To my parents, Athanassios Kravvas and Eleni Lioudi-Kravva

To my children, Bigina and Thanassis

Without them I feel that my accomplishments would be somehow incomplete…

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Preface to the book by Pat Caplan

Dr. Kravva's book makes an important contribution to several fields of anthropology. First of all, it is an ethnography of the remaining small Sephardic Jewish community in the city of Thessaloniki in northern Greece. Although Dr. Kravva is herself a native of this city, she notes that until she began to look for a research topic for her Ph.D., she knew almost nothing of the existence of this community and its long history.

This brings me to the second area which is covered in this book – the turbulent history of the city of Thessaloniki during the twentieth century. The author shows how the ethnic composition of the cosmopolitan city changed dramatically, firstly with the coming of the Greek-speaking refugees from Asia Minor, which rendered the large Jewish population a minority, and secondly with the Second World War and the deportation of the city's Jews, only a few of whom were to return. Thessaloniki became a Greek-speaking city, with its inhabitants mainly practitioners of Greek orthodox Christianity. The Jewish population abandoned its original language of Ladino, which they had brought with them from Spain, and adopted Greek as their language.

History is not, however, just about 'what happened' but also about how people continuously interpret it and try to make sense of it. Kravva demonstrates that while the official version of history, which she herself learned in school, makes little reference to the Jewish contribution to the city or to what happened during the second world war, members of that community who returned to live in the city did retain such memories, and an important way in which they continue to do so is through food practices.

While the Jews of Thessaloniki continue to think of themselves as such, they also consider themselves to be fully Greek and citizens of the Greek state. The generation below middle age is ambivalent about its Jewishness, not wishing to appear too different, while the Greek orthodox majority sometimes questions the 'Greekness' of the Jews. Yet paradoxically, Jews outside Greece question the way in which those in Thessaloniki practice Judaism, particularly criticising them for their lack of a kosher diet. In fact ethnic and religious identity is complex and shifting, and a sense of being Jewish manifests to a greater or lesser extent in particular contexts, being particularly marked in terms of religious rituals.

Food – its preparation, cooking, and eating - is the focus of this book, and is the way in which identity is remembered and enacted. The author shows the central importance of food not only in the construction of the Jewish family but also in that of the community, particularly through three main institutions: the Jewish primary school, the old people's home, and the synagogues. Food is about taste,

smell and the evocation of memory, it is about nostalgia and belonging and Jews in Thessaloniki, like the rest of humanity, are indeed what they eat.

Yet ideas about food and identity are far from static. Even as Kravva shows that there are debates within the community about whether or not Jews in Thessaloniki should adopt kosher practices, she also reports the discussions in the wider society about the place of ethnic minorities in Greece and how their history should be represented. Such debates are by no means resolved, and the issue of the relationship between religious and ethnic identity, on the one hand, and citizenship of the Greek nation-state on the other, remains highly contested.

In short, then, Kravva's work reveals the way in which the study of food can lead in so many different directions. It covers gender relations, households and families, it involves the construction of communities through rituals and the commensality practiced in their institutions. Yet its study also encompasses the politics of the nation-state, its politics and ideologies, and even moves beyond to the global arena, in which members of the Jewish diaspora may consider themselves linked to one another. The author clearly conducted her fieldwork with sensitivity and has been able to translate her data into an empathetic account of the people with whom she worked. In the process she has made a significant contribution to the anthropological study of food and identity.

Pat Caplan

Professor of social anthropology, Goldsmiths College, University of London and ex-director of the Common Wealth Institute, London.

Preface to the book by Margaret Kenna

It has been said that the most important cooking implements are the nose and the tongue, followed by the eye – does it smell right? does it taste as it ought to? does it look as it should? The tastes, smells, colours and textures of food are intimately bound up with personal and embodied experience, with both cook and eater recognising through their senses what their bodies learnt in the past about that particular substance as an ingredient of a dish, and about that dish as part of a meal. Whether this is a personal or a family past, food triggers memories of a particularly fundamental kind, which are aspects of a multi-faceted identity: as an individual, a family member, the inhabitant of a village or town, resident of a region, and citizen of a particular country. No wonder that the saying "you are what you eat", and the aphorism of Brillat-Savarin, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are", ring so true: food, memory and identity are inextricably intertwined.

In this book, the author sensitively and discerningly begins to disentangle the plaited threads of Jewish food, cooking, memory and identity among these Greek citizens of the city of Thessaloniki. She shows that, like all traditions, this is not a fixed cuisine, but one which has changed over time and incorporated new ingredients, methods and meanings. So too with individuals and families; their sense of who they are has altered and is fascinatingly varied, as are the ways in which they express these different identities in a range of contexts.

To do this involves tracing some of the history of the Jewish communities of Greece and their relationships with their Christian and Muslim neighbours. But the focus is on food, foodstuffs, meals, and cooking, viewed through an anthropological eye – or rather, through an anthropological nose and palate. In some academic quarters, the importance of the primary anthropological method of gathering information, participant observation, still needs to be justified. Sitting and watching, listening, smelling, tasting, and talking, so apparently simple, are as much an art form as the skill of a chef. And turning those experiences and that information into a coherent narrative is also a great skill. You will find more than enough evidence of that art and those skills in this book.

This preface is designed to act as a *mezadaki*, a little appetiser, before the real *mezedes* (hors d'oeuvres), and the *kirio piato* (main dish). Read on, and you will find your body responding to the descriptions of foods and meals, and you will understand why Greeks say "eat in order to remember".

Margaret E. Kenna

Emeritus Professor of social anthropology, Swansea University

The author's preface

The main issue explored in this book is how and why food is used as a channel through which everyday identities are informed and elaborated. As such it is examined when, how and in what circumstances food and the activities involved in its preparation, consumption and exchange can be used as vehicles for identities. My ethnographic focus is on the Jewish population of Thessaloniki, the largest and most economically viable city of Northern Greece. The Jewish past of this city is quite remarkable: the Jewish community of Thessaloniki remained a significant part of the overall population and existed continuously until early twentieth century. Dramatic events during the twentieth century and in particular the coming of Asia Minor refugees in 1923 and the Second World War in 1939-45 caused significant upheavals and resulted in a radical reduction of the city's Jewish population. My ethnographic data confirm that this turbulent history is reflected in the construction of present-day Jewish identities. Food and the associated activities like preparing, serving, eating, talking and remembering through food are explored as meaningful contexts in which the Jews of Thessaloniki make statements about their past, create their present, construct or reject collective identifications, express their fears and preoccupations, imagine their future. The identities of my informants were multiple and complex. Being Jewish interacted with being Sephardic, Thessalonikian and Greek. In the thesis I argue that food was a way of experiencing and expressing these identities. I use the term "community" cautiously since it fails to reflect the complexity of Thessalonikian Jewish experiences and the varying degrees of identification by individuals with that community. Different degrees of belonging are considered in relation to gender, age, economic and social status. Therefore, the ambivalence or often the reluctance of Jewish people living in Thessaloniki to be identified as members of "a community" is an important theme of the thesis. Another important theme discussed is the the overlapping and the shifting between religion and tradition meaning *kosher* diet and Sephardic food as it is translated and perceived by the Jewish people themselves.

