during a morning prayer (except on Saturdays and holidays).The Bar Mitzvah ceremony, which is usually held on the Saturday following the first putting on of *tefillin*, signifies that the child has joined the Jewish community as a member who has reached the age of maturity and who has taken responsibility for his own religious duties. During this ceremony, the boy is called to the *Tevah* to read a section from the *Torah*. Now, he has grown up, has promised to be a worthwhile adult to his mother, father, family, and the environment, and has left his childhood behind.

17 Reflection on Hilton's work. Laura Yares, Journal of Jewish Education Published On: 2018-11-14.

18 The website underwent some changes in context and design at the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025. This quotation is from the new version. https://www.turkyahudileri.com/content-page.php?lang=tr&page=bar-mitsva&category= (Accessed, January 19, 2025).
The original text reads: "On üç yaşını dolduran erkek çocuk ilk kez bir sabah duasında(Cumartesi ve bayramlar hariç) Tefillin ve Tallet takarak erginliğini ispatlar. Genellikle tefillinin ilk kez takılmasını takip eden Cumartesi günü yapılan Bar-Mitzva töreni çocuğun, Yahudi toplumuna, dini görevlerini yerine getirebilecek erginliğe erişmiş, kendi sorumluluğunu üstlenmiş bir üye olarak katıldığını anlatır. Bu törende çocuk Tevrat'tan bir bölüm okumak üzere Teva'ya çağrılır. Artık o, büyümüş, annesine babasına, tüm ailesine, çevresine faydalı bir ergin olacağına söz vermiş, çocukluğunu geride bırakmış bir ergindir."

First of all, the "true" religious requirement of Bar Mitzvah is fulfilled with the religious ceremony held after the opening of *Ehal* scrolls on Monday or Thursday. In Istanbul Jewish community, the ceremony in the years of 1975 was held only on these two days with the boy reading the corresponding *Parashah* from the *Torah* while wearing *tefillin and tallit*.[19] The religious ceremony performed on Saturdays was added later and is not part of Bar Mitzvah religious requirements. Having a Bar Mitzvah ceremony on a *Shabbat* Day (Saturday), generally includes reading a section from the Bible (*Haftara*) as well. Nowadays, Bar Mitzvah ceremonies are still held in a synagogue on Monday or Thursday in Istanbul and some families still prefer to have Saturday ceremony as well. On the other hand, according to both the religious authority and those from the market, currently the frequency of Saturday Bar Mitzvah ceremonies in synagogues is in a state of sharp decline. Increasing prices are the leading cause, but the necessity for separate budgets for each event (clothing, synagogues, etc.) is also a difficulty for event hosts. Interviews say that almost 90% of Bar Mitzvah events now consist of the mandatory Monday or Thursday *tefillin and tallit* ceremony followed by a night reception (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J and interview with Company H, June, 2017). In addition to this, what must be underlined in this section is that all Jewish community members want to remain a part of society and perform these rites of passage, one way or another. A person from the religious and secular authority summed up the issue, "We have never seen anyone who did not want to have a Bar Mitzvah. It never fails. Even those who claim to be atheist, communist, leftist; they all did it in the end" (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority A, January, 2018). Currently, Bar Mitzvah ceremonies are performed at certain synagogues, namely Ortakoy Etz-Hayim Synagogue, Yenikoy Tiferet Israel Synagogue, Caddebostan Bet-El Synagogue, and Neve-Shalom Synagogue. This ritual/practice has also preserved itself with the help of the religious authority. However, when the order of importance of the efforts and budgets spent for the invitation is taken into

19 *Tefillin* ceremony is performed by the male child, wearing *tefillin* and *tallit* on Monday or Thursday, when *Ehal* is opened. The boy is also being called to the *Torah*.

account, the non-religious ceremony/reception/party takes precedence over the religious ceremony in the synagogue.

6.2.3 *Yoel Bar Mitsva Club and Annette Bat Mitsva Club in Istanbul*

The name Annette for the *Bat Mitsva Club* is derived from 8-year-old Jewish girl Annette Rubenstein Talu, who was killed during the 2003 Neve Shalom Synagogue terrorist attack.[20] Similarly, the name Yoel for the *Bar Mitsva Club* comes from nineteen-year-old Jewish security personnel, young man Yoel Kohen Ülçer, who was killed during the same terrorist attack.

The founding purpose of these currently active *Clubs* is guiding twelve and thirteen-year-old female and male children, respectively, through performing their Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonial duties as well as having them socialize with peers in their age group and learn more about their Jewish identities along the way. A Rabbi described the founding purpose of the two *Clubs* as,

> Provides unity and solidarity. Brings together children of the same age. They get to know each other and socialize. This is a social congregation project that unites children at that age. These are all advantages (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

It is like a school, especially for children who do not attend Ulus Jewish School, where only Jewish subjects are studied, and they can get together with their other Jewish friends. Also, *the Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* can be defined as a graduation ceremony for girls of the same age. These *Clubs* operate under the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*, and a Rabbi, a member of Bet-Din, is responsible for coordination at the *Clubs*.[21] As mentioned above, these *Clubs* also work like "invisible colleges" in the community.

The *Bat Mitsva Club* takes one year to complete, and girls attend classes in groups, not individually. Almost all lessons are conducted in a non-formal

20 After the terrorist attack on November 15, 2003, the names, Yoel and Annette, are added to the official name of the *Clubs*.

21 If a child is born in a mixed marriage and the mother is Jewish, s/he can join the *Club*. However, if the father is Jewish, they first give the child a short training and accept him into the *Club* (interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority B, January, 2018).

education format. *The Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* happens at the end of the academic year, and girls' parents can only invite a limited number of friends and relatives. As printed on the booklet distributed among parents, the goal is "to infuse in them the values a Jewish woman possesses first and foremost, then prepare them for Bat Mitzvah, one of the most important days of their lives."[22]

The Bar Mitsva Club, on the other hand, takes two years. The first year consists of group lessons like the *Bat Mitsva Club.* As stated in the booklet distributed among parents, the first-year objective of the *Club* is "to infuse in them the values a Jewish man possesses."[23] In the second year, after turning thirteen, male children work individually with more experienced teachers, a *Hazzan*/Cantor, or a Rabbi to prepare for the *Parashah* (passage in Hebrew) that they will read on the day of their Bar Mitzvah. As specified in the booklet distributed among parents, the second-year goal of the *Club* is "to prepare them for the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, one of the most important days of their lives."[24] Children are offered two options at the beginning of the year, either maximum, which means reading the whole *Parashah*, or minimum[25] reading. If their *Parashahs* are read in the same week, they will study it in groups.

Both groups, boys and girls, meet at the Ulus Jewish School every Sunday for their lessons. They meet approximately twenty-five times over the course of a year. The *Club* is closed on certain religious and public holidays. On Sundays, all girls and boys attend their lessons at the same hours in separate classrooms. The number of students in a class varies depending on the number of students in a given year, but usually, there are six or eight students in one class. Attendance records are kept, and absences are noted and followed up. Male children usually wear a *kippah* in the classroom. Sometimes, groups are combined for lectures on certain topics. For instance, if there is a specific topic regarding prayer or religion that week, a Rabbi speaks to all children in a big meeting room. Every week, all groups have lunch together. All meals and available snacks are kosher. The primary reason for separating girls from

22 The booklet of the *Bat Mitsva Club*.

23 The booklet of the *Bar Mitsva Club*.

24 The booklet of the *Bar Mitsva Club.*

25 *Shema and Beraha.*

boys in classes is that the content for girls and boys sometimes tends to differ.

Instructors (*madrih and madriha*) at the *Club* are from Jewish youth and work for the system under mentorship. They teach children by following the curriculum and the teaching guides provided. While instructors were initially chosen from psychology graduates and those who had *Mahzike Torah* experience, the more recent years saw the inclusion of university students with volunteering experience in Jewish associations. They sometimes get training or seminars during the year. Generally, young people take the instructor job both because they are qualified (in talking about Judaism) or/and they need pocket money or allowance. An aspect of the *Clubs* of special importance here is that while educating children around the ages of twelve or thirteen, these *Clubs* simultaneously keep young people ages eighteen to twenty inside a Jewish-themed education. As a result, the content provided by this institution reaches a wider audience than originally intended. As wide as the age range of the employed is, the older are generally more experienced and placed higher on the hierarchy. Coordinators and other people in charge have more authority than the instructors and are responsible for how lessons and content are conducted. They communicate with the young instructors and manage aspects of the *Clubs* such as gift distribution, timing, emergency intervention, health problems, missing equipment procurement, and communication with disruptive children.

Children participating in the *Club* pay a certain fee in return for the service.[26] Each year, the price increases by a symbolic amount. At the beginning of each year, all children are given backpacks with the club logo on them, containing personal notebooks, journals, *kippahs,* and other educational materials. An 80% attendance rate is expected of the children annually. A point-reward system was implemented for the first time in the 2017-2018 academic

26 The fee for two-year *Bar Mitsva Club* was 3000 TL (approximately 750 Euro) in 2017 while 1,500 TL (approximately 375 Euro) for the one-year *Bat Mitsva Club.* In addition, a 2,500 TL (approximately 625 Euro) payment was required for the C*ollective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* in 2017. The price included ceremony costs, cocktail reception, attire for the girls and ties for the fathers. If someone needs economic support to pay for the fee, the *Club* subsidized the price.

year. Children are eligible to earn and lose points according to criteria related to classroom and club order. This system was designed to motivate children to actively participate in the whole process.

Although there are minor revisions to lesson content every year, the main subjects are as follows: Identity, Jewish identity, Jewish Holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Hanukkah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim, Passover, Shavuot, some commemoration days, *Shabbat*), *tzedakah*, life cycle events and rituals, *Mitzvah Day*,[27] Jewish house, symbols, *kashrut*, Sephardi Jews, Jewish women, Jewish values, etc. These subjects are accompanied by visits to places like the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews, the Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center and some synagogues. Finally, the curriculum includes some social activities such as a football tournament, contests and competitions, picnics, and watching Jewish-themed movies. In some years, families are offered *Shabbat* dinners and seminars. In addition to these, quite many weeks at the *Annette Bat Mitsva Club* are used to rehearse the prayers, ceremonial rituals, and songs, as well as for the general rehearsals with the fathers, in preparation for *the Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* at the end of the year.[28]

The whole arena has its fair share of disputes among agencies as well. For example, for one year, a parents' commission (family members) could not agree on what the children should wear during the ceremony, challenging the religious authority in a way. There were arguments, and the mothers did not like the chosen attire. The institution had to make the decision to have a fixed ceremonial attire from that year onwards. Although sometimes it is about small details, the negotiations between agents never end in this field. While the whole school/*Club* idea and collective ceremony came from

27 The concept of the *Mitzvah Day* is generally observed in the United States or programs taken from the American institutions and when compared with the other ones, it is a more modern one.

28 2023-2024 Year-end Ceremonies: https://www.salom.com.tr/salomTurkey/haber/133743/annette-bat-mitzvah-club-and-yoel-bar-mitzvah-club-year-end-ceremonies (Accessed, January 19, 2025).

religious authority, but it still has space for family members to shape the ceremony in this field.

Moreover, the *Club* song, which is sung at *the Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony*, called *On the Road to Torah*,[29] is full of messages. As a research item, it is possible to understand the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*'s goals in creating and implementing the *Club* and the messages used to ensure its continuity. These lines, in particular, serve as a reference and warning for individuals who tend to reform such events in consumer cultures, as well as firmly stating the institution's stance in certain matters; "It is a difficult journey, now begun, not only a party, being done…"[30]

As confirmed by the interviews with the religious authority, what it is called Bat Mitzvah is, in fact, a prayer that takes two minutes long. But when the day comes, the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* includes a candle ceremony and singing along to wise words from the ancestors. The moving atmosphere, most importantly, appeals to the families and their emotions. As

29 ON THE ROAD TO TORAH

Big day approaches, Approaches fast, My Bat Mitzvah year, Can hardly believe it, I open my eyes, see the future, Take on my new role with pride.

On the road to Torah, to Torah, I am strong, I know what to do, It all depends on me, With the Torah I have learned, With every mitzvah the world will be complete.

It is a difficult journey, Now begun, Not only a party, Being done, With all we have learned we sow seeds, Together we grow as one heart, My page if full now, I put down my pen, And I read my diary from the beginning, All that I have learned, intensifying with the Torah, Is what I will apply in life, from now on.

Original Turkish version: TORA YOLUNDA

Büyük gün yaklaşıyor , Çok yakınlaşıyor, Benim Bat- Mitzva yılım, İnanasım gelmiyor, Gözlerimi açıp geleceğe bakıyorum, Ve yeni rolümü gururla üstleniyorum.

Tora yolunda, Tora yolunda, Gücüm var, yapacağımı biliyorum ben, Her şey bana bağlı, Öğrendiğim Tora, Her bir mitzvamla dünya tamamlanacak.

Zor bir yolculuktur bu, Şimdi başlayan, Sadece parti değil hazırlanılan, Öğrendiklerimizle hep tohum ekeriz, Birlikte tek yürek olarak büyüyoruz biz, Sayfam dolu artık, Kalemi bırakıyorum, Ve günlüğümü baştan okuyorum, Torayla yoğunlaşan öğrendiğimi, Yaşantımda artık hep onu uyguluyorum.

30 Club Song-On the Road to Torah.

seen in the emphasis on the moving atmosphere on the Chief Rabbinate's website,[31] Bat Mitzvah is defined as follows:

> Bat Mitzvah ceremonies have been celebrated since the 19th century. In these ceremonies, girls come together as a group and celebrate. In the Bat Mitzvah ceremony, girls enter the synagogue in their fathers' arms, dressed in white, and they all recite prayers and songs together.

As also seen in interviews, the scene mainly remembered from the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* is while the girls walk with their dads to the *Ehal*[32] and sing their songs on the stage. At the beginning of the ceremony, fathers wearing suits and white ties walk with their daughters in all-white dresses to the *Tevah*. Just like a wedding day, the girls ascend to the stage. During the speech, they talk about their wishes and desires for the day they would become brides. Rabbi Isak Haleva, the Chief Rabbi, repeated his wish every year, "god willing, we will see these children under the *huppah*[33] at Neve Shalom Synagogue." In her interview, Ester said about the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony*, "a great excitement for the father, as if he is presenting the bride at her wedding" (Ester and David, May 12, 2017). This ceremony also serves as an investment for the future, and it promotes the next Jewish life cycle event/ritual. A tradition is effectively constructed over many years during all these ceremonies. A certain pattern is established through rehearsals. This regulated order flows seamlessly and is repeated every year, the same as the year before.

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31 The website underwent some changes in context and design at the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025. This quotation is from the new version. https://www.turkya-hudileri.com/content-page.php?lang=tr&page=bat-mitsva&category= (Accessed, January 19, 2025).
The original text reads: "Bat-Mitsva törenleri XIX. yüzyıldan itibaren kutlanmaya başlamıştır. Bu törenlerde kız çocukları toplu halde bir araya gelirler ve kutlalar yapılır. Bat-Mitsva töreninde kızlar beyaz kıyafetler içinde sinagoga babalarının kollarında girerler, hep birlikte dualar ve şarkılar okurlar."

32 The cabinet where the *Torah* rolls are kept.

33 A canopy beneath which Jewish marriage ceremonies are performed.

6.2.4 *Bar and Bat Mitzvah Receptions*

As Hilton (2014: 158-161) stresses, today, Bar Mitzvah for boys and Bat Mitzvah for girls are more popular than at any time in history and are sometimes accompanied by lavish celebrations. This claim is also valid for the Turkish (Istanbul) Jewish community. Spending significant economic and cultural capital and having lavish celebrations are also trendy in Istanbul. As a reflection of this situation, the Chief Rabbinate clearly shows the attitude of being on the opposite side of the trendy parties and receptions. The religious institution states on its website that,

> A Jewish boy automatically becomes a bar mitzvah upon reaching the age of 13 years, and a girl upon reaching the age of 12 years. No ceremony is needed to confer these rights and obligations. The popular bar mitzvah ceremony is not required and does not fulfill any commandment. The ceremonies and receptions that are commonplace today were unheard of as recently as a century ago.[34]

Needless to say, the celebrations held after the religious ceremony of the Bat/Bar Mitzvah have nothing to do with religious obligations. However, this attitude and position of the religious authority is also related to the *Kayadez* tradition, which is tried to be made still prominent in a way by the religious authority and lay leaders of the Jewish community. One of the most notable problems for the religious authority is that reception becomes more important and attractive than the religious ceremony. As Shoham (2018) also underlines,

> Bat mitzvah gradually came to denote the event no less than the girl's new status, just as bar mitzvah changed to describe the event no less than the status, and the social event began to attract more attention than the religious ceremony, with regard to the emotional and economic resources invested in it (Shoham, 2018: 116).

34 http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/judaism/100-bar-mitzvah-and-bat-mitzvah (Accessed, December 9, 2022).

These receptions become more important than the religious ceremonies in the eyes of both the families of teenagers (hosts) and other community members (guests). This reception/ party became a marker of Jewish identity and was strongly influenced by consumer culture. As Joselit says, "underlines the associated party and understands the bar/bat mitzvah as an indication of the Jews' acculturation to modern consumerism" (Shoham, 2018: 103).[35] On the other hand, the receptions and ceremonies provide family and community members a way to create their identities and positions within the community through these consumption areas and practices, especially in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s.

This section discusses historical change and development of Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah receptions. Since Bat Mitzvah patterns, emerging later in time, have largely followed those of Bar Mitzvah, Bar Mitzvah receptions are the main point of focus. In the 1970s, food was served at the house of the boy for his family and close relatives after the religious ceremony on Thursdays or Mondays. This occasion evolved into renting venues and serving food and drinks such as cake and lemonade. As the venues progressively became larger, the boy started taking the center stage, and the ceremony turned into a little performance with a speech included. As B says, "The Bar Mitzvah reception night is a concept about thirty or thirty-five years old" (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority B, January, 2018).

When the 1990s arrived, it is worth remembering that this decade witnessed the rise of a new middle class in Turkey (Ayata, 2002; Işık, 1995; Uner & Gungordu, 2016). Thus, it was surely felt within the Jewish community, and some changes, like Brith Milah receptions and Jewish weddings, paralleled this development. This decade was also a period when the community entered the extraversion phase, as Yıldız (2015) also pointed out (see Chapter 4.3). As explained above, in 1992, 500 years of hospitality of (the Ottoman Empire and Turkey) were celebrated, and Jewish ritual and cultural characteristics were not hesitated to be displayed. It should not be forgotten that this visibility was generally shown in a depoliticized venue. The life cycle event area was also in a situation that fits this description. While *Kayadez*

35 He gives reference to Joselit (1994: 89-105) and Reuveni and Roemer (2010: 17).

was still held by the community leaders in a way, community members did not see any harm in expressing themselves through the consumer and global trends with the newly rising middle class. In the 1990s, Bar Mitzvah receptions occurred in five-star hotels. Five-star hotels meant larger crowds, more people invited and much bigger budgets. By the mid-90s, even five-star hotels were no longer enough and varying concepts were created depending on the year's trends. The trend was usually to decide on a popular concept (from a cartoon or a movie, etc.) in these ceremonies, such as *Space Jam* film, *We are the World* song or a Jewish symbol. In addition to these concepts, it was also common to hire a famous singer (on stage) to entertain the guests during the reception in five-star hotels such as Kenan Dogulu,[36] etc. Providing such facilities was undoubtedly closely linked to the family's economic capital and social capital. Receptions focused on Jewish symbols were mostly the handiwork of Izzet Bana. He was among the leading names in the industry during the 1990s. There was also a woman who was prevalent during the time, Rina Muraben. She still almost completely dominates the Bar (and Bat) Mitzvah scene. In her own words, she described her upbringing as "under the wings of such a gem as Izzet Bana" (Rina Maruben – RN, June 30, 2017). She was also a student of theatre actress Rozet Hubes and musician Selim Hubes through her work at Jewish associations. Her first job, upon a personal favor request, was the adaptation of *Grease Musical* for a Bar Mitzvah in the mid-1990s (1994-95-96). She created unique videos for the show where the Bar Mitzvah boy entered the stage ripping through a large sheet of paper. She said: "That night made such a splash that I immediately got four more offers" (Rina Maruben – RN, June 30, 2017). Alongside Bana and Muraben, Nino Varon[37] was another leading name within the industry at the time. He used the song, *We Are the World,* [38] at a Bar Mitzvah reception at the beginning of the 1990s, and the whole ceremony was centered on this concept. Dressed up as singers and musicians on stage, all children

36 He is one of the well-known singers in Turkish pop music, and the price should be paid for his performance is very high.

37 Nino Varon is a composer and a songwriter, and he is not just an important figure in the Jewish event sector but also in the Turkish music sector.

38 The song for charity, 1985. USA for Africa. Compositors, Lionel Richie, Michael Jackson.

pretended to perform the song on playback. Considering the trends of the time, this ceremony also had a significant impact within the community. The prime motivation in those years and the decades after, has always been to distinguish one's ceremony from previous ceremonies, to create something new and use it for the first time in a Bar Mitzvah. In addition to all these trends in the 1990s, there is also a remarkable concept of the *menorah*[39] with thirteen candles (thirteen-arm *menorah*) that is without question still used at every Bar and Bat Mitzvah reception. Although Sevindiren and Maruben claimed this to be an invention of tradition by Nino Varon, Nino Varon maintained that it is an old tradition that he did not create. Varon stated that he observed it abroad and adapted it to Turkish Jewish event culture. Varon believes it to be a practice that beautifies the candle-lighting ritual. Although similar practices can be observed in other countries, it is still valid to describe the lighting of a *menorah* at these receptions as an invention of tradition because this tradition was reciprocated and embraced by the Istanbul Jewish community. It was used one way or another in almost every Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

Having started in the 1990s, this trend continued well into the 2000s and 2010s, constantly evolving and becoming fancier. As mentioned above, Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, as well as receptions became more and more child-centered. Then, in the 2000s, open-air Bar Mitzvah receptions were added into the mix and grew popular. Maruben, who has been in the business for twenty-seven years, said: "It is my mission to bring to life a child's dream world… That child is the star of the night… It is my duty to make their dream come true" (Rina Maruben – RN, June 30, 2017). Meanwhile, Nino Varon described his work as, "I used to assess a child's talents, speaking ability and prepare the *menorah* ceremony accordingly, he should not be embarrassed at the *menorah*, he must shine. That is why I consider their talent" (Nino Varon – RN, November 2, 2017). These receptions have become such acts of show business that a bit of dancing as in a school talent show no longer satisfies anyone. Technological advancements have allowed children

39 *Menorah* has seven-branched candelabrum. It is also used as emblem of Israel. It has a place in the Hebrew Bible as well.

to be part of *PlayStation* games or become *Superman* in videos. Professional dancers, acrobats, percussionists and such were added. Even clothes have become extravagant. These days, even larger stages are used, and giant LED screens as big as eighteen meters project 3D images. Animated clips with the boy as the leading star are made. Shows imitating Broadway Musicals are performed. *Fiddler on the Roof*, *We Will Rock You*, *Lala Land*, *Pirates of the Caribbean,* and *Harry Potter* are among these. In other words, the event's size, shape, and scope have changed drastically.

The thirteen-arm *menorah*, used in almost every Bar/Bat Mitzvah event, has also seen its share of changes. It began to take shape depending on the event such as a *menorah* with *Sefer Torah,* made of human figures, etc. A different person/invitee is called upon to light each of the thirteen candles together with distinct texts attached to the act. Girls and boys both start rehearsals months in advance with their families in order to read the texts fluently. Great effort is made to make sure that children in the same cohort do not end up with similar concepts or candle ceremonies. Or, if the child has decided to include his friends as part of the show, they spend months together practicing the ten or twenty-minute-long show and/or dance. Also, each of the family members, relatives, and child's friends, who get up to light a candle, prepare a surprise video or song for the child. As a result, the scope of the overall performance becomes wider with each passing year. Similarly, the Bat Mitzvah reception is a phenomenon that has been relevant since 2001. It has become more of a party than anything for the last twelve-thirteen years. All changes and developments in Bar Mitzvah receptions are also valid for Bat Mitzvah receptions.

Around the mid-2010s, due to the unstable Turkish economy and political landscape, together with decreasing Jewish population numbers, the number of events and their grandeur is in decline (see Chapter 7.2.3). Families who prefer to opt out of the night reception sometimes end the occasion with a candle ceremony or a simple cocktail reception right after the *tefillin* ceremony (Monday or Thursday) and skip the Saturday religious ceremony as well. This decline is also valid for all occasions (weddings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs), and it is repeatedly noted during almost every interview. Maruben stated in her interview that her figures also approve of this claim.

> I used to do thirty-forty Bar/Bat Mitzvahs yearly, but I do eighteen-twenty now. The overall size of the industry has shrunk a lot. The number of people invited to these events also decreased from 500 to around 200. They now invite a hundred children with a hundred adults and make the night more focused on the celebrant child (Rina Maruben – RN, June 30, 2017).

§ 6.3 Regulations for *Shabbat* and Kosher/*Kashrut* and Its Application

According to religious authority, not just Bar or Bat Mitzvah but all life cycle festivities must keep *Shabbat* and kosher. All life cycle events are not limited to the religious ceremony of rites of passage inside synagogues but also include after-parties, brunches, and receptions held in hotels or other venues. It must be underlined here that the control mechanisms for *Shabbat* and kosher were either put in place or attempted to be put in place by the religious authority during the rites of passage year by year. The critical point is that religious authority has no actual way of enforcing these rules via any kind of sanctions, but as an institution, it succeeds in controlling this arena. These two crucial 'religious rules' and practices of an Orthodox Jewish community are tried to be applied by the religious authority and get lots of criticism from the community members. In this negotiation arena, three main agents, namely family members or community members, the market, and religious authority, are actively present and participate in with their actions and their voices. The control mechanism, which has been tried to be constructed by the dominant agent (the religious authority here), has had some counterattacks by other agents over the years. This section discusses these two religious regularities by referring to the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies and receptions.

A repeating claim seen in interviews with family members/couples and the market is that the rules regarding religious requirements, specifically *Shabbat* and kosher, are constantly becoming stricter. A most common claim was "that did not exist back in the day… We could do…", followed by,

> Nowadays it is impossible to have a midday party on Saturday because we cannot light candles, etc. However, for example, back in around 2004-2005, we would put people onto a bus to *Kemerburgaz* for festivities, lighting candles, etc. and no one would meddle (Interview with Company E, November, 2017).

Interviews seem to have a pattern of emphasizing how rules have become stricter recently and the emphasis is also on complaining about these 'new policies' and 'new inventions.' The other issue discussed by the community members is the receptions, which are unrelated to religion and its practices. Even though religious ceremonies and receptions are two different things, religious authority is also insistent on supervising receptions. Family/community members criticize religious authority mainly on this matter, and the rules allegedly become rigid over time. A community member described their feelings as follows:

> I feel like these are sanctions. Honestly, there is nothing religious about the Bar Mitzvah night reception… They even say that it is a kosher reception if a *menorah*[40] is involved in a Bar Mitzvah. *Menorah* is something we have added [to our receptions]. It is not religious (Edit and Moris, May 18, 2017).

Despite the *menorah* not being a religious requirement at Bar Mitzvah, or the reception following a Bat Mitzvah ceremony (or a religious wedding ceremony) not being religious in any way, the religious authority asserts control over these occasions. Religious authority's view of the issue is apparent. According to a Rabbi, "If it is Bar Mitzvah, if it is a religious ceremony, the following dinner must be kosher because it is a religious event" (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). While it is easier for the religious authority to control events inside synagogues, controlling and regulating the occasions organized as part of a rite of passage or as a follow-up to a life cycle event is much more difficult. Notably, smaller Bat (or Bar) Mitzvah ceremonies or receptions not held at five-star hotels are almost impossible to control. Here, it is crucial to underline that the religious authority does not have a right to

40 Here, while pointing the *menorah*, they mean thirteen-branched candelabrum.

penalize, fine, or give sanctions. Still, as a playmaker, the institution creates its own way and rules to control the life cycle event field in time.

Jewish laws dictate that *Shabbat*[41] is a day when work and engaging in any activity is forbidden. Therefore, religious authority demands that *Shabbat* must be observed on all occasions falling within *Shabbat* day limits. For example, *Shabbat* rules apply for Bar Mitzvah ceremonies held in synagogues on Saturdays.[42] That means no microphones are allowed, and taking photos or recording videos is prohibited. Another example is the reception, preferably performed on Saturday evenings, and interviewees reported how it is required to wait until the end of *Shabbat* on Saturday evenings. They added that the rules were not so strict in the old days.

Here, the example of a thirteenth birthday party, which a family organized after the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony* in the 2010s, will be given as a prime example of being able to evade the control of the religious authority (Ester and David, May 12, 2017). On the day after the occasion, the girl's family decided to have an individual celebration party, announced it as a thirteenth birthday party, and picked a venue outside the hotel (In some cases, this could be a house party). The party went through on a Saturday afternoon – *Shabbat* day, and many *Shabbat* and kosher rules were violated. At this party, they played music, lit candles, etc., which all violated the *Shabbat* rules, and they also served non-kosher food. This example was a case of how the family members/couples (as an agent in this field) challenged the religious authority and made a move in the game as an agent. The family members/couples here developed a strategy (Bourdieu, 1993; Maton, 2008) by labeling the event a birthday party, exempting it from the traditional framework and required rules. It should be noted that they felt embarrassed while talking about the event in the interview because some of the family

41 The religious narrative of *Shabbat*; after creating the earth in six days, God rested on the seventh day. *Shabbat* begins on Friday evening, but when three stars are visible in the sky, and ends the same way on Saturday evening. During this time work, business, lighting fires, touching electricity, playing music and spending money etc. are forbidden.

42 Starting in 2002, for nine-ten years, almost every Bar Mitzvah had a synagogue ceremony on a Saturday. However, with dwindling budgets, these ceremonies became less frequent over the years and almost extinct after 2014.

members had some positions in the community's administration in that period. As Bourdieu emphasizes, the concept of strategy is an active and creative practice while using the analogy of a game (Maton, 2008: 54). As Harvey et al. state, before more dominant players (in this case, it is religious authority) nullify their strategic moves, they move quickly and in this case, as silently as well (Harvey et al., 2020: 2; Bourdieu, 1993). According to Bourdieu, strategies are influenced by the atmosphere of the field and the agent's habitus. Agents maneuver within the field to achieve his/her aim and preserve this position in the community/field. The practice can consist of a deliberate plan, or it could not be calculated consciously, but in any way, the agent/individual applies to her/his capital to make moves towards the rules or structure. So, after this incident, as interviewees say, religious authority tried to be more rigorous in the rules of *Shabbat* for the receptions. Not to forget, religious authority has no right to give any penalty for this birthday party. So, the agent of religious authority also took a step after this move in the field to control. When explicitly asked about such occasions, religious authority representative, Rabbi, acknowledged the unfortunate events, said:

> The doors are being forced here; it is not clear who or what they are trying to push, but they are on the wrong side… In other countries, the ceremony and dinner take place in the same venue. Hence, when a Rabbi performs the ceremony, he insists the food be kosher… If you are determined to break the rules, we cannot stop you… This is literally religious understanding. It is Bar Mitzvah… If you label it a birthday party and serve food that is not kosher, this is on your conscience between yourself and God, and it is wrong for me to comment any further (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

So, while they are talking about the past 'wrong' events since they could not have any authority to give any sanctions, he commented on this issue by referring to the agreement between God and the individual. However, after the incident, religious authority worked on how to take precautions for future occasions; in other word, they act reactively rather than proactively. Although religious authority is the dominant one in the field, community members (sometimes the market) can have a say or are able to take action (with

their different types of capital) to challenge the authority and maneuver in this field/game so that the ethno-religious communal identity is constructed together with all agents in life cycle events field. On the other hand, it should also be noted that such occasions that break religious laws are infrequent.

According to Jewish dietary laws, *kashrut*, a meal can be labeled kosher if it follows several rules, including the types of meat, proper forms of slaughter, conditions for meal preparation, consumption way of food of animal origins, and dairy products. It goes without saying that just as all life cycle festivities must abide by *Shabbat* rules, all occasions must also be kosher. Compared with the *Shabbat* rules, more control over the matter of kosher can be applied because the religious authority and the market cooperate very well. The most potent tool that religious authority has in order to control whether receptions are kosher is a team of *mashgichim,* which consists of approximately six or seven people working for the religious authority. A *mashgiach*[43] is a person who individually[44] supervises the kitchen preparation of the food before the reception and the serving of the food during the reception.

Two factors related to the tightening of *kashrut* rules are mentioned in the interviews. One is the arrival of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik in Turkey in 2003, and the other is the establishment of *Denet Gıda* Company (a kosher food company) in 2004.[45] The establishment of the *Denet Gıda* Company is also the story of how the *kashrut* issue became institutionalized in the Turkish Jewish community. The community leaders assigned a director to this company, and the company gained a monopoly over the market. In an interview in the *Şalom Newspaper* in 2008, Silvyo Ovadya, the President of the Jewish

43 (pl. *mashgichim*) Usually selected among religious young people who keep *Shabbat* and kosher. They are expected to be observant of all religious requirements, get rained and know kosher diet laws inside out. They are overwhelmingly men, although there is no rule about it.