The ethnographic material discussed in the book was collected between 1998 and 2000 in the context of a doctorate programme at Goldsmiths College in the University of London. The life-histories discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Six were collected between 2005-2007 in the context of a European research programme, CENTROPA, concerning the lives of Eastern European Jews throughout the 20th century. Yet since most of the field material presented was collected between 1998-2000 It could be argued that the book is by no means a "recent" ethnography. In the last years many changes have taken place not only in relation to the Jewish community in Thessaloniki -a new Rabbi is certainly among them- but also as far as the Greek socio-political context and the opening of the

discussion of issues of religious minorities -including Jewish communities- among local academics. The first thing to be noted is the fact that this is a general “problem” that ethnographers have to deal with: They are writing about societies or groups which they studied some years ago. So the question is whether anthropologists are entitled to represent the past in the present and yet make it sound like part of the present. I strongly believe that the very deep epistemological issue is not whether ethnographers depict “accurately” the reality. Many social thinkers have argued that we live in a *Runaway world* (to borrow to the title of Gidden's book) and as such “reality” and “the present” become notions quite problematic. In our globalised, fragmented world we can only have analyses that take into account the plurality of voices and thus the multiplicity of realities. Anthropological accounts take seriously this fluidity of strategies and expectations and provide a sensitive look at people's lives. And what more “the present” is not an autonomous, unchangeable entity but on the contrary there is a constant dialogue between the past and the present. To a great extent the past is to be traced by the analysis of the present conditions and vice versa. I hope that this book will be judged by the reader on the basis of the empathetic understanding -if at all- of the complexity of belonging to “a community” and the ways proposed so as to trace the past -more accurately the pasts- and uncover the past-present dialectic.

Introduction: What is to be "cooked" in this book?

> The authentic Greek tastes of several places in our country were forgotten for many years. To be honest, we either felt embarrassed about our village's cuisine or we simply deprived this cuisine of any cultural value. But we do change. We now feel that these dishes, apart from providing calories for survival also constitute memories of our tradition, ties of communication… For that reason a three-day culinary festival was organised… The first day of the food festival was dedicated to the Jewish community of the city.
> (*EF, magazine of Material Culture,* No. 18: October 1997. My translation)

According to the article entitled "The Attack of Tradition" culinary festivals organised in some of the cities of Northern and Southern Greece are the living proof that "we do change". Similar culinary celebrations have taken place in Thessaloniki,[1] the largest city of Northern Greece and the locus of my research. According to the organiser of a food festival in the city in 1998: "We are going to present the culinary traditions of the Jews, Pontioi and the refugees from Asia Minor. The aim is to promote all local cuisines". The above festivals are only some examples of an endeavour to "dig out" the culinary past or pasts of Greece and to "remember" and re-value traditions and local tastes. Indeed, as the article highlights, people's perceptions are in the process of changing. But why and most importantly in which direction? Is the change in food habits a natural process, something we feel or is it the outcome of a resurgence of memories? And if so how do food memories survive and why? In which ways can the preparation and consumption of certain dishes enact and transmit memories? Is the return to our "village cuisine" a meaningful and conscious effort that needs to be analysed? If people talk about national or local in the culinary lexicon could this process of naming a cuisine enact images of belonging? Can food and cuisine tell us something about the populations that have lived and continue to live in Greece including the Jewish populations? In short, what, in this context, is the relationship between food and identity?

This book is an attempt to provide some answers to these questions. It deals with food and discourses of belonging among the Jewish people who live in Thessaloniki, a Northern Greek city with

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[1] In the literature, Thessaloniki is variously referred to as Salonika, Salonica or Saloniki. The naming of the city is possible to derive from the Slavic *solb,* which means 'salt' with the addition of the ending -un. Hence we could presume that Thessaloniki of the sixth and seventh centuries AD. was "the city of salt", meaning the city where the salt trade was taking place.

a population of almost one million inhabitants. I use food and eating as channels in order to explore past and present experiences of Jewishness in this city and attempt to trace possible connections between "feeling Jewish" and eating "Jewish food". Drawing on an anthropological perspective I explore the relationship between food and identity and consequently problematise and de-naturalise notions like "authenticity", "tradition", "memory" and "nostalgia" in relation to food. In the popular imagination, food mainly belongs to the domestic realm and as such it is often viewed as a gendered and trivial enterprise which is not highly valued. Yet food and eating contribute to the creation of families and the construction of group boundaries through the act of commensality. Food exchanges become a metaphor for shared familiarity because they strengthen the personal bonds between individuals and groups. Households and, to an even greater degree, ethnic or (and) religious communities, are not natural entities but are created and transformed through cultural practices which take place in them, among which eating is certainly one of the most important. Food crosses the boundaries between nature and culture and through its consumption people "taste" and "consume" their culture, their past and present; they also create images of cultural continuity. The social value of food consists in its ability to attach emotions and recollections to taste while its transferable quality and its ability to resist socio-historical changes prove that food is indeed an important channel of communication.

A second aspect of food's capacity for sociality is that it can be considered as a language, a set of meaningful patterns. I am not arguing that food can be equated with language: the latter is performative and can be used and controlled as a source of political power. Nevertheless there is a form of power attached to food as well: it generates emotions and recollections and thus it often becomes a vehicle for expressing past and present histories. If we take the argument further, in certain cases food both marks and creates histories and thus serves as a central mnemonic device. My research points exactly to this: Thessalonikian Jews, especially the older and middle-aged generations, employ food as a metaphor for belonging. For them it is a way to "taste" their past and present and create images of belonging, continuity and cultural distinctiveness.