44 It depends the size of the event but usually *mashgiach* works individually.

45 As mentioned in Ch. 5, the establishment of the catering company, *La Casa de Barinyurt*, in 2003, which also serves life cycle religious events as being a kosher events.

community and executive board member of the *Denet Gida* Company, clarified the goals in establishing the company:

> Until the beginning of 2004, a 'kosher certificate' was given following the inspection of our clergymen[46] within the Turkish Chief Rabbinate to assist food factories that were particularly involved in export. It did not present a pleasant image for the Chief Rabbinate to give a donation receipt when issuing the document. Again, the Chief Rabbinate was providing inspection in kosher events held in hotels. *Matzah*, wine, and cheese production was being done under the responsibility of the Turkish Chief Rabbinate and the Turkish Jewish Community. As all of these are trade-related work, we found it appropriate to establish a joint-stock company. The goal when this joint-stock company was founded was not that the partners receive profits, but that the specific service offered be done in the most proper way possible and for the profits accrued to be invested anew. It is a joint-stock company, and while some religious officials have assignments in community management, they do not benefit financially as managers or as shareholders. As seen for the past three years, the company has not distributed profits but has made new investments. Since the ability of Community Foundations to form economic entities is a matter of legal debate today, the establishment of a company was preferred.[47]

As clearly stated, the aim of the joint-stock company establishment was to separate trade-related work from 'religious work' and the legal debate on

46 *Din adamı*. Religious authorities.

47 https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber/65054/s-ovadya-denet-gida-as-ve-matsa-ithalatina-iliskin-acik (Accessed, April 27, 2022).
This interview was made in response to the article titled *Imports That Confuse the Jewish Community* published in *Milliyet* Newspaper on Tuesday, April 3, 2007. The reason I used this interview is that the subject is discussed so openly and publicly on an open access platform/newspaper and this article contains a clear statement made by a person from religious authority about the *Denet Gıda* Company.

forming economic entities as a foundation. Ovadya lists the employees at the *Denet Gida* Company establishment in the following manner:

> In *Denet Gida*, more than thirty people are paid part-time or full-time salaries, including *Hahams* (Rabbis) members of the Bet-Din and those who are not, inspectors that they employ, inspectors that go to wine and cheese production, those who inspect restaurants and catering companies' restaurants that provide kosher food, *shohets* who slaughter chickens, and [people] who work in administration, the bakery, and the warehouse.[48]

So, these newly established organizations (*Denet Gida* Company, *La Casa de Barinyurt*) are the establishments that continue to be managed by some lay leaders and have been integrated/channeled to activities done by community members.

Previously not adhering to such strict rules and regulations, the events have progressively had to follow a kosher diet law, including more and more food items added each year since 2003. An interviewee made a rather important observation about the whole process,

> I remember my brother's Bar Mitzvah, and it was not kosher at all. Nowadays, even drinks must be kosher. They inspect the kitchen all the way to the cheese you serve. And the congregation wants to profit from this; it is very natural (Sandra, June 4, 2017).

This is also about circulating the money in the community as much as it is about the congregation profiting. As the number of kosher products sold increases, so does the number of products to be inspected. However, the issue is undoubtedly not merely economic. According to another interviewee,

> It was around 2003-2004 when these things began. Things changed in Turkey after [Rabbi] Mendy's arrival. There was no kosher requirement when I got married. But then they started doing things like

48 https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber/65054/s-ovadya-denet-gida-as-ve-matsa-ithalatina-iliskin-acik (Accessed, April 27, 2022).

> *Hagalah*[49] in hotel kitchens. Then came kosher cheese, and then checking if the wine is kosher. It turned out that sour cherry juice is not kosher, which we had never known before (Interview with Company D, June, 2017).

As seen in this quote, a considerable amount of interviews conducted by the community members claim this uprising religiosity in the regulations/rules is also related to the arrival of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik in Turkey (2003). While this claim has been made repeatedly by community members, the religious authority avoided commenting on it. Within this context, a Rabbi of the religious authority described the situation and historical change,

> The *kashrut* issue has been a work in progress for approximately forty years. The Chief Rabbinate of the time was also involved. Things were starting to become very degenerated. After a Brith Milah or a Bar Mitzvah, dinner tables were set up, and all kinds of foods, such as shrimp,[50] were served and so on. I am talking about the 1975-1980s, and it was awful. Rabbi Moşe Aşalom, Moşe Benveniste, and the Bet-Din of the time began working to fulfill the needs of the congregation. It can be done within available means - there were not many kinds of cheese or wine at the time. Back then, the rule was to exclude shrimp and so on, meat and dairy products… However as people began to understand over time, as the system took root, the bar of standards rose higher. Similarly, with increasing means, more kinds of cheese and wine, it got to the point where *kashrut* had to be the way to do things… Surely, there are still things we lack (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

Parallel to this quote, another member of religious authority described and legitimized the development and progress of *kashrut* rules,

> [Back then], There was no kosher cheese or wine production, accurate, it did not exist in Turkey but was written [the rules] in the *Torah*.

49 *Hagalah* is cleaning metals and teflons in hot water. It is not routinely done these days unless there is a special request regarding *kashrut*.

50 Shrimp is not kosher.

> We are only now finding out [In Turkey]. It is not an invention, it is just we who did not know. It is not teaching new tricks to old dogs… Think of it like any other education: you learn to read in first grade, progress through high school and become advanced at university… Kosher 101-102-103, these must be applied. Let's at least agree on the 101; there is no need to jump to 505 (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority E, November, 2017).

Here, the emphasis was on the fact that *kashrut* rules are not becoming stricter by the day; instead, already existing religious laws are progressively made into rules for this society and observed. In other words, as new things are learned, as new products arrive and as society is able to purchase more, new rules appear as a natural consequence.

In this process, religious authority's acting partners for supervision are not the family members/couples but rather the hotels and venues that are part of the market. That is how the process works. Wedding couples or families hosting receptions go to hotels to agree on a price and reception details. Couples and families who are aware of the rules readily express their wish to adhere to kosher regulations. In other cases (if the couple/family did not make a note of it), if the hotel has already hosted a Jewish event in the past, they notify the religious authority about the agreement. If such is the case, the Chief Rabbinate contacts the ceremony holders to inform them of the necessities. Then, the Chief Rabbinate sends *mashgiachs* to the hotel/venue. The head of the *mashgichim* is a person with connections at hotels. Today, a group of *mashgichim* arrive early at a reception venue's kitchen to supervise the whole preparation process. They inspect everything from how greens such as spinach are washed to which plates are being used in reception. Grills are 'cleaned' according to kosher rules.[51] Kosher status of the cheese selection, the fish types and the drinks served are all checked.[52] They ensure no other food service is mixed up with the reception food. *Mashgichim* do this professionally and are paid for their services. Thus, the control mechanism is

51 A grill is considered fit for kosher after twenty minutes spent on flames, empty.

52 Fish is often preferred at hotel weddings and receptions as it is easier to supervise and serve. When meat is served, *mashgiachs* have to inspect it at least four times.

established by market elements (hotels). A significant curiosity here is why hotels go along with it and support the process. Interviews had been held with very clear answered to this question,

> Hotels must follow suit because Jewish weddings and ceremonies continue throughout the year. Also, Sunday is a day when hotels are mostly empty, and this is an essential revenue item for them. Hotels must abide by the rules, or they will not be booked for the next Jewish wedding (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J, January, 2018).

Therefore, the market bears the responsibility, not the family and community members. On the other hand, a Rabbi stated how difficult it is to educate hotel crews and create a system based on the *kashrut*,

> In other countries, you book a hotel, and a catering company [that knows kosher business] arrives. For this, there are several companies you [the Jewish community] work with. You tell the event owners to choose. Here [in Turkey], it is not like that, the hotel itself provides the food. As a result, because everyone in our congregation rightfully wants to use a different hotel, it is required to go to every single venue and tell them about *kashrut*. There are many layers of difficulty (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

It is an incredibly long and challenging effort to ensure the hotel understands the rules and that the kitchen staff act according to them. On the other hand, the market is the actor defined by the religious authority as partners in this game, and compared to family members/couples, the said market (hotels) is an element with which a more permanent and long-standing relationship can be built and maintained.

§ 6.4 Concluding Remarks

Three agents, namely religious authority, the market, and community members, actively participate in this life cycle event field, like in other arenas, and they all also have a role in creating the ethno-religious cultural and communal identity. In this specific arena, Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, the

religious authority took lots of steps to make this arena more institutionalized and standardized. Sometimes, they had to make more 'modern' moves due to the reactions of the community members and the market. As said before, establishing the *Bar and Bat Mitsva Club,* or what can be called a 'school,' was the most significant step and most made efforts for the religious authority in this arena. Compared to other arenas, this time, one of the aims of the religious authority was not just to regulate the market and community members; it was also about regulating and controlling the individuals working for and to the religious authority. For the first time, they voiced their aim and were open about their team when conducting interviews. In this establishment, the *Yoel Bar Mitsva Club* and the *Annette Bat Mitsva Club,* the definition of ideal Jewishness and the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity were tried to be established by the religious authority and lay leaders. It is also seen as a contribution to the Jewish future in Istanbul, Turkey. Instead of leaving the Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony performed in one day, they preferred to extend the learning of the Jewish identity formation process to a year (Bat Mitzvah) and two years (Bar Mitzvah). In this initiative, the religious authority also draws the picture of how proper Jews could be and, most importantly, propagandizes against assimilation. Therefore, the religious authority/secular authority wants to have a right to speak about what kind of Jewish profile/identity will be drawn (*Bar and Bat Mitsva Club,* seminars, *kashrut*, *Shabbat*, etc.), and they succeed. It should be noted that, as mentioned before, particularly Bat Mitzvah ceremonies did not come from bottom to top, and religious authority insists on it. It comes across as an invention of tradition to the community members. All improvements related to the *Club* are inspired by the examples of those abroad that could not be seen so much in other life cycle festive events. In addition, it is evident that the effects of the arrival of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik and the impact of Americanization on Jewish identity.

Year by year, control mechanisms and rules of the religious authority are getting stricter regarding *kashrut* and *Shabbat*, especially in receptions. As given in some examples above, community members also challenge these regulations and religious authority in some way. However, religious authority collaborates more with the agents of the market in terms of religious rules.

One of the parts of the control mechanism is established through these agents. Both *Denet Gıda Company,* established with the initiative of the religious authority, and five-star hotels collaborate with the religious authority to be strict and control these religious rules.

Lastly, the receptions of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies are getting bigger and bigger over time. Especially starting from the 1990s and particularly after the 2000s, these receptions can be observed as the size rises, the receptions get more crowded, and still be one of the most attractive amusements for the community members. The market, as an agent, plays significant role in this way, and they help to put the child at the center and inspire community members to aspire to the concepts/ shows for the receptions. However, the religious authority still tries to protect the attitude of *Kayadez*, specifically being low profile and not supporting the myth of wealthy Jews. Parallel, they see this glossiness too much, as they said in this quote. As one of the people from the institution side stated: “Bat Mitzvah is not a religious requirement, it is just snobbishness/ foppishness, nouveau-riche practices and an invention” (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority A, January, 2018).

7

Life Cycle Festive Event: Jewish Wedding

This chapter not only focuses on the religious ceremony in a synagogue but also examines the events and ceremonies as a package. While some components of this package are official necessities, others are voluntary events. On the other hand, some events are expected from the couple socially and culturally. These include the proposal and going to the female household to ask for her hand in marriage, the betroth, *Drahoma,*[1] engagement party, religious engagement, the bridal/groom trousseau,[2] preparation of dowry, showing of the dowry/ *Aparar Ashuar*, bachelor party, state wedding, compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar, bridal bath/ *banyo de novya*, *mikveh* ceremony, arranging the bridal bed/ *Ordenar Kama de Novya*, bachelor party, religious wedding ceremony, wedding reception, honeymoon and the ceremony of *Shabbat Hatan*.[3] Some of these events have been forgotten or abandoned over the years, while others have been added to the

1 The money or property that is given to the newly-wed couple by the bride's parents.

2 While the concept of trousseau can be employed to explain the situation, it is essential to how it is practiced in Turkey. The trousseau is prepared for both parties of the couples for their partner's families. The process starts after the asking for the marriage, and the gift bundles are presented during the engagement ceremony. While a typical bridal trousseau package consists of slippers, nightgowns, lingerie, perfume, and some cosmetics, the male packs his shirt and trousers, wallet, tie, cufflinks, watch, towel, underwear, and slippers.

3 It is a ceremony that is held on the *Shabbat* before the religious wedding ceremony by the groom in the synagogue. In Yiddish, it is called *Aufruf*.

package, such as the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar. The order and content of these events have also evolved over the years, so this chapter focuses on the transformation of the wedding event package over time and the role of the three key agents in this field.

Here, it should be noted that some marriages outside the already culturally accepted marriages or exceptions take place inside the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey building. To name a few, generally, second marriages are carried out with a simple ceremony. Economically bankrupt couples and their families' wedding ceremonies also happen here. Couples with low economic capital also very rarely occur here. Also, couples who have performed the *Giur*[4] ceremony use the Chief Rabbinate Office. Because it is practically near impossible to access the information and stories of these couples, their marriages, more often than not, stay silent. Additionally, the concept of *Giur* is not a promoted idea within the community. When discussing marriages, a Rabbi also mentioned weddings at the Chief Rabbinate Office in the past; the only examples he could offer are second marriages (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

§ 7.1 Religious Wedding Ceremony and the Meaning of Jewish Wedding in Turkish Jewish Society

For a Jewish couple to be recognized as married, both the religious ceremony within a synagogue and the official marriage in the eyes of the state have to be completed. There are two required steps for a religious ceremony to be technically complete. Before discussing the two ceremonies named *Erusin/Kiduşin* and *Nisuin,* a brief look at engagements is necessary. Although nowadays the engagement tradition has taken a new shape, as will be discussed below, in the old days, as the Chief Rabbinate website states, it was traditionally performed as follows: After approval from the families, the groom-to-be would send the bride-to-be *Aniyo de Kiduşin*, meaning an

4 Name changing/Judaization ceremony which is done for non-Jewish women. Usually, the name of the non-Jewish women is changed into "Bat Avraham Avinu" in the paper.

engagement ring and silk cloth to be used for a dress. In return, the bride-to-be would send pastries named *Koza d'orno*, which she has cooked. Some also added a silk handkerchief with her initial engraved. In cases where the engagement period was prolonged, both sides would correspond by letters.[5]

After these steps, the prospective groom and bride have to go to the Chief Rabbinate Office to schedule the wedding day. When the couple applies for a religious ceremony day at the synagogue, the religious authority collects time and location information for the wedding reception to ensure compliance with *kashrut* and *Shabbat* rules during the reception. Then, the couples should pay the religious wedding fee. According to the Jewish calendar, there are days and months when it is forbidden to marry in terms of religion.[6] These dates roughly correspond to Rosh Hashana, Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot, the period from 17 *Tamuz* to 9 *Av* (*Tisha beAv*), the days of the Omer count (until *Lag Baomer*—thirty-three days), the days of *Avelut, Taanit* (fasting), and *Shabbat*. The month of *Heshvan* is also not preferred for marriage (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). Then, if the bride-to-be wants to have a *mikveh* ceremony, she can perform it before the religious wedding day. Lastly, official civil marriage also takes place during this period.[7]

In the Jewish religious wedding ceremony,[8] after the bride and groom take their place in the synagogue, according to Istanbul traditions, the *Sivlanot ring,* the groom bought for the bride, is presented to the bride. The Rabbi, who also vocalizes the prayers for the wedding, is appointed as the bearer to give the ring to the bride. The religious authority has provided support for this tradition to be continued. Afterward, the marriage contract, known as a *Ketubah,* is signed. As stated in the Chief Rabbinate's website, "The *ketubah* spells out the husband's obligations to the wife during marriage, conditions of inheritance upon his death, and obligations regarding the

5 http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/history/did-you-know (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

6 In Izmir, cycle of the moon is also taken into consideration.

7 Since 2015, the order of ceremonies could be changed. See, Chapter 7.2.2.

8 https://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/judaism/104-marriage (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

support of children of the marriage."[9] Some of these commitments are clearly visible in the Turkish version.[10]



Figure 7.1 Ketubah document from 2022

The two-part religious wedding ceremony follows this. The first is the engagement ceremony, known as *Erusin/Kiduşin.* Accompanied by wine, the blessing prayer is said, and the ring is presented to the bride. Then, the glass-breaking ritual is performed. The second part is the marriage ceremony called *Nisuin.* Although there are disputes about when it first began, these

9 https://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/judaism/104-marriage (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

10 The translation of the text: "Be my wife in accordance with the rules of the Jewish religion and I will support you faithfully and respect you like all other Jews who support and clothe their wives with the help of God. I will give you ... silver coins, which you deserve according to the religion, the price of virginity. I also undertake to provide for you, your clothes, your needs and the duty of husband to you."

two ceremonies were merged centuries ago and are performed this way today. The part of *Nisuin* is performed with the bride and groom standing under the *huppah* or *tallit. Sheva Berahot,* the seven blessings are read, and the marriage ceremony is concluded. After conclusion, a special prayer is said for the prosperity and peace of the Turkish Republic and its President, and it is called *Anoten.*[11]

After the ceremony, although there is no religious necessity, a celebration reception follows. After the religious ceremony on a Sunday at (usually) the traditionally significant Sephardi Neve Shalom Synagogue of Istanbul, a huge wedding party is held in a hotel or another venue. This wedding reception is the final and seemingly the most prime step of a Jewish wedding today.

THE NUMBER OF JEWISH WEDDINGS FROM 1960 TO 2020

The distribution of the number of Jewish weddings by years from 1960 to 2020 is as follows:

Table 7.1 The distribution of the number of Jewish weddings by years from 1960 to 2020

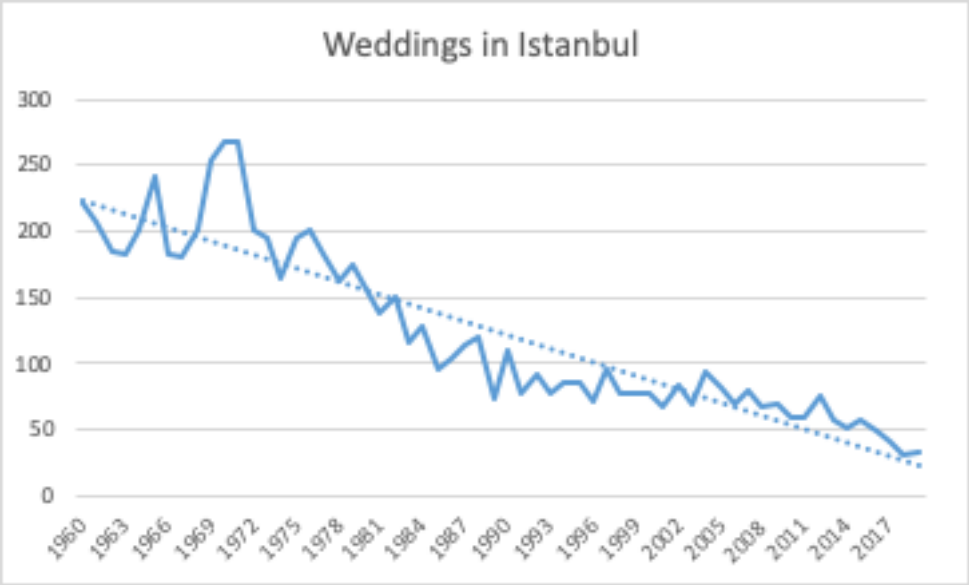
11 Differing traditions, rituals and customs can be observed in Jewish marriage ceremonies in Izmir.

Year	Total in Istanbul
1960	222
1961	207
1962	184
1963	183
1964	200
1965	242
1966	183
1967	180
1968	200
1969	253
1970	268
1971	267
1972	201
1973	194
1974	165
1975	194
1976	201
1977	182
1978	163
1979	175
1980	157
1981	139
1982	150
1983	115
1984	128
1985	96
1986	103
1987	113
1988	119
1989	74
1990	109

Year	Total in Istanbul
1991	77
1992	92
1993	78
1994	86
1995	85
1996	72
1997	95
1998	77
1999	77
2000	78
2001	67
2002	83
2003	69
2004	93
2005	82
2006	69
2007	80
2008	67
2009	70
2010	60
2011	60
2012	75
2013	58
2014	52
2015	57
2016	49
2017	41
2018	30
2019	33
2020	5

When the data is visualized as a line chart, a downward trend is evident in the number of Jewish weddings between 1960 and 2020.

Table 7.2 The line chart of Jewish wedding numbers between 1960 and 2017



The decline in Jewish wedding numbers has been steady and has persisted for decades. Of course, this decline was also influenced by unstable Turkish politics (in specific periods), economic crises in Turkey, and other factors. However, the obvious reasons, which are directly related to the Turkish Jewish community, are the decreasing Jewish population in Turkey, the increase in mixed marriages, and the increase in migration of Turkish Jewish people to other countries. According to an interview with Silvyo Ovadya, Press Spokesperson of the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey, in a national newspaper in 2003, this statement used by the author;

> The number of mixed marriages among Turkish Jews is increasing day by day. A significant change is observed in marriages in Jewish society, which is closely tied to its traditions. 'While in the past the marriage between a Jew and a Muslim was considered a taboo, today it is becoming difficult not to talk about it' (Şubatlı, 2003).

Notably, after the 2000s, the issue of getting married to non-Jewish people become a hot topic and accurate for the Jewish society in Turkey and, of course, the religious (and secular) authority.

§ 7.2 Historical Change of Jewish Weddings

7.2.1 *Jewish Synagogue (Religious) Wedding Ceremony*

This section focuses on the transformation of religious wedding ceremonies over the years and the role of the three agents, followed by an analysis of how the three agencies have transformed these areas into negotiation arena in this field. The changes in the ceremony are analyzed through efforts to institutionalize and regulate practices related to places, music, education, dress, and *mikveh*, with some modifications permitted by the religious authority also being examined.

Since the 1960s, most Jewish religious wedding ceremonies have occurred in two synagogues: Zülfaris Synagogue/Kal Kadosh Galata and Neve Shalom Synagogue. Although rare, Şişli Bet Israel Synagogue, Caddebostan Bet El Synagogue, and Ortaköy Etz Ahayim Synagogue are chosen for weddings. Although it was claimed in the interviews that Ortaköy Etz Ahayim Synagogue was used for second weddings, it is not possible to prove this with quantitative data.

When it first opened in 1951, Neve Shalom appealed to Istanbul's uppermost economic class, and it continued to do so for a long time, as stated in the interviews. The price difference for ceremonies between the two synagogues was one of the frequently emphasized points. Having a wedding in Neve Shalom is a pretty costly matter. After Zülfaris Synagogue closed in 1983, most Jewish community weddings in Istanbul took place in Neve Shalom Synagogue.[12] Therefore, the economic prowess of community members ceased to be so blatantly visible. The financial disparity between the upper and lower classes became more equal regarding religious ceremonies. There

12 The Neve Shalom Synagogue, which was closed for nine months after the 1986 terror attack, hosted a wedding for the first time on June 7, 1987 (Pinhas et al., 2002: 68).

were long stories during the interviews about how glamorous the weddings were, the decorations, and the flowers at the weddings performed at Neve Shalom.[13] Neve Shalom was also preferred over others because it has a capacity of 640 seats and can host events with up to 1,000 people, making it the largest synagogue in Istanbul. Here, it is worth noting that Neve Shalom Synagogue, compared to others, is promoted by the religious authority and is more desired by community members. A more pronounced emphasis, particularly on the Neve Shalom Synagogue and its impact on the community, was also evident in the interviews. "If I had been an only child, I would have my wedding at Neve Shalom Synagogue for the good of my parents; I would not deprive my family of this" (Sindy and Melih, May 3, 2017). In every conversation with religious authority and secular leaders, the social symbolism of having a religious wedding (or another life cycle event) at Neve Shalom Synagogue was emphasized, and the beautification of the experience was also highlighted by the religious authority. Rabbi did not neglect to add that weddings inside synagogues are more beautiful and holy, especially the Neve Shalom (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

Over the years, demands from family members and couples regarding religious ceremonies have paved the way for some changes in this field. As expected, this field contains lots of negations between the agents, and every agent makes their move in this game. The religious authority approved some of the requests submitted by other agents, which pertained to the details of the religious ceremony. First, weddings performed under a *tallit* for many years were allowed under a *huppah* after requests from community members.[14] Interviews explain the reasoning as the difficulty and discomfort of holding the *tallit* over the bride and groom's heads for a long time. The *tallit* ruined hairs when it touched the head; therefore, photographs did not come out as expected. Secondly, as one religious official said during interviews, the

13 Because of the 2003 November terror attacks, a dozen weddings were held at the Ashkenazi and the Caddebostan Bet El Synagogues instead of Neve Shalom Synagogue. In July 2004, the Neve Shalom Synagogue resumed its regular services after an eight-month pause (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, 2017).

14 "Düğün," Neve Şalom, accessed 29 March 2024, https://nevesalom.org/dugun.html#dugunn.

wine given to the bride was spilled onto her dress at a few weddings. He noted that some couples started calling before their weddings afterward, saying they did not want to drink the wine anymore (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). Because of this request, they provided two options for the couple to choose from, allowing them to decide whether to drink wine or not.

Besides these two small changes, it highlights a few trends that have gained popularity over the years. In the past,[15] as the religious authority told in interviews, the bride used to be the first to enter the synagogue; now, she enters the synagogue last. The bride was placed at the center of the ceremony and became the most remarkable element of the ceremony. The other example was also highly debatable within the Jewish community, and the religious authority decided to loosen the rules. In the old days, two kids were dressed up like a bride and groom and called the little bride and groom. With requests coming from community members and couples nowadays, the couple's friends, mostly the bride's friends, are often seen as bridesmaids. The trend of bridesmaids, which is part of global trends, involves them dressing in the same dresses and holding flowers, as well as small hats or headbands on their heads, as they walk onto the stage before the bride and stand throughout the ceremony. It was an arguable topic in the Jewish community because some community members compared and likened the bridesmaids' rituals to the Christian/church tradition. However, this move, initiated by community members, was ultimately accepted by the religious authority with the support of the companies.

Alongside these changes, the religious authority received more feedback from community members regarding ceremonies. The attitude of the religious/secular authority has changed in recent years, and the religious authority has adopted a new practice. After the religious ceremony was completed, they began calling the newlywed couples to ask about the troubles they had and what they were happy with (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, 2017). It is also a way to gather more feedback about the ceremony

15 The religious authority could not say the year for this change.

and to have more control over the market (photographer, cameraman, and so on), which works well for couples' ceremonies.

7.2.1.1 Music and Choir in Synagogue

The music played during the religious ceremony in synagogues was also a hot topic in the last quarter of the 1980s.[16] Before the songs were recorded with the help of technology in 1986-1987, live music took place in the ceremonies. The Jewish wedding choir consisted of six or eight people who sang songs and played musical instruments. They did not earn their living in this position; they also worked in different business sectors. During the 1980s, this choir, consisting of Jewish women and men, sang songs alive in religious wedding ceremonies.[17] The establishment story of the choir was told by Izzet Bana,[18] one of the choir members. "We invited our friends who had excellent voice. We brought our friends there" (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017).

16 According to Aron Saltiel (Aron Saltiel – RN, November 10, 2017), there were several Ladino songs (from Turkish Sephardi culture) related to the wedding. He could follow them until the 1940s. Two-third of the sources based on written sources and the rest based on oral sources (as he said, he refers to Isaac Levi, Sephardi Radio, the Hazzan's repertoire, a woman from *Hasköy*, a man from Thessaloniki, and Samuel Molho). He collected all the songs he could find in an album of consisting three CDs, called *BODA*.
https://istanbulsephardiccenter.com/urun/boda-by-ensemble-saltiel/?v=1a13105b7e4e (Accessed, January 30, 2025).
These songs are about the engagement, putting out the dowry, *ketubah, mikveh*, altercations between mothers-in-law, and night of henna. When I was conducting interviews particularly about marriages in the 1960s, no one mentioned the songs played in Ladino during the wedding ceremony or before and after occasions of the wedding. According to Aron Saltiel, in fact, the repertoire of Şapoşnik, from Ashkenazi Synagogue, was used for many years, and the Jewish community did not know about these old Sephardi Ladino songs.

17 The exact formation date of the Jewish wedding choir was not reachable but, according to Izzet Bana, as of 1978, the choir actively took part in Neve Shalom Synagogue. According to Karen Şarhon, since the 1980s, the choir had played in Neve Shalom Synagogue.

18 Izzet Bana had different positions in the Istanbul Jewish community. He is the founder of the *Estreyikas d'Estambol* (The stars of Istanbul) which is a children choir. He is also theatre director, professional actress, and directed several musicals and theatre in Jewish cultural associations. He worked for the survival of the Judeo- Espanyol language and he is a group member of the *Los Paşaros Sefaradis.*

According to Bana and Karen Şarhon, the choir played and sang pieces by Şapoşnik,[19] a composer and the *hazzan/*cantor of the Ashkenazi Synagogue. There were hundreds of synagogue songs (also songbooks) that Şapoşnik composed. According to Bana, "No Sephardi composer has ever emerged from this community. And then there is Goldenberg, Ashkenazi, who was the most recent. These songs are all from the Ashkenazi synagogue" (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017). However, he then added to the choir's story and discussed some things that are also harbingers of change.

> We brought our friends, but this time, some impertinent people said, 'Are you singing at weddings?' Some members of the choir who did not want to bear these words left the choir. I loved this job and did not care about those who talked like that (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017).

The obstacle was not only a negative view of the choir but also a challenge to keep a lively choir afloat. A Rabbi said: "There used to be a choir in the Neve Shalom Synagogue; it was a live choir. It was not easy to have a live choir professionally at every wedding" (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). In addition to the challenges (keeping the live choir afloat and the negative view), there was one more factor that caused the change. The price to be paid for choristers was not fixed, and the amount was placed in an envelope. Bana said: "In the past, the method was to give an envelope full of money to the choir, and whoever paid more, more beautiful and more songs were sung to them" (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017). This tipping payment method affected the quality of the music and the number of pieces to be sung. "The repertoire was not renewed very often, but when there was a rich wedding, two more pieces were added" (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017). For all these reasons, the religious and secular authorities decided to standardize it. This attempt was the first for the religious authority, as revealed through the conducted interviews, to intervene in the religious ceremony and standardize it with the help of several individual initiatives. However, this was different from the intervention of the *Bat/Bar Mitsva Club,* as

19 Shaposhnik.

the Rabbis and *Hazzans* intervened there, whereas here, it was the choir members who were counted as part of the market, as well as community members who purchased the service. According to Şarhon's account,

> Weddings were not equal. If they did not pay enough money, they were given a simple and basic program. ....[20] They decided to go for the record..... I always had it on my mind. It should be equality and honesty. You would perform well because he gave you a tip, and what would have happened to the other poor man if he were not in a position to tip you? This was something that seemed very wrong to me (Karen Şarhon - RN, November 2, 2017).

In 1986-1987, the management team and religious (and secular) authority decided to take this responsibility away from the live choir and decided to play the wedding songs from the recording. Especially during the process of making this decision, as explained in the interviews, the unequal situation that emerged in the synagogue, along with the excessive splendor and showoffs, led to this decision being taken. In this way, the aim was to provide equal service to all community members at a fixed price.

At that time, with the help of Karen Şarhon's network, Melih Kibar was reached. He was also one of the famous composers of Turkey. "Wedding songs were recorded with three or four people from the choir and professional vocalists from Kibar's team. Again, for this repertoire, the repertoire of Şapoşnik (the Ashkenazi Synagogue's *Hazzan* and composer), which was previously used by the wedding choir, was used for the recording" (Karen Şarhon - RN, November 2, 2017 and Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017). According to Bana, the first time a tape recording of wedding ceremony music was produced was in 1986-1987, and it was not Sephardi music either (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017). According to Şarhon's memory, the first or second recorded songs were used in November 1988. It was also appreciated by community members (Karen Şarhon - RN, November 2, 2017). One of the reasons for this was that the recordings were of high quality. After this change, Bana was appointed as the responsible person for the music affairs

20 He mentions that he was abroad for a while here and then returned to choir work.

at Neve Shalom. According to Bana, over the years, the records have become frazzled and have been renewed several times. In his words,

> And then there was a wedding at Neve Shalom Synagogue. The wedding host made a sudden change to the entire facility at Neve Shalom Synagogue, and it was a lovely contribution to Neve Shalom. It sounded much better, and the acoustics got better. The old one was also good, but this new one was much better. It was around 1995 or 1996. Several new devices were purchased. One of these new instruments was a small disc that we call an MD. I could play whatever I wanted, and we could listen. They also bought a CD player. With these developments, I also tried new songs to play. First, I tried small things; they said, oh, how nice it was. Slowly, I moved forward with that courage. But of course, some said that you turned this place into a disco. On the other hand, more people said it was good. Open-minded and modern people from the management [religious and secular authority] were dominant in the decision-making process, and we have come so far (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017).

With these developments, the songs played by Bana from the recording continued for a while at religious wedding ceremonies at Neve Shalom Synagogue. It should be added that wedding songs that are now played at weddings are not the same as the recorded ones at that time. However, as the Rabbi said, "The music that is currently playing in Neve Shalom, '*Baruchu Baruch Shemo*,' is the music from that choir" (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

As the 2000s arrived, additional values began to be recognized, and music-related products started to gain prominence in wedding ceremonies. In 2004, the Sephardi Children's Choir, *Estreyikas d'Estambol* (The Stars of Istanbul)**,** was founded by Izzet Bana. The *Estreyikas d'Estambol* consists of girls and boys ages between eight and fourteen.[21] Bana told the establishment story of the Sephardi Children's Choir as follows:

21 https://sephardiccenter.wordpress.com/music-2/izzet-bana-estreyikas-destambol/ (Accessed, January 28, 2025). As claimed, "It is the only children's choir in the world that sings

> I struggled with it on my own, and the idea was mine. I said that this is done in other countries, so why do not we have it in our country? I invited the administrators [religious and secular authorities] to my house. I showed them, and I said I could do this. [They asked] What do you need to do? I need a studio, I need money for the gig, and I need this amount of money for the arrangement. They provided me with all of that. With today's figure, I got about 5,000 Turkish Liras.[22] We did the preparation. I prepared them all within one year. I worked with the kids for a whole summer, and everything was ready for winter (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017).

In the 2010s, the Sephardi Children's Choir, the *Estreyikas d'Estambol*, began performing at weddings upon request and in exchange for payment. This service, which was presented as a new 'product,' was a reinvention of tradition. It also reminded the older community members of the adult wedding choir that used to be part of the Neve Shalom. The fee requested for this service was also defined as expensive during the interviews. The religious and secular authority also commented on the expensiveness of this service. "It adds a different added value to people's weddings, and everything which is extra beautiful you do has its price" (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). However, by 2017-2018, this children's choir had begun to lose its appeal and attractiveness.

In addition to the children's choir, the services offered to couples for their religious wedding ceremony within the Neve Shalom Synagogue have also expanded. The existence of these services was also due to the requests of community members. The most well-known of these services was the wedding songs sung live by Cenk Rofe, whose voice was appreciated and who received a conservatory education. Then, Izzet Barokas, a young *Hazzan* in

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in Judeo-Spanish and who are characterized as a 'Sephardic Children's Choir'." And "The aim of the choir's foundation is to help the new generation of Sephardic children know and love the slowly disappearing Judeo-Spanish culture. The choir has performed in many cultural activities in cultural clubs".

22 5,000 Turkish Lira equals to approximately 1,250 Euro in 2017 when the interview was conducted.

the community, is added to that list. In addition, upon the request of the community members, some small shows were held in which three instruments were inserted into the synagogue, and wedding songs were played. The first one, produced by Izzet Bana,[23] took place in Neve Shalom in the 2010s and was not the first or only example of this decade. All these additional services were included in the wedding fee and are available at higher costs (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, 2017).

One of these additional values involved the groom singing live, which has been one of the most controversial topics. Needless to say, thanks to the new trends seen in YouTube videos, live music is again popular in the synagogue. This service can be selected by prospective couples who are willing to pay a premium over the usual amount. According to the conducted interviews, a video was shared on social media, and everyone liked it on their social media account. In this video, a groom stands on *Tevah,* singing the *Boi Kala* song alive when the bride walks down the aisle in the synagogue. Then, the couples want to adapt this gospel to the ceremony. As it is remembered, the two grooms, who had beautiful voices, wanted to sing that song live when the bride would walk down the aisle, just like in the video. One of these requests was to have it inside the synagogue, and the other was for a beach wedding. This request, coming from community members, was accepted by the religious authority. However, several couples received a "no" to their requests to change the entrance music before this permission was granted.

Another example was being permitted to sing in English at a wedding two weeks after not being granted permission to play an English song in a synagogue (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority K, 2017). As K said:

> We were asked to provide a live orchestra; we initially said no, and that was it. It has become more like a church, and everyone marries as they wish. However, it will not be like a church if the Chief Rabbinate Office does not say yes to these requests. The secular authority [named here] and the Bet-Din are the decision-makers here. These

23 When the interview was held in 2017, Izzet Bana was continuing this duty. He is still responsible for all kinds of music products and productions. He is the only one in the Neve Shalom and works with two men as assistants who also have different businesses in various sectors.

> are the authorities that grant or deny the permit. Permission must be obtained for everything you want to add to your wedding. It [a Jewish wedding] is ultimately a religious event (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority K, 2017).

Of course, the most prominent comment in religious authority's interviews was that the wedding in the synagogue should have propriety and boundaries. Despite the religious and secular authorities being the final decision-makers, the constant pressure from community members, or repeatedly expressing the same request, eventually led to some doors being opened. There was also the impact of the religious authority's desire to continue to keep religious weddings attractive. At the same time, it sometimes depends on the social capital of a person who wants it (and his position in the community). The religious authority kept pace with the era's trends from time to time.

7.2.1.2 The Compulsory Religious Pre-Marriage Seminar – 2003

Since 2003, under the umbrella of the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom,* a standard seminar has been designed for the bride and groom who are about to get married, which they must take before their wedding. Without having attended a religious seminar on married life, a couple does not receive consent for their (religious) marriage. It was a top-down decision, and it went parallel with the decision of establishment *Bar and Bat Mitsva Club* by the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom.* As discussed above (see Chapter 6.2.1), this decade was a period when the community's management team most considered what Jewish identity meant and how it would be presented to the public, with the contributions of new, visionary, and young leaders. The compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar was one of the most concrete examples of this work.

This several-hour-long, compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar covers topics such as Jewish identity, Jewish rituals, Jewish values, and the values of the Jewish home. This seminar, which is typically held collectively by bringing together couples who are getting married during that period, can also be given individually, although this is rare. Religious officials, specifically Rabbis, within the Bet-Din, play a significant role in shaping this education,

and approximately four Rabbis are also involved as trainers for this seminar. At the end of the seminar, participants are given a box containing various books and Jewish items as a gift, including a Jewish calendar, prayer books, Jewish holiday books, and a *mezuzah*.



Figure 7.2 Compulsory pre-marriage seminar kit from 2015.

The compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar is one of the most concrete examples of the "invisible colleges" frequently mentioned above (Kaya, 2011: 108-109). In particular, it defines what the Jewish household and couple are trying to create, and the Chief Rabbinate contributes in this way as a source of Jewish identity formation for the households in which future generations will grow up. This seminar is a critical standardization and institute work, especially undertaken by the religious institute. The aim is to remind people of their ethno-religious communal identity, as defined by the values of the Chief Rabbinate/Orthodox Sephardi Jewish identity. The meaning of *ketubah*, different religious stories and texts from the Bible, the rules of *Shabbat*, the regulations and significance of *kashrut,* the details of the practices in a religious wedding ceremony, the fast before the religious marriage, the philosophical meaning of being a Jew, the meaning of assimilation, the meaning of the Jewish objects such as *mezuzah*, *tzedakah*, *tefillin, tallit,* etc. are told in this seminar. They, all Rabbis, also promote several information

channels of the Jewish community, such as the newspaper of *Şalom*,[24] the website of *Sevivon,* and others. They prioritize specific subjects and topics, such as the meaning of a *huppah* wedding, the responsibilities of couples (male and female, separately) in a Jewish household, the blessedness of *mikveh,* and *Shabbat Hatan* (the groom's *Shabbat*). According to a Rabbi,

> There is a marriage seminar before the religious wedding. We explain the holiness of the Jewish wedding in this seminar. The tradition of fasting before the marriage is told. The importance of *huppah* and being together with your future wife and husband under the *huppah* are told. In addition, we explain the importance of why a bride should perform the *mikveh* ritual. When you give the seminar, you can feel that some of them understand the importance of these rituals (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

As the Rabbi stated in the interview, they were not police; they could only suggest that community members follow these practices in this compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar. Therefore, they insistently promote the before and after practices of a religious marriage. It was possible to gather various feedback from the interviews with couples about this seminar, which suggests that the seminar employs neutral language and a friendly approach.[25] In addition, it proceeds not on obligations but on how a better life is possible. While some couples (Sindy and Melih, May 3, 2017) view this seminar as overly religious and strictly tied to Jewish traditions, others (Lisya and Uri, May 25, 2017) criticize it for not being religious enough and not adequately highlighting Jewish identity. Some community members could develop strategies to counter this rule set imposed by the religious authority within the game. The interviews revealed that creative and strategically improvised solutions (Bourdieu, 1977: 171) were also proposed to find suitable

24 The Chief Rabbinate gave free one year subscription of the newspaper *Şalom* as a gift to newlywed couples for several years.

25 In the period of my fieldwork, I came across with a compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar when a derby football game was playing. Almost all groom-to-be got permission to watch this match and they left the seminar before it concluded.

ways to avoid attending the seminar, as it did not align with their worldview or was deemed unnecessary.

As mentioned above, *Shabbat Hatan* and the *mikveh* have a priority in this seminar, and, as the Rabbi stated, the number of *mikveh* rituals and the practice of *Shabbat Hatan* increased after they began offering this compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar. The most common idea of religious authority is that a lack of information for community members leads to low numbers of practices. They believe that the number of *mikveh* practices will increase more if they explain the beauty and meaning of the practices. Therefore, the first aim is to introduce community members to these rituals and then make them understand the meaning and importance of these rituals. A female interviewee who got married in the 1990s said, "I got married in the second half of the 1990s, and nobody told us to perform the *mikveh* ritual. We did not know it at that time" (Tuna and Hayim, June 30, 2017). The aim is first to provide the required information and then to encourage them to practice these rituals.

According to a Rabbi, the ritual of *Shabbat Hatan* originates from the Balkan Turkish Sephardi Jews, and they desire to continue it. This ceremony is held on the *Shabbat* before the religious wedding ceremony by the groom in the synagogue. In reference to traditional Jewish practices, for the first seven days after the wedding, a Jewish newlywed couple would typically be invited to various guests, including family members and friends, and the *Sheva Berachot* (seven blessings) would be read (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). However, in modern times, this tradition is fading into oblivion, largely due to the groom and bride.[26] As Rabbi underlined, they no longer feel like inviting these people to their house because they have already hosted them at the wedding reception. The practice of *Shabbat Hatan* is the last of these seven days, and it is performed in a synagogue on Saturday. Again, according to a Rabbi, the biggest obstacle to not having this ritual is that newlywed couples prefer to go on a honeymoon after the wedding ceremony, and they are unable to do so in that manner (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

26 I witnessed a few couples who performed this tradition in the period of my fieldwork.

The other underlined ritual is *mikveh,* as mentioned above. The *mikveh* is a pool filled with rainwater or natural water that is used (primarily by women in Turkey) before the religious wedding ceremony and after every menstrual cycle for a purification ritual. Men in Turkey very rarely practice it. This ritual is not mandatory according to the religious authority, though it is recommended. According to a Rabbi,

> To establish a Jewish community, it requires three essential elements: a *mikveh*, a school, and a cemetery. There should be a mikveh. If we do not have a modern *mikveh* like today, the Bet-Din needs to make an agreement with a *hammam*/Turkish bath. For example, fifty years ago, an agreement was reached with the *Cagaloglu Hamamı*, allowing Jewish women to perform their mikveh ritual properly there before getting married (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

The information about the date of the establishment of *mikvehs* in the Istanbul Jewish community is blurred. However, the interviews reveal that during the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish women practiced the *mikveh* ritual before their wedding at the *Cagaloglu Hamamı.* According to the Chief Rabbinate's website,

> Friday of the week before the wedding is "*Banyo de Novya*/ Bridal Bath" day. On that day, close relatives, the bride's best friend, mother-in-law, and sisters-in-law, are invited to the bathhouse/ *hammam* by the bride's mother. While eating and drinking in the bathhouse, people dance on the central massage platform [like a stage] while singing songs; at one point, as if unintentionally, the bride's loincloth slips off and falls to the ground. This aims to show the mother-in-law and sisters-in-law that their daughter-in-law has no physical defects.[27]

This explanation provides a detailed account of how to perform the *hammam* ritual in the past. However, although the bride's loincloth story is

27 http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/history/did-you-know (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

written clearly, no interviewees told any memoir similar to this one. In addition, in recent *mikveh* ceremonies, young brides-to-be have insisted that their mothers-in-law not be present during the ceremony where they get naked and enter the pool. Because they emphasize that their bodies are not property that needs to be checked before "buying." As a result, in recent years, the above quote has no longer been included on the renewed Turkey Jews website.

In the 1980s, a *mikveh* was built within the Sisli Beth Israel Synagogue.[28] In the 2000s, two more *mikvehs* were built into the Caddebostan Bet El Synagogue and the Neve Shalom Synagogue.[29] Nowadays, there are two active *mikvehs* in two different synagogues: the Caddebostan Bet El Synagogue and the Sisli Bet Israel Synagogue.[30] The *mikveh* practice is free of charge, but donations may be made to the institute/synagogue if desired. Under the Chief Rabbinate's umbrella, several women employees[31] in the Istanbul Jewish community lead this religious service and help prospective brides. As seen above, religious authority does not just produce the discourse around the *mikveh* ritual, but also the Chief Rabbinate Office (religious and secular authorities) works on establishing *mikvehs* to promote them for Jewish community members and on making them available to all Jewish women in Istanbul. A religious ritual was thereby brought inside community premises, and an insider company provided the food and refreshments served afterward.[32]

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28 However, on the website of Neve Shalom Foundation, it is written about Sisli Beth Israel Synagogue that "A '*mikveh*', ritual immersion pool was added to the Synagogue in 1961. A '*mikveh*', ritual immersion pool was added to the Synagogue in 1961. After serving the congregation for a while, the *mikveh* was closed down. It was reopened in 2015 with a modern new design and still continues to serve the community." https://nevesalom.org/synagogues.html#sisli-synagogue (Accessed, January 28, 2025).

29 At the Naim Güleryüz Research Library, the *mikveh* is on display now and it was covered by a glass dome. It has not been in use since 2021.

30 There is one more *mikveh* in the Büyükada Hesed Le Avraam Synagogue. The synagogue is located in one of the Istanbul Prince's Islands. It has been used actively in summer times.

31 These Jewish women need to keep kosher and *Shabbat*.

32 It should be noted that not all ceremonies include large spreads of refreshments and food.

7.2.1.3 Let All Companies Get In – During the 2000s and 2010s

When the prospective bride and groom apply for a religious ceremony day at the synagogue, they are also given several company options to work for their wedding day, such as videographer, photographer, florist, etc.[33] Until 2003, Neve Shalom Synagogue employed two people to serve as videographers and photographers for community members at weddings. The first was photographer Berman,[34] and the other was *Roni Production*, which gives video services. These Jewish photography and video companies operated as monopolies within the Neve Shalom Synagogue, and no one else, aside from them, was allowed in. However, in 2003, according to interviewees, Yigal Sevindiren was called by Neve Shalom to do the video work as an alternative to *Roni Production,* whose employees had been complained about at the time. Around the same time, as Mr. Berman grew older, Albert Modiano was invited to serve as a photographer as an alternative. Both of these names are Jewish and well-known by the Jewish community. After receiving this invitation, the two names began working with community members on weddings at Neve Shalom.[35] It took nearly two years before Sevindiren could get in for the video and do his first job. As he states, the first gig for Neve Shalom was in September/October 2005 (Yigal Sevindiren – RN, June 22, 2017). According to Sevindiren, he was chosen because he belonged to the same generation as married people. Thus, Neve Shalom was able to offer two alternatives (companies) to community members in the arena of photography and video. In interviews with the religious and secular authorities, it was stated that there were no issues with the etiquette and rules of the Neve Shalom Synagogue regarding the two companies selected and added to the roster. In addition, in 2011, Belin Rodikli Seloni was added to the staff of photographers at the request of Neve Shalom Synagogue.[36] When I asked her why she

33 The deal is made between the chosen company and the community members. Religious and secular authority is just responsible to give that suggestion/option list to the prospective groom and bride.

34 During some interviews, he is called Mr. Photo Berman - *Bay Foto Berman.*

35 Competition among companies within the festive event market will be discussed in Chapter 9.2.

36 Photographer Berman was not able to work anymore.

thought he was chosen for the job, Seloni Rodikli summarized her story. She explained that since 2009, she has been going to the bride's house to take photos of the wedding preparation phase. And this is how she has developed her portfolio. Afterward, the images taken by Seloni Rodikli were well-received in the Jewish community, and her name gradually began to be recognized by everyone. Also, like Sevindiren, Seloni Rodikli mentioned that she is closer to the new younger generation compared to photographer Modiano. She stated, "My generation starts to get married in that period. I can handle with the brides, and at that time, almost all brides are my friends" (Belin Rodikli Seloni – RN, June 14, 2017). In line with the story of Modiano and Sevindiren, Seloni Rodikli also received a phone call from the Neve Shalom Synagogue to work as a photographer at synagogue weddings. After the conditions were discussed and an agreement was reached, in 2011, she began working inside the synagogue as a competitor to Modiano. Until the 2015 amendment, the religious (and secular) authority worked with these companies without any problems, following the synagogue's rules and etiquette. At the same time, since these people were part of the Jewish community, there were also no security concerns. During that period, it was possible to speak of a strong religious and secular authority that could control the players/companies in the field.

However, in 2014, criticism began to rise that this monopoly should be broken, both coming from community members and different 'Jewish' companies in the market. These criticisms are becoming significant problems that need to be addressed immediately by both religious and secular authorities. This situation was the most concrete negotiation movement between three agents in the field. This time, it was not just a matter of letting a few 'Jewish' companies in but of opening the doors to all companies. It was stated that the companies already working inside could not meet the demands of the community members. As reported in interviews, some community members claimed that Neve Shalom receives a commission from companies operating within the synagogue, which was not true. Community members, as agents in the field, leveraged their word-of-mouth power, and this strategy often proved effective. At the same time, in their phone conversations with the companies working inside, prospective grooms and brides began to express

their dissatisfaction with this collaboration, saying things like, "Unfortunately, we have to work with you." As Bourdieu underlines, the position and function of the actor are also determined by the actions of other significant players in the game (see Chapter 3). It was one of the most concrete examples of how the religious authority had to remodel the system due to pressure coming from both the market/companies as well as community members. The reason why they (religious authority) keep the borders as of that day is also the issue of security and to keep the manners in the synagogue (No name interview). The market and the religious authority had agreed on the rules of the synagogue and the order of the religious wedding ceremonies before the decision to let all companies in. So, the fear of breaking the rules and losing control over the market, especially for non-Jewish companies, was a fact for the religious and secular authorities. The religious authority found a solution and, as a strategy in the field, created a suggestion list; however, this process was not very smooth, which will be discussed further in Chapter 9. In 2015, some relatively younger 'Jewish' companies were added to the list because, as in previous reasoning, friends of the owners of these companies had begun to marry. By the way, this list does not just consist of 'Jewish' companies.

This suggestion list was presented to the prospective bride and groom to choose from. However, none of these measures prevented some problems from occurring. According to a commissioner from the religious (and secular) authority, there is less control over newly permitted companies and their employees. Before allowing the (new) companies to enter the synagogue, a list of rules was provided to these companies and was mutually signed. However, as stated, despite all these precautions, problems still arose. For example, photos are taken where pictures or videos should not be taken in the synagogue. To regain control, they were informed that those who did not comply with the synagogue's rules would be removed from the list. Finally, an interviewee who requested anonymity described the situation as follows:

> External [s/he means 'non-Jewish' companies here] companies have this thing. They (religious and secular authorities) could not control it. Where the one could not stand or stand. [There are] short filmmakers and photo artists, etc. They need to take photos from different

> angles. They take the photo until they [the authority] say it cannot be taken from there. They are not involved in any regulation. Another company was unable to shoot any films and photos from that point on. (No name interview, 2017).

In summary, due to the tremendous pressure from the market and the support of community members, religious and secular authorities allowed all companies to enter the synagogue in 2015. Additionally, the second permission was granted in another service category. Before the 2010s, the wedding candy/ *bonbonyer* distributed after the ceremony could be made by certain companies within the Jewish community (the Barinyurt Nursing Home and Elderly Care Center – Or Yom, Ulus Jewish School, etc.); approximately since the 2010s, they can also be ordered from the institution they want which are not Jewish, such as the *Tema* Foundation, the *WWF*, etc.[37]

7.2.1.4 The Permission for Beach Wedding – 2014

The request to have weddings outside the synagogue first came from the community members. This permission was one of the most critical and recent negotiation moments, and the process of giving this permission was not very smooth. Although the discussion among religious authorities was not shared with the society, the gossip mechanisms within the society were already aware that the appropriateness of this issue had been extensively discussed among religious authorities themselves. The reasons for the request and the concession given by the religious authority during the decision-making process reflected the authority's changing attitude. In his interview, someone representing the religious authority stated:

> We did not want to disappoint people. The request came. The trend started with summer weddings. Congregation elders became more moderate. We used to be more strict, but now it is viewed as 'let's

37 Sending floral arrangement and wreath (as a gift) are no longer allowed in the synagogue because of security reasons.

> not disappoint the youth (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J, 2017).

However, it was not such an easy transition. The religious authorities initially opposed these innovations but later conceded. As Dalven underlines in her study,[38] the importance of keeping up with the times and the threat of being old-fashioned by stressing that sentences; "the betrothal and marriage customs have been modernized to fit the times" (Dalven, 1990: 145). This permit and the doors it has opened were also the religious authority's adaptation to new trends and global consumer culture. They recognize that adapting to new trends is a crucial factor in keeping these events alive in the community. They also realized the need to adjust to the latest trends to keep these events within the community. Although a Rabbi did not neglect to add that weddings inside synagogues are more beautiful and holy (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017), the religious authority decided to accommodate the times. By June 2014, religious ceremonies at other locations outside the synagogue were permitted by religious authority.

As claimed in some of the interviews, gossip mechanisms within the community helped spread the fact that a couple could be religiously wed without having the ceremony inside a synagogue. However, a marriage conducted at a beach by a random Orthodox Rabbi should be recognized by the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey. Although there have been several rumors circulating within the Jewish community that this has been attempted, it was impossible to prove during the dissertation process. A Rabbi described the decision-making process and claimed,

> One family wanted it and insisted a lot. There was no petition or anything. Sometimes, these decisions are tough, and at other times, we

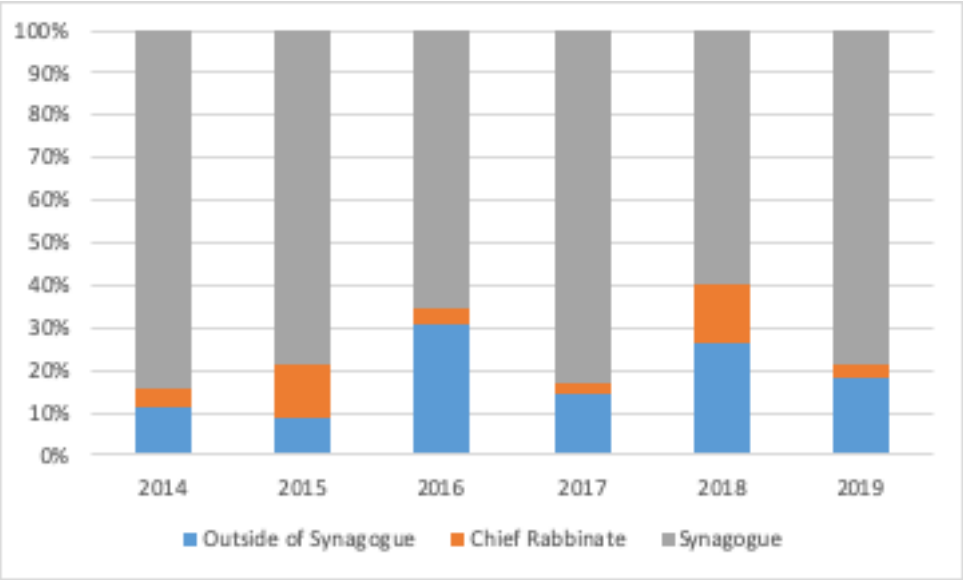
38 Dalven's book (1990) titled *The Jews of Ioannina* which is a valuable and flourishing analysis comparing the situation of Jews in the nineteenth century with the times of World War II. Dalven concentrates on the changes in family life, education, betrothal, marriage customs, circumcision, content of dowry (Dalven, 1990: 137), etc., historically. She elaborately describes religious traditions practiced in Ioannina in the old days, because, as she states there were sixty-five people in the Jewish community back in the day the research was conducted. She displays the changes in traditions from generation to generation very well.

> struggle to open the door. And when that happens, the public does not understand. Because once that door opens, it could go in many directions. In that context, many of us wanted to keep the door closed. Then they said, 'If you do not perform this wedding, we will bring a Hazzan from abroad.' When these types of things start, it completely breaks harmony and unity. If imports begin, then harmony is wholly gone. We had to say, ok, do it if you really want to (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

First of all, remembering that this is a negotiation arena, the language and words the Rabbi chose to use regarding the possibility of a wedding being held by bringing in an external Rabbi are a disruption of harmony and unity. However, if a wedding were to be held by bringing in an external Orthodox or reformist Rabbi, it would also cause the religious authority to lose the dominance it has established in this game. Moreover, after assessing the process as such, he emphasized that the religious authority's preference was to have the wedding ceremony inside the synagogue. He underlined that the synagogue is a holier place, "People who have become one with their spiritual values, who know the meaning of holiness, do not choose outside weddings" (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). Besides, fear and anxiety over the possibility of more locations outside the synagogue still linger. "We said, if synagogue numbers go down, then we will consider closing doors permanently" (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, 2017). It was also noted that if such a decision is taken, it could change over time. Then, when numbers since the decision are considered, as seen in the table below, these beach weddings make up for only a small percentage of all.[39] Hence, the fear is diminished, and the decision stays.

39 The table above shows fifteen weddings outside synagogues in 2016. The reason of that is not the number of beach weddings, but the temporary decision given by religious authority having a religious wedding outside the synagogue after the terror attack in 2016. Seven out of fifteen weddings were beach weddings.

Table 7.3 The table of the Jewish wedding venues' percentage distribution between 2014 and 2019



With the changing attitude, steps were taken to provide order and control at locations outside the synagogue similar to inside, and these events became standardized. The religious authority has sat tight on its principles in several areas. Some rules were implemented to ensure outdoor weddings are no different from synagogue weddings. A fee was determined, like the fee at the synagogue. A required religious official or a *Hazzan* was appointed by the religious authority and sent to the location. An essential factor in the control mechanism was providing a kosher wedding, and the religious authority provided the required controls. As a result, the religious authority tried to maintain some control over the events. However, some interviews have shown that some beach weddings served non-kosher foods after midnight. After each challenging move by community members or companies, the religious authority positioned its new move in the game accordingly. As Bourdieu underlines, the field is based on relational interactions within a specific spatial area (Swartz, 2014: 398), and it is both changeable and evolving. That's why, due to their position, the religious authority took the necessary precautions as much as possible so that the discourse on how to organize an already established Sephardi Jewish wedding was not distorted.

Market players have also commented on this change, which has impacted their businesses. A representative from Company A's comment regarding the matter was,

> It is the one place they [religious and secular authorities] can catch you and corner you. And they brought very strict regulations. Beach weddings opened new doors. They had to modernize and adapt; otherwise, they would lose their competitive edge. People had enough inside [the synagogue]. If you do not adapt, you cannot survive. That's why they loosened the rules (Interview with Company A, June, 2017).

A representative from Company H from the market said:

> The *komünite* [religious and secular authority] improved themselves and changed their mind. They also improved on sanctions and control. They even included assimilated people and bent their rules a little because the more people they could get, the happier they [the religious authority] would be. It was not always like this before (Interview with Company H, June 2017).

Briefly, in 2014, thanks to the challenges raised by individuals and discussions within the community, the religious authority permitted Jewish couples to hold a religious ceremony in any location they wished, such as an open-air venue, a beach, or a restaurant. The religious authority has not persisted in the synagogue as a venue for religious marriages. This change of attitude by the religious authority was significant enough to be noticed by everyone. It also sent a message to the community, making it a more welcoming place. Nowadays, beach weddings with *huppah* are considered "normal." However, as stated above, the religious authority wished that weddings should be held in the holy synagogue.

The first open-air religious wedding ceremony took place at *Kilyos Tırmata* Beach. *Sait Halim Paşa* and *Çubuklu* followed this. In 2015, there were five outdoor weddings (Antalya Kemer, *Kalamış*, *Büyükada*, etc.). In 2016, the number rose to seven (*Göce*k, Four Seasons, *Bodrum*, *Izmir*, *Anadolu Hisarı*, etc.). While Istanbul and its surroundings were chosen after the permit was

obtained, popular summer resorts and beaches, such as *Çeşme* and *Bodrum,* were preferred. Traditionally, the groom's family's city determines the wedding locations, but with the permit, a groom can get married in Izmir or Bodrum.

7.2.1.5 Locations Outside the Synagogue and the Issue of Security – 2016

2016 is another significant turning point in the location changes of religious ceremonies. The 2014 (beach wedding) permit primarily affected summer weddings, and outdoor weddings were allowed. But in 2016, after the terrorist attack[40] on a group of Israeli tourists in *Taksim*,[41] Istanbul, it also had an impact on community events. Some couples had second thoughts about having weddings at Neve Shalom Synagogue. Once again, although there are no issues regarding security at the synagogue, a permit was granted for approximately two and a half months (from March 19th, 2016, to May 29th, 2016) to couples who did not want to get married in the synagogue. The couples could have the religious ceremony in indoor ballrooms of specific hotels, so they either canceled or moved almost every single ceremony to locations other than synagogues. The Neve Shalom Synagogue was operational and open during this time, but no wedding ceremony happened. The *huppah* was built explicitly for weddings held in hotel ballrooms. Religious authorities emphasized that choosing to hold ceremonies outside synagogues is a matter of personal preference and depends on the community. Using an anecdote, a Rabbi explained this:

> We did not direct them to hotels. Security-related issues were nonexistent. It was a matter of personal preference, and everybody had their own anxieties. We preferred not to put pressure on anyone. The synagogues could have been opened. Even though two out of three weddings that day were held outside, one of them insisted on coming anyhow, so they called me and said, 'I am in a big dispute with my family. I want to get married at the synagogue, but the other two

40 https://embassies.gov.il/UnGeneva/NewsAndEvents/Pages/Israeli-tourists-hurt-in-Istanbul-terror-attack-19-March-2016.aspx (Accessed, January 30, 2025).

41 *Taksim* neighborhood is very near to the Neve Shalom Synagogue.

> weddings took place somewhere else, so I am not sure what to do.' Those two other marriages set an example for them not to choose the synagogue (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

This permit was lifted in May 2016, and religious ceremonies at Neve Shalom Synagogue resumed. Once again, this permit resulted from the requests of family members or couples, and rules were stretched to keep the wedding schedule intact.

7.2.1.6 The Regulation for Clothing in Synagogue – 2016

One of the issues that religious authority has been most challenged is the issue of dressing by community members. The religious authority consistently emphasizes that the synagogue is a house of God, imbued with a certain degree of sanctity (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). Although it was not a written rule, it was expected to behave in a certain manner in the synagogue (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, 2017). In this regard, the religious authority has taken the following precaution: the prospective couple who goes to the Chief Rabbinate's Office to make a marriage appointment must sign a booklet produced by the religious authority before marriage.

With this booklet, the verbal rules of the older generation, which outline what attitudes and behaviors are suitable for the synagogue, began to be written down and established as formal and written rules. In this booklet, in addition to all the information about marriage, there were also pictures and drawings of the form of the wedding dress, which is suitable and not suitable to wear inside the synagogue. The religious authority desired to control and regulate not just ceremonies (and, of course, the field) but also individuals, bodies, and behaviors. Describing the positions taken by the actors in this negotiation arena and what they mean to them is crucial. Based on the statements in the interviews, the community members who challenged the rules, in particular, argued that this wedding event belonged to them and wanted to represent themselves in a way that felt good in this ceremony. At the same time, they emphasized that it was not right to interfere with women's clothing in a world where the calendar year was almost 2020. However, another actor, the religious authority, emphasized that the synagogue was sacred and that the religious officials should establish the rules under this roof. In

addition, according to religious authority, another critical point was that the tradition of women dressing appropriately in a religious setting, regardless of the year, should be preserved. Therefore, religious authority continued to create new strategies (Maton, 2008: 54) on this issue without giving up. The authority could not give a fine to some extent, but it is also stated that if the written rules are violated, the wedding dress will be covered with a veil. While it was a problem for the religious authority to have the decollated wedding dress, another issue was the clothes worn by the female family members who would walk down the aisle and stand at the *Tevah* during the ceremony. For this reason, the document signed by the prospective bride is not sufficient for the religious authority. In this regard, it was explained at length how some female community members pushed the boundaries in the interviews. The religious authority was also criticized for failing to address this issue. Ultimately, they were unable to cope with it, so the Bet-Din published a paper. They decided to post this warning letter on the wall and also send it as an email to all community members (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017, and Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority H, J, 2017).



BET- DİN DUYURUSU

Değerli Dindaşlarımız

Sinagoglarımızda dini tören ve dualara özellikle hanımefendi dindaşlarımızın bir ibadethaneye yaraşır kıyafette katılmaları, bulundukları mekânın kutsiyetine saygıları yanında, bulundukları mabet ortamında kendilerini rahat hissetmeleri bakımından da büyük önem taşımaktadır.

Hep iyi vesilelerle icra edilmesini dilediğimiz törenlerde ve bilhassa dini evlilik merasimlerinde genç gelinlerimizin ve yakınlarının bu konuda sinagog adabına uyumda önemli davranmalarının gerekli olduğunu vurgulamak isteriz.

Bu duyurumuzun değerli dindaşlarımız tarafından önemle dikkate alınacağı inancıyla esenlikler dileriz.

Dualarımızla.
Türkiye Hahambaşılığı
Bet Din G.

Figure 7.3 Warning letter at Neve Shalom Synagogue from 2016.

As written in the warning letter hung on the wall of Neve Shalom Synagogue on November 3, 2016, it urged community members to behave and dress appropriately in the synagogue. Although this letter was written in neutral language, all community members were aware that it was primarily addressed to women. As seen above, the warning against wearing proper clothes was made clear. At the same time, it also announced what remained within the normal and abnormal boundaries. The religious authority, which has the power to do so in this (life cycle event) field, has been unambiguous about the rules of this game and creates limits for both normal and abnormal behavior for all community members. When I asked the Rabbi about this warning, he explained:

> We have translated the article written in Spanish fifty or sixty years ago into Turkish again. It is not a new decision. Now, it has been

> translated into Turkish to preserve the sanctity of the synagogue and modest clothing culture (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

As he stated and has repeatedly underlined, the critical thing in religious weddings is not clothing and ostentation but the spiritual satisfaction that will be experienced in the synagogue.