I started my research in 1998 although it was an unknown field to me since I had no previous knowledge of Jewish people living in Greece. The only mention was during my University years when I learned about the figure of the Jew in Greek fairy tales and folk-stories. At that time the Jewish presence in Greece was largely unknown at least before 1997. However, I do recall conversations from my early childhood during which older members of my family talked about their lives in pre-War Thessaloniki. These narratives included Jewish friends and invitations to attend ceremonies at the synagogue. My childhood narratives were neither fairytales nor figments of my imagination. During

my research I found out that they were true stories of the Jewish presence in Thessaloniki and pictures of the everyday life in the city prior to the Second World War.

The Jewish people of Thessaloniki have a history that underwent sweeping changes during the twentieth century and clearly reflects, *inter alia*, the building processes of the Greek nation-state. At the same time Jews themselves experienced remarkable shifts in their own feelings of attachment to the city. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Jews in Thessaloniki constituted a significant part of the city's population and sometimes even the majority. However, with the end of the Balkan Wars in 1913, after the annexation of Macedonia -and Thessaloniki- to Greece there was a noticeable endeavour on the part of the newly born Greek State to build a homogeneous Greek Macedonia. Thus a process of the Hellenisation of Greek Macedonia -in which numerous peoples with different ethnic origins and languages lived- gradually started. The role of education in this process was central: through a purely Greek education and through the imposition of the Greek language in schools all the local vernaculars, including the Thessalonikian-Jewish, *Ladino,* were gradually marginalised.

The population in the city changed drastically after the Asia Minor disaster in 1922. The Greek refugees from Asia Minor who found shelter in the city were not only Orthodox Christians but also Greek speakers. With the arrival of these refugees and the departure of the local Muslim population the Jewish population instantly became numerically less significant and Thessaloniki was no longer a multi-cultural city but a largely Christian city of Northern Greece. The Second World War completed the change of the scene: of the 70,000 people who were sent to the concentration camps only 2,000 escaped death and returned to Thessaloniki. Some of these migrated to Israel, Western Europe and America so that today the Community numbers just under one thousand Jews, a small ethnic group whose "Greekness" is often questioned. Thus an assessment of shifts of "feeling" Thessalonikian and at the same time of belonging to a Jewish community seem to be worth exploring in the case of Thessaloniki's Jewish population.

The city has a turbulent past and a contested present. The largest city of Northern Greece, it is a port of strategic importance in the wider area of Macedonia and has been the locus of serious past and present political confrontations. In 1995, Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were in dispute over the naming of FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and the symbolic "ownership" of Macedonian history. The citizens of Greek Macedonia were mobilised by organising mass demonstrations in order to prevent "the falsification of the history and the name of Macedonia". This debate, known as "The Macedonian conflict", ended with the failure of Greece's diplomacy and the recognition by the European states of the name "Macedonia" for the Yugoslav republic. Some years later, in 1998, the wider area of Macedonia entered a series of political and

military confrontations: the Serbs were accused of maltreating the Albanians living in the Kosovo area, which was part of the former Yugoslav Republic. Subsequently NATO repeatedly bombarded Serbian territory in an attempt to introduce ethnic cleansing measures. The area of Macedonia continues to be the locus of contested military and political views and mobilises different interpretations of national histories. In recent years many migrants, especially from the Balkan area such as Serbs and Albanians but also including people from the Near East, have settled in Thessaloniki mainly in a search for a better life. By briefly presenting the recent political antagonisms in the area I want to highlight the fact that Macedonian identity was highly contested not only in the past but also in response to present conditions. The construction of national histories in the area plays a very important role in the creation of national consciousness. Whereas the history of minority groups was in a sense largely absent from the national body of historiography. It is quite interesting to analyse the history of the Greek-Jews under this light.

In the course of my work identity and culture are not treated as natural, bounded entities, but are imbued with complex meanings and practices which are often in the processes of alteration and adjustment. People construct their identities and elaborate or erase their differences and thus create, re-create, and often modify their strategies in order to accommodate themselves to several local contexts. In this light I found that "Jewishness" in Thessaloniki is highly contextual and Jewish people emphasise their Jewishness, Sephardicness, Thessalonikianess or Greekness according to context and always in relation to their present and future positioning. Food and eating are effective strategies in this process of identity making and Thessalonikian Jews employ and often reject food discourses as a means of denoting who they are or would like to be.

People often employ food practices and narratives as a channel for expressing past and present histories and a vehicle for expressing preoccupations about the degree of 'belonging to Jewishness'. Food is a metaphor for the formation, the evaluation and the interplay of their identities in relation to Judaism, Sephardiness, Thessalonikianess. Food, including actual food practices (like preparing and eating) but also food narratives and memories, are going to be my main tools in exploring this complexity. This book examines what Thessalonikian Jews eat, why, what they say while eating and what aspects of their identities such food mobilises.

However, approaching the Jewish community of Thessaloniki as a homogeneous entity leads to serious theoretical misunderstandings and ethical dilemmas. Such an approach over-simplifies the complexity of the weight of everyday experiences that different generations carry with them and risks essentialising and naturalising groups and boundaries. I argue that the feeling of "being Jewish" is strongly affected by lifetime experiences and future expectations and is itself context-specific. Thus

generation -and by the term I include the baggage of memories and experiences- is an important factor that influences the degree of belonging. There is a significant variation between the first and the second generations of Thessalonikian Jews, meaning the older and the middle aged people. These were directly or indirectly influenced by the Holocaust and they also identified more strongly with Sepharadism and Thessaloniki, whereas the youngest generation identified more strongly with Greekness. For them "Sephardic food does not exist" and the same applies to Sephardic Jewish identities. In the course of the analysis "generation" is not treated as an abstract category but rather as a meaningful process. As such is shaped by past and present experiences. I believe that the Holocaust and its consequences dramatically marked people's lives and divided time and space into a pre- and post-War Thessaloniki. In this sense the survivors of the Holocaust constitute one generation drawing from similar experiences while their children, today middle-aged, share the post-War uncertainty and sometimes the silence of their parents. Yet the younger generation of Jews identifies strongly not only with Sephardic Jewishness but also with the city of Thessaloniki and are more keen to stress their Greekness. Their attitudes and the fact that they "do not want to be different" will also be discussed.

In Chapter One I introduce the reader to my actual field, the Jewish community (henceforward referred to as 'the Community') and discuss the acceptance and the interpretations of Sephardic identity and of the kosher diet. This chapter is very much based on interpretations from within. I am interested in how Thessalonikian Jews view themselves, their Community and the changes taking place in it. It is important to account for people's own interpretations of the "resurgence" of Community that has taken place over the last few years and the way it has gone hand in hand with food initiatives and the reintroduction of kosher dietary rules. Thus a mosaic of idiosyncratic interpretations of the "real" meaning of Judaic dietary rules -such as the emphasis on symbolism or hygiene or both of them- reveal that religion and religious norms are internalised by people who "respond" to their needs and life conditions. Religion is by no means untouched and unproblematic.

Chapter Two is an attempt to explore the theoretical orientations of the book and thus to analyse its conceptual "ingredients". In this chapter a variety of different theoretical approaches to food are discussed highlighting the power of food to symbolise social relationships and the local and global interplay. Another body of literature that the analysis draws upon is that concerning ethnicity and the construction of ethnic and national boundaries. At this point comparative material from other Jewish communities will be presented so that the reader will have a clearer account of the ambiguity and ambivalence experienced by supposedly bounded groups. Food is a central component in these processes. What follows is a brief analysis of the anthropological studies of Macedonia which reveal how strongly historical processes during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affected the local

populations. In the second part of the same chapter I describe the methodology and the field strategies that were followed. Thus I assess the advantages, disadvantages and limitations of already existing theoretical orientations with reference to my own field experiences and I discuss some of the ethical issues that this research raised.

Chapter Three examines the encounter of two different but at the same time overlapping histories: that of the Jewish community in the city and that of the Greek nation-state during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. By presenting the two versions of history my intention is to provide a polyphonic account and to underline the fact that alongside the national body of history several other localised versions of history exist. What more, I attempt to trace how history was internalised and translated by the Jewish people themselves and therefore to treat history as a series of lived events which were invested with certain emotions. Inevitably the notion of "class" runs history and produces different historical "readings". It is interesting that the history of the Jews in Thessaloniki was largely dismissed from the official version of Greek historiography. This "absence" is itself a starting point for discussion about the role of "nationalised" history in the creation of nation-states and the formation of key national symbols whose existence is necessary for the consolidation and maintenance of the nation itself.

Chapter Four is an examination of the creation of families through acts of cooking, serving, eating together and exchanging food. Families are meaningful contexts, created by ongoing processes of which eating food is crucial. Fasts and Feasts of Judaism are described in an attempt to understand and reconstruct the calendrical cycle of Jewish religion and the role that food plays in it. The chapter is also an examination of debates that the topic of food raises within the family setting such as the role of motherhood and socialisation, "proper" food, food exchanges, the creation of kinship and everyday versus ritual food. Moreover the deconstruction of notions like "authenticity" and "tradition" are analysed in relation to food. In general I try to trace any possible connections between "eating Sephardic food" and "being a Sephardic Jew" or in other words between what is considered "authentic" food and sentiments of belonging. The discussion on the creation of family ends by assessing gendered and generational differences.

The role of food and eating in creating institutions and making the Community are closely examined in Chapter Five. The school, the synagogue and the Old People's Home serve as important loci for the reproduction of Jewishness, which is achieved through various activities including food consumption. These three institutions will be used as examples of how discourses of Jewishness are expressed, exchanged and perpetuated. In particular the contestations over food along with the tensions experienced will be explored. There is a constant interplay between the various identities that

Thessalonikian Jews experience: there are tensions between being Sephardic and eating Sephardic food and at the same time being Jewish and eating kosher food. The recent initiatives towards a more "Jewish" diet will be analysed along with my informants' efforts to be more "Sephardic". The different generational perspectives will be a central theme of my analysis.

Chapter Six is preoccupied with food narratives about the past and present. In the course of talking about their childhood, family life, the city, the War, Thessalonikian Jews mobilise two overlapping discourses: the discourse of cultural distinctiveness and the discourse of culinary symbiosis and synthesis. The role of individual, family and community memories acquires a significant position: it is argued that memories evoked by the preparation and eating of food can often become a vehicle for expressing belonging. Food and eating retrieve memories of "distant" and "close" pasts, of childhood, family life and pre-War Thessaloniki. Thus food memories become a medium for expressing past, present and future identities. For the past is not a closed autonomous entity but it is often re-visited and in certain cases reconstructed by present life experiences whereas our present experiences are shaped and re-shaped by real or imagined pasts. The relationship between the past and the present is thus in many cases a dialectical one and this becomes more evident in the short life-history presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Seven outlines contested views of belonging and what attempts to provide insights on the complex processes of creating Self and defining Otherness. As such I try to give voice to Thessalonikian Jews who critically assess issues like education, language and mixed marriages in Greece. The informants claim that anti-semitism does not exist explicitly in an overt form in Greece today. They distinguish historical anti-semitism -which often resembles economic antagonism- from contemporary antisemitic views. In certain cases their Greekness is a source of contradictory judgements and in certain cases "has to be proved". Within this cultural ambivalence Thessalonikian Jews try to perpetuate the discourses of "being Greek" but still "feeling Jewish".

I end this introductory note with some additional thoughts on the book. The way people perceive their identities and the discourses they mobilise are central in this book. I have tried to find a balance between theoretical models and conclusions and the paths that Thessalonikian Jews themselves employ in order to highlight or to hide certain aspects of their complex identities. I have tried to respect their strong dislike of the term "minority" although at certain points of the analysis there was not a more suitable term to use. They certainly do not view themselves as belonging to a minority group because for them such a notion often signifies being "in need"; such persons are perceived as passive and unable to react. In their own view Thessalonikian Jewry has a dynamic presence, and despite its ambivalence and internal contradictions, it remains an active part of the city's population. I have tried

to respect the image they have of themselves and avoid any victimising discourses. And I have used an anthropological approach because it tries to be sensitive to local conditions and in spite of complexities –or indeed because of them– anthropological research provides unique insights into lived social experience.