> '*Ikar vetafel*' [Hebrew term]. That is to say, people need to distinguish between what is truly important and what is not truly necessary. In other words, the more spiritual value a person has, the more s/he understands the importance of religious weddings. What made the wedding a wedding was beyond the dress s/he was wearing. S/he experiences [a wedding] for the first time in his life, and this is the most important turning point in his/her life. Yet, there is one thing s/he needs to know: it is more than a dress. However, when people are so far away from spiritual values, unfortunately, the new youth is also not aware of what is truly important and what is not (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017).

It has been consistently emphasized that the new generation of women are rule-breakers, especially in this clothing issue. Finally, as stated by religious and secular authorities, it was emphasized that the wedding (or other life cycle ceremony) to be held in the synagogue should adhere to certain rules, with limited room for individual expression. In addition, it was one of the principles that couples should not show off too much at their weddings, and their religious ceremony should not differ much from the previous or next wedding ceremony. Moreover, as stated, the companies' employees must also comply with the (employee's) dress code. As mentioned in various company interviews and religious authority interviews, they were often warned to wear clothes that were appropriate to synagogue etiquette. As a representative from Company C stated:

> Neve Shalom is a place that has interesting regulations. Spots to stand as an employee are determined, clear, and so on. Male employees are required to wear *kippahs*; they must also refrain from wearing earrings. Do not let it pass here and there. They show point by point.

> There are a lot of rules that you have to follow. These rules were primarily verbal. We also received verbal warnings. Complain that his pants are ripped off or his hair is very blowzy (Interview with Company C, June, 2017).

Many other employees said in interviews that they tried to stay within these rules by dressing in black and monotype. Photographer Rodikli Seloni, who also worked in the synagogue in the 2010s, stated how sensitive she tried to be to this issue as follows:

> When I was taking some photos, I wondered if my underwear was visible behind me, what I was wearing... I wondered if it was too revealing. … I was spending fifteen or twenty minutes at home on this issue, raising my arm, looking at it in the light, looking at it on the balcony, etc., I was always wearing the same clothes... Being a woman also limited my choice of clothes (Belin Rodikli Seloni – RN, June 14, 2017).

The religious authority assumed (and desired) these dress codes to be part of synagogue culture. However, over time, with gained experience, religious authority felt the need to intervene in this arena. As Wacquant underlines (Wacquant 2008: 270), these unwritten rules—doxa, a set of shared opinions and natural attitudes of everyday life —are assumed to be part of society by religious authority. However, these two different points of view of the community members and the religious authority were not parallel. That's why religious authority decided to write these rules and ensure that every community member would act accordingly. In this field, again, religious authority, as an agent, sought to establish the rules and wanted all community members to play this game in this respect.

7.2.2 *Official (Civil) Marriage*

The official civil ceremony is another step in completing the wedding proceedings in the eyes of the Turkish Republic. This step involves signing the marriage contract, also known as *resmi nikah* in Turkish, by the couple. Before 2015, this step was, with no exceptions, required to be done before the

religious wedding. However, it is considered more a formality for Jewish weddings. For instance, despite the state recognition of the marriage, a Jewish couple is not expected to move in together until the religious ceremony has been completed. This necessity has eased over the years, and couples living together prior to civil and religious marriage have become more common, particularly in the 2010s. When Jewish couples are asked about their wedding anniversary, the reference date is typically the date of their religious wedding. In other words, only with the religious wedding ceremony and the marriage contract (i.e., *Ketubah* in Hebrew) given by the synagogue can the couple be considered "properly" married in the eyes of the community.

Most couples married in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s mentioned the *Beyoğlu 6th Marriage Office* as their location for civil marriage during their interviews. Located very close to the Neve Shalom Synagogue, this building remains active in the historic Jewish neighborhood of *Galata/Taksim.* The second half of the 1990s saw an increase in marriage receptions, and the locations of these events began to vary. After the 2000s, official civil marriage became another huge event that required more organization. Venues were booked, dresses were bought or tailored, and guest lists were prepared for the occasion. In 2015, a new development sent shockwaves through the news. The Supreme Court decided on 27.05.2015 that the 5th (related to bride and groom) and 6th (related to Rabbi in this case) clauses of the Turkish Penal Code should be nullified.[42] The two clauses are as follows:

> 5. Those [couples] who marry [religious marriage] before the official ceremony are to be jailed for 2 to 6 months. However, when an official civil marriage is complete, any public cases and sentences that were distributed are nullified.
> 6. Should a person perform a religious ceremony without proof of legal civil marriage, they are to be jailed for 2 to 6 months.

42 Resmi Gazete (Official Newspaper), 10 June 2015, No. 29382, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2015/06/20150610.pdf (Accessed, March 28, 2024) Pp.4-18.

This change legalized religious weddings before official weddings. The controversy this development created in Turkey aside,[43] it was also a very challenging decision for the Jewish religious authority. Upon requests from family members/couples, the decision to have a religious wedding before the religious authority considered the official wedding. The primary motivation behind this request was to merge the wedding reception with the official wedding ceremony for event savings. After deliberation, the religious authority and community leaders, at a wedding in January 2016, primarily allowed this: The couple could have their official wedding at the *Tevah* with a state official after they complete their religious wedding inside the synagogue. According to this first decision, the religious authority requested that religious and official weddings be conducted consecutively without interruption. Afterward, once again responding to requests from couples, it was permitted to have the official marriage at the wedding reception after the synagogue, on the condition that it would be the same day (Interview with a Rabbi, November 1, 2017). Turkish laws have no restrictions on official marriage dates, but Turkish Jewish society has deemed this limitation suitable. As pointed out in the interview, the authority wants to fill the civil marriage slot written in the *Ketubah* on the same day (Interview with Rel. and Sec. Authority J, 2017). It could also be interpreted as meaning that, in cases where there is no official civil wedding, the entire responsibility for marriage and divorce will be with the religious authority. Religious authority may not have wanted to take responsibility for this. This case was also an obvious moment for negotiation, where the religious authority acted wisely and strategically. At this moment in the game, the religious authority responded to a demand from grassroots/ community members, which the state had already allowed. But at the same time, it did not ignore taking some precautions to protect itself in the game.

43 https://bianet.org/yazi/resmi-gecerliligi-olan-dini-nikah-kiydirabilmek-bir-hak-mi-188953 (Accessed, March 26, 2023).
https://istanbulbarosu.org.tr/HaberDetay.aspx?ID=10485 (Accessed, March 26, 2023).

7.2.3 *Jewish Wedding Receptions – Before and After Events*

THE 1960S AND 1970S

The 1960s and 1970s, compared to other years within the scope of this dissertation, were two decades when the Jewish community was more withdrawn, rituals and traditions were more prevalent, and mixed marriages were relatively fewer. During these two decades, the word and power of religious authority ruled events, and the agents we defined as the marketing sector were nearly non-existent. While the 1960s were relatively calm, the 1970s, especially its second half, are remembered and told when tea parties outside homes were common. Inside the Jewish community, especially in the middle and upper classes, homes and home decorations are essential concepts. A participant in an interview who requested anonymity discussed the mindset in great detail and stated as follows:

> During the 1970s-75, our Jewish congregation was deeply concerned with who would make the better house with a decorator and what kind of events they would host. Those with money and those without. They would invite everyone to these house events… I would not call it an obsession because it is not. It is a way of showing off. A man would buy a huge Jeep but does not have the money to use it or cope with the gasoline and maintenance expenses. But he has to show off. He also does not even have the means to maintain that house. He did something not within his means but way out of his means (Violet, June 21, 2017).

As stated above, these activities and situations exhibited inter-communal ostentation and cultural capital. In addition, it was common for the middle and upper classes to attend tea parties at *Hilton* or *Tarabya* Hotels, which were often used for socializing. However, these venues were not yet being used for wedding receptions.

One of the main points to summarize the reception format in these two decades was that invitees were usually families and extended families. Therefore, there was no need for huge venues. Wedding receptions during these two decades were mostly at luxurious restaurants, poolside venues,

and nightclubs. Booking live music or reserving a few tables at a live music venue was a widely used practice. Booking entire venues for a reception was rare compared to the years to come. In the 1970s, venues such as *Sarıyer Urcan Club*, *Lido Poolside*, the upper and lower sections of *Harbiye Kervansaray*, *Taşlık Club*, and *Bosphorus* restaurants were prominent.

The 1960s and 1970s were when the average marriage age was the youngest. Arranged marriages, where families selected the bride and groom or arranged for them to meet, were standard practices. While the issue of virginity was significantly important, the flirting time was much shorter compared to later years. Therefore, hearing about marriage proposals in these years was more challenging during the interviews. As it was a community much more attached to its strict traditions and rituals, *Drahoma*[44] was essential and specific to weddings. In addition, although not written, the issue of which side (groom or bride) would pay for what cost was precise in words. Interviewees share stories of families canceling weddings over *Drahoma* disagreements or families having difficult times being able to pay the determined price. The bridal and groom package preparation, *Bogo de Novya* in Ladino, was among the crucial practices. The ritual was considered complete after mutual families offered or sent the packages to each other. Additionally, the dowry showing ceremony, *Aparar Ashuar* in Ladino, was a crucial status matter for women before the wedding. The bride's family would prepare this dowry over the years, and the dowry was enriched with doilies sewed by hand. The dowry would be set aside for the big day to come. On *Aparar Ahsuar* day, women from both sides of the wedding would invite everyone and show it with great pride and enthusiasm. The preparation of the bed where the newlyweds would sleep, *Kama de novya*[45] in Ladino, was a different ceremony. During the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish women performed the

44 Money which is given by woman's family to man's family.

45 "Thursday before the wedding is '*Ordenar Kama de Novya*/Arrangement of the wedding bed' day. A woman who is content in her marriage will prepare the wedding bed from the girl's side, sprinkle almond candies and rose petals on the cover, and good wishes will be expressed in the meantime." http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/history/did-you-know (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

mikveh ritual, which they traditionally need to fulfill before weddings, by visiting the *Cagaloglu Hamamı*.

In these decades, there have also been varying engagement receptions. While primarily performed in homes in the 1960s, in the 1970s, it was either done in the home or outside, depending on the condition of the house and the family's economic status. Food was either prepared in-house or purchased from well-known bakeries and served. Eating white desserts was a tradition. Henna night, *Noçe de Alhenia*[46] in Ladino was also performed in a size that depended on the family's status. Depending on status, mostly the bridal dresses and groom's suits were rented instead of bought. However, for the dresses and hats of the 1960s, the names of the non-Muslim tailors in *Taksim*, such as Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, were often mentioned in the interviews. *Hazzopulo Passage* in *Taksim* was also a famous station for the fabrics. Hatmaker Katia in *Beyoglu*, hatmaker Aida in *Kurtuluş*, bridal dresser Markoziye in *Beyoglu*, tailor Figoro, and tailor Teo[47] are some of the most common names in the Jewish community at that time.[48] In the 1970s, they added more names to that list of non-Muslim tailors. They are tailor Lütfiş and tailor Kalyopi (Greek) in *Osmanbey*.

Engagement or wedding receptions had relatively fewer guests. Home or kitchen appliances and other things that the couple needed were more critical in gift selection. The engaged couple would have *Shabbat* dinner every Friday night at the groom's house from engagement day to wedding day. Domestic trips were more common for honeymoons, but it also depended on the family's financial status. In some cases, a honeymoon could not planned due to lack of economic capital. Lastly, the situation where the groom lives

46 "The night before the wedding is the "*Nochada de Alhena/*Henna Night." Although there is no evidence that the bride's hands are hennaed in the Eastern style in this night of singing, eating, and drinking, attended by close relatives and very close friends from the bride's side, it is undoubtedly that the henna night tradition was acquired from the Eastern culture" http://www.turkyahudileri.com/index.php/en/history/did-you-know (Accessed, December 21, 2022).

47 They ordered the fabric abroad.

48 In addition to these names, they added Tanju as photographer.

in the bride's parental house, *Mezafranga*[49] in Ladino, was quite common. Couples could reside in the parental home until they achieve economic independence and move out when they have attained it. In some traditional families, couples eat at different family members' homes for a week after the wedding.

THE 1980S AND 1990S

Especially with the socio-cultural and economic transformations experienced in Turkey, Jewish rites of passage events also inevitably began to change (see Chapters 6.2.4 and 4.3). During this relatively new and slow period of growth and change, the religious authority attempted to maintain strict rules and retain control. It is possible to state that because the ratio of mixed marriages within the Jewish community was relatively low, respect for religious authority was high, and the Jewish community was relatively closed to outside stimuli, religious authority still had control. It makes sense to picture the religious authority during these years as an agent trying to understand the atmosphere and developments behind the event sector. The perspective mentioned above, which was reliant on house presentation and hosting guests that occurred during the late 1970s, left the household in terms of life cycle events. These life cycle events began to move towards commercially valuable venues, where predominantly Jewish people were still invited as guests. With the help of neoliberal (urban development) politics that began in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s, Istanbul became an attractive investment area for global capital. Istanbul was redesigned as a "global city" with large hotel projects, shopping malls, and luxury housing areas. It also helped to upgrade the city's image, and Keyder (1999a) emphasizes that Istanbul became a city that showcased global capital during this process. It led to Istanbul being restructured as a global financial, tourism, and trade center. Thus, the commercialization of Istanbul, its growth capacity, the rise of the tourism sector, and the increase in the number of hotels accompanied this transition. These social and economic transitions inevitably affected and transformed

49 Couples could reside in the parental home until they gain economic freedom and move out when they have it.

Jewish life cycle events as well. While wedding receptions of the 1980s were at luxurious restaurants, clubs, and sometimes five-star hotels, weddings in the 1990s were almost always organized at five-star hotels.

This new type of wedding reception evokes the concept of the 'champagne wedding,' introduced by Argyrou (1996). Analyzing wedding receptions held in Greek Cyprus, Argyrou notes that the wedding ceremony in the present day serves as an element that creates a class distinction between two parts of society. One of the main arguments of this study is that wedding celebrations have been transformed from rites of passage to rites of class distinction.[50] "A champagne wedding" is a celebration typically associated with the urban working class and middle class. These weddings are held in fancy hotels, and every element is well-designed. With little to no room for spontaneity, children are usually not invited. Therefore, urban weddings, also known as "champagne weddings," have become a venue where individuals reinforce their class identities and establish rites of distinction. These weddings are called "champagne" because hors-d'oeuvres and champagne are served during the reception. Istanbul Jewish wedding receptions, which had so many similarities with "champagne weddings" in Greek Cyprus, played a much more significant role in clearly setting the Jewish and non-Jewish separation as well as class distinction.

With the transition to a free market economy, along with the increasing number of big five-star hotels in parallel, the size of life cycle events and their venues also grew. Along with the new middle class, which was already growing, the boundaries of Istanbul Jewish society's rite of passage receptions began to expand. In the 1980s, couples often married in wedding halls, clubs, luxurious restaurants, and occasionally, five-star hotels, which upper-class community members preferred. However, what must be emphasized here is that choosing a venue other than a five-star hotel due to financial reasons was not yet a cause for embarrassment within the community (Rakel and Selim, May 3, 2017). During the 1980s, as stated in the interviews, the upper class primarily preferred the five-star hotels of *Tarabya* and *Hilton,* as well as the stylish *Pera Palas* Hotel. Other economic classes preferred certain

50 Accordingly, he proposes the concepts of "village wedding" and "champagne wedding."

restaurants, clubs, and wedding halls. The in-house singer for live music and the venue's menu for food for the night accompanied the weddings.

With the opening of many new five-star hotels in the 1990s, most celebrations began to shift to these venues. *Ceylan* Intercontinental Hotel (1995), *Sheraton* Hotel (1975, renewed), *Swiss* Hotel (1991), *Conrad* Hotel (1992), *Four Seasons* Hotel (1996), and *Hyatt Regency* Hotel (1994) were among the highly preferred venues. As stated in the Bar and Bat Mitzvah section above, more guests had to be invited to fill the big ballrooms of these five-star hotels. The content and details of receptions also began to diversify. Chair decorations and center-table ornaments were among the most seen examples towards the end of the 1990s. Interviewees shared examples of nights when famous singers performed at these five-star celebrations at the end of the 1990s. As a representative from Company E stated:

> Then, *Ceylan* Intercontinental opened in the 1990s… Jewish Community events suddenly jumped from 100 guests to 300. This meant inviting everyone they knew, including people other than friends and family. We would sometimes say [when we found out we were invited as a guest to the wedding], 'I wonder why I am invited' (Interview with Company E, November, 2017).

So, non-Jewish guests (such as co-workers, neighbors, etc.) were slowly included in the guest list. However, the majority of guests were still from the Jewish community.

Couples who married in the 1980s and 1990s were still relatively younger than they are today but older than those in the 1960s and 1970s. Stories of arranged marriages still existed but had a lower ratio compared to the past. On the other hand, stories of couples meeting each other at (Jewish) cultural youth associations are more prevalent during these two decades. While marriage proposals were relatively straightforward during the 1980s, the surprise aspect of proposals appears to have increased during the 1990s. However, compared to the 2000s and especially the 2010s, proposals from the 1980s and 1990s were relatively low-key. The *drahoma* tradition maintained its significance, influence, and importance. Interviewees often mention the parents from both sides, especially the men/fathers, getting together to decide

on the matter. Having lost much significance, traditions like *Noçe de Alhenia*, *Kama de Novya*, *Aparar Ashuar*, and *Bogo de Novya* were sometimes seen. The tradition of serving white desserts still existed. In the 1980s, Jewish women preferred to go to the Sisli Bet Israel Synagogue's *mikveh* and (still) the *Cagaloglu Hamamı.* For the dresses and hats of the 1980s, the names of non-Muslim tailors and hatmakers, such as Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, were still frequently heard and popular in interviews, including hatmaker Katia in *Beyoğlu and* hatmaker Aida in *Kurtuluş*. However, Muslim tailors were also added to that list, such as tailor Hayri, whose work was costly. It became common to bring hats from Paris as well. In the 1990s, popular Turkish tailors like Cengiz Abazoğlu and several international fashion brands, such as *Christian Dior*, were mentioned in the interviews.

Engagement and marriage receptions varied in these two decades. Engagements were held in the house or out in a venue, depending on the family's financial status and house size. During the 1980s, it was common practice to go to a restaurant or the house after the engagement with a few select guests. The 1990s witnessed an increase in engagement ceremonies held at various venues. Like previous decades, the engaged couple would have *Shabbat* dinner at the groom's family house every Friday until the wedding. Wedding guests chose between gold, dollars, or home furniture as gifts. A frequent interview remark about the 1980s and 1990s was, "We would buy at least two or three pieces of gold because we expect a similar gift at our weddings or our children's wedding" (Tuna and Hayim, June 30, 2017). In the 1990s, the concept of bridesmaids gained popularity among brides. For the honeymoon, the destination, domestic or abroad, still depended on families' economic and cultural capital. Although less seen, the *mezafranga* situation continued. The tradition of visiting family members for dinner the week after the wedding, as seen in previous decades, also continued.

THE 2000S

The 2000s witnessed the most visible and highest growth in the events organized before and during wedding receptions. The difference between the 1990s and 2000s was that the desire to host big events spread throughout the community, regardless of economic status. At the same time, in addition

to the expensive and relatively hard-to-afford five-star hotels, an increasing number of *budget-friendly* hotels and event venues allowed almost every wedding to be held at hotels or unique venues. Wedding receptions and pre-wedding events would differ depending on the hotel's suitability for a particular economic class. In other words, everyone would host their receptions for the whole wedding package at a hotel or venue they could afford. Almost all of the social groups held events outside (the home). These wedding receptions usually included fancy dishes of world cuisine prepared by chefs and an abundance of alcoholic beverages served by representatives from private companies. Women and men wore tailor-made, fashionable dresses and suits to the event, respectively. A deejay was hired for music, and the decoration was also the responsibility of the organization's companies. This means that the expansion worked in two ways: the economic capital spent on events increased, and the number of non-community guests rose. The growth in Jewish events also led to changes in the invited guests. Firstly, while the number of guests at events varied greatly (compared to the 1990s), there were sometimes receptions with 550 to 600 people. Secondly and more importantly, the number of non-Jewish guests at Jewish ceremonies increased rapidly in this decade. Therefore, these events gradually became a window for the community, through which it would present itself to the outside world.

The market and companies played a big part in this expansion. These private companies included event planning and party organization companies, music and video companies, photographers, choreographers, caterers, and confectioners. New companies were founded in the 2000s, in addition to the existing few, which needed more competition (see Chapter 9).[51] Companies specializing in specific issues entered the market. This increase in numbers and rich content caused the event market and companies to be more influential, even decision-makers. Indeed, it was the market and companies that pushed the expansion of the event market. They kept the sector alive with new concepts and ideas created every day. Not to mention family members/couples who tried to differentiate themselves within these events (see

51 The growth of these companies will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Chapter 8), which were all the same, and they made decisions together with the market.

As wedding ceremonies became increasingly aesthetically stylized and opened to the larger society (including non-Jewish friends and associates), a traditional/conservative control mechanism was triggered. The religious authority, as an institution, started trying to exert control over wedding ceremonies in Istanbul, not just wedding receptions but also all Jewish life cycle events, as seen above as well. Individuals within the religious authority and the community in higher positions were uncomfortable with the state of outward expansion and the level of ostentation. For them, the *Kayadez* perspective remained fundamental, particularly for its low profile. Hence, many community leaders emphasized and repeated that so much splendor and showing off was unnecessary.

Two critical developments occurred for the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish congregation during the 2000s. Both developments helped the institution change and develop a more controlling attitude, and both events helped promote the controlling attitude within the community. First, one of the most significant turning points for the Turkish Jewish community was the two simultaneous explosions in front of two synagogues in 2003. After this grievous event, the community turned inward institutionally for a while. As stated above, Brith Milah ceremonies moved to synagogues instead of hotels or other locations (see Chapter 5). The second significant change was the arrival of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik, a Chabad representative from the United States, in Turkey. After his arrival, the rules and control mechanisms of the religious institution gradually became more rigid (see Chapters 4.3 and 6). This development led to stricter controls, increased interventions, and institutionalization efforts in certain areas. As mentioned above, with Rabbi Chitrik's lead, the *Bar/t Mitsvah Club* was founded, and education was standardized and institutionalized (see Chapter 6). While the two life cycle events, namely Brith Milah and Bar/t Mitzvah, underwent major changes, religious authority could not exert the same control over marriage package events. In fact, religious authority loosened the rules even more in the 2010s. In the 2000s, the ever-growing and ever-more glamorous events had become an arena where new trends were created and tried every day. Family members/couples were

acting together with the market. Even though the religious authority attempted to maintain strict rules during the period of rapid growth, it was so fast, and there were so many variables, that it was much more challenging to control than in previous years.

Religious authority tried to take some steps regarding the matter. As mentioned above, first, *kashrut* and *Shabbat* were controlled at wedding receptions in hotels. The religious authority exerted control over every event, wherever it may be, to ensure it was kosher. Wedding receptions organized at hotels after the religious synagogue ceremony were included in the definition of a Jewish event and became subject to inspection by religious authority. Founded in 2004, the *Denet Gıda* Company was a big step towards this.[52] Second, the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom,* organized the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar in 2003. Another example is the warning letter/text regarding the synagogue dress code, published in 2016 and repeatedly issued by Bet-Din. The message of religious authority is clear and straight – "if you are organizing this event, do it in a way in accordance with Jewish values and befitting our community." It was also a process of familiarization for religious authority with the new cultural and social aspects and requests of Jewish society while still exerting considerable effort to maintain control over the wedding ceremonies of Jewish society.

The most commonly preferred venues in the 2000s, according to interviews, were *Ritz* Hotel (2001 - claimed to be seven stars), *Dedeman* Hotel, *Mövenpick* Hotel (2003), *Radisson Blue* Hotel (2006), *Four Seasons Hotel* (2008), *Sait Halim Pasha* Mansion, *Kemer Country* (events started 2004-2005), *Conrad* Hotel (1992), *Çubuklu 29.* Weddings at these venues almost always included alcohol and DJ performances, with dinner service; rarely, there were also performances by famous singers. According to an interviewee from the event market, "The years between 2003 and 2011 were when the sector grew, and we profited the most" (Interview with Company D, June, 2017). During this period, market companies could make daring

52 For detailed information, see Chapter 6.3.

moves and try authentic new things, and community members would consciously choose to make these spending. An interviewee stated:

> In the 1980s, it was a sign of wealth to have a wedding at the S*ürmeli* Hotel, but at the same time, there was no shame in not being able to afford these venues. Conditions were not like today. Nowadays, you are a loser (*ezik*) if you cannot do it (Rakel and Selim, May 3, 2017).

As this quote demonstrates, this spreading trend had become mandatory due to social pressure from community members. It was also a period when the average age of guests dropped, and young people were increasingly more present in guest lists.

During these years, (Jewish) cultural youth associations were still among the places where couples met. Marriage proposals in the 2000s were much more aesthetically stylized and glamorous than in the 1990s. Some examples were foreign holidays, renting yachts and mountain cabins, and surprise parties with big groups of friends. "Save the date" photoshoots to announce the wedding date became more frequent. *Drahoma* tradition was slowly losing influence, but although rarely, there were still couples who split because their families could not agree on *Drahoma*. In this decade, the old *Noçe de Alhenia* re-emerged in all its glory in the format of bachelorette parties. Sometimes, the bride's or the groom's core group of friends organized domestic or foreign trips for the bachelor/bachelorette party tradition. On these often short trips, the bride or the groom's small and close friend group celebrated with everything planned hour by hour. The bride and her close friends usually received goody bags prepared in their name. Another old tradition, *Kama de Novya*, was transformed into a ceremony where guests visited the new couple's home and shared a meal. *Aparar Ashuar* and *Bogo de Novya* traditions were obsolete at this time. However, during the bridal bed preparation, the house where the couple will be living is toured by guests, and this was similar to a new generation of *Aparar Ashuar*.

The *mikveh* also became a separate event, akin to preparing the bridal bed. In the 2000s, Jewish women in Istanbul preferred the *mikvehs* of the Sisli Bet Israel Synagogue, the Caddebostan Bet El Synagogue, and the Neve Shalom Synagogue for practicing this voluntary tradition. In addition, large

spreads of refreshments and food were served on that day, and some old rituals and traditions were partly kept, such as eating white dessert. For the dresses and hats of the 2000s (and the 2010s), community members told the tailor names such as Tamer, Filiz, Cengiz Abazoğlu, Begüm Salihlioğlu, etc. They also added the hatmaker Merve Bayındır, who brings hats from London, and Figen. In addition, it was common to purchase fabrics from Bağzıbağlı Fabric Store in *Osmanbey/Nişantaşı*. As told in interviews, some women (mothers of bride and groom) went to look at the Neve Shalom Synagogue wedding photos archive to get an idea of the bride and groom mothers' dresses and hats.

Varying receptions for engagements and weddings were observed during the period. Like in other decades, engagements were either in-house or mainly in a venue, depending on the house's condition and the family's financial standards. Similarly, official state marriage ceremonies were a separate event. The compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar was mandatory for all couples. As the religious ceremony approached, the cars carrying the bride and groom became increasingly luxurious. Wedding guests would bring gold, dollars, or euros as gifts for the couple. A tradition of small surprises by the couple's friends during wedding ceremonies emerged during this decade and the 2010s as well. Almost all weddings had bridesmaids who accompany the bride. Brides and grooms usually got lessons from a dancer or choreographer[53] for their first dance at a wedding reception in the 2000s and 2010s. For the honeymoon, the destinations were usually abroad, including Europe, Bali, and Maldives. Lastly, a meaningful quote from an interview that summarized the period as follows:

> [Talking about Jewish people] When he comes into some money, he first changes the car and then the house; we like vanity, and the best place to show off is here. [Talking about Bar/t Mitzvah]. You have the lead on stage, all eyes on you; you are hosting all those people. These days, it is invaluable to get your children to marry under the *huppah*. We leave the gratitude part aside. Instead, we think, 'Where can I do it best?', 'How can I do it best?'... Typically, people spend their own

53 Most common names are Rina Amuraben and Hande Yılmaz.

money, but these days, the gold pieces you receive cover wedding costs (No name interview).

THE 2010S

Wedding receptions in the 2010s were similar to those of the 2000s in terms of content, but the sector gradually declined as the decade progressed. The size of receptions and the economic capital spent on events also shrank. Turkey's fluctuating economy played a big part in this change. The young Jewish population in Turkey was also hopeless about the country's future. The unstable Turkish economy and political landscape, including changes in minority discourse, the termination of the Peace/Solution process in 2015, the general elections held in 2015, the 2016 coup attempt, and the 2018 currency crisis, also affected this change. In addition, the antisemitic wave that spread after the Gaza War of 2008-2009 and the *Mavi Marmara Event* of 2010 affected the ideas and life perspective of the young Jewish population. As with every antisemitic wave, *Aliyah's* numbers rose compared to other years. Not only to Israel but immigration to other countries increased. This immigration issue wave was not specifically for the young Jewish population (Elveren & Toksöz, 2019). During the decade, Turkey's white-collar, educated young population also accelerated their efforts to move their lives elsewhere. Lastly, the terrorist attack on a group of Israeli tourists in 2016 at *Taksim*, Istanbul, also affected the state and shape of occasions.

For the Turkish Jewish population, these events used to be a place where they could reaffirm their status in society, which occurred a few times in life when they could take the stage, showcase themselves, and perform. This show space was also an investment in one's status within society. However, for the above reasons, young people/couples and families stopped considering these events as (social) investments. They began to think that the economic capital spent on these event packages would be better spent elsewhere. Young couples who no longer felt motivated for their future in the country chose to save their economic capital for their new lives and invest in experiences such as going on a holiday, having training, obtaining a certificate, learning a language, or more physical items such as a house, car, or

using this economic capital for a new business. A newly engaged interviewee summarized the situation as,

> So I am to have a wedding and spend millions. Why am I doing this? To show off to random people? Instead, I am leaning towards spending this money on travel, buying a house, or using it as capital for a new business. We are already considering moving abroad with my husband; I would much rather use this money to make a fresh start there. Thankfully, my family feels the same; these costs were going to put a strain on them anyway (Janet and Selim, May 17, 2017).

In addition, another point made by interviewees is that the gifts received at these events were insufficient to cover the enormous costs or that it was not worth organizing an event full of conspicuous consumption.

As mentioned above, parallel to the decrease in the number of weddings, the size of events also shrank in the 2010s. Fewer guests were invited, and less money was spent. Luxurious hotels such as *Çırağan* Hotel were no longer preferred.[54] Budgets were tightened, the guest list was narrowed, and guest profiles were changed. A representative from Company D remarked,

> I will give an example from my business. In the 1980s and 1990s, most guests were friends of the parents. Only a tiny portion were friends of the couple. Nowadays that has changed and become 100-150 young people and a few parents' friends. Or sometimes it is parties for only young people. They have come to realize that entertainment is often associated with youth. After the wedding cake, friends of the parents leave, and only young people remain (Interview with Company D, June, 2017).

Lastly, some events in the wedding package started to merge and became one occasion with several events. Commonly, the promise, asking for permission from the father, and engagement were done all at once. Since 2016, official (civil) marriages, wedding receptions, and religious receptions have

54 However, in this decade, for the upper economic class, two more hotels were added: *Raffles* Hotel (2014) and *Shangri-La Bosphorus* Hotel (2013), marketed as seven stars.

started to merge (see Chapter 7.2.2). Society has come to realize that event savings were the wise thing to do. And with Turkey's economic conditions, with a venue for each event, dresses, and food servings - the costs had gone up too much. During the interviews conducted with companies within the market in 2017 and 2018, many sector employees stated that the market had shrunk immensely. They said that they foresee the future of non-Jewish organizations. In the following years, this estimate has become a reality. Hence, companies that started in the 2010s gained experience and matured, not only doing Jewish events. In a way, they were forced to go outside their zone.

Despite the relatively few weddings compared to other decades, the 2010s saw the religious authority lose control and loosen its rules. They did not resist change requests at certain points and tried to adapt the new conditions to a religious format. As mentioned above, open-air or beach weddings were allowed in 2014. Due to the fear felt after the 2016 terrorist attack, religious wedding ceremonies in hotels or other buildings were allowed for a while. Finally, conducting the official wedding at the synagogue after the religious ceremony was allowed in 2016. All these permissions granted and the loosening of rules coincided with periods when the community administration was particularly "courageous" in exhibiting itself in public spaces. All these steps were "courageous" for the Jewish community, especially those raised in the *Kayadez* tradition. To give a few examples, the start of the Hanukkah celebration in 2015 in the public sphere, the holding of a relatively more critical exhibition in the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews in 2015, and the holding of the annual national commemoration of the Struma Disaster in a public place in 2015. At the same time, Turkey's social context also facilitated this, helping minorities find the courage to be more visible, as seen in the 2013 Gezi protests and the Peace/Solution process that continued between 2013 and 2015.

Stories of how couples met had increasingly diversified in the 2010s, but (Jewish) cultural youth associations were still a place to meet. Like in the 2000s, the prospective groom performs the marriage proposal, preferably in a luxurious setting such as a chic restaurant or on a yacht, and in a flashy way, often with the close circle of the couple's friends. "Save the date" photoshoots continued to be a popular trend. *Drahoma* was no longer a

common tradition, and it was no longer remembered. Economic conditions led couples to share the costs of their weddings. Bachelor/bachelorette parties with domestic or foreign trips remained. The traditional *Kama de Novya* was still essential. *Mikveh* was a ritual frequently performed. Events such as engagements, official marriages, and weddings were merged as much as possible, as discussed above. The compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar, which was introduced in 2003, has remained in effect. The luxurious bridal car used to attend the religious wedding ceremony was among the continued rituals. Like in the 2000s, gold, dollars, and euros were preferred gifts for the wedding couple. However, as the number of guests went down and smaller gifts were given, the total gift amount was reduced. It was the decade when the little surprises close friends prepared during wedding receptions were most frequent. Destinations abroad were the first choice for honeymoons.