Chapter One

Introducing the Jews in Thessaloniki: Views from within

> For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.
>
> This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that creepeth upon the earth:
>
> To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.
>
> (*Old Testament,* Leviticus, Chapter Eleven)
>
> These *are* the commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Si-nai.
>
> (*Old Testament,* Leviticus, Chapter Thirty Four)

About the present of the Community

One of the most important anthropological issues that emerged during my fieldwork and is discussed in the first chapter concerned the different ways in which Jewishness is perceived and experienced. Most of my informants avoided associating themselves with this identity and yet they still experienced feeling "different". A much debated issue which is discussed refers to people's attitude to keeping a *kosher* diet. My informants denied that they kept a *kosher* diet yet in their everyday lives some were trying to incorporate, and in some cases reintroduce, *kosher* rules. People's internalisation and mobilisation of their Sephardic past is also to be discussed. Thessalonikian Jews experienced their Sephardicness as "a meaningful resource" and employed this aspect of their identity to denote their distinctiveness from other Jews. The last issue assessed is how Jewish people in Thessaloniki viewed other Jews, meaning non-Greek Jews, in order to trace the ambivalent feelings experienced and the slippage of Jewish identities.

Today, the Jewish community of Thessaloniki is legally subjected to the Greek civil code[2] and thus it is answerable to the Ministry of education and religion. The Community submits its budget for approval to the Greek state. A twenty-member committee assembly is elected every four years and various boards are responsible for the community's institutions: the cemetery, the two synagogues, the

[2] It operates on the basis of the Greek law 2456/20, which refers "To the Israeli Communities" and was introduced after the First World War.

museum[3], the primary school, the summer camp, the Old People's Home. The director (president) of the Community is also elected.

At the time of my research the Community Centre maintained a "brotherhood"[4] and a youth centre, social clubs organising various events[5]- a "ladies organisation"[6], the athletic club *"Maccabee"*[7] and a "Greek-Israel"[8] association. The Community published a series of newspapers and booklets, which were posted free to its members. The monthly newspaper was called *"Τα Νέα μας"* (Our News) and contained various articles and news concerning Jewish communities all over Greece. There was also a newspaper circulated called *"Νεολαία"* (Youth) with similar interests and several information leaflets concerning the cultural activities of the Community. A booklet was also sent to people's homes before the Jewish High Holy Days. The first pages explained the historical context and the symbolism of the celebrations and the last pages illustrated the Sephardic dishes that accompany such celebrations. There were also many ritual songs and children's crosswords.

My informants argued that the Community's profile had drastically changed over the last decade. For most the earlier difficulty of the Community to express itself freely was partly explained in terms of the traumatic Holocaust experiences. Those who had come back from the concentration camps were mainly preoccupied with surviving. According to them, after the Second World War Thessaloniki was a deserted city: no friends, no relatives, no homes, no property. They had to start their lives from zero:

> We found a ghost city, a deserted city. No relatives, no homes, no belongings. Difficult times .[9]

People explained that the "opening" of the Community occurred after 1992, the year of the 500th anniversary of the exodus from Spain. My informants believed that the celebration helped the Community to become "more visible". Most of them could remember many cultural events that took

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[3] From 1997 onwards the Museum's address has changed. It used to be situated on the upper floor of a building but now it has been replaced by an old house, easily identified. It is situated in one of the busiest areas of Thessaloniki.

[4] For adult members.

[5] These are mainly cultural activities like excursions and seminars but also other events like dance parties.

[6] The most interesting classes that women organise at the Community centre are the cookery classes in which they try to learn "traditional" Sephardic recipes, Hebrew classes and Judaism. All these classes are being held on a weekly basis.

[7] The athletic club *Maccabee* includes basketball and table tennis teams.

[8] This association organises official events in order to emphasise Greek and Jewish bonds. Two events had taken place just before I started my fieldwork: an event dedicated to the Greeks who had saved Jewish people by hiding them from the Nazis during the War and another event dedicated to the "Greekness" of Macedonia *(Μακεδονική Βραδιά)* which was organised at the Jewish school.

[9] Quoted from a video documentary with the title "The Jews of Thessaloniki", which was sponsored by the Organisation of Thessaloniki as Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997. Shown on a public channel.

place at the time: speeches, publications, concerts. I quote from a booklet the Community published that year:

> This booklet seeks to inform those who are interested in getting to know more about both the historic past and the dynamic present of our Community. It is published to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the expulsion and exile of the Jews from Spain and their settlement in Thessaloniki, the city that in 1492 received thousands of persecuted Spanish Jews and offered them shelter. With their contribution, the city prospered once more and became a first class economic centre as it used to be in the Greek, Roman and Byzantine times. This anniversary is being celebrated by our community with a series of events. [10]

In 1997 Thessaloniki became the Cultural Capital of Europe and this offered further opportunities for the adoption of a higher profile for the Community. Indeed, during 1997, the Community showed an active cultural presence and became the "object" of study of many scholars. Publications, talks and the release of several music albums dealt one way or the other with the Sephardic past of the city and the Jewish population. But this rekindled interest left people rather sceptical:

> During the period when Thessaloniki was the Cultural Capital of Europe many events concerning the Jewish presence in the city took place. I feel though that it was just an episode which lasted very briefly. It was like a balloon that deflated. This always happens, it was just for effect.

On 23rd November 1997, fifty years after the Holocaust, a monument was built in the city, a sculpture representing the Jewish seven-branched candelabra *(menorah)* between flames and human bodies. The monument was built at the same place where "151", the Jewish neighbourhood, once stood. The whole square was renamed *"Πλατεία Εβραίων Μαρτύρων"* (Square of Jewish Martyrs). During the ceremony in which the monument was inaugurated by the President of the Republic of Greece many non-Jewish Greek politicians and religious leaders were present. Among others, the ceremony was attended by several Ministers and members of the Greek parliament, an Archbishop's representative, a representative of the Metropolitan bishop of Thessaloniki, the Israeli Ambassador, the Greek

[10] From the information booklet published by the Jewish community of Thessaloniki page 26.

Ambassador to Israel and representatives of the Military authorities. I quote from *Χρονικά* (Chronicles), the official series of the central Jewish assembly in Athens:[11]

> On the 23 November 1997 the official Greek State –represented by the President of the Republic- fulfilled a duty after several years of delay. It was a recognition of and a memorial to what the Greek people and especially the victims' fellow townsmen have been feeling in their hearts for many years.

The speeches given by major Greek political figures are really interesting but I would like at this point to focus only on the speech of the President of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki. In his words there is a constant effort to stress the patriotic feelings towards Greece of Jewish victims, emphasising their Greekness. I quote some of his words:

> They were not only sacrificed as Jews but also as Greeks…when necessary they willingly rallied to defend their country…they gave their lives for Mother Greece.

Since that time the Community has shifted from social and spatial invisibility to visibility and this symbolic movement also signalises the growing interest of the Greek academia for the topic of Jewishness in modern Greece and in general the opening of discussions and debates concerning religious identities and minority rights. During my post fieldwork visits, on the 16th-17th April 2000, a conference about the Judaeo-Espagnol language took place at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The following was an introductory note about the conference, which I found at the Community Centre:

> A Jewish language in search of its people…It is the realisation of this unique nature of Judeo-Espagnol as the repository of collective memory of Sephardic culture, that has spurred in recent years a surprising and encouraging revival of interest in the preservation of our distinctive cultural identity.

This extract and the entire conference programme were translated into English, *Ladino* and Greek. According to the President a centre for the "preservation" of *Ladino* language, the so-called "Ladino society", was inaugurated. Many important aspects of Jewish folklore were presented at the conference.

[11] This is the official magazine concerning all the Jewish communities left in Greece and it is published every two months. It is posted to all members of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki. There are no subscription fees.

Apart from booklets with Sephardic songs and poems one could also find a booklet with information about some Jewish artists in Thessaloniki and a leaflet containing some of the city's Sephardic recipes.

I was invited me to the Community Centre that same night and as I was told a "Judaeo Espagnol night" had been organised. When I arrived there I encountered some of the people I knew who had just spent their Friday evening there and were just leaving. I realised that not all Thessalonikian Jews identified with that event. *Ladino* was the key language of that celebration and I remember many older people who tried to speak in Judeo-Espagnol. When a middle-aged man started narrating a story in this language, critical comments were made by the older people. Rather annoyed, he commented:

> It's not so important if I make some mistakes. The important thing here is that at least I try to remember this language!

Food played an essential role that evening. On every table were found many "traditional" Sephardic dishes like *keftikes (*fried dumplings), *borekitas* (small cheese pies), *sfougato* (a thin kind of omelette made either from zucchini or aubergines), *tupishti* (walnut cake) and *ouzo* (a typical Greek alcoholic drink). I later found out that some women from the Community and the official cook, who is not Jewish, were responsible for the preparation of these dishes. That night I shared a table with a non-Jewish Spanish student and an Ashkenazi Jewish woman from Istanbul who commented that she had never before tasted this food. Although the conference was announced in the local Greek newspapers, the presence of non-Jews, both academic and non-academic, was very small. Memories, although presented publicly, were still privatised, forming the basis of the differentiation from the rest of the population in the city. And yet the Community's institutions remained invisible and unknown to the majority of modern Thessalonikians. Thus, the square of Jewish Martyrs -publicly visible- became a symbolic space so as to commemorate the Jewish presence in contemporary Thessaloniki.

Conceptualising Jewishness

It would be quite essentialising to claim that all Thessalonikian Jews perceived Jewishness the same way. For them the term "Jewish" was not an abstract and meaningless entity but encompassed memories, past and present experiences, current preoccupations and future fears. It is important to underline that Jewishness was differently understood by War survivors, middle aged and young people. Although there was a general consensus among older and middle aged Thessalonikian Jewry that they

were not religious and thus they attended the synagogue rarely, their preoccupation to maintain alive certain "traditions" revealed a certain need to belong and to feel Jewish.

For Linda, a War survivor, going to the synagogue and being very religious were matters for scepticism. She was often very critical of Judaism and her own non-religious lifestyle was the outcome of her imprisonment and torture. Jewishness was a heavy legacy that had destroyed her personal and family life and left a series of unanswered questions:

> I am not religious. I do not go to the synagogue. The only time I go there is to commemorate the day of the Holocaust or on other commemorative occasions of people I knew. I don't go there to pray because life in the concentration camp has marked our lives. We were all wondering where was God at that time? Do you understand? The fact that my husband and I were saved was just a coincidence. Most of those who left never came back. Only a few were the lucky ones. They say that Jews are the chosen people. Oh God we don't want any more protection. But now we avoid talking about the old times. In previous years when two survivors met they only discussed their imprisonment. But now it's too heavy for us, we can't take any more...

Another camp survivor admitted that she never went to the synagogue and did not consider herself a religious person. According to her all religions are good because all of them "preach nice things". She believed that you have to carry religion and faith inside of you and there was discernible a process of religious adaptation to meet individual needs and experiences. For many older informants the Holocaust Day or the commemorative occasions of friends had been employed as channels to express their Jewishness. In the same way *Yom Kippur*[12] represented something more: apart from being the most important High Holy Day in the Jewish calendar it was the only occasion when my informant came to terms with her Jewishness:

> Nowadays I practice the Kippur, the day of Forgiveness, in memory of all those people that died during the War. On this day I concentrate much more. This is because after the War I never found the time to devote properly to my lost family.

The same attitude towards religious norms was expressed by Susan, another camp survivor. Suffering and imprisonment were the main reasons for her gradual detachment from religion and synagogue but

[12] The Day of Atonement, a major fast of the Jewish calendar.

they were also responsible for the concretisation of her Jewishness. Thus for her being a full member of the Community did not presuppose religious devotion or participation in the synagogue:

> Although in the past I tried to be religious I didn't manage to do so. My family was not religious at all. So, I don't really believe in religion. After the concentration camp I realised that all religions are made by human beings. Of course I am Jewish and I have full consciousness of my Jewishness because I was born like that and I suffered because of that. I have full consciousness of my identity.

Susan considered that her relationship with the Community was a very good one and that she did everything necessary in order to maintain this relationship. However, she never attended synagogue. What is most striking in all the discussions I had with the older generation was their general scepticism and challenge of religious norms. Yet the personal ordeals during the War had in a sense solidified their Jewishness which was now being expressed in other ways. Older people did observe specific religious occasions but used them as vehicles for expressing what reminded them most of being Jewish: their lost family and friends.

The situation was more or less similar with people in their forties and fifties. Albertos, a man in his forties, claimed that his feeling of being Jewish had changed over the years with a conscious effort to maintain and even create differences that could distinguish him from others. For him Jewishness was to be understood by contrast with non-Jewishness and Jewish identity was perceived through the process of sharpening and in certain cases creating differences with other non-Jews:

> I remember when I was a child and went to school I was learning Hebrew. At that time Jewishness for me was no more than a game and a leisure pursuit. I felt Greek and Jewish. I have had this feeling since I was very young. As I grew older I tried to elaborate much more my differences. Everyone was smoking so I decided not to smoke, the others studied classics whereas I decided to study progressive literature. I always had the feeling that my identity was special.