§ 7.3 Concluding Remarks

Like in other rites of passage events, the ethno-religious cultural and communal identity is produced together by religious authority, market, and community members. They all actively participate in this life cycle event field. In this specific arena, Jewish weddings, compared to others, have more pre and after-events. Again, compared to other life cycle events in this field, the religious authority has also attempted to institutionalize and standardize this arena. The first step was taken for the choir and music in the synagogue. The target was the standardization of the service that was provided by chariots. Until the end of the 1990s, religious authority looked more likely to be the dominant player in the game. It should be noted that the Chief Rabbinate still holds the center position in the Jewish community, and no party has challenged it. However, the requests from Jewish community members and the effects of the global trend prompt the religious authority to take some steps. The new steps, particularly in the 2010s, also demonstrated the synagogue's adaptation to the changing cultural and social aspects of Jewish society. At the same time, religious and secular authorities still made a great effort not to lose control of the wedding ceremonies of Jewish society. Particularly after the 2003 terror attack, the religious authority wanted to

protect the attitude of *Kayadez*, specifically being low profile and not supporting the myth of wealthy Jews. Still, the ceremonies and receptions continued to grow in size over time. Reception sizes rose, and the guest list got more crowded each year. Jewish wedding ceremonies were and are one of the most attractive amusements for community members.

One critical step was the introduction of the compulsory religious premarriage seminar (as an "invisible college") by the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey Education Commission, *Hegkom*. The content also demonstrates how the ethno-religious cultural and communal identity of the Jewish community is produced and shaped by religious authority. Year by year, control mechanisms and rules of the religious authority were getting stricter regarding *kashrut* and *Shabbat*, especially in receptions. They tried to keep a low profile for clothing as well. Sometimes, they had to make more "modern" moves due to the community members' requests and the market. As seen above, the permission for beach weddings in 2014 was a good example of this "modern" move.

PART 2 - Concluding Remarks

Part 2 sees specific patterns, as in all historical processes, as well as continuity, divergence, fluidity, and changes. Historical flow and historical changes are the main points of these three chapters. The life cycle event field, of course, parallels Turkey's economic and cultural histories, and the effects of these events on this community, like others, have been evident between 1960 and 2020. The rise of the new middle class in Turkey, the transition to a liberal economy in the 1980s (and 1990s), and its parallel reflection on the Jewish community is plain to see. Similarly, economic and political crises, especially after 2014, have impacted these rites of passage events. In addition to all these developments, antisemitism and its practices had heavy results for the Turkish Jewish community during the period this dissertation focuses on. These incidents impact this minority group's daily life and, at times, their very existence and assets. As seen above, it is possible to trace these effects by examining the life cycle events and how they were performed in these

distressed years. Fear and security concerns sometimes indicated how the event was held, as well as the architecture of the places.

So far, three active agents, namely, religious institutions, the market, and family/ community members, have actively taken a role in this life cycle event field. The ethno-religious communal identity has been constructed in this field by the participation of the three agents. These three agents are not only information sources but also sometimes negotiate and comply with each other during the festive events, before and at that moment. The roles and steps taken by the actors in the field are also relational, and one can lead to determining the other significant players' next step (Bourdieu, 1977). All agents make their own moves in this life cycle events field as the key players. The field shows clearly the habitus, which "focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being" (Maton, 2008: 52). It also captures "how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others" (Maton, 2008: 52). As Maton stresses, habitus which is "an ongoing and active process" (Maton, 2008: 52), and "the structures of the habitus are thus not 'set' but evolve - they are durable and transposable but not immutable" (Maton, 2008: 53). The definition of "ideal Jewishness" and the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity does not come top to bottom. Their ethno-religious cultural and communal identity actively continues to be established by three agents in their life cycle events arena. Religious and secular authority, which is the dominant player in the field/game, is doing its best to create this ideal type[55] of Jewishness and puts frankly the demand for uniformity from the community members. Here, the matter is how norms are established, and the historical flow clearly shows the efforts of demarcation and maintenance of religious (and secular) authority. The religious and secular authority wants to create what kind of Jewish profile/identity should be drawn with the efforts of some establishments (particularly in the 2000s) and their content, such as the *Bar and Bat Mitsvah Club,* the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar, the control mechanism of the events regarding *kashrut* and *Shabbat*, etc. As discussed above, all these efforts and many changes in terms of standardization and professionalization in the community were also related

55 Not referring to Weber's ideal type concept.

to the relatively younger generation in community management, which consists of modern and open-minded individuals, as well as the arrival of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik. While the literature about the Turkish Jewish community stresses that the period after the Quincentennial Foundation (1989) was the extraversion phase, the changed practices and the picture of ideal Jewishness and its representation showed itself with institutionalized and standardized form in the 2000s.

In addition to these "invisible colleges," religious authority wants community members to be part of that community through their bodies (in this case, clothing, etc.) and soul (in this case, believing in spirituality) (Bauman and May, 2001: 47). They draw a picture of Orthodox Jewish community members practicing all religious requirements, which does not reflect reality in the community, except the times of their life cycle events. However, sometimes, the authority was not able to have the power to say something to the players on the field and had to give permission for some subjects, such as beach weddings. So, this historical flow shows how authorities were sometimes challenged and loosened the rules and also the strength of Jewish religious institutions in the institutionalization and standardization efforts in this life cycle events field. As both community members/couples and the company/market play a role in shaping the ethno-religious communal identity (as will be discussed further in Part 3), it is not a one-sided process.

The 2000s were the period for all these changes for the Turkish Jewish community, at the same time, there was also a huge trauma from the 2003 terror attacks. Despite this trauma, a greater openness in receptions and a more glamorous image for the outside world is discernible. The attitude of *Kayadez* and maintaining a low profile during life cycle events were practices requested of Jewish community members by religious authority and lay leaders. The religious and secular authority spent their efforts taking the life cycle events into the community building, such as Brith Milah ceremonies and their receptions. It also helped them direct money/(economic) capital into the community. While the expectation from the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community was to become more insular and stay within their community when they felt themselves under threat (because of antisemitic actions) in the Turkish community. However, the community members did not doubt

showing their lifecycle cultural identity in the receptions and hotels, such as Bar Mitzvah and wedding receptions. It should be noted that community members do not feel safe around the synagogues, especially on days of crowded events and ceremonies, but not in hotels and other venues. No doubt, global trends, and the market also have a significant influence on these types of receptions.

Finally, the ongoing institutionalization and standardization efforts, as well as the efforts to keep pace with the times, were among the aims of the religious authority during the 2000s and 2010s. The negotiation arena between the three agents—religious authority, market, and community members—has taken different shapes over the years. While the religious authority was the dominant actor in the field, especially until the 2000s, things started to change in terms of control after 2000. The standardization and institutionalization steps taken by the religious authority in the arena of Brith Milah and Bar/t Mitzvah were more effective in ensuring control. Successful steps have been taken, especially in terms of fulfilling religious requirements and ensuring that the money spent ultimately benefits the Jewish institutions' coffers. At the same time, the uniformization and standardization of (non-formal) education in the field of Bar/t Mitzvah and the discourse of the ethno-religious communal identity spread by the religious authority after 2000 were also essential steps. In the arena of Jewish weddings, it is observed that these efforts were not very effective, and the religious authority made certain relaxations in the regulations and rules in response to the pressure from community members, couples, and the market in certain areas. However, it should be noted that religious authorities strive to maintain control while bending these rules. Compared to other life cycle events, a wedding is an invitation with the highest proportion of non-Jewish guests. It is an area where the Jewish identity is represented to the outside world. Although the impact of these efforts and steps taken is less compared to other life cycle events, this control and "proper" representation of Jewish and non-Jewish society have been attempted to be achieved through other decisions made, such as the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar and the kosher event obligation. At the same time, it is possible to read this change as a

religious authority having to adapt to the changing trends of society, especially in the decreasing number of Jewish-Jewish marriages.

Part 3. The Field of Life Cycle Festive Events: The Practices of Jewish Life Cycle Events in Istanbul Jewish Community Among Community Members and (Jewish) Companies

This Part continues to present the ethnographic findings of the study and the results of field research and in-depth interviews are discussed in the context of the field of religious life cycle ceremonies. This rite of passage event field is considered an "arena of struggle" (Wacquant, 2008: 268) among family members/couples, the market, and religious authority. As stressed above, the ethno-religious communal cultural identity has been built with the help of these three actors. In Part 2, the focus was on the historical changes and mostly underlined the actions taken by the religious authority as a dominant player of the game. This Part's focus is on the two agents/teams and their members/players, namely community members and companies in this game, by referring to all three life cycle events. The position of women and men in the field are also discussed in this Part. The life cycle festive events and the event economy, following new global trends, are growing bigger day by day. So, this Part shows how these actors (and players in the teams) take their positions with the help of their capital in this field. It is a field in which all actors take different positions, applying various strategies and capital, and in wider picture, all contribute to the Jewish

community's ethno-religious communal identity. The structure of this Part is as follows: First, community/family members and the gender perspective are addressed, followed by companies and the market in the field.

8

The Field of Life Cycle Festive Events: Habitus, Capital and Gendered Practices within Community Members

§ 8.1 The Practices of Community Members and Families in the Life Cycle Events Field

One of the essential reasons for having a life cycle event is clearly to celebrate a rite of passage and to fulfill *mitzvot* within the family, friends, and community. The functional goals can include doing what is necessary for *Halachah*, religious fulfillment, providing a (religious) education for their children, connecting to Jewish traditions, blessing couples, entering into marriage, and making a public declaration for the community. Besides the fulfillment of the functional goal of the religious ritual of life cycle events, the symbolic benefit of rite of passage ceremonies is also very crucial for the community members of the Jewish society. As Bourdieu discusses in his study (2005: 209-215), economic agents are not purely rational decision-makers and economic behaviors are also shaped by historical and social conditions. The choices are not simply individual decisions, but rather, they are influenced by and also products of collective histories and social positioning (Bourdieu, 2005: 209). The interviewees in this study repeatedly emphasized the symbolic utility and meaning of the celebrations within the Jewish community rather than how the celebrations are rationally grounded for them. As seen, economic behavior is culturally constructed and socially

embedded.[1] Bourdieu emphasizes that economic models fail to capture the full complexity of human decision-making and underlines how habitual action is not a reflex and habitus determines economic decisions. These religious events and their accompanying festivities play a role in determining and establishing the status and their disposition in the community. Each community member's set of dispositions determines habitus in this field. Habitus also consists of different forms of capital, namely economic, cultural, social, and symbolic, and they shape members' preferences and behaviors, which are embedded in their social actions culturally and socially. In addition, it is an active form and can be affected socially and by changes over time. As Harvey et al. (2020: 4) state, "A particular strength of Bourdieusian theory is its focus on formative practices within organizations and the logic underpinning such practices, conceived as customary, habitual or naturalized ways of doing things (Bourdieu, 1990)." As the fieldwork of the present study indicates that, different capital are used in these festive celebrations, and habitus also forms the way and practices of these receptions. So, more elements of the celebration become important and serve this aim, which consists of strategies for status determination by way of the celebrations and the economic costs involved in gaining or maintaining a certain status. While it brings status, these occasions put an increasingly heavy burden on community members. As Belk and Nguyen (2012)[2] mention in their work,

> Wedding costs often become a burden for couples. For some families, wedding consumption may worsen their quality of life. If they seek to improve perceived social status and spend too lavishly, they have to

1 Bourdieu gives reference to Veblen's notion of "habit" and Duesenberry's emphasis on social influence (2005: 211).

2 Belk and Nguyen (2012) examine the changes in the meaning, function and structure of wedding ritual consumption in Vietnam, during *Doi Moi*, the country's radical program of renovation launched in 1986. *Doi Moi* refers to the change from the socialist-oriented economy to the market economy. Belk and Nguyen claim that the "proper" way to get married in a socialist or capitalist system is an ideological issue. The changes in wedding consumption reflect broader societal changes in consumer culture, social relationships, and the tension between modernity and tradition, the local and the global.

> work to pay back the debt they incur on weddings (Belk and Nguyen, 2012: 113).

There is a high price to pay, but it is worth it because they want to assert their power and maintain their social position in the community. Family members have applied different capital to establish their representations and status within the community. As expected, the need to "purchase" these added values on the receptions is an extra burden on community members in society. However, within this field, community members can distinguish themselves not only by their economic capital but also by cultural, social, and symbolic capital. The festive events field can be summarized as a "space of action" (Rey, 2007: 44) and practices, in which community members have different amounts of capital which can also be produced, consumed and negotiated.

8.1.1 *Burden: Economic Capital*

The need to gain or maintain status can be so pressing in the context of the Jewish community that families often make considerable financial sacrifices and take on heavy burdens during different rites of passage within the community. In Istanbul, celebrating a rite of passage has become a huge social event and, therefore, a vast monetary burden for the family members. Surprisingly, couples/families in different economic strata try to afford these big events, even if they have to take a bank loan or a significant financial burden. In other words, this burden potentially brings stressful mental and economic consequences to the families. Yet, everyone tries to take on a burden that their power and financial capacity are able to handle, while when they are unable to handle the burden, getting into debt becomes a normal/norm and natural circumstance. So much so that they have to use different ways to meet the costs related to the event. If families do not have enough economic capital to afford these events, the first option is taking out a bank loan, and the second option is receiving help from an older generation. Monetary support is received from grandmothers, grandfathers, or a wealthy sibling (Ester and David, May 12, 2017), or the costs of an item on the budget are being borne by them. One of the most frequently encountered examples of such

an item is having someone else pay for the sewing of the ballroom gown (Rinat, November 13, 2017). If holding an event is prohibitive from an economic standpoint, a third option is possible: creating an alternative. One of the interviewees spoke of the Bar Mitzvah of his son's peers in the 2000s:

> Because [their] economic situation is bad, they cannot hold a party in the evening for the kid [speaking of the reception at the hotel], and instead, they take people they are close to for a four or five-day vacation in Israel. There are those who also did this 'thing' of taking people on vacation to countries other than Israel (Ester and David, May 12, 2017).

As the informant shared, when the "space of action" is not followed as socially dictated, this creates certain anxieties in the family. The interviewee shared that the families felt ashamed and embarrassed and regretted not having a "proper" reception in a hotel. From the interviews of this study, it is possible to see examples like this in the 1990s as well.

In the interviews, a frequent circumstance was the following: "We were going to do this only once, and we tried to do the best we could do." The following is a quote from a father whom I interviewed:

> Regarding our family's economic condition, we were okay when we had our first child's Bar Mitzvah ceremony. However, it was tough to afford my second child's Bar Mitzvah celebration. Anyway, it was a one-time opportunity to celebrate such a great occasion, so I did not regret it and was able to spend that amount of money. Now, I am very worried about my second child's wedding celebration because all prices are so high, and there is no way to afford it (Laris and Avi, May 25, 2017).

While talking about their wedding, another young couple shared how high their expenditures were for their wedding and complained for a while about the amount of money being spent. They then added: "We somehow did it, and when we look at the photographs and videos from that day, we say, 'We are glad we did it'" (Sindy and Melih, May 3, 2017).

Another couple, after explaining that they had a large and luxurious Bar Mitzvah ceremony for their firstborn son, shared the following sentence with a sarcastic tone: "If we had organized a Bat Mitzvah ceremony for our girl, we would have gone bankrupt" (Stella and Yusuf, May 11, 2017). Later in the interview, despite the saying "they did nothing for the Bat Mitzvah," it appeared that for their second-born girl, they got the surprise home party, huge preparations, and also joined the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremony,* which they elaborately describe. Here, leaving aside the importance of the economic dimension, it is seen how important it is to organize the celebration in a "proper" and socially expected way. This sometimes becomes a thing to be ashamed of and the celebration alternative produced is defined as "doing nothing."

In festive event arena, there is almost no limit to the expenditure that can be made. An interviewee relayed how large of an expenditure and limitless burden to have a Bar/t Mitzvah reception with the following sentence. "After you are in it, you see how endless this task is; it does not end, it is endless, you can do anything, spend money on anything or any item. There is always something better to represent your family" (Eti and Isak, May 15, 2017). An interviewee from the market summarized the situation with the following words. "No matter how much money they have in their pocket, they set off with the motivation of 'mine should be better.' And they keep spending money on several items" (Interview with Company D, June, 2017). Therefore, this arena is a space where there are no spending limits.

Furthermore, in explaining how much of a burden the situation is for family members/couples, and sometimes it becomes impossible to afford it, a company owner from the market said:

> There are stories that we have faced and lived through. For example, once the bride and groom come together and say that they want this and that, then we agree. Later, the groom comes to the office alone to meet us. He requests another meeting, saying, 'Actually, I do not have such a budget so we cannot pay these amounts of money' (Interview with Company C, June, 2017).

In situations where two different families come together, in the case of marriage, tight bargains are also being made between the two families concerning the wedding expenditures. Especially in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, in situations where the two families could not agree about the expenditures (and sometimes on *drahoma*), and the celebration could not even take place in some cases. As seen in the interviews, while in these decades, the economic division of labor between the bride's and groom's sides was resolved in a more traditional way, in the following years, the adherence to this tradition was somewhat broken and less bargaining has been observed between families. The sentence from a father trying to get his daughter married in the 1980s was dramatic. "The counterparty was very rich. This situation, in that period, really strained me as a father" (Suzet and Alp, May 6, 2017). As expected, issues can arise when the two families are not economically equal. It is crucial to underline that the problem was not just the imbalance of economic capital between these two families; the real issue was that the failure to equalize the real economic difference between the two parties at a symbolic level created a crisis.

Sometimes, awareness of the economic background of the family status was not only for those who held an event but also among those who could not have an "appropriate" event. The interviewee summarized the situation as follows:

> We did it small and were able to handle it, and we wanted it to be something simple and ours. It was vital for us to be able to do that evening. We were not able to host an appropriate party. I have one son, and we wanted to experience it and see our child in this reception. And we chose the most suitable hotel (Melis and Murat, May 6, 2017).

Despite this family knowing their "limits," the festive event was still important, but they called their party not a real "proper" party. So, this quote indeed shows how status was involved in the celebrations, the feeling of not being able to keep up with other community members, and the feeling of shame that one had not really done it quite right.

As seen above, they did spend money, then they complained, but in the end, when families looked back, they were happy with the results and

how they kept up with the other community members and represented themselves in the community.

8.1.2 *Representation in the Jewish Community: Cultural and Symbolic Capital*

Community members consider this sphere of consumption as a one-time opportunity to represent their family in the best way possible. Their primary concern is how the family is perceived and valued within the community rather than how much money is actually spent. Here, the emphasis is on consumption because in this festive event field or "space of action," the ability to express themselves and reveal their identity and way of being proceeds through their consumption for the event. As Wacquant (2008: 272) discusses by referring to the Marxist perspective,

> Against Marxist theory, which defines classes exclusively in the economic sphere by their position in the relations of production, Bourdieu argues that classes arise in the conjunction of shared position in social space and shared dispositions actualized in the sphere of consumption: 'The *representations* that individuals and groups inevitably engage in their practices is part and parcel of their social reality. A class is defined as much by its *perceived being* as by its being' (Bourdieu, Distinction, 564).

So, Bourdieu and Wacquant go beyond classical Marxist theory and its focus on production; they build their theoretical framework on the idea that classes are defined not only by production relations but also by consumption patterns. Here, consumption is emphasized in this "space of action" (Rey 2007: 44) and how others perceive it in this field.

Based on data from the fieldwork, in this underpopulated/small Jewish community, how friends and family see each other is essential. Therefore, this whole ritual celebration and economic process turns into a performance. This field is perceived as a one-time opportunity by community members, and this situation can be better understood with the metaphor of a theater stage. According to Goffman's theory, celebratory events function as theatre stages where individuals have their performances and represent themselves

(Goffman, 1956). As a representative of the social interaction school, Goffman assigns the role of actors to the individuals. When the role and contribution of Jewish society in the field of celebratory events is understood as an arena for actors, neither the role of families can be overlooked, nor the power of human interaction in this field can be ignored. This dramaturgical action in the festive event arena also yields us insight into how community members design their public image and how it is perceived by others.

In the interviews, almost nobody felt regret about the economic capital they had spent or the burden they had taken on. On the contrary, they described the process as "how good that we did it, glad that we did it." They seemed to be fully aware of the crucial importance of status in the community and the methods they employed to attain higher status. According to them, status must be held on to exist in this society, and there is no drawback in taking on these types of burdens to protect this position in the community. Many of the interviews crystallized this awareness. "I have one son/daughter, and we will only be able to do this occasion once, so we should do our best for them and us." As seen in this quote, "us" here represents the whole family, not just the child, and the emphasis on "us" is also related to how the family is represented within the community, as can be understood from the following parts of the interview.

The words, first, "chance to present your portfolio," second, "showing your status," and third, "creating a representation" were repeated frequently in the interviews. As an example, one of the interviewees likened the occasion to a portfolio showing. When asked about why these events carry such weight within the community, the answer was:

> I think because they do not care about it too much in terms of religion and there is a huge gap [religious knowledge and wisdom] in that regard, they aim to fill that gap with something and think of it as a presentation of materiality and vanity [of the family]. A portfolio presentation. It is because they believe it is an exhibition of their family, clothes, and lifestyle. And since they have certain years when they can do it, [these days are..] when eight days, … [and talks about other life cycle days] (Interview with Company L, December, 2017).

Second, this "showing" situation takes place as "showing off" in these "theatre stages" (Goffman, 1956). Different types of purchasing practices do not exist in their day-to-day lives but are involved in religious events/ daytime ceremonies/ parties and receptions. As Bourdieu (1990) underlines, "Symbolic capital is valid even in the market. A man may enhance his prestige by making a purchase at an exorbitant price, for the sake of his point of honour, just to 'show he could do it'" (Bourdieu, 1990: 119). It is important to show that the family is able to afford these expenses due to maintaining or enhancing their status and symbolic capital in the community. Here, the term "conspicuous consumption," coined by sociologist and economist Thorstein Veblen (1899) in the late nineteenth century, is relevant to understanding the circumstances.[3] According to him, luxury commodities, which include services and goods, are a way to display economic power that helps maintain social power and prestige in a society. The most substantial reason for purchasing all added "expensive" values that can be included in "conspicuous consumption" is to maintain family prestige in society. In one (market) interview, an interviewee summarized the situation in the following way: "Our community likes showing off, likes paying the check for the table next to them, not like being inexperienced, uncouth, unrefined (they have experienced), but it is more like being underbred" (Interview with Company E, November, 2017).[4] As the quote shows, the showing off and conspicuous consumption in this field are not done because of a lack of manners or ignorance but because families are forced to assert status. So, this show business and reception are not part of the religious rituals for families and community members but rather an opportunity to create the image they wish to present themselves and reproduce it repeatedly.

The third word, "creating a representation," which was repeated frequently in the interviews, has an intense meaning in the field. Since the last

3 Veblen (1899) discusses the practice of "conspicuous consumption" and identifies it as a behavioral feature of the nouveau riches of the late nineteenth century. According to him, consumption was a purposive activity of social display in order to impress and to exude wealth and status.

4 The original say: "Bizim toplum gösterişi sever, yan masanın hesabını ödesin sever, bir görmemişlik gibi değil de görgüsüzlük gibi."

two decades, for families, the state of representation during the three to four-hour-long ceremonies and receptions has come to differ from limited time, one-off performances. Families are going after leaving a mark on the "future" as much as they care about how they look. This objective is sought through companies that are contracted to record ceremonial performances. The event or the performance is served to the public countless times to be watched by themselves and also everybody else by using social media tools of our day. When the focus expands and is no longer only how the event itself occurred, every move and the appearance of the stage become major issues. Going even further to the next level, the whole setup of the occasion becomes one of the main problems. During the interviews, it was reported that countless objects and situations look "good" in photographs, video cameras, or short clips edited afterward. These include wall-to-wall decorations, expensive hotel suites, dozens of tiny accessories bought, over-budget rental cars, etc. The main point here is that while there is a memory created during the reception, there are also quite many items to be purchased and details to be considered how to re-narrate it after the event. All preparations to represent the family on stage are in the background and then the maximum possible performance on stage is delivered. However, all these preparations are done with the idea that it is not a one-time show. Because the performance is recorded, how it looks on video becomes just as important as how it looks on that day. The backstage practices also become significant in completing this representation of the family. Video recordings of bride and groom leaving their homes, bridesmaids in bathtubs filled with balloons in hotel rooms, and even preparation of the family for Bar Mitzvah nights are among these backstage practices. While the appearance of more crowded guests is sometimes an important value in receptions, sometimes it becomes crucial to record in videos how much fun people are having on the dance floor during the wedding reception. Photography and video companies play a vital role in meeting this "need" and to best make use of this opportunity to interfere with how it looks. Moreover, companies that make the night look better than it actually is using added scenes and nicely edited short clips are preferred in the community. These words from an interviewee describing the wedding revealed a lot:

> It was a very ordinary night, and none of us had a lot of fun, I could even say we were there because we had to be there. A few days later, I saw a short clip on either *Instagram* or *Vimeo* and I could not believe my eyes. Was this that night? Did we have this much fun? It was like I was watching another wedding… [here they mention company name] I remember thinking to myself, 'company' did a really good job (Mati and Bünyamin, May 18, 2017).

The representation of the family and their reception is crucial and as mentioned before, these events are "one of the four or five podiums in life where you get to show off" (Interview with Company D, June, 2017). For this reason, families do not hesitate or hold back from investing in these events.

While this economic capital is spent and this financial burden is taken on, the following discourse is repeated substantially in the interviews: While this is an expense you are doing for yourself/your son/your daughter, it is also an expense you are making for everybody else. Of course, the money spent on everybody else is also a way to display their status to society, as mentioned above. However, it is also related to the aim of gaining social mobility through the possessed capital (Rey, 2007: 44). What the families purchase is not only the services behind the event's organization or the resulting enjoyment but also the ways in which a given family is going to be talked about, evaluated, and positioned within the extended community. Here, the family's reputation is at stake. In that context, gossip, possessed mainly by women, is a potent tool that will be discussed more below (see Chapter 8.2). While talking about someone who did not hold a wedding reception, an interviewee who did host a wedding event said:

> [I am] So glad that [s/he] did not do a wedding event. What happened now that we did? [S/he] spent [his/her] money on things needed for himself/herself and to establish his/her home. This is, in conclusion, an expenditure you pay for everybody else for one night; what a shame (Ester and David, May 12, 2017).

When they need to make financial decisions concerning the family, such as a summer holiday or saving money in a bank account, they still prioritize the ritual life cycle events in order to improve or maintain their social

representation in the congregation. Another couple described this situation surrounding their son's Bar Mitzvah ceremony event and said the following:

> We had two or three options in that period ahead of us. One was to open up an account in the bank, and we were going to save that much money for his future. The second option was to have a huge vacation as a family, and the third option was to entertain people with a large event (Stella and Yusuf, May 11, 2017).

The distinction here is being shaped as investing in the future financially or purchasing your place, and status in society and by holding a ceremony. As seen in the field research, most community members choose their reputation and representation of themselves in this festive events field. As Harvey et al. (2020: 4) state,

> Habitus is important because it shapes the praxis of strategizing. In generating similar dispositions within groups, habitus induces commitment to a common praxis based on categories of 'perception and appreciation' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 170). This affords strategists a secure feel for the game, an intuitive understanding of available options and how these might play out. Habitus causes strategists to favor options their dispositions suggest will lead to success (Harvey et al., 2020: 4).

So, having a flash life cycle event reception and display of expenditure is mostly seen as a very natural and common and part of their habitus.

This whole image-making process is accomplished not just through economic capital but also through cultural capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). While the amount of money one has for purchases is important, what you have purchased, how you make use of your capital, and what it represents also becomes important. It becomes a means whereby family members and couples distinguish themselves from other families and couples in society, as well as from non-Jews in Turkish society (see Chapter 9.3). For instance, during the time when hotel ballrooms were beginning to be rented, the hotel one picked, the displayed largess, and the pride one derived from it became significant. Stella and Yusuf (May 11, 2017) described the *Conrad* Hotel, in which they hosted a reception at the end of the 1990s: "For us,

that hotel has great meaning to our family history, and it is defined by the Jewish community as the 'good' one." So, it was not just about how much money or economic capital they spent; it was also about the choices and their choices' representations in the eyes of the community; as Bourdieu (1986) stresses,

> The different types of capital can derived from economic capital, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question (Bourdieu, 1986: 252).

Of course, again, the main idea is not how much money is spent but how it is transformed into a cultural symbolic value within the community. *Conrad* Hotel is precious for this family and the Jewish community because it is well-established, prestigious weddings have been held there before, it has a fantastic sea view, and it is a part of international hotel chains, etc. All these features also serve to show and use their family's symbolic and cultural capital, and there is a distinction between symbolic/cultural capital and crude money purchasing power.

Wacquant stresses that capitals can be exchanged with each other and among the different fields. "Individuals and families continually strive to maintain or improve their position in social space by pursuing strategies of reconversion whereby they transmute or exchange one species of capital into another" (Wacquant, 2008: 271). In addition, this exchange can sometimes bring advantages to the community members; as Moore (2008: 104) emphasizes, "First, he seeks to demonstrate the arbitrary and instrumental character of symbolic capitals as types of assets that bring social and cultural advantage or disadvantage." And, Moore (2008:109) adds, "In that symbolic capital is the transubstantiation of economic capital, it multiplies or diminishes the social returns to economic capital to varying degrees for different social agents and groups." The size of the *abudaraho*[5]—an expensive delicacy—or the choice of caviar served during the reception, or having a unique orchestra at the beginning of the reception are crucial to show one's cultural

5 Ladino for waxed fish roe.

and symbolic capital, as well as the taste of the family. Verter (2003) also mentions how certain "refined" tastes and preferences are played out against each other and are characterized by families' attempts to reach higher esteem.

> Aesthetic perceptions and preferences, the qualification painting authoritatively, the linguistic facility to discuss a string quartet, the yen for sushi or caviar: these abstract tastes and competencies are precious assets in a symbolic economy characterized by the struggle for domination (Verter, 2003: 152).

Several examples show how important and indispensable people find a "rich, well spent, tasteful" wedding. As a family guest at a large and expensive wedding at the beginning of the 1960s, she remembers that

> There were dresses sewn by Stefan,[6] and an evening party was also held. It was gorgeous, but I could not go. Is that not odd? I had a two-three-month-old baby, and my mother-in-law said, 'look, you will see a lot of reception in your life, let me go to this wedding instead of you; let me see this'... The wedding took place in one of the most beautiful and best hotels of that time (Raşel, June 14, 2017).

Again, in an interview from the event sector, one interviewee shared how much this business has turned into a kind of show business where people only care about showing off their individual taste.

> This business is squarely a show business; the customer comes in with dreams and designs and then puts them on stage. [talking about a Bar Mitzvah]… works with the child, creates, prepares dances, and melds/works it all into a concept (Interview with Company H, June, 2017).

Such concepts assist with the room decorations, the dance teachers hired by the bride and groom for their first dance, and the party favors distributed to guests at the end of the event. This business of establishing/creating a concept

6 Very famous, elegant tailor in that time.

may also be evidenced at Bar Mitzvahs, where thirteen-armed candelabras or *Menorah* are fashioned. Or occasionally at Brith Milahs, where a color or an object is used as part of a theme. The main goal here is to ensure the compatibility of everything in the venue and within the reception. While the trend in one period was imitating musicals or famous book stories, in another period, concepts with references to Jewish history were the trend. Surprises by friends at weddings are also often consonant with the chosen concept and prepared in collaboration with an organization or music company. At marriage proposals, plans may include renting a mountain home or a yacht and sharing that whole day with friends (Mati and Bünyamin, May 18, 2017, & Karen and Ceki, May 2, 2017).

The excessiveness in the festive events field described here is also not related to the level of education of the family members or the hosts of the occasions. An interviewee who is a graduate of one of the top-ranking universities in Turkey and has her own business vents for a while[7] about how much time and money people spend on this business and how much it is about showing off. Yet their language when speaking about their own event was not so different (Rinat, November 13, 2017). They boast about the event they put together, comparing it with others and exclaiming that "we were the first ones to do this back then; afterward, they imitated us." The description of a dress ordered from abroad is formulated in terms of distinction. The emphasis is mainly on being a person who has impeccable "taste" (Bourdieu, 1984). Another emphasis the interviewee particularly pointed out here was being a pioneer, which is the novelty in the festive event field. The interviewee's statement, "First we did it, then everyone imitated us," actually means that we raised the bar and set the trend, and then others followed suit. This action and form of expression are also a state of presenting one's own cultural and symbolic capital. It is also an effort to set a distinction between community members who are not able to do it and those who imitate.

7 During the time period the interviewee described, it was much rarer to see a woman owning or running a business like this one.

8.1.3 *Different Strategies to Feel for the Game*

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, in Bourdieu's framework, "feel for the game" is the way that those understand the game and its rules and regulations and act according to them. A good player of the game does what needs to be done and meets the demands of the game (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 112). First, community members try to provide a "minimum standard" that is assumed to be the expectation of the community under all circumstances. Moreover, this ability and practical sense come from their habitus, embodied cultural dispositions, and experience of the game (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 111). Second, they try hard to distinguish themselves from the other families and their occasions. Therefore, they use different strategies and methods, referring to their capital to play the game and maintain the status quo, then gain power (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 111) and become good players to compete with others in this festive event field.

The initial move is generally to ensure a "minimum standard" for the celebration, and the answer to what it is may vary from person to person. Moreover, it is assumed that this "minimum standard," which is often unclear and varies from decade to decade (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7), reflects the Jewish community's expectations. When I asked Tuna and Hayim how they made decisions about all the items they preferred to spend money on at their wedding, I got the following answer.