For most people Jewishness was highly personalised and influenced by family memories and childhood. Yet for the majority of older and middle-aged people "being Jewish" often remained private, something kept in the domestic sphere and the realm of the family. For Linda and other

Holocaust survivors Jewishness was encapsulated in highly treasured domestic items[13] like photos of parents and children. The ritual of showing the photographs of their family was an almost indispensable part of my regular visits. I remember Linda, full of pride, showing me photos of her daughters and grandchildren who lived abroad.

For others, their identity was enclosed in the memories from the War which they had written and published in the last few years. Sharing their experiences and giving me their memoirs were effective ways to express their Jewishness. On several occasions I was given magazines like *La Lettre Sepharade,*[14] *Los Muestros*[15] and *Chronika*.[16] I believe that all this material was written in a way that encapsulated Jewishness but at the same time it was mediated by personal memories and experiences. Most homes I visited had something that reminded the visitor of the Jewish identity of its members. In most cases people kept *menorah,* the seven-branched candlesticks, either in "open" and "public" areas like the living room or in more "private" rooms like the bedroom. On one occasion an old woman showed me the only items she managed to find in her deserted home after her return from Bergen-Belsen:

> Look this is my mother's favourite table and this is the jewel case that my husband had bought me as a marriage present. It was before the war. You can't imagine how valuable these things are for me. Full of happy memories…

However, among the younger people I spoke to there was no similar acceptance of and identification with Jewishness. Although most of them had attended the primary school and the summer camp, especially those in their mid-twenties, they were very reluctant to identify themselves with anything "Jewish". Thus some remarked that they were "fed up" with discussions of Jewishness and others said that they did not believe in bounded ethnic identities. For them "Europeanism" and "globalised identities" were the paramount values and in our discussions they avoided any association with Jewish identity. And yet, whenever I visited the Community Centre I always met young people there socialising with other friends. And during my visits to people's homes I always encountered young

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[13] Lovell (1998) argues that domestic objects can be "objects of mnemonic desire". It is noted that "These objects very much serve as mediating elements in the recreation of (the memory of) place, and act as surrogates for a memory-time-space which can never be fully recovered, yet which is also precisely recreated through the use and display of the objects themselves" (Lovell, 1998: 16). Thus objects, especially personal belongings, carry life-histories, life-cycles and personal trajectories.

[14] In English it means "The Sephardic Letter".

[15] In English it means "Our Own". Both *La Lettre Sepharade* and *Los Muestros* are written in *Ladino*.

[16] This is published in Greek every two months by the Central Greek-Jewish council which is based in Athens. Literally it means "Chronicles".

people who had just returned from the Centre. I remember a university student in his early twenties, proudly showing his mother his project about a local Jewish industry that had belonged to his grandfather before the War.

"We are Sephardic Jews"

Thessalonikian Jews claimed to be Sephardic Jews and descendants of the Spanish Jewry that had settled in the area from the end of the fifteenth century onwards. During my fieldwork I witnessed people's tendency to make associations with their Spanish past. This past stood for something not necessarily distant, but rather familiar and privatised. Memories of Spanish ancestry formulated a common point of reference, a starting point for differentiation with the rest of the population in Thessaloniki. Remembering this specific past was not only a way to denote distinctiveness but also a source of communal pride. References to Spanish ancestry were discursively tied to the multi-ethnic past of Thessaloniki where many famous Rabbis, scientists, scholars and local rulers were born. People remembered them and praised their contribution to the welfare of the city. This strong affiliation with Spanish civilisation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was evident in many of my discussions and covered many aspects of life and various cultural products, including language, music and cuisine. Mary, a working woman in her late thirties, said to me:

> Spanish music feels closer to us and the same applies to the Spanish language. These are familiar sounds we all recall from our childhood and family life.

This comment was often made to me in different versions. For Thessalonikian Jews Spanish culture constituted the basic "ingredient" of their Sephardiness.

According to them the Sephardic was the supreme expression of Judaism. For them Sephardicness was the most liberal expression of Jewishness and what is more, the Sephardic were the most cultivated people. On the other hand, the Ashkenazi, the Jews from central Europe, were thought to be "vulgar" and "backward". Many times people made comments about the uniqueness and the "superiority" of the Sephardic. The rest of the Jews had to "bow" - as they vividly put it to me - in front of the Sephardic who constitute the "elite of Judaism".[17] This perception was even more persistent as far as language was concerned. This is *Judaeo-Espagnol* and the local version of it, *Ladino,* a

[17] Whereas in Thessaloniki the Sephardic are considered the elite of Judaism in Israel Sephardic Jews are considered "backward" and are looked down upon by Ashkenazi Jews who are considered the more "civilised" people.

vernacular derived from ancient Spanish[18] and subsequently influenced by several languages that were used in the area[19]. It was a commonplace among people over thirty-five that:

> This cultural element was the only property that Spanish Jews took with them when they left their homeland.

A common expression was *Los Muestros,* which means "our own", used even by people who could not speak *Ladino* properly. This expression was employed in order to stress that language was a shared point of reference for them. Leon, a middle-aged man, commented:

> We avoid using terms that the rest of the Jews impose on us. You see, even in Judaism there is some kind of internal racism. We are Sephardic. Our language derives from Spanish. This is the only thing that we managed to rescue when they kicked us out of Spain. Modern Spanish is not far away from us. We use to say Los Muestros. We don't want any Ashkenazi edition of our language. For example we say casher not kosher.

The Jewish-Spanish past did not just constitute the official version of Jewish history; it was also held by the academic voices of the Community such as historians and folklorists and by individual, anonymous members. It seemed to me as an internalised form of history, a widely used discourse of shared origins. By sharing a distant cultural past, Thessalonikian Jews shared a cultural present as well: images of diasporic conditions[20] and cultural expressions of the present like language, music and cuisine. If we accept that a group acquires some form of coherence by sharing a number of cultural

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[18] *Ladino* is a version of the ancient Castillian dialect and has many similarities but also many differences with modern Spanish. Spanish speaking friends, whenever I gave them a poem in *Ladino* to translate, always found unknown words.

[19] According to historical sources (Molho, 1998) the Jews brought from Spain their language, a version of ancient Spanish. This language was subsequently influenced by Turkish, Italian, Greek and Balkan languages and created the local version of Spanish-Hebrew or *djudezmo*, which is widely known as *Ladino.* The scholars agree that initially *Ladino* had nothing to do with the Hebrew language but the population of the Ottoman Empire recognised *Ladino* as the language of the Jewish people in Thessaloniki. Thus, they used to call it *yahudidje*, which means in Turkish "Jewish language".