> We believed that there was a certain minimum for this job. In other words, it seems it does not work if certain things are not done. I can give some examples. For instances, the clothes you wear must be of a certain quality. The first dance you perform that night after working on it for hours in advance is very critical. Or there must be a treat that you buy or add, such as hiring live musicians for a cocktail party (Tuna and Hayim, June 30, 2017).

So, as also seen in the quote, the first strategy is to be aware of the unwritten rules as the reception owner or as a guest, which is one of the essential things that also feeds the "feel for the game." This state of knowing what to do, how to behave, or what to have in celebration is a kind of practical sense and comes from their habitus. Community members' experiences attending different

rites of passage events help them to "learn the tempo, rhythms and unwritten rules of the game" (Maton, 2008: 54).

As discussed in the theoretical chapter (see Chapter 3), this situation can be understood better with Bourdieu's concept of "doxa." While "doxa" is a set of established dominant opinions in the field, it also contains the 'go without saying' actions and the limits. For instance, wearing a ready-made dress to the synagogue as a parent of the groom or bride is taboo (Valeri and Yusuf, May 17, 2017). Women need to have a tailor-made dress for the synagogue to avoid having the same dress as the other guests. Another example is the contemporary trend of preparing a surprise for the bride and groom at their wedding reception. If the friend group prepared a surprise show projected on a screen or produced a dance show for the bride and groom, one is expected to reciprocate by organizing a surprise when the friend gets married. Sindy and Melih explained this need for reciprocity very well.

> A surprise was prepared for us at our wedding by our circle of friends, and we had to do so in return for the [next] couple. If we had not prepared something like this, […] we simply could not have (Sindy and Melih, May 3, 2017).

So, this surprise show was based on reciprocity, and couples were very aware of this unwritten rule.[8]

Moreover, the need for reciprocity is an important issue among the community members, as expected. Here, the next two examples underline the issue of having an equivalent exchange, namely, guest and gift lists. If anyone from the family is invited to that particular occasion type previously, such as Brith Milah, *Fashadura*, pre-wedding bridal home-leaving ceremony, Bar Mitzvah synagogue ceremony, or *Mikveh*, then an invitation should be sent out for the equal ceremony. Some exceptions aside, this is almost seen as an unwritten rule. The sentiment from several interviews, "If they invited me,

8 A few interviewees shared how stressful it was to prepare a surprise for their friend. They talked about running out of ideas/concepts for surprises in a large group of friends and stressed the necessity of doing that. Some of them also underlined that how tired they get from watching these surprises in receptions as well.

then I have to invite them," provides a clear proof. This appears as a hidden social rule as both a requirement and a way of clearing of social debts in relationships.[9] The main motivation regarding the guest list can be positioned between social pressure ("it would be rude to the other family") and expectation of financial reciprocity of the previously given gifts ("we attended, gave our gift, now it is their turn."). The need for reciprocity is valid for the gifts as well (Bauman and May, 2001: 79). The value of the gift can vary proportionally to the event venue and the services offered. In multiphase occasions, such as marriages, smaller gifts are given in the beginning such as the engagement, and the largest gift is given at the end which is the wedding. Although the shape and financial dimensions of gifts have evolved over time, the state of reciprocity[10] has not changed. Families do these acts expecting to receive a similar value gift in the future. And lastly, the purpose of gifting is not just economic return but rather cultivating social and cultural relationships. As French sociologist Mauss (2018) states in his "theory of gift," while gifting seems to be voluntary, this exchange is also mandatory, like a contract between families. The gifting tradition that started with household items nowadays takes place with the use of foreign currencies such as dollars and euros or valuables such as gold.

The second strategy frequently used for the "feel for the game" is observing the events done that year or their cohorts with attentive eyes. One interviewee shared this in the following way:

> In my mind, I kept a list of all the mistakes made at other events and wanted ours to be the best. You need some difference, and you need to stand out. For this reason, we placed ....s, hired ….s for people to have more fun (Laris and Avi, May 25, 2017).

This observation strategy could be likened to a student preparing for a final exam or a player watching his opponent's matches. Families spend a lot of time observing others and making great preparations before organizing their events. If it cannot be observed, which means not being invited to the event,

9 For these reasons, many interviewees mentioned lots of unwanted guests invited out of necessity.

10 See: Malinowski (2005).

they try to get this knowledge from other information sources, such as the market and their cohorts (see Chapter 3). Another such situation was when the event venue was visited during the previous wedding or Bar Mitzvah ceremony. It is said that observing a similar occasion at the venue before theirs provides valuable information for the family to work on the shortcomings regarding the venue, organization, sound, and technical details. In addition to observations, the strategies are sometimes formed out of tips from their cohorts. Great attention is paid to the experiences of friends who have already celebrated the same event. In this quote, Lisya and Uri explained how they learned more about the procedure at a hotel reception.

> Friends told us [talking about the hotel ballroom where the evening event took place]: provide a great deal of alcohol yourselves in the hotel because you should be aware that the hotel staff will say that the drinks you provided [served to guests] are run out and oblige you to purchase drinks from the hotel (Lisya and Uri, May 25, 2017).

When the community members do not have enough capital to follow the most recent trends and the minimum standard, the third strategy for the "feel for the game," which is to create an alternative, could be observed. As they also want to play this game like other players, they need to find alternative solutions. Families spend considerable time looking for ways to organize an event and provide the best quality at the lowest price rather than seeing it as a "waste of money" and a "big burden" to keep up with what others are doing. One interviewee gave an observed example that described the situation concerning her friend in the following way:

> A well-known and famous hairdresser requests money in nine units for wedding hair, but their own hairdresser does this work/hair for two units of money. S/he can have it done cheaply (Ester and David, May 12, 2017).

The motivation behind this idea is to keep up with others and imitate valued capital in order to fit in the game. This strategy comes close to Bourdieu's strategies of trying to convince others that your capital is valuable like the others. The fieldwork data shows that the most frequently visited

neighborhood for finding the more affordable options is *Eminönü*. Interviewees extensively discussed an object used for show purposes, how much it cost when provided by the company, and how much cheaper they were able to complete it themselves from the *Eminönü* neighborhood. One couple interviewed disclosed how much time and effort they willingly spent in *Eminönü*. "We found the place for the cheaper [version] of everything; we traveled a lot for this, had patience and allocated time" (Lisya and Uri, May 25, 2017). Moreover, an interviewee from the event sector shared the following quote to explain the situation in the field.

> This effort involves sorting something in the cheapest way, coming to an agreement with a florist here or there, showing the picture of the décor they want, or trying to sort the chairs from somewhere else… (Interview with Company D, June, 2017).

Of course, a representative from Company D added that when a family does not work with well-known businesses in the market, the outcome does not provide the same quality as desired. Most importantly, if it does not look similar to the imitated one, it does not also bring the same symbolic capital to the family.

Another point I would like to emphasize from Ester and David's hairdresser example (Ester and David, May 12, 2017) is how they described at length the measures this woman took to keep her secret. In other words, this process should be kept secret. According to another interview, if a wedding dress is purchased at a price lower than what is considered normal, in a neighborhood outside daily life habits, it should also be kept secret. What becomes a secret is felt to be shameful or somehow faulty. If they were not ashamed and seemed pleased with themselves for handling the issue during the interview, they would not have hesitated to make this information public at that time; however, they kept it secret. Since not keeping up with expected cultural and symbolic capital is a situation to be ashamed of, in other words, it is a skeleton in the closet.

The fourth strategy for playing the game includes the practice of event saving, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. This strategy includes holding several events at the same time, which has become more common in recent

years. The reason behind this decision is to be able to invest all their energy and capital into one or two receptions instead of having more low-quality events. In other words, it is not only because of not being able to afford it. However, this event-saving strategy is employed by those who cannot afford several separate events as a money-saving method. As mentioned earlier (see Chapter 6), briefly, the person in charge of the synagogue explained that in recent years, families have preferred not to hold Bar Mitzvah ceremonies on Saturdays but on Mondays or Thursdays instead. After fulfilling the religious obligation of donning *tefillin* and *tallit,*[11] the photoshoots and the *Seuda*[12] take place. They interpreted that people save money on clothes and parties that they would otherwise have to spend if the Bar Mitzvah took place on a Saturday. A different example is combining the necessary steps for weddings (see Chapter 7). Recently, official marriage and religious weddings have been held together in the synagogue, or civil marriage and receptions have been held together. As the interviewee explained, the expenses for the venue, the clothing, and many other costs are avoided, making it easy to have only one event to spend time and energy on.

The fifth and last strategy is to be able to add some innovations with the help of cultural capital they have for the celebrations. Beyond the growing expense, the drive for distinction also challenges community members. Even though the cost increases because of the need to add something new and resonant to the celebration/reception, the festive event field becomes a social race among the community members. Doing something for the first time also means generally having held the "best" event of the year. One interviewee from the market sector said very clearly and in a deprecating tone that "this is a contested state between people" (Interview with Company D, June, 2017).[13] In other words, organizing the best event that accumulates the most amount of cultural/symbolic capital, becomes a contest in time and space where contestants assess each other's performance and compete to gain the upper hand next time by their very own production (and

11 On Mondays and Thursdays, the *Torah* is read during shacharit, the morning weekday prayers, during which adult Jews (above the age of thirteen) wear a *tallit* and *tefillin*.

12 Breakfast after morning prayer.

13 Original says: *Sidik yarışı:* Pissing contest.

consumption). The examples of innovations vary over decades and according to the economic and cultural capital of the family members/couples. However, hiring circus acts to entertain children for a Bar Mitzvah in the 1990s was a new concept to be proud of (Melis and Murat, May 6, 2017), a Bat Mitzvah (Vivet, November 2, 2017) where cocktails were served on the dance floor for the first time became a trendsetter. A Bar Mitzvah ceremony built around a viral song was a source of pride in the 1980s, only to be succeeded by a *Hamsa*[14] (souvenir) object distributed as a party favor to tables in the 1990s and by a video of flying a drone for the first time in the 2010s (Interview with Company A, June, 2017). The data from the fieldwork also show that doing something different from others or being the first one for an innovation are important parts of the practice. As one market interviewee put the desire for differentiation in summary by this quote, "The desire and the need for one to show off exists in us Jews… They do it to say, 'I do it too; I did the best'."

Instead of a plain conclusion, it would be more explanatory to tell a story summarizing this section, which I heard from an elder in the community, someone whose name I would like to keep anonymous.

> One day, a man went to a company for his son's Bar Mitzvah. He said: "Let's do something that has never been done before for my son." The company said: "Let's do *Shabbat tefillah* on elephants back in Africa," and the man agreed. The ceremony began, and everything was going very well when suddenly the ceremony stopped. The man asked what happened. The company employee said: "There are elephants from another Bar Mitzvah passing by, so we stopped and waited for them to pass, sir" (No name interview, 2018).

At the end of the story, the person who recounted it also added, "Do not you know that Jews are neck and neck competitors? They are competitous, competitive, and ostentatious."

14 Also known as the *Hand of Fatima*.

§ 8.2 Looking at the Life Cycle Events Field From a Gender Perspective: Gendered Experiences and Social Reproduction

8.2.1 *The Position of Women (and Men) in the Field*

While rites of passage reflect and maintain a particular habitus, some responsibilities and gender roles are expected of both men and women. My central claim is that most of the weight and responsibility of these life cycle events fall on women. In addition to being the face and promotional figure of these events, they are also responsible for representing the family at the event.

Along with the duty of continuance of family and lineage clearly belongs to Jewish women, the Jewish woman is also assumed to be responsible for the continuation of traditions, rituals, and education of new generations. Women have a unique place as producers and transferrers of culture from one generation to another. Turkish Jewish women, as vital agents of the events, are the hosts, organizers, and decision-makers for every single detail of these events. They hold stronger positions in interactions with the other agents (companies) in Jewish society. Women are at the front in hosting events and its preparation stages. Some exceptions aside, men are undertaking more passive roles in the decision-making process and do not make final decisions for each step. And this endeavor is taken on as duty once again by the Jewish woman, creating another stressful burden on her shoulders. This duty includes being a decision-making authority, spending hours of effort for an event, and carrying a psychological and emotional burden. Particularly, the Jewish woman plans everything in minute detail and administrates the perception of the event. Above all, they are expected to represent their families and their reputation in the community. Moreover, she not only represents the family within the community but also contributes a lot to the ethno-religious communal cultural identity. Most importantly, women are the ones who take on the role of carriers of the ethno-religious communal cultural identity.

Both women and men learn the duties (and social expectations from society) that fall on them in these life cycles since their childhood in the Jewish

community. They are raised in this field with its habitus. They sometimes voluntarily contribute to that field and are sometimes forced to do it. As Butler and Bourdieu agree, all of these gendered roles are learned, repeated, and embedded into the body. These gendered stylized acts are repeated by community members for years and help build and rebuild the field of life cycle events and the game. However, according to Butler, "In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988: 519). In other words, gender (role) is not a fixed or inherent identity and is continuously formed through repeated social performance and acts. According to her, it is also not a source of action, which means repeated acts can be changed by the agent.

Butler underlines that gender is, a "doing" rather than a "being" (Butler, 1990: 25), and she adds that gender is not a role, it is an act (Butler, 1988: 528). In other words, this state of becoming comes from doing, which means gender roles are not fixed or stable. Therefore, she gives a floor for the change as well. Butler underlines the possibility and the capability of gender and gender roles being constituted differently. According to Butler, all of these gender roles and stylized repetition acts, are "performative acts," as discussed in the theoretical chapter (see Chapter 3).

In the Turkish Jewish community, all rituals are repeated again and again and the identity is protected and recreated through women. They do not only imitate but also, the woman takes the role of establishing the habitus of the life cycle events. It is also the woman who creates new performative acts, it is the woman who imitates others, and it is also the woman who adds innovations. They reproduce this field with their actions, sometimes with their bodies, and with their decisions. They also mostly volunteer to take on this gendered role. Each one of them tries to create changes with minor additions, and they try to compete with other families with these small changes they make. It is women who know how to play in this field and have the feel for the game. That is to say; they have the sense of what you should or should not do, the sense of how to be in that playground, and the knowledge of how to "win" at the game.

Therefore, at the end of the day, the ethno-religious communal cultural identity is not fixed (without forgetting the contributions of religious authorities and companies), it is a reproduced and unstable identity. And, of course, all these stylized repeated acts are also performative. In the last instance, it is the community that reproduces itself, it is defined by changing symbolic acts.

One of the most important agents that determine the boundaries in this game is Jewish women. It is the woman who has a sense of what society expects and also knows how to use the taste and symbolic capital which is necessary to represent her family. The active implementer of repeated act is also the woman, and it helps her to draw the boundaries in the community. In addition, women are not only holders of culture symbolically but also protectors of group borders. With the help of gossip, which is discussed below, the woman always has the final say in these matters: what is considered "tasteful," "high quality," "elegant," "unique," "contribution to the family prestige," "having a gusto," or "non-esthetic," "poor quality," and "outdated" within the Jewish community.[15] What can or cannot be done, which novelty can be tried during the event, or how to differentiate oneself from other members but still stay within the acceptable boundaries of the community are the woman's decisions. In this process of the issues of boundaries, the woman comes forward as a family member who is the main determinant and agent. As underlined in the theoretical chapter (see Chapter 3), Bourdieu takes women as a maker of taste and is responsible for converting the economic capital into a symbolic one for her family with the help of displaying taste (Skeggs, 2004: 28). As seen during the fieldwork and interviews, this claim was justified again and again. Turkish Jewish women are agents who transform economic capital into symbolic capital. However, some reserve cases were seen as well. In the case of exceptional families, when men are the decision-makers, the taste filter or sharing responsibilities, they (men) are labeled as "meddling with everything like a woman,"[16] thus underlining that this responsibility belongs to women as a part of their expected societal

15 All these terms were told by interviewees during the interviews.

16 This term was also told by several interviewees during the interviews.

role. Again, in sporadic cases, when a man intervenes and participates in decision-making process, his stance is appreciated and he is recognized as "tasteful, stylish." A representative from Company D summarized this as follows:

> [Talking mainly about events] While it is a space where women are more present and seem stronger, if a man rarely has *gusto* and understands art, then they get involved. He becomes a consultant when there is indecision and when he is asked to make the final decision (Interview with Company D, June, 2017).

As seen in this quote, it is expected that this responsibility can be carried out by those with impeccable taste, and this person is rarely male but mostly female. Women also hold the position of trendsetters in the field by adding novelties or new innovations that suit this "desired" taste or "gusto." Over time, new performative acts are added to the rituals/events, and other families repeat these new additions. These innovations are also passed on to new generations and thus, a pattern emerges that shows how the Turkish Jewish Sephardi Bar Mitzvah ceremony is performed. As it is reproduced over the years, it changes and renews. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant, "Each maneuver undertaken by the player modifies the character of the field and establishes new lines of force in which the action in turn unfolds and is accomplished, again altering the phenomenal field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 21). In other words, this life cycle festive events field, or the ethno-religious communal cultural identity as it is used in this dissertation, is also constantly changing with the help of women's maneuvers (families), companies and religious authority. This field has no essence; the steps taken by the agents develop and transform it. As all these acts are performed, these life cycles become, in a way, Turkish Jewish life cycle events.

Within the division of labor between men and women, as repeated during many interviews, unsurprisingly, men are more present regarding the financial aspect of the events, price negotiations, and payments. So, while women hold primarily cultural and symbolic capital in the game, men mostly hold the role of economic capital. As a representative from Company J said: "[company owner talks about the company's payment procedure]... then I

receive payment from the groom whom I have never seen before" (Interview with Company J, November, 2017). As referring to other interviews, while men are mostly invisible in decision-making meetings where details and choices are made, men become visible at the point of payment. This attitude and gendered role also put a huge burden on the man - the burden of being a man who is financially strong enough to afford the event organized (see Chapter 8.1.1). Another critical point is that if the economic capital is insufficient or the economic load determined for this event cannot be carried, only the man is held responsible, not the family.

The below quote demonstrates how men and women differ while performing their gendered roles in the field. A representative from Company A stated:

> Suppose a man shows discontent with the decoration and organization company. In that case, the complaint is usually centered around 'I paid for it but did not get what I paid for,' or traditionally, 'you were supposed to put more flowers, but these are not enough.' For a woman, the complaint is usually, 'It does not look stylish, not like what you showed in the fancy demo.' So, all in all, a dream world exists for her (Interview with Company A, June, 2017).

While the man focuses on the quantity of the flower offered in return for the money he gives, the woman evaluates the flower based on how it looks in terms of taste. Another example was provided by a representative from Company A, which emphasized the woman's dominance in choosing the details and added: "Even if there is interference by men, it is because women force them to or give a task for him" (Interview with Company A, June, 2017). They are like non-managerial employees, meaning they are only responsible for carrying out assigned tasks and reporting to "their managers" without participating in the decision-making process. A representative from Company F briefly summarized this gendered division of labor in the interview.

> A woman is the commander. She is ninety-five percent in charge, and Ishak has five percent. Esther is ninety-five percent responsible. The

> guy does not want countless troubles in his head (Interview with Company F, November, 2017).[17]

So, while the company labeled the woman as a commander, they underlined that the responsibilities of all these tasks are defined as duties that do not belong to men. The event's success depends on the women's ensuring that these details are executed at the right place, at the right time, and in an orderly manner, which was discussed before as the feel for the game. The interviewees showed that the woman is not hesitant to take on these responsibilities. In fact, the woman is ready to take on this responsibility no matter what situation she is in. A representative from Company A portrayed the woman who is taking the responsibility of the Brith Milah event regardless of her (health) situation:

> I am sure [from the moment the child was born] she [the mother] has not sat down idly for ten minutes in the past seven days… but she is present that day, standing… it is usually the women who do it, men only do it if they are pushed by women to do so (Interview with Company A, June, 2017).

During another interview with one of the couples, the woman was very confident and briefly summed it up with one sentence: "Woman makes the decisions among Jews for sure" (Stella and Yusuf, May 11, 2017).

Furthermore, during several interviews, many jokes were made about the Sephardi mother's dominance, and the Sephardic mother's anecdotes were shared. Moreover, if neither the bride nor the mother (of the child) takes this position, then the position is immediately filled by another woman in the family. This position could sometimes be taken by either the grandmother or the bride's or groom's mother. For example, a representative from Company D said: "If the bride is passive, she looks for her mother's approval for any decision by making eye contact with her mother during meetings" (Interview with Company D, June, 2017). They are women who follow the process closely and are experts in the details. Two types of outcomes were

17 The interviewee used commonly used Jewish woman and man names to exemplify the issue.

mentioned during the interviews in these mother-bride encounters. Especially at weddings, the mother of the bride and groom "let their egos take over"[18] and become competitors with the bride. Or, they collaborate with the bride as an "experienced" female family member and "help" the bride through the process as a "taste" filter.

Lastly, the absence of men in interviews was also apparent, and this absence was strong evidence that men did not exist during decision-making periods. Some statements men gave during the interviews were clear indications of this distance. When I asked about some details of the event, generally, they turned to their wife and said: "You took care of everything; you can speak if you wish," "You go ahead and speak; what am I going to say anyway." In several cases, man did not know which company they worked with for their festive event. Men often lost interest in the detailed discussions about a festive event during the interview. As a result, they either started playing with their phones or left the room to mind their own business. There were even some interviews where men chose not to attend. Their excuse was, "What am I going to tell you? You know everything better than me." So, all in all, the organization details and information about the events are always in the hands of women.

8.2.2 *The Responsibilities of Women*

Here, I divide the duties assigned to women to represent the family, which women often accept voluntarily, into two: the preparation stage and during the event. First, before starting to explain the women's expected duties in the preparation stage, at this point, it is beneficial to refer to Boden's study (2003). Boden seeks to understand "new" commercial weddings,[19] and she uses a

18 This was the term used by a company during an interview.

19 Boden (2003) has an alternative approach to examine festive ceremonies and she discusses celebrations through the consumption and consumerism patterns which specially focuses on the wedding consumption in Britain since the 1994 Marriage Act. Boden seeks to understand 'new' commercial wedding as an expanding commercial phenomenon. She also engages the study with the sociological consumer culture literature, the feminist theories of consumption, gender ideology (which is central to the whole wedding experience,

concept that is also very useful for this dissertation, called "superbride." *Superbride* refers to the bride/woman who is a rational project manager and an emotional childish fantasizer simultaneously with the help of wedding consumption culture. Referring to Boden, the role of an emotional childish fantasizer can be seen parallel to the role of Jewish women who seek to add innovations to the events and visualize and imagine the whole event. As discussed above, women are the ones who carry the burden of representing the family. Most importantly, in the Jewish life cycle events, as seen above, it is easy to see/locate women in this field as rational project managers, including planners, organizers, event executives, and communication managers.

As the event executive, women interact with other parties such as institutions, companies, etc. The woman determines her position as a contact person for almost all the companies they work with. One of the employees from Company H stated:

> Mothers have schedules and plans. It is much more difficult for fathers if they get involved in the decision of details, but it rarely happens anyway. It is more often mothers and children [emphasizing their leading roles in deciding outlines and small details]. The mother always has a plan and schedule [in her head] and comes prepared after much deliberation (Interview with Company H, June, 2017).

As a planner and decision maker, the essential duty is to provide a "healthy" and "tasteful" filter for the family (family's reputation) during the preparation period. The position of "organizer"[20] requires a very serious state of control and constantly revisiting the details until the last day. The woman, as an "organizer" word-for-word, becomes the person who deals with every detail and every step.

Whether the bride, a Brith Milah, or Bar/Bat Mitzvah mother, in addition to all the emotional reactions these ceremonies create, she also carries the

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influencing brides' and grooms' attitudes to the occasion and their behavior as consumers), theories of emotion, and the Veblenesque perspective.

20 As Ester stated: "I was like an *organizer.* I took on the entire responsibility and details of the organization of the event, and my husband took care of the rental of the venue" (Ester and David, May 12, 2017).

emotional weight of all the tasks. All added together, it becomes a huge burden for one person to bear, as stated in several interviews. For a single rite of passage occasion that is expected to take approximately four to five hours, the woman has to think and work thoroughly about every detail for weeks to months beforehand. As Eti, one of the interviewees, stated:

> Because it is a very grueling and exhausting task, every detail takes an enormous amount of time, and you must work your brain. As I said, I used to go to bed with a pen and a notebook so that I could take a note if something came to my mind while I sleep… that day and night [reception] takes real effort…What I worked on for months was over in only four hours (Eti and Isak, May 15, 2017).

Of course, the woman is stressed about a plan she has spent so much time and effort on to make work flawlessly. An anecdote Eti shared about her son's Bar Mitzvah preparations is appropriate here to exemplify how much stress levels can rise. She explained how she wrote speeches for her son to read at the candle ceremony.[21] This quote clearly illustrates the emotional weight of the event on a woman.

> Nearing the last days, almost at the end, I was constantly writing. That table was a heap of paper. I told my husband that I could not breathe in this house anymore. I felt like the walls were closing in on me… Bar Mitzvah was in one month. I still could not sit at the table, and I could not breathe. So, I took all the files, pens, and papers. I decided to go to the seaside. [I planned that] I would write there. So, I took my folder, there is a cafe I always go to, by the seaside. I told the waiter: 'Bring me coffee and refill as needed, do not ask me anything, I will totally concentrate and write this'…I do not know how concentrated I was, how I looked like, what kind of energy I radiated… I was writing, writing, coffee after coffee, writing…[Talking about the customers at

21 At Bar and Bat Mitzvah receptions, thirteen guests or a group of guests are invited to the stage to light each candle. When the Bar Mitzvah boy or Bat Mitzvah girl calls them to the stage, boy/girl reads a text containing kind words about them or about their relationship with them.

> the next table] They were leaving, and the woman handed me a paper and said, 'Could you please read this please'…The paper said, 'I do not know what you are working on right now, your stress passed on to me, you are spreading such negative energy, whatever you are doing, I respect it but know that the result will be excellent, and you will understand that it was not worth agonizing yourself so much. Everything will be wonderful for you, but please take some time off for yourself.' I read this, turned around, and she was gone. I did not know her…It was indeed an excruciating time; was all that actually necessary? But once you are inside, you lose control. You cannot stop it. Either you do it, or you do not. I always say to myself, if I am going to do it, I will do my best. I have always been like that (Eti and Isak, May 15, 2017).

As seen above, the stress and emotional weight grow even further with deadline pressure.

Moreover, the manager, planner, and organizer role is not limited to the preparation stage; it also continues during the event day. It is also the woman who tries to ensure that everything goes as planned and everything is going well. An employee from Company A recalled the typical scene they witnessed while the bride's family was getting ready to walk down the aisle in the synagogue (called 'cortege').

> Fathers and other men are usually very excited and wander in the cortege. They do not know where to look, which camera, where they stand, and where their flower is. They ask, 'Were we supposed to wear flowers? I had no idea.' Women are the opposite, controlling, 'Where is your flower? I set it out for you at home, didn't you see? Yours was white, not purple' etc. They somehow make sure that the father appears on stage appropriately. A fascinating hierarchy exists (Interview with Company A, June, 2017).

As seen in this quote, the woman usually prepares the man for the ceremony or reception, who knows where to stand and how to behave appropriately that day. She does her best to ensure that the whole event goes as planned, "perfect," and without problems.

Of course, as expected, no matter how much control she has, some problems and setbacks occur during the event. In such cases, again, women become the crisis solver. As frequently repeated in interviews, the most crucial emphasis here is the female host's effort to be seen as an error-free occasion by other community members. This memory becomes a success story when the woman becomes a crisis-solver, especially without guests noticing. Almost all the women interviewed brag while telling these "success" stories. Interview instances include how the mother heroically solved a problem with the wedding dress or even fixed it by sewing it herself, how a wedding dress ruined by spilled wine during the wedding was instantly saved by soaking it in water on the spot, or an extensive story about how the "big" problems with the seating arrangements, which were decided after days of thinking, were resolved last minute. An interviewee told a similar story (Edit and Moris, May 18, 2017); during a Bar Mitzvah reception, she realized, during the lighting of the second candle, that the kids (friends of Bar Mitzvah boy) to light the sixth candle are not in attendance. She glanced around and looked for a solution to light the candle. She then remembered some school friends visiting from another city to attend. First, she signaled the DJ to slow down the music and transitions. Then, she went to the back of the room, changed the names, and wrote a new paragraph for the newcomers. She quickly handed it to his son who was presenting his Bar Mitzvah candle ceremony. The boy, who had just turned thirteen, did not know these people, but by her mother's command, he kept going to present the ceremony as if nothing had happened. During the interview, the woman spoke of this "huge problem" that was solved without anyone knowing, which was accepted as an indicator of success.

The woman not only ensures that everything goes well during the occasion but also ensures guests' happiness, controls (sensation of) the atmosphere, and maintains emotional balance at the venue. During the occasion, the woman, as a family representative, is also responsible for both interactions with guests and ensuring that guests are pleased by the end of the event. The key phrase repeated by many female interviewees was: "They [guests] must leave with a smile on their face." Once again, as stated above, women take the role of entertaining the guests as well.

Along with many other responsibilities of women in organizing the events, preparing the guest list, and making a list of the presents previously gifted to the family also fall under the domain of women. Reciprocity is perceived as quite a significant value for these two issues. Primarily, the effort spent on the guest list is not limited to preparing the list before the event. Because this reciprocity also requires keeping in mind the memories of the occasions you were previously invited to. This mental workload is also valid for the gift list. Very remarkable scenes about gift lists were mentioned in the interviews by the women, after big night receptions, opening gifts at home. Gift packages were opened one by one, written down on a list with the name on it, and recorded. This list is then compared to previously given gifts or forecasts the value of the gifts to be given to that family for upcoming occasions.[22]

Last but not least, one of the most significant mechanisms that ensure this field is kept alive is gossip, which is possessed mainly by women. Gossip is a potent tool to contribute to the issue of representation. This tool is like an evaluation for understanding what is tasteful for the community and helps with decisions for future events. It affects everything from setting boundaries and knowing what to care about to affecting the social status of the event host within the community. These conversations, chats, and gossip among friends also determine the borders of occasions in the community. At the same time, they play a big part in deciding what the new occasion should look like and how it can be better than the previous one. Gossip functions to disseminate not only the negative assessments about the events but also how a particular occasion was "good," "decent," "great," and "elegant." These gossips present notable indicators of the community boundaries and cultural codes on religious occasions. During many interviews, the audio recording was sometimes paused to share gossip. This was something I frequently encountered, especially among women; the comparisons, evaluations of recent occasions, and discussions about it for weeks appear to be very normalized topics in the community. As an alternative information-

22 Women interviewees mentioned some emotions during the making of these lists. Appreciation and happiness occurred when it is decided that the gift is fair, whereas disappointment and surprise were the main feelings when the gift is not considered as such.

sharing tool, gossip can be assumed to be an essential information resource that determines the shape and form of upcoming occasions. This gossip circle also opens the door to commentary about the economic status of the family who hosted the occasion, such as whether the family had enough financial power required for the occasion. It also gives the floor to talk about the families' cultural capital and how it is used. All these create pressure and stress on the families who plan to hold events in the future.

As discussed above, the mental workload and responsibilities of the event are not limited to the preparation stage and event day, it is more than that. She needs to be aware of the community's expectations and update herself to be in that game/ to have the feel of the game. All rituals are repeated and repeated, becoming the role of women again. As Butler puts it, "Gender is not just a process, but it is a particular type of process, "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame'" (Salih, 2002: 56). A woman who carries the symbolic capital and ensures its visibility within the community. The woman carries out and maintains the social identity and, again, this identity is protected through women in the community.

8.2.3 *Stigmatizations and Degrading Labels Women Face*

There are such times for a woman when she loses herself in it, always trying to catch up with something, full of stress, excitement, fear, and happiness in so little time. Thus, hiding all these emotions during the occasion becomes equally tricky. Women who manage events are usually labeled with negative adjectives such as angry, stressed, and impatient because they struggle to carry all the responsibility and emotional baggage they take on. At the same time, this emotional state which is shown and observed, is not well-liked by other people, guests, and companies. That is why the person who can regulate this emotional state is seen as "a more successful bride," "a more relaxed mother," "a cooler event host," and "a suave host."[23] These are reinforced by praising those who "succeeded" in the job or labeling those who "failed" with negative adjectives.

23 All these terms were told by interviewees during the interviews.

The last thing first is that the interview results make it clear that women are associated with three negative labels on these occasions. First, they are labeled as "commander," and second, particularly the bride as "bridezilla." Third, the bride is labeled as full of "bridal hormones." To analyze these sexist and degrading labels in depth, let's start by examining the meaning of the term *commander*. As seen above, women hold stronger positions in occasion-related interactions and that role comes with carrying certain responsibilities and emotional burdens. The term commander refers to the woman who takes on the role of a commander who is full of stress and gives orders to everyone and for everything to be sure that every step goes through flawlessly. Besides being the *commander* as the organizer, as mentioned above, two more significant negative attributes are used exclusively for the bride: *bridezilla* and *bridal hormones*. Assuming the fact that these occasions "naturally" belong to the bride, being the "owner" of the event comes with a lot of stress and tension. While the term "superbride*"* has relatively neutral tones compared to *bridezilla* or *bridal hormones*, it shares some characteristic features with *bridezilla*. Thus, the stress this brings upon the bride, along with the will to fulfill "every" wish, causes the bride to have a fluctuating emotional state and, as a result, to be called *bridezilla*. *Bridezilla*, as the phonetical resemblance to *Godzilla* suggests, refers not to a bride who desires to fulfill every duty expected from her in the situation with naivety and softness but rather someone who controls everything, a state of total control. Especially while society expects the bride to generally feel excitement, sadness, happiness, etc., she is also expected to be as elegant as a swan on the stage. Therefore, a bride who silently orders people around, checks if flowers are placed correctly, "obsesses" on camera angles, and is "troubled" by whether food is served hot or cold is not welcomed. When asked what this concept means, an employee from Company K explained the meaning of *bridezilla* during the interview as follows:

> It is an English term. *Bridezilla* means a crazy bride, a control freak… For example, the photographer has to take the photo exactly at the moment while she is looking at her father with love, one second later she turns into a different person and … 'Who took the bag?', 'Where is my gift necklace?' … I mean, the walking to the car scene was good

> for a minute, but for the other three minutes, she becomes a woman ordering people around with her finger (Interview with Company K, November, 2017).

This controlling state is reflected as a rational desire to control all aspects of the day but, at the same time, labeled as a person who is drowning in feelings, an emotional woman. One of the female interviewees admitted that she was also in that control state at her wedding, that it comes a bit "automatically," and that one needs to put in the effort to snap out of it. While partially carrying derogatory undertones, it is also explained as a factual state of mind that women do not actually want but are forced to have. Besides, a bride who, even though under stress for several reasons, enjoys the day and does not reflect her troubles to the people around her is seen as having a successful job (Valeri and Yusuf, May 17, 2017). Therefore, a bride is expected never to stop smiling, but it is acceptable to shed tears of happiness at some moments.

As expected, *bridezilla* also has *bridal hormones,* which refers to another sexist concept: the hormones during a woman's period of menstruation. Every cliché associated with menstruation is carried onto the bride through this metaphor. As stated in the interviews, it refers to assumptions such as a "woman losing all her perception," "wanting everything done immediately," "wanting to be the biggest star of the day," "experiencing emotions at the highest level," and generally "being excessively emotional, and happy but also angry and stressed."[24]

In summary, women take the roles of family status representatives and decision-makers. It is a performance that women and men have learned by observing and experiencing since childhood in the community and also from schools, (social) media, Jewish associations, and synagogues. In addition, women support this whole story by bearing a significant burden and are willing to do it. In terms of family roles, women represent the family during the occasion, and these gender roles put heavy burdens on women's shoulders.

24 All these terms were told by interviewees during the interviews.

9

Navigating the Marketplace: Companies, Taste, and Generational Dynamics in Life Cycle Festive Events Field

§ 9.1 The Role and Influence of (Jewish) Companies in the Life Cycle Events Field and the Internal Jewish Economy

This event service market and its agents have been developing quickly since the middle of the 1980s. These companies include private companies for event planning and party planning, music and video companies, photographers, choreographers, dancers, caterers, and confectioners. These mostly Jewish-owned (event) companies have a vital role in this game. These companies shape the economy of Jewish life cycle events and provide services and products for the community members. They also influence cultural practices of Jewish rites of passage within the life cycle events field and contribute to the ethno-religious communal cultural identity. While competing in this game, they also reproduce the habitus of the Jewish community with their know-how.

These event companies are, almost all of them, either wholly owned/run by Jews, with finance from Jews, or companies established with a Jewish partner. These companies, those with Jewish owners or partners, have know-how and knowledge and can naturally follow new trends in the social and religious occasion and event sectors. As a source of information, this agent is quite powerful within this game because it mainly tells a new incoming

"client" what could and should be done during an event and how they represent their family in this game. These companies provide lists like a comprehensive catalog; in other words, each item or budget line could be imagined as a color book offering a wide range of options.

These companies know the practices of Jewish rituals and traditions well and can manage the entire process and every step of the event in a familiar manner. Most importantly, they have significant knowledge of the Jewish community and know the religious rules set by the religious institution by heart. They are acquainted in that they address a community that is performing rites of passage events and ceremonies in a traditional manner and within certain constraints. Moreover, from the data, it is clear that in the eyes of the Jewish community, these companies seemingly "know" what these ceremonies are supposed to look like, whereas other companies (i.e., those without Jewish connections) may not. In other words, they have the feel for the game and know how to represent their customers/community members as a player in this game. Above all, these companies know how "show business" could be done and develop concepts for an event by applying different forms of capital, which "is any resource effective in a given social arena that enables one to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in it" (Wacquant 2008: 268), as Bourdieu stresses. They are also acquainted with how to fulfill the expression "this was an appropriate event for us" and how to align this "proper" event with the habitus of the community members in the field.

Two reasons for this state of knowing stand out here. First, these companies know the "Jewish" event hosts and their characteristics very well; their target groups are tiny and in an accessible, recognizable state for them. This target group is, in a way, relatively homogeneous, which means that a particular group born in the same land, socialized in the same society, grew up within the same rituals, and likely was invited to an event in the same ballroom on two or three occasions. In addition, they know what is compatible with this time/era in these sorts of events and what would address this group. The second reason is that, as emphasized above, they are mostly companies that Jews partially or wholly own. These Jewish event professionals are also Jewish community members who grew up, socialized and lived

within this congregation. They have similar habitus with the group they serve, and this group (and their habitus) shares a common historical path and shared material conditions. The shared habitus also gives them an understanding of the "taste" and "gusto" of the community. In addition to knowing it professionally and working on it, they also know this "taste" as insiders.

Their acquaintance with the festive events field also enables them to know the rules of the game and the unwritten rules better than other (non-Jewish) companies. It also provides a "feel for the game" gained through game experience (see Chapter 3). This feel for the game allows them to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 111). Most importantly, I want to emphasize here that they also share the "doxa" of the field and its boundaries and limits. It includes the assumptions "go without saying" and the limits of the doable and the thinkable (Maton, 2008: 59) (see Chapter 3). In other words, they have significant knowledge of where to stop, where their boundaries end, and where they can exaggerate. Here, I would like to provide an opposite/negative example to prove this claim and explain the situation that happened in the Jewish community in the 2010s. As mentioned, there are unwritten, hidden rules and clear boundaries in the fields of festive events, and if these boundaries are crossed, they alert different mechanisms or warning systems in the congregation. It means they could receive a reaction from community members and sometimes from community leaders and religious authority. An interviewee related their reaction to a wedding event in the 2010s:

> From the ...[gave the company's name here]company, a particular person turned it into a show and something that it should not be. S/he did things that should not have been done, such as stripteasers, etc., as if you came to see a show at an X [random] place. S/he tried to introduce himself/herself to the community and tried to say I am

> familiar with this type of work. However, as we saw later, it did not stick (No name interview, November, 2017).[1]

In the continuation of the interview, the interviewee explained in detail how this company was not accepted within the community and how the community did not embrace the choice of the stripteaser show. This example demonstrates that the economic or cultural capital used in celebrations needs more knowledge to be compatible with the festive event field, a skill mostly Jewish-based companies have.

The reader will have noticed that only Jewish-based companies create an "internal economy," meaning that money circulates in the community thanks to the Jewish companies in the festive events sector. As mentioned above, they are often owned or shared by Jews themselves. In other words, the Istanbul Jewish community's current events sector helps create a self-contained and growing economy within the community. Although the occasions have become more visible and open to society at large, this growing economy is still embodied in the Jewish community. Here, the concept of internal economy does not address the efforts of community leaders to take as many opportunities as possible to the "inside" (buildings belonging to the congregation) to contribute to the community's finances, as mentioned above (see Chapters 5 and 7), such as promotion of the Neve Shalom Cultural Center for Brith Milah receptions. On the contrary, the term of internal economy emphasizes that it is independent of what the authority tries to do. By comparison, it is a situation where community members specifically choose these companies, which are more organically formed. Therefore, community members also contribute to keeping this event sector Jewish, and additionally,

1 During this part of interview, the recorder was turned off at the request of the interviewee. I took very detailed notes while s/he was talking, and after the interview I made a clear copy of my notes without wasting time. This quotation is a summary from my notes in that interview. The reason for this desire for secrecy is that they do not want to voice this "irregular" situation within the Jewish community and at the same time, they do not want to be recorded while saying this. Even though I put this anonymously, I included this quote because this request for confidentiality was also about feeling ashamed of the incident. In some cases, some community members are reluctant to publicly report these incidents when it is already difficult to take responsibility for the hidden rules that are being broken.

they can increase their chances of becoming "good players" in this game through these companies that have a grasp of the Jewish community and know the habitus of the Jewish community very well.

This relatively small festive event sector brings some advantages and disadvantages for the companies in the event market by being an internal economy and serving a small community. The whole system does not depend on advertisements but mostly on advice, recommendations, and suggestions within the community, which is typical of how small communities function. To be recommended, completing work by pleasing both the client (host) and the guests (community members) and the work being seen on *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Vimeo*, *YouTube,* and other social media tools means free advertisement or PR within the community. In fact, among the stories told in the interviews, newcomers to the market work for small amounts of money and thus conduct their advertising and launch (Interview with Company B, C, D, E, and L, June, November, and December, 2017). Through the power of recommendation and suggestion, it becomes possible to "stay in" or "be dismissed from" the event sector in the congregation. So, they put lots of effort into not to make any mistakes. When any "error" is made, it is considered a mistake made by that company, and this mistake spreads through word of mouth within the community.

At the same time, as companies stated in their interviews, working with a small community sometimes brings challenges for them. People within the event sector told at length the negotiations and bargaining that take place in preliminary meetings before agreements are finally reached and contracts are signed. As everyone knows almost everyone in the community, the request for an "acquaintance discount" has become standard (Interview with Company B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, and L, June, November, and December, 2017). Moreover, company owners and employees complained about some strategies people employ to get the work done cheaper. As stated:

> They approach you like, 'I am smart; you are dumb.' For example, we agreed on five Turkish Liras [numbers were symbolically used]. However, s/he pretends as if we agreed to four Liras. S/he tries to find out where to beat you (Interview with Company M, November, 2017).

A representative from Company M explained when and how they left this event sector: A client who thinks he fooled them acts rudely (sticking his middle finger). They stated: "I left the….industry because of the guy who made a hand gesture from the boat while sailing in the sea with the gesture of how did I rip you off" (Interview with Company M, November, 2017). Almost all company owners added that knowing the audience gives them an advantage, but sometimes, this familiarity puts them in a difficult situation.

Lastly, since the Jewish community is small and families generally know each other well, community members are more or less aware of their fellow members' economic situations. The companies explained in interviews that it is necessary to act fairly and ethically, but as they stated, they sometimes do favors for some community members. Some company owners explained that they offer more affordable prices to event hosts they know are in difficult situations. As their wording, they want to "support" and "protect" them in this community.

§ 9.2 Same Habitus and Different Paths: Generational Shifts in Professional Formation

This Jewish festive event sector first developed in the middle of the 1980s. In the 1990s, the prominent sector leaders had already settled down and found their place in the party and event market. Later, in the 2000s and the 2010s, many small and large businesses emerged in the life cycle event sector. I employ the terminology of the first, second, and third generations to facilitate easy reading and categorization of companies. First-generation companies roughly describe Jewish-owned companies established before the 2000s. The second generation points to those established between 2000 and 2010. Lastly, third-generation companies are those that joined the market after the 2010s. Each generation has its own characteristics, which are presented by applying several examples from each sector. Of course, these generations of companies have relationships with each other. Sometimes, this relationship is based more on collaboration, like between the first and second generations, while it is based on challenge and contest, like between the second and third generations. Lastly, almost all established companies' stories start

with a small company or small production at home and then become professionalized, as seen below.

9.2.1 *First-Generation Companies*

As mentioned above, first-generation companies are the ones established before 2000. The first generation's founding stories, as told by many company owners (or employees), are very similar. Most of them stated that they started learning their skills and business in Jewish cultural associations. As emphasized above, the common aspect in these stories is continuing the path with another Jew or a non-Jew as a partner. As expected, this first generation[2] determined the rules of the game, and at the same time, they raised the new generation that I categorize as second-generation companies. If the younger generation grew up with this first generation and was raised by them, the new generation remembers this older generation with respect and gratitude. These first-generation companies are in more support positions for the second generation through apprenticeship, passing the skills down, teaching the job, lending a hand, and passing the job on.

The music (and video) sector started getting involved in this event field around the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. However, starting with Nino Varon, who began his music career in the 1970s, is essential. Nino Varon did not completely fit in this pattern because this Jewish event (music) sector was not where he really positioned himself (Nino Varon – RN, November 2, 2017). Composer and songwriter Nino Varon has been a prominent figure in the Jewish event sector but, more importantly, has played a prominent role in the Turkish music sector since the 1970s. Varon had such a significant role in the Turkish music sector that the past of this Jewish event sector was somewhat blurred. As he told in the interview, he first trained himself in social events where Jews participated heavily rather than in the Jewish cultural association (Nino Varon – RN, November 2, 2017). As

2 First-generation companies include the *Izzet Yakar* Company, *Mix Music* Company, DJ Murat Mazliah, *La Bonbonniere*, *Happy Leyla*, *Davet*, Izzet Bana, Mr. Berman Photography, and *Roni Production.* I also added Nino Varon, who has *Mr. Music* Company.

mentioned above (see Section 6.2.4), Varon organized the Bar Mitzvah ceremony in 1988, which fascinated the Jewish community and at the heart of its concept was the song "*We Are the World.*"[3] Varon has trained many young men and contributed to the music (and video) sector, initially through *Mr. Music*, a company he founded.

The *Izzet Yakar* Company, which made its mark on the first-generation companies, evolved from *Mr. Music.* This company's two Jewish partners, Izzet I. Biton (nicknamed TOTO) and Yakar Allevci, are among Varon's disciples.[4] The *Izzet Yakar* company was established in 1992.[5] While Biton took an active role as DJ within the Jewish cultural association, *Dostluk (DYD),* Allevici took charge of the younger team and learned the technical side of the work. *Izzet Yakar* Music and Video Company has published a thank you note in the *Şalom* newspaper for their mentor, Varon. Varon is the one who is remembered by their younger ones with respect, as claimed above, as the characteristic of first-generation companies. Another characteristic of the first generation is that they set up their businesses in small steps and afterward became professionals. A blurb from the website of the *Izzet Yakar* Company claims that the company does work that "combines the amateur work spirit and professionalism."[6] Aside from being a marketing phrase, these words also reflect the truth. These people grew up in non-professional spaces/places, namely Jewish cultural associations. They are either discovered by other professionals in the sector or taken to the sector or companies because they are already familiar with the Jewish community members and their taste.

Other essential and older people from the music and video sectors are Gaydar Mircik[7] and Avi Ovadya. In 1992, they jointly established the *Mix Music* Company. Ovadya is Jewish, and similarly to the abovementioned

3 The song for charity, 1985. USA for Africa. Compositors, Lionel Richie, Michael Jackson.

4 In addition, DJ Murat Mazliah was also coached by Nino Varon.

5 http://www.izzetyakar.com/ (Accessed, January 3, 2022).

6 Original text: "amatör çalışma ruhu ve profesyonelliği birleştiren" http://www.izzetyakar.com/ (Accessed, January 3, 2022).

7 Gaydar Mircik is Armenian, and before the *Mix Music* Company was established, he entered the field through DJing at the *Playback*.

examples, he is a disc jockey raised in the *Yildirim Spor Kulubu* (YSK), a Jewish cultural association. Later, within the *Mix Music* Company, many other young men were formed under the guidance of Gaydar Mircik, one of the sector leaders. Various companies have been established in Istanbul as alternatives to the *Mix Music* Company.[8] An interviewee who is a veteran of the music (and video) sector summarized the market in the 1990s as follows: "In those periods, there were five known, and perhaps ten unknown companies" (Interview with Company L, December, 2017).

Event management organization[9] is another sector that includes tangible examples of first-generation companies, particularly having a route, starting with a small production in a small atelier and then professionalizing. These companies, in general, were established by a woman or women. They first began to provide services for Jewish events, including Jewish cultural associations' events and Jewish life cycle events. *La Bonbonniere* and *Happy Leyla* are leaders of the sector, but *Happy Leyla*—considered a doyen—is not continuing this work and currently lives abroad. The owner of the *La Bonbonniere,* Mirey Karaso,

> started designing wedding candies after the candies she prepared with her mother at her own wedding were appreciated. After a short

8 In the same period, the 1990s, other companies were established, such as the Remix and the *Staras* Company, which have particular wedding departments in their entities. As alternatives to the *Mix Music* Company, various companies have been established within the Armenian community, like those founded by Sarven and Envan Cicek. Besides, Salih Saka and Suat Ates, who have backgrounds as DJs in the *Cubuklu* and the *Samdan*, have played active roles in events for Istanbul's highest economic layer, including parties held in private homes. According to an interviewee, one never came across these two people at Jewish community events in the beginning of the 1990s until they established the *S&S* Company in 1996. See, https://www.salihsaka.com/bio (Accessed, January 3, 2025).

9 There are also several examples that include catering companies, which I did not mention here.

> while, she expanded her work area and started to prepare invitations and decorate the entire hall, taking on the entire organization.[10]

Karaso started this business as a small family company; afterward, she professionalized and became one of the leaders in the event organization sector. In 1987, the company, *Davet*, also considered one of the sector leaders, was founded by two women partners. A business journey started by the initiative of two Jewish women, Dalya Akkohen and Ivet Adut, later became a huge event organization company. The Jewishly run company has recently continued its partnership with Dalya Akkohen and Tuna Rozant. Akkohen described the begining of their journey in the following way:

> I was in my thirties. I have been in the sector for thirty years. We minimally started this work by making *bonbonyer*[11] [candies]. The *La Bonbonniere* [company] existed before us. We [talking about herself and Adut] became competitors of *Happy Leyla* during that period. She was doyen and had done this work abroad before. We started this business in 1987. We did not even know where to buy almond sugar [laughs]... After preparing *bonbonyer*, we started saying that we should put some flowers in the middle of a dinner table. For thirteen years [talking generally about the decoration and organization], everything went [in] slow motion. (Interview with Davet Company – RN, November 2, 2017).

In addition to all these companies, one must not forget from the first generation. While Izzet Bana described himself as someone who did not get educated in this work, he has participated in these types of activities in the Jewish cultural associations for many years, including leadership (Izzet Bana – RN, November 9, 2017). He combined his background in theater with his experience in the Jewish cultural associations and became a professional. Particularly in some institutions within the community, he still works and

10 https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/dugun-yapmak-artik-cok-kolay-39086371 (Accessed, January 3, 2025).

11 The practice of giving candies to guests has become a cultural tradition in events in Istanbul. These are generally candied almonds in decorated or plain packages.

organizes the *Collective Bat Mitzvah Ceremonies* and manages a large children's choir (see Chapter 7.2.1.1).

All in all, considering all the companies and their establishment stories in the Jewish festive event field, the Jewish individuals in the companies that were able to position themselves in the event sector until 2000 acquired knowledge about their profession in the social events held in the Jewish cultural associations they were raised in or in the Jewish events they attended. The market/ companies have become strong players in the life cycle event field by being raised in the social events of the Jewish community and having the feel for the game. What I especially wanted to emphasize is that, as it has frequently been repeated above, being an insider and having insider knowledge causes them to know how to use different types of capital in an event to be held within the community and to know the field very well due to their previous experiences. They have all contributed to developing second-generation companies with this experience.

9.2.2 *Second-Generation Companies*

The second-generation companies[12] are mostly raised under their mentors from the first generation, as claimed above. These companies were founded and joined the festive event field between 2000 and 2010. Most of the stories about getting into the businesses are organic. As their peers started to get married, they were asked by their peers to work for them at their events, particularly wedding events. In other words, as the old generations became "old enough" in the festive events field, new generation companies naturally joined the field. During the 2000s, the apprentice relationship was tighter and the first generation trained the young/second generation. These second-generation companies moved forward by apprenticing themselves to someone more experienced in the sector. They were a more compatible generation with the Jewish institutions compared to the third-generation companies established in the 2010s. In addition, they have more respect for the community management and religious authority. They know the rules and

12 Second-generation companies include the *Pixus* Company, *Royalty Organization* Company, Choreographer Rina Muraben, Photographer Albert Modiano, and *Alcoholoco* Company.

regulations better since they grew up within the community and Jewish cultural associations. If assigned by religious authority to an event for the Jewish community, they define it as a responsibility, not a job, and never refuse the gig. At the same time, they created competition in the field, as this is also an arena of struggle.

The first example of second-generation companies is the foundation narrative of the *Pixus* Company, which was established by Yigal Sevindiren and Vedat Şoef in 2004. Yigal Sevindiren, like many of his colleagues, grew up in the *OraHayim* Jewish cultural association and learned this work within the Jewish community's social events. Between 1996 and 2001, he worked at the *Izzet Yakar* Company, which is described as first-generation companies above. Sevindiren recounted his professional entry into the sector as follows:

> In 1996, while in high school, I talked to Vedat [Soef]. He said, 'We need a DJ. Are you still DJing?' Back then, Vedat was working at the *Izzet Yakar* Company. One day, I met up with Vedat [had a meeting]; we were working for the Ulus Jewish High School graduation in May 1996. 1996 was the first year I entered the [music and video] sector. Before that, I was in the *OraHayim* Jewish cultural association. From 1996 to 2001, I worked at the *Izzet Yakar* Company (Yigal Sevindiren – RN, June 22, 2017).

Vedat Soef grew up in the *Amikal* Jewish cultural association in his youth. Subsequently, he went on to work in the *Izzet Yakar* Company for many years and learned the trade of this business. Sevindiren left the *Izzet Yakar* Company in 2001, and he continued in the sector, entering into a new partnership with Mircik and Ovadya's (the *Mix Music* Company) former partner Ersavas (owner of the *Mix Video* Company) and later Muammer.[13] Between 2002 and 2004, this company[14] was run by Sevindiren, Muammer, and Ersavas under the name *DV Production*. This time, the partnership was with a non-Jew. Sevindiren brought his Jewish network, technical and "Jewish" know-how (knowing the community very well), while Muammer and Ersavas provided

13 Muammer later established the video department of the *S&S* Company.

14 They bought the production department from the *Eti Star* Company and continued working in this sector under the new name *DV* Production.

the technical equipment and devices. At the same time, the industry was interlocked, and the relationships and connections were complex. Sevindiren was at the *S&S* in this period as a DJ, that is, in the company in which Muammer was a partner. This partnership and collaboration continued until 2004. All these companies provided services for the Jewish festive event field. In 2004, Sevindiren established the *Pixus* Company in collaboration with Şoef (who left the *Izzet Yakar* Company where he was trained), which is one of the most significant players in the field/game today.

Among those invited to Neve Shalom Synagogue to serve at the religious ceremonies was the *Pixus* Company, especially Yigal Sevindiren (see Chapter 7.2.1.3). In 2003, Sevindiren was invited by the Neve Shalom Foundation management as an alternative to the *Roni Production* Company, which was working at that time in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. As claimed above, the marriages of his peers started, and Sevindiren became an active person/company in the market. It took approximately two years for Sevindiren, now known as the *Pixus* Company, to get into the Neve Shalom Synagogue. As expected, companies or people who were in the field before have advantages in certain aspects. *Roni Production* Company, the only player in the game in the synagogue, tended to know the rules of its game better. *Roni Production* Company also had an effect on slowing down this entry, and this process was not smooth and easy. In other words, the old ones in the field have an advantage over the newcomers at the institutional level in this respect. In the last quarter of 2005, the *Pixus* Company was able to do its first job at the Neve Shalom Synagogue. As seen in this example, second-generation companies also contributed to the competition in the field, and sometimes, it was not a smooth one, just like in an arena of struggle.

The *Royalty Organization* Company, which has found quite a space for itself in the event organization sector currently, should be counted as part of the second generation. The company's history of establishment developed as the "Jewish and non-Jewish partner company." In 2004-2005, the story started with Lina Sadik, a Jewish woman, working with Atilla Oguz at a company named *Salute*. The *Salute* Company evolved into the wedding and organization business after casinos were closed in 1998 in Turkey. They both learned how to do the work of event organization in this company. Following

the *Salute* Company's winding up in 2009, Sadik and Oguz established their own company, the *Royalty Organization*, as partners. Within the Jewish community, while the *Davet* Company spoke to the upper economic class, the *Royalty Organization* Company was able to speak to a larger audience during that period. Therefore, they became an important player in the game. During the 2010s, while there were few players in the sector, it is now possible to speak of many companies on a large and small scale, and this increase in the number of companies is hard to track, as in the music and video sector.

Another example of the second generation from the festive event field is Rina Muraben, a dance teacher and choreographer. She also grew up in a Jewish cultural association (*Ora-Hayim* and *Dostluk*) like others. As mentioned before (see Chapter 6.2.4), she was a student of Rozet Hubes, a professional theatre actress, and Selim Hubes, a musician in Ladino, through her work at Jewish associations. Additionally, Izzet Bana, who is considered in the first-generation category, is a name that played a major role in Rina's career development. In line with the second generation's characteristics, Muraben speaks of the first generation with respect as a member of second-generation companies. She has been active in Jewish cultural associations for many years, performing in theatres and dance shows. She became a professional and has continued this journey as the number one in this event sector throughout the years. She is most definitely the name behind almost all Bar and Bat Mitzvah receptions held recently. Muraben opened up an entirely new world in Jewish event culture, not only introducing dance and theatre but also expanding to decor, show business, and entire concepts in receptions. She also contributed somewhat to raising the third generation; she employed young Jewish women as her assistants on reception nights.[15] She also provides "first wedding dance" classes for couples to dance at their wedding receptions.

The last company from the second generation is *Alcoholoco,* which was established by two Jewish partners, Reyzi and Nafi Pinhas, in 2003. This company is a leader and pioneer in the industry and provides services in the

15 After her, many individual young Jewish women who could be categorized as third-generation entered the sector, but none were as successful or sought after as she was.

beverage catering sector. The *Alcoholoco* Company significantly influenced the Jewish festive events field with their "must-have services."[16] Especially during the company's first years, they were hired for almost every Jewish wedding and Bar/t Mitzvah reception. In 2006, they expanded the business, involving Ugur Karagoz, a non-Jewish partner.[17] They currently do business with the "non-Jewish Turkish community,"[18] their growing company also provides services in different categories in the festive event industry. Around the 2010s, many similar companies with similar concepts emerged in the beverage catering sector.

While the event sector is getting bigger and bigger year by year, the first and second-generation companies all have almost the same story about how they entered this event sector. They were trained at and grew up in Jewish cultural associations. They were DJs and dancers and had a chance to bring big productions to the stage at many different social and religious events. They were in committees or small working groups in Jewish clubs similar to organizations, videos, editing, writing, plays, and theatres; then, they became professionalized. Or, within the Jewish religious event, a new business arm is being established (such as bonbonnieres, the candies being distributed, etc.). Businesses start unprofessionally, and then later, it is professionalized with a Jewish or a non-Jewish partner, and there is always at least one Jewish person within the company.

9.2.3 *Third-Generation Companies*

Third-generation companies[19] are the ones established, especially after 2010. When considering the founding story of all these companies and the biographies of the company owners, they did not grow up within Jewish cultural associations like the first and second generations. This comparatively younger generation, on the contrary, either finds their way by trial-and-error

16 This term was told by several community members during the interviews.

17 http://eventturkiye.com/alcooloconun-sihirli-elleri/ (Accessed, January 3, 2022).

18 *Geniş Toplum.*

19 Here, the *Bymed* Company, Photographer Belin Rodikli Seloni, Cenk Rofe, and *Good Drink* Company were selected as examples of third-generation companies. These companies reflect the characteristic of the 2010s very well.

or learns the work through other channels, such as school and university. People who establish third-generation companies transfer the capital they have earned in different fields to the Jewish festive event field. Compared to first and second-generation companies, third-generation companies, with their young owners and younger employees, as expected, are more open to innovation and are quicker to follow new trends and technological development in the festive event industry. In addition, unsurprisingly, this group, which I call the third generation, emerged after 2010. This group is more critical of community management and does not define itself only by its Jewish identity. As explained in detail above, it coincided with the period when *Avlaremoz* was founded (not just a website, as an attitude) (see Chapter 4.3). It is also possible to observe this difference in attitude towards community management and rules with the examples given below. Moreover, like second-generation companies, the most common story behind how companies were founded is that the founders generally join the sector at the age when their peers or their generation are getting married.

Reflecting on this decade, one music (and video) veteran said of the market in the 2010s. He[20] described the current situation (the 2010s) with exaggerated numbers and with a somewhat disapproving tone,

> Nowadays, within the sector, there are almost 550 or so companies. No one knows anyone. Today, someone who purchases four speakers does this work (Interview with Company L, December, 2017).

As this quote underlines the competition in this event sector, in the 2010s, the new generation often had to challenge the previous generation as the total number of companies in the market increased and, therefore, the competition increased. Third-generation companies compete with their Jewish generation and the previous one, as well as many other alternatives, as the sector is no longer just Jewish-owned companies.

The first example is the *Bymed* Company, founded by two young Jewish partners, Melih Ozeskinazi and Mert Sarfati. Ozeskinazi graduated from the

20 According to my experience and research, there were no Jewish women working in this music and video sector, so I did not hesitate to use the pronoun "he" here.

media department, and Sarfati studied Physics. 2009-2010, before they entered the festive event field, they established a blog/website called *Köşe Kapmaca.* On this website, they published the interviews they conducted and some articles with semi-political content. In this way, they became familiar with audio-visual work and trained themselves to use video cameras and other technical parts of the business. This entire foundational knowledge was learned from Garo Babayan,[21] who is Armenian. After this period, they were discovered by someone very popular in the media sector, and their work improved as a result. Later, they included a few more partners, grew the business, and learned more about its technical aspects, such as camera work and filming. They explained that they had no technical knowledge before starting this work. When this multi-partnered (four or five) business dissolved in November 2012, one of their Jewish friends requested them to work for his Jewish wedding. This Jewish wedding became their first event in the Jewish community. Two partners were able to handle this work successfully. After that, they also continued to work outside the Jewish community and gain more experience. Subsequently, with referrals, start receiving requests to work for other Jewish weddings (Melih Özeskinazi and Mert Sarfati – RN, June 22, 2017).[22] As briefly mentioned above (see Chapter 7.2.1.3), at the insistent request of members of the Jewish community, Neve Shalom Synagogue expanded the suggestion list given to prospective grooms, brides, or host families in 2015. Some relatively young 'Jewish' companies were added to the list, as well as non-Jewish companies. *Bymed* Company was one of the newcomers that was added to the suggestion list, and it was not a smooth change for the synagogue (see Chapter 7.2.1.3).

In 2012, *Bymed* Company just started to work for the Jewish community, but they were still unable to get work inside the Neve Shalom Synagogue. For this reason, the *Bymed* Company tried another way in 2012. In fact, this well-tried new method could be described as "improvisation," which Bourdieu repeatedly speaks of practice (Bourdieu, 1977: 171), as discussed in the theory chapter (see Chapter 3). Around this time, *Pixus* Company became

21 Garo Vram Babayan is famous and successful director in Turkey.

22 The *Puci* Company, originally from Izmir, is also included in this group, and this non-Jewish company has recently made a name for itself by taking part in many Jewish events.

the most preferred company, and *Roni Production* Company also lost its popularity. In 2012, during a religious wedding ceremony, *Bymed* Company's employees, in collaboration with *Roni Production* Company, which was already inside, entered the venue as if they were *Roni Production* Company employees and shot the whole wedding ceremony as a video company, even though they were not allowed to enter the venue. In other words, *Roni Production* Company and *Bymed* Company collaborated to get *Bymed* Company's employees inside. In describing an agent's position in the field, Wacquant (2008) says that established members in the field are more interested in preserving the existing order, and new entrants are more interested in challenging it (Wacquant 2008: 269). It seems natural for the latest generation to challenge the existing pattern and to make an improvisation while doing so. However, *Roni Production* Company, the firstcomer in the field, helped and collaborated with them (*Bymed* Company) because the company had already lost its popularity in the community. Of course, this action had consequences, and Neve Shalom Synagogue expressed anger to both companies about this issue. However, as mentioned above, the third generation has a different attitude than the older generations regarding challenging the rules created within community institutions. In parallel, they have more maneuverability and are not compliant like their older generations. Moreover, they do not hesitate to tell this story as a success story. Emirbayer and Mische discuss in their article that "human actors do not merely repeat past routines: they are also the inventors of new possibilities for thought and action" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 983-984). They also take Bourdieu's improvisation and creativity one step further and add Mead's "distance experience."

> As they respond to the challenges and uncertainties of social life, actors are capable of distancing themselves (at least in partial exploratory ways) from the schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions. This capacity for what Mead calls "distance experience" enables them to reconstruct and innovate upon those traditions in accordance with evolving desires and purposes (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 984).

They term it the *projective* dimension of human agency, a tool that helps us make sense of the actions taken by the third generation, particularly *Bymed* Company's move. The third generation is slightly more advantageous in establishing this distance experience because, as discussed above, they were not raised within the Jewish cultural association and can distance themselves from the community. According to Emirbayer and Mische,

> *projection* is neither radically voluntary nor narrowly instrumental; the formation of projects is always an interactive, culturally situated process in which social actors negotiate their paths into the future and derive their impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 984).

In other words, human agency creates its projects not only according to its own ideas or interests but also by shaping them through interactions within society and the problems it faces, as Bourdieu underlines the interaction in the field.

The second example of third-generation companies is photographer Belin Rodikli Seloni, who entered the industry in the 2010s. She is a female entrepreneur and a communications graduate who took photography classes. Later, she decided to advance her career and develop her skills. The years she entered the doors of the Neve-Shalom Synagogue coincide with the 2010s, the period in which her peers were getting married. Like Ozeskinazi and Sarfati, she is a representative of the new generation, having entered the sector without having grown up in Jewish cultural associations but instead learning this work at school. In 2009, she started this business by visiting her peers' homes where they were getting prepared before the synagogue ceremony or reception and taking photos of them before their wedding ceremonies, thus expanding her portfolio (see Chapter 7.2.1.3). Rodikli Seloni was very inexperienced in her first jobs and, like her contemporaries, naturally learned this work as she went along (Belin Rodikli Seloni – RN, June 14, 2017).

In addition, she is one of the best examples of someone who can challenge the older and previous generations. The Neve Shalom Synagogue invited Rodikli Seloni to work as a photographer for the religious ceremonies

in 2011. At that time, Alberto Modiano, part of the second generation, played an active role as a fairly traditional photographer in the synagogue. Photo Berman, a part of the first generation, was already retired as a photographer from the Neve Shalom Synagogue. Rodikli Seloni positioned herself as a storyteller photographer in this field and brought a considerable challenge to the photography that was being done by the older generation, which was called "traditional" photography.[23] This new generation of photography dealt a significant blow to the older generations. As a result, Rodikli Seloni took on almost all the religious ceremony work done in the synagogue at the time.

The third example of the third generation is Cenk Rofe, a singer, actress, and drama and music teacher.[24] In the Jewish life cycle event field, he becomes known by the community members as the cantor voice singer who welcomes the bride while she is walking down the aisle in the synagogue.[25] He was very active in the Jewish cultural associations but did not receive his training in singing within these associations; instead, he graduated from the Conservatory with a degree in Voice. He does a lot of professional work within and outside the Jewish community. Therefore, he has been able to place himself in the game differently, and he has created his own path for the Jewish life cycle event field.[26]

The *Gooddrink Bar and Catering* Company is the final example of a third-generation companies. It is a Jewish-partnered company that entered the event sector in 2009. The owners of this company are Alper Yeruşalmi and Mayda Yeruşalmi. This company has positioned itself as more affordable and appealing to a broader audience than *Alcoholoco* Company, the leader in the sector.

23 Later, several other young Jewish female entrepreneurs were seen in the sector as photographers with this perspective.

24 https://dergi.salom.com.tr/haber-359-cenk_rofe_muzik_dunyasinin_notalarinda_adim_adim_yukseliyor.html (Accessed, September 12, 2024).

25 During the cortege, after the groom's side takes their place on the *Tevah*, first, the bride and father enter together and walk the aisle, followed by the family of the bride.

26 After Cenk Rofe, another male name from the younger generation was seen in this category (see Chapter 7.2.1.1).

As shown above, this field is an arena of struggle with numerous companies vying for dominance. It should be noted that the members of the audience they speak to have access to the internet and social media (e.g., *Pinterest* and *Instagram*) and are aware of all the latest trends in the sector. Thus, companies are required to renew themselves quickly and continuously. Moreover, as the number of Jewish receptions decreased, technological developments in the industry, and new trend transitions accelerated, some companies had difficulty keeping up with them. One interviewee said, "Motivated by the urge for distinction, new trends are being created, and the sector eats itself up to a point" (Interview with Company B, June, 2017). In parallel, new trends created in response to community members' motivation/motto that "we want our event to be different" are causing company owners to push themselves too hard and shoot themselves in the foot (Interview with Company A and B, June, 2017). Another person from the sector described the situation similarly, complaining about "the necessity for renewing yourself," "keeping up with the times," and "the need for teams that will be able to accommodate each new thing that comes out" (Interview with Company A, June, 2017). Rodikli Seloni, the photography artist, mentioned this in the most precise fashion when discussing new trends.

> For example, a new trend is having events with large productions and, at the same time, flying drones. And this business…[here recounts a few company names] does well. It is a different world for me. When they took me into this sector, I knew that this community would drain me, and when a new trend would come up, I would be torn down. In those times, I would either develop myself and put together a team accordingly or take a break and have a child, and I chose the second (Belin Rodikli Seloni – RN, June 14, 2017).

Several interviewees also agreed on the importance of being proactive in this sector and confirmed Rodikli Seloni's observations.

Third-generation companies especially need to differentiate themselves in this competitive field. For those joining these sectors as the new (third) generation, being chosen/preferred is established by being friendly and

cheerful and forming an intimacy: "Being madcap kids,"[27] "doing business sincerely," "always providing service with a smile," "having a warmer relationship and conversation" (Belin Rodikli Seloni – RN, June 14, 2017) is what distinguishes you from others, and the new (third) generation knows how to do this much better than the older generation. Aside from work, being supportive of the event hosts and doing work that is not being paid for/is not included in the job description could make the company a preferred company within the sector. They also have significant experience pleasing the Jewish community members who participate as guests in these events. They can meet the demand of showing themselves privileged, to be treated like an elite, feeling exclusive. Customers or community members not only want to receive service; they also want to be treated with respect and privilege, as well as receive quality and innovative service. As demands such as showing oneself as privileged, feeling exclusive, and behaving as more elite are met by the market and companies, these types of characteristics are becoming a part of the ethno-religious communal identity. New-generation companies know how to do this very well. Moreover, being chosen/preferred also depends on "holding the customer in high esteem/ cherishing the customer," which was a shared discourse among almost all interviewees (Interview with Company A, B, C, D, E, F, H, J, K, and L, June, November and December, 2017). Especially "being able to handle customer sass" [28] (Interview with Company L, December, 2017) and "paying attention to everything of the client" (Interview with Company A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, K, and L, June, November and December, 2017) appeared in the interviews as distinguishing features.

Finally, new (third) generation companies do not avoid competition and struggle and do not hesitate to break the rules when necessary. They are also good at applying the capital they have accumulated in different fields in this field. They also do different "reproduction through creativity" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 982) within their habitus. When necessary, they use creativity (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 983) as well. This creativity also allows them to step towards and stay in the field. They put forward an action different from

27 *Zıpır çocuk olmak*

28 *Kapris.*

the attitude of the older generation, which accepts everything with compliance. Instead of this more submissive, rule-abiding behavioral pattern, they try something else; Emirbayer and Mische called it a "creative reconstructive dimension of agency" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 984).

Lastly, almost all company owners and employees who were interviewed shared that, as of the years 2015-2016, due to the economically and politically unstable situation and the latest economic crises in Turkey, Jews no longer spent as much money, time, and effort on these events, nor did they attribute them with as much importance (Interview with Company B, C, D, E, H, J, K, and L, June, November and December, 2017). As shared in interviews, unstable economic (and social) conditions have led many to want to avoid "paying lots of money." While it becomes more difficult for the middle class to keep up with the money spent, it is no longer wise and preferable for the upper class to invest so much in this area. These celebratory events no longer have had priority as tools for showing off or establishing one's position within the Jewish community. In recent years, considering Turkey's changing social, cultural, and economic conditions, along with the changing minority inclusive language, the 2016 coup attempt, the 2018 currency crises, and the policies produced by polarization, the *Kayadez* reaction has begun to be felt more strongly within society. The spaces where community members exist with their Jewish identity have also been differentiated, which could be an important area for future research. That does not mean the end of this sector or event culture, but it does mean that these expenditures are decreasing, and the size of the events is becoming smaller. These improvements in the field made the companies look for other "customers" to be afloat.

Another reason why companies were shifting to other occasion sectors was that the Jewish population was shrinking daily because of migration, the rise of *Aliyah,*[29] the increase of mixed marriages number, etc. (see chapter 4), and therefore, this life cycle celebratory event field's "customer" was also decreasing. As a result, the piece of the pie per company is getting smaller, and the competition among companies is also increasing. The competition was openly expressed during the interviews with these Jewish companies, as

29 Migration form "diaspora" to the "homeland – Israel."

they all mentioned that events are getting smaller. Additionally, as explained above as well, the decrease in market volume is also due to events being combined and celebrated jointly (see Chapters 6 and 7). According to the companies, this "issue/problem" has caused them to turn towards the non-Jewish communities and/or non-Jewish corporate work. Therefore, the "Jewish occasion sector" is getting into the (non-Jewish) market more and more day by day. All these companies mentioned above and others not explicitly mentioned have tried to transmit their skills and, most importantly, their capital and taste into other fields in the market. They underlined that they have to reposition themselves because of the changes taking place in the Jewish events sector (Interview with Company B, C, D, E, K, and L, June, November, and December, 2017). In the companies' words, the sum of these experiences and capital becomes a skill and a tool to be sold to the "general public/ the non-Jewish Turkish community."[30] What is learned within the community and the wealth of experience are being used as PR material geared towards non-Jewish communities and become a means of entering new business areas. The quality of work done in the past (company's portfolio) serves well as marketing material.

§ 9.3 Transmitting Skills, Marking Boundaries, and Maintaining Distinction in the Field: The Term of "Vedre"

During this entire process, it is clearly observed that these accumulated skills are being passed down to others. Regarding the Jewish community, a two-fold transmission process should be discussed, i.c. to the inside and outside world. No *outsider*—i.e., someone without sufficient cultural or social capital to be able to do this work or perceived as such—can join the sector easily. By now, the inside world has been discussed under the umbrella of generation, but after 2000, the Jewish companies started to transmit their skills to suppliers who were not Jewish. After all, these non-Jewish small companies were not insiders, but they were the companies that provided the labor and materials needed for the grand and fanciful concepts in life-cycle event

30 *Geniş toplum.*

receptions that have become big shows. This category includes small companies that prepare podiums/stages, provide carpet covering services, and supply flowers, chairs, decoration details, etc.[31] These small companies in the event industry were less experienced than the Jewish or Jewish-partnered companies in this field and were considered "inferior" by the Jewish companies. Moreover, they were described as people/employees without *gusto* ("taste" could be used to refer to Bourdieu). As discussed above, being an insider meant possessing a sense/insight into the Jewish community and, most importantly, having a feel for the game. The outlook on these owners, employees, and companies is expressed with not-so-nice and unpleasant words. These discourses and adjectives include "yahoo" (coarse, uncouth), "lowbrow," "ignorant," "we made them rich," and "they learned the work from us." Therefore, while the outsider companies were able to get involved in these events, the relationship between these outsider companies and the insider companies was not smooth or easy.

Some of the phrases mentioned above, e.g., "having gusto," "having an understanding of taste," and "having an eye," coincide with Bourdieu's (1998) concept of "taste." In particular, it is being emphasized that small companies, as suppliers, do not have "enough" cultural and symbolic capital (and also taste) and need to be guided and tightly controlled by the (Jewish) players in the sector. The Jewish companies also consolidate their dominance within the market by differentiating themselves from the outside. In the interviews, it was emphasized by the companies that sometimes suppliers do not know how to behave in the hotels where the event takes place, and they are then in a situation in which they must take responsibility for them. The observations from the fieldwork showed that the preparation stage of these events

31 These small companies are not responsible for the main work; they are subcontractors and suppliers. In addition, there are some services sourced from the "outside," some skills and work, that are not transmitted to other groups. For example, the same Armenian has been making and renting the candelabras placed on tables for years. Despite his advanced age at the end of the 2010s, while I was conducting my interviews, he was still working in this field. Another example is the supplier who has been providing fish/salmon for the festivities for many years is Jewish, Soli Duşi. Specific categories including handicrafts still remain in the hands of some minority groups.

displays class distinction openly, with examples of clothing, hygiene, eating habits, attitude, and behavior. Wacquant summarizes very well the concept of distinction referring to Bourdieu as follows:

> A second major argument of *Distinction* is that the aesthetic sense exhibited by different groups, and the lifestyles associated with them, define themselves in opposition to one another: *taste is first and foremost the distaste of the tastes of others*. This is because any cultural practice – wearing tweed or jeans, playing golf or soccer, going to museums or to auto shows, listening to jazz or watching sitcoms and so on – takes its social meaning, and its ability to signify social difference and distance, not from some intrinsic property it has but from its location in a system of like objects and activities (Wacquant 2008: 271).

The term *vedre* is also often employed by Jews regarding the non-Jewish companies and their work. *Vedre* means the color green in Ladino, but Jewish Turks use this term for the Muslim Turkish people. However, it has a broader meaning in Jewish society; it is not just a religious distinction. *Vedre* is not only used to describe people, but also work that has been done, services, or products; as a result, it also has the meaning of cultural distinction. The term can be used for people, a cloth, or a decoration in a reception. The concept of *vedre* comes largely into play during the preparation phases of the reception and, as well, the evaluation of the reception by the community members. What is considered *vedre* is "*varoş*,"[32] "poor quality," "outdated," or the opposite way, what is considered not *vedre* is "tasteful," "high quality," and "elegant" within the Jewish community. It has a negative connotation that those who call it *vedre* mean the lack of cultural and symbolic capital in

32 According to urban sociologist Tahire Erman (2001), the term *varoş* emerged in the 1990s, first in the media, then in society, and has greatly influenced academia. The term, "It was later employed to refer to any outer neighborhood in a city or town. In its Turkish use, the term carries in itself strong negative connotations. The *varoşlu* are the economically deprived (the deprivation may be relative or absolute) an impoverished lower classes…., in a nutshell underclass" (Erman, 2001: 996).

society. One of the interviewees told their (Jewish) friends' wedding reception as follows:

> They held their wedding reception in [giving a place name], it was a cheaper place than a five-star hotel. There was live music at their reception, but the singer was too *vedrik*, with her outfit and musical repertoire. On top of that, a belly dancer appeared; everything looked too *vedrik*. The table decorations were also too exaggerated (Laris and Avi, June 25, 2017).[33]

Here, the emphasis was on the aesthetics in the reception and underlined the (cultural) distinction. The notion of boundaries is beneficial in understanding the frequently used term *vedre.* The use of the binary of us and them forms the group and their boundaries as well (Barth 1969). This differentiation also helps to form identity and the process of being self and other. The distinction made by Jewish society between "the non-Jewish Turkish community and us"[34] is a question of boundary maintenance about which Barth (1969:14) states the following:

> The nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change and the cultural characteristic of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change - yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allow us to specify the nature of continuity and investigate the changing cultural form and content.

Barth explains that maintaining group identity "when members interact with others, (this) entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion" (Barth, 1969: 10) but also "a structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences (Barth, 1969: 16). Examples of boundary protection were apparent in the repeated use of specific terms and discourse by interviewees including "having gusto,"

33 Here, the word *vedrik* is used like an adjective form of *vedre*.

34 In Turkish, used as *geniş toplum*.

"knowing our taste," "we know this work," "we used to this from before," "they are ignorant, we have taste," "we like brands and branding," "we like to behave like bourgeoise," "we have an eye," and "we know how this is not done and how it is done" (Interview with Company A, B, C, D, E, F, H, J, K, and N, June, November and December, 2017). As obviously seen, it is not only ethnic or religious distinction, but also class and cultural distinction. In the final analysis, it actually nourishes and shapes/forms the ethno-religious communal cultural identity of the Jewish community.

PART 3 - Concluding Remarks

In this Part, two other critical agents in the life cycle event field, namely community members and the market, are examined in depth. The ethno-religious and cultural communal identity has been built with the help of these two actors in this field. As emphasized above, agents continue to play this game not only among themselves but also within themselves. The life cycle festive events and the event economy, following new global trends and those shaped by economic, social, and cultural transformations in Turkey, are growing bigger day by day. So, Part 3 shows how these actors (and players in the teams) take their positions with the help of their capital in this field/game.

Chapter 8 demonstrates that the symbolic benefits of rite of passage ceremonies are more important than the fulfillment of the functional goals of religious rituals associated with life cycle events. Although financial sacrifices and the heavy burden on families are primarily made to gain or maintain status in the community, it is highly valued among community members. In this "space of action," they are trying to have a "proper" event and representation of their families. This field, which presents a one-time opportunity to represent their family, is an area where community members reveal their cultural, symbolic, and as well as economic capital. This entire image-making process and the creation of a representation also align with global consumer trends. Primarily, the market supports the integration of global consumer trends into the life cycle event field. With the ease of accessing information individually and the facilitating effect of social media, community members support this change with their wishes and demands. Additionally, Jews make

a great effort to present themselves as prominent, privileged, and in a more elite position, which is a departure from the prevailing position that has prevailed for years.

Community members and families who already have a "feel for the game" use different strategies in this game when necessary. They strive to meet the minimum standard, regardless of the community members' limited financial resources, even when it comes to following the latest trends. Then, the position of women and men in the field was discussed, and it was concluded that the responsibility for these life cycle events falls on women who hold stronger positions in this game. The celebration of the life cycle is a performance that women and men have learned through observing, experiencing, and performing since childhood. These performative acts are developed by doing and reproduced by repetition. Particularly, women carry the responsibility of the family and play a crucial role in this life cycle event arena as nurturers of generations, as well as bearers of ethno-religious cultural communal identity. Additionally, women are the ones who protect the boundaries of the community in the field, especially with the help of gossip circles, as discussed above. Finally, as they play in such an essential position in the game, they often encounter/ face stigmatization and degrading labels.

As claimed in Chapter 9, most of these companies are Jewish-owned. At the same time, it was mentioned that when looking at the Jewish individuals in the company, they grew up in the same habitus, and therefore, their understanding of the game (feel for the game) was sufficiently developed, allowing them to be good players in the game. Chapter 9 explains how Jewish companies undergo almost a similar socialization process and grow while contributing to the development of this field. Since they come from within the community, they share a typical habitus, which also gives them an understanding of the community's "taste" and "gusto." They know how to align this "proper" event and understand the "doxa" of the field and its boundaries and limits. It is also emphasized that this is an internal economy, which means that money circulates within the community through Jewish companies in the sector.

Moreover, this chapter focuses on how the sector developed historically, the compliance and competition within the generations in the event sector,

parallel to the economic and cultural histories of Turkey and their effects on this community. The rise of the new middle class in Turkey, the transition to a liberal economy in the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis on the global city concept, and its parallel reflection on the Jewish community are plain to see, and in fact, companies in the event market came up as an active agent in the mid-1980s. This sector is summarized as having developed in the following periods. In the 2010s, economic and political crises, particularly after 2015, have had a profoundly negative impact on the Jewish event industry. The Jewish event sector is shrinking day by day, also due to population decline. As a result, the competition among companies is intensifying. While most owners of first and second-generation companies learned their skills and business in Jewish cultural associations, the third-generation companies themselves operate under even more different conditions.

Additionally, it is emphasized that there are changes in the way third-generation companies interact with other stakeholders, namely, community members and religious authorities. Although their founding stories are similar, when the first and second-generation companies entered the event sector, they established a more respectful and obedient relationship with the religious authority. With the social transformation that the community underwent, along with the social and economic transformation in Turkey, a decrease in the number of events, a decline in the value placed on events, and an increase in competition have led to a different company attitude compared to the early decades.

Last but not least, while the first type of skill transmission was internal, the second type targeted non-Jewish companies. The Jewish companies started to transmit their skills to the suppliers who were not Jewish, and they were considered as inferiors by the Jewish companies. In addition, while significant efforts are being made to differentiate themselves in this area, descriptions are also being made with negative connotations for the non-Jewish market players.

10

Conclusion

This study seeks to answer the question of what key agents and actors are involved in constructing the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity of the Istanbul Sephardi Jewish community in the period 1960-2020 in the arena of life cycle events, how has this identity evolved over time, and how can the dynamics of these roles be analyzed using Bourdieu's framework of social fields. In this framework, this dissertation analyzed three rites of passage ceremonies in the Sephardi Jewish community in Istanbul, namely Brith Milah, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and Jewish weddings. I considered the life cycle event arena as a domain of negotiation and a Bourdieusian field among three agents, as well as within the agents themselves. Three agents, in particular, community members/ families, the market, and religious authority in this life cycle event field, contribute to the ethno-religious communal identity of the Turkish Jewish community. These life cycle events evolve over time, and this study provides a detailed account of these dynamics of change, showing how these actors assume their positions over the years.

The discourse of "ideal Jewishness" or the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity does not come from top to bottom. The study reveals that the religious authority is not the sole actor holding power in this arena, but three actors play roles in the formation of communal identity. However, as it is especially emphasized in the Introduction chapter, this is the only area where the religious authority can reproduce the Jewish identity. Of course,

religious authority, as an agent in the field, is the one who holds religious capital, which is gained by "religious labour" (Bourdieu, 1991: 5). Therefore, it makes religious authority and lay leaders in more powerful to set the rules, applying to the invisible colleges, especially religious principles or educational activities related to life cycle events, such as *Shabbat* and kosher rules, the *Bar and Bat Mistva Club*.

Moreover, due to the decrease in population and dwindling attendance at social and cultural events at Jewish cultural associations, the field of rites of passage almost became the only area where the religious authority could capture members and establish economic and social contact. One of the main aims of the Jewish community authority is to combat assimilation and set "ideal" Jewish identity, and another aim is to direct money (economic capital) into the community by hosting increasingly lavish events within the Jewish community through various strategies. Therefore, examples of the community's efforts were provided to create new venues, places, and institutions that would keep these celebrations and the associated funds within the community's boundaries. However, in some cases, religious and lay authorities in the community have loosened control over these events, leading to compromises and the relaxation of rules.

Concordantly, all changes are also part of a story of how the religious authority keeps pace with the times and accommodates new trends. The President of the Turkish Jewish Community, Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, gave an excellent summary of this issue in his speech at the funeral of Turkey's Chief Rabbi Isak Haleva, which was held open to the public at the Neve Shalom Synagogue on January 16, 2025.

> It is difficult in our community to be a Rabbi; to be a Chief Rabbi is to achieve the impossible. Because we, as a society, know the best of everything. When one of us becomes the president, we teach that president how to be the president. When he becomes the Chief Rabbi, [this situation] is even more difficult because we try to teach him religious rules as well…Some of us say, 'Chief Rabbi, you have become too conservative; this society cannot handle that.' We look at the other side, and the other says, 'Chief Rabbi, the world is changing, where is the liberalism? If you continue like this, none of us will exist.'

> Some of us are in front, 'Chief Rabbi, you are behind us; we must put you ahead of us.' Some of us are behind, 'Chief Rabbi, you have forgotten our past.' Our Chief Rabbi was in the middle. Of course, it is difficult to stand in the middle and maintain balance (Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, President of the Turkish Jewish Community, January 16, 2025, Neve Shalom Synagogue).[1]

Given my knowledge of religion and position, it is not my place to conclude that religious authority or lay leaders are at the forefront or behind the community. Still, this speech emphasized that this field is also a balancing act of keeping up with the times, alongside ongoing institutionalization and standardization efforts by the religious authority, which were also discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

In this life cycle events field, the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity actively continues to be established by three agents, and I consider it a battlefield (Wacquant, 2008: 268) where identity, hierarchy, and practice are endlessly negotiated among the players. In the life cycle events arena, as underlined several times, negotiations are taking place among three agents, as well as within the agents themselves. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 not only depict the negotiation and challenge between the three agents but also illustrate the religious authority's efforts to institutionalize, standardize, and control these rites of passage ceremonies. Field analysis also helps me understand and discuss the interactions and relational features of negotiations, as well as how they affect changes in traditions (Bourdieu, 1977). All steps and challenges taken by the agents shape the behaviors of other agents. Thus, the ethno-religious and cultural communal identity, as well as habitus, is a

1 The original text reads: "Haham olmak bizde zordur, Hahambaşı olmak imkansıza soyunmaktır. Çünkü bizler, toplum olarak her şeyin en doğrusunu biliriz. Birimiz başkan olduğumuz zaman biz o başkana nasıl başkan olacağını öğretiriz. Hahambaşı olduğu zaman (bu durum) daha da zordur, çünkü ona dini kuralları da öğretmeye çalışırız. … Bazılarımız diyor ki, 'Hahambaşımız sen artık çok muhafazakar oldun bu toplum bunu kaldırmaz.' Bakıyoruz, diğer tarafa, öteki diyor ki, 'Hahambaşımız dünya değişiyor, nerede liberallik, sen böyle gidersen, hiç birimiz olmayacak.' Kimimiz önde gidiyor, 'Hahambaşımız arkamızda kaldınız, seni çekememiz lazım' (diyor). Kimimiz arkada gidiyor, 'Hahambaşımız geçmişimizi unuttunuz' (diyor). Hahambaşımız ortamızdaydı. Tabii ortada durmak ve dengeyi sağlamak zordur."

process of social interactions that changes over time, an active and ongoing process, not fixed (Maton, 2008: 52).

In this field, the other two agents —community members and the market —are also part of the negotiation on life cycle event practices. A person or institution does not possess power, and there are power relations and interactions in this field. As underlined, the decisions are not coming from top to bottom; actions of one agent also modify other actions, as well as they can also walk together in some issues. At the end of all these negotiations, the answer to the question of who is a Turkish Jew comes out, and in this field, the ethno-religious cultural and communal identity is reproduced and reinvented again and again by all of them.

Moreover, as shown especially in Chapters 8 and 9, the agents were competing among themselves. In Chapter 8, I discussed how community members become agents in this field and how they compete within themselves. This Jewish life cycle event arena is a place of a meeting where many people come together just because of their Jewish identity; most importantly, this is not just an event to fulfill their religious requirements but also define their status and representation in society, as well as a space where one can establish their distinction from the other members in the community, by referring Bourdieu's concepts. Chapter 8 reveals that this space is not just one where members of the community can exhibit their economic capital but also for displaying their cultural and symbolic capital. I provided several examples and cases to illustrate how they attempt to utilize their capitals to compete with one another effectively. In particular, I emphasized the importance of putting these efforts into practice, at least to a "minimum level," as community members who want to represent their families in this one-time opportunity. I discussed how people utilize the capital they have for their own events, the means they use, and the strategies they develop, referring to Bourdieu.

The taste of ceremonies and receptions changes from decade to decade, and as discussed, it is not a fixed standard. New generations challenge the old ones over the years, and this continues by producing new ideas and following new trends. However, the state of representation and the effort spent on it has not changed during these years. Despite the tradition of years,

Kayadez, the communal identity experienced in the realm of life cycle events, establishes itself as privileged over habitus and capital. As seen above, the religious authority and lay leaders are trying to maintain a low profile – to be modest, as part of *Kayadez*. Still, community members also insist on being privileged and support the myth of wealthy Jews. This attitude remains essentially unchanged, regardless of the conditions. Chapter 8, last but not least, reveals how gender roles differ in this arena; I also tried to draw attention to the large share that falls on women and the negative labels that come with it. Women become carriers and managers of life cycle events. It is a performance that women and men have learned by observing, experiencing, and performing since childhood. Women, in particular, play a crucial role in this life cycle event arena as nurturers of future generations and guardians of lineage, and it is women who are responsible for making it better than the previous one.

This state of gossip and constant competition is a process that causes the individuals of this community to struggle. At the same time, it brings certain burdens and consequences for family members and couples. This illusion imprisons people, and choosing to stay outside or deciding to leave that box causes families to face unpleasant social consequences. The quote that best summarizes the pressure on community members to live according to a certain standard of living, especially to meet a minimum, is this, in my opinion. This expression is as follows:

> [From the interview of a participant who has moved abroad] As a matter of fact, the reason why I have left is very much connected to all this. Let me summarize. We were trapped in a box in Turkey's evolving social structure. But I am not happy in that box. And I do not want to destroy my own life to afford that box. That thought is that we have to work hard; our income cannot be lower than a certain number. We can never live in except these such neighborhoods...We are not happy in that box. It is always a competition. Whose wedding was better than whom, whose wedding dress was fluffier than that of whom, who had a more expensive venue…Just have a wedding with thirty-five people in your garden, make it something special for you…They buy service; there is no end to it…Generally, everything we

> pay for, especially things that push our budget [services], make us prisoners in our community…That imprisons us (No name interview, 2017).

At the end of the day, they generally find themselves in this box, which is also their habitus, they have locked themselves into.

My findings indicate that, following new global trends in the 1980s and 1990s, the Turkish Jewish festive events and event economy expanded significantly. In Chapter 9, I focused specifically on the stories of how the market was formed and how it became an actor in this field during the mid-1980s and 1990s. During the dissertation, I have also made connections between the transformations in the celebration of life cycle events and social and economic developments in Turkey over time. The rise of the new middle class in Turkey and the transition to a liberal economy in the 1980s and 1990s also affected the Jewish community's life cycle events. While during the 1960s and 1970s, life cycle event receptions, especially weddings, took place in luxurious restaurants with extended family, in the 1980s and 1990s, the venues started to transition into five-star hotels, thanks to the development related to the global city concept of Istanbul. Chapter 9 reveals how Jewish companies enter this game as powerful agents, supporting this with examples from the companies' founding stories. This chapter also illustrates the transition of Jewish companies over decades and the differentiation in their approach to playing this game, as well as the application of different strategies (Lamaison and Bourdieu, 1986: 111-112). Moreover, Chapter 9, underlining Bourdieu's field analysis, highlights how these Jewish companies were new to the field and sought to exert influence by applying the capital they possessed. The cases presented in this chapter also demonstrate how Jewish companies reproduce this habitus and the manner in which the Turkish Jewish community celebrates life cycle events by engaging in this power struggle on this battlefield. In addition, it is emphasized that these companies have a "feel for the game" and seem to "know" what these ceremonies are supposed to look like, whereas the other companies may not, in the eyes of the community. The study reveals that in this field, the habitus also defines and significantly filters and distinguishes between in-group and out-group community members (and companies).

Along with all this, I have tried to show that the attitude changes within the Jewish community, which Yıldız (2015) defines as the extraversion phase with the beginning of the establishment of the Quincentennial Foundation (1989), also led to this path. The changes within the Jewish community also impact the perspective on this life cycle event. However, these attitude changes turned into action in the 2000s in the field of life cycle events. As I emphasized in Chapter 4, especially with the filling of the Jewish community administration with younger and visionary cadres, this change was facilitated. The religious authority (and lay leaders) took several steps for institutionalization and educational activities in the 2000s, such as the *Bar and Bat Mitsva Club.* The arrival of Rabbi Mendy Chitrik also accelerated these institutionalization efforts in this field. The Jewish community's role as Turkey's good minority child (Brink-Danan, 2009; Bali, 2012) is reflected in the efforts made by Jewish leaders to acquaint other groups with Jewish identity. These efforts also helped these structured rules in the life cycle events arena. As discussed in Chapter 4, during this period, they came to the forefront, showcasing themselves, their rituals, and their cultural aspects. Because cultural and religious elements do not seem political. Even though the two attitudes seem opposite to each other, this glossiness attitude goes hand in hand with the concept of *Kayadez,* and this *Kayadez* tradition is still very clearly operating in the background. However, this visibility remained in "de-politicized venues" (Brink-Danan, 2012: 60). As discussed in Chapter 4, the Istanbul Jewish Community has gained more public visibility recently than in the past, especially since the early 2000s. The creation of the Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews and its relocation to the Neve Shalom Building, as well as the public celebrations of Hanukkah and the European Day of Jewish Culture, are demonstrated as examples. However, the religious authority and lay leaders did not want to show the image of a wealthy Jew, but they could not prevent it, as seen in particular receptions. These efforts also contain security concerns, not to draw too much attention, as they were part of a discourse carried out silently for years.

While the existing domination of *Kayadez* tradition is still in the air, accompanied by the rise of antisemitism following the 2003 terror attacks, unexpectedly, the Jewish community did not choose to be more insular in this

field. For just a couple of months, it was possible to observe the Jewish community as more introverted, closed, guarded, and cautious in some social and religious settings. Afterwards, although religious authority insisted on being humble in demonstrating ethno-religious communal identity, it had less control, especially in the areas of Jewish weddings and Bar Mitzvah receptions, compared to other life cycle events. At every opportunity, religious authorities strive to maintain control over the finances and occasions in the community, such as in Brith Milah ceremonies. Despite the religious authority's efforts, the myth of wealthy Jews is struck up by community members and the market.

As discussed, the Istanbul Jewish Community has gained more public visibility recently than in the past, especially since the early 2000s. It also should be noted that the change in discourse and representation of the Jewish community is related to the change in the lay leadership of the Jewish community as well as to the conjunctural changes in Turkey. The democratization of Turkey in the 2000s and the country's efforts to join the EU elicited Turkey's embrace of its "different colors," whereby it became easier for the (minority) communities to become more extroverted. The establishment of the Quincentennial Foundation and the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Jews' presence in Ottoman and Turkey is another factor that assisted the community to become more extroverted. Therefore, the 2000s were the years when the representation of this cultural identity was most debated, especially within the realm of religious authority. For this reason, the years when the compulsory religious pre-marriage seminar was created and the *Bar and Bat Mistva Club* was founded also coincide with this period.

The 2010s is also news of another change. While religious authority has been the dominant player in the game thus far, this decade marks an area where the market and the young generation of community members are taking more active steps in the game. This new generation of companies and community members have embraced the *Avlaremoz* tradition, and they have pushed to relax the rules a bit more. The latest generation is now more educated, more critical not only of the community leaders but also of the world, and more aware of global trends. At the same time, the group I call third-generation companies emerged during this period and played the game

more aggressively and powerfully compared to other generations, especially when positioning themselves against religious authority. Particularly, permitted beach weddings are a part of the efforts of younger generation community members' insistent requests as well as the market' support. All of these reasons have led religious authority to bend the rules on many issues, allowing things that align with new trends. In addition to that, religious authority (and lay leaders) has tended to become more open and outspoken, as seen in some examples from 2015, such as the public celebration of Hanukkah, the commemoration of the Struma, and the first Holocaust remembrance ceremony[2] held in Ankara (see Chapter 4). In the context of life cycle events, this shift is further reflected in the establishment of the hygienic room, the permission granted for beach weddings, and the allowance for all companies to work in the synagogue in 2015.

Finally, economic and political crises, especially in the mid-2010s, have had a profoundly negative impact on this life cycle event field. Particularly in the last five years (the period covered by the thesis), it is possible to see how the sector has shrunk and how the field has narrowed, resulting in fewer shows and activities. At the same time, it has begun to lose its appeal as a place for families to invest in and represent themselves within the Jewish community. In parallel, it is observed that Jewish companies are also turning to non-Jewish target groups instead of the Jewish event field.

2 https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber/93785/ankarada-ilk-27-ocak-anmasi- (Accessed, May 21, 2025).

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