[20] Cohen's book (1997) *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* discusses the Jewish people as an example of a classical notion of Diaspora. He argues that " The sense of unease or difference that members of the diaspora feel in their countries of settlement often results in a felt need for protective cover in the bosom of the community or a tendency to identify closely with the imagined homeland and with co-ethnic communities in other countries. Bonds of language, religion, culture and a sense of common history and perhaps a common fate impregnate such a transnational relationship and give to it an affective, intimate quality that formal citizenship or even long settlement frequently lack" (1997: 20). For an account of the limits of Diaspora as an analytical category see Nuhoglu-Soysal (2000).

patterns, this was the case for the Jewish population in Thessaloniki. All these common patterns produced some kind of commonality and strengthened the boundaries of the group. Thus, by sharing a common past they created a sense of a shared present and thus they constantly reproduced their feeling of belonging to a distinct part of the Thessalonikian population.

Of course, belonging to Thessalonikian Jewry did not imply uniformity. Although attitudes towards the community itself varied, I was confronted with a general acceptance of the Sephardic past and feelings of pride, superiority and distinctiveness which derived from this association. Several internal differentiations emerged. In this case, the age factor was decisive. Notably, there was a strong dividing line between the young generation and middle-aged people as well as the older[21] generation. Among the people I talked to, especially those who belonged to the first and the second generation, there was a noticeable consensus about what constituted their past. They were aware of the exact period and the historical reasons for their expulsion from Spain, the living conditions of that time, the progress that the Community had made and the cultural achievements of Thessalonikian Jews. For them, Thessaloniki had originally proved to be a rather friendly city to live in; it was “the mother of Israel” and a place to live in “Without fear”. There was a strong emotional attachment to Thessaloniki and it was as if this city constituted a “ real homeland”.

During my visits to people’s homes I was constantly told about the historical trajectory of their ancestors. A feeling of dignity underlined people’s narratives:

> Sepharad in Spanish means Spain.[22] Therefore, we are Jews with Spanish origins. Our fathers left Spain to avoid the Inquisition and the compulsory conversion to Christianity. A great number settled in Thessaloniki, which proved a rather friendly and secure city. Their second homeland.

Caroline, a housewife in her eighties, vividly presented to me the situation:

> I will tell you what happened to me and my husband. The other day two tourists stopped us in the street asking for some information. My husband talked to them in English, German and French but they did not seem to understand. In the end my husband looked at me and said: 'Se

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[21] People over fifty-seven were born during or before the Second World War. I believe that the Holocaust has marked their lives in a direct way and has divided time and memories quite sharply between life in pre-War Thessaloniki and life after their return from the concentration camps.

[22] Interestingly enough the word *Sfarad* is a Hebrew word and it means Spain.

> Ladino'[23] They couldn't believe it. They wanted to know how we learnt Spanish. So, we explained to them that we are Jewish and our ancestors were expelled from Spain nearly 400 years ago. It was a very touching moment for all of us…

Sephardic identity was inseparably linked with *Ladino,* the local vernacular of the Thessalonikian-Jews. This language provided a common point for the elaboration of continuities even with modern Spanish culture.

Thessalonikian Jews did not perceive Jewishness as a homogeneous umbrella that lacked differentiation. 'Being Jewish' evoked some kind of sympathy and commonality but yet different interpretations of 'other Jews' resulted in different versions of Judaism. Israeli Jews were considered very strict and Orthodox Jews were thought to be "obsessed" with Judaism. For Sara, Israeli Jews were different, even their eating habits were different: "They have humus and felafel whereas we don't even know these dishes. We certainly eat differently". Thessalonikian Jews identified strongly with Greece and felt that they had all the qualities that distinguished "Greeks" from "Europeans". For Sara the sun and the mild climate were the essence of Greekness. When I complained about the weather in England she commented: "I don't blame, you sweetie. Our climate is the best in the world. I could not live anywhere else". Most people narrated to me incidents of meeting other, European Jews who "lacked" all the characteristics of Greek people namely, "warmth" and "friendliness". Once Barbara narrated how she met some English Jews during summer vacation:

> I found out that they were Jews. I didn't care. I disliked them. Typical English people. We are different...

"We don't keep *kosher* but"

Most Thessalonikian Jews I talked to refused to be religious and attend the synagogue. Their refusal to keep a *kosher* diet was part and parcel of their non-religious lifestyle. But things were not that simple or even as homogeneous as they presented them to be. Not only did they prove to be very keen in providing me with different interpretations of the meaning and the usefulness of practising *kosher,* but also such food was not totally absent from their diet. In fact most of them preferred to buy kosher meat from the kosher butcher shop in Thessaloniki and avoided eating pork or mixing meat with dairy

[23] *"Se Ladino"* is the local version of the Spanish language and my informants explained in their language that the tourists must speak a Latin language.

products[24] Additionally some of them, especially people in their thirties and forties, tried to keep the major fasts prescribed by Judaism. For example they avoided eating rice, bread or pasta during *Pessah.* Some middle-aged people were even consciously trying to reintroduce a *kosher* diet into their lives, although they all admitted that *kosher* products were far more expensive than non-*kosher* foodstuffs. I remember an informant who decided to start keeping *kosher* during the Jewish *Pessah:*

> This year I managed to keep kosher. At least during our Pessah. You know every diasporic people has one major celebration and for us this is the Jewish Easter. This year was the first time I decided to keep the diet rules.

On several occasions, as in restaurants,[25] they used to order dishes that were compatible with *kosher* laws like for example *pasticcio* (a Greek dish always cooked with minced-meat) without minced meat. Their request often annoyed and confused the waitresses.

People's interpretations of *kosher* varied: for some these food restrictions were symbolic and their purpose was to encourage abstinence and purity whereas for others *kosher* was nothing more than a matter of hygiene and a healthy diet:

> Kosher is about cleanliness. Of course there is a difference between the Jews who follow Kashrouth (kosher) word for word and the Jews who just follow some food traditions. Very few families in Thessaloniki nowadays keep all the dietary laws because they are so many and so time consuming. Of course there are some families who have different plates for meat and dairy products but they keep this only during our Easter. Well, I keep the kosher rules when buying meat for example. After I buy it, I put it in salt. Or I always clean the oven when I want to bake a cake after I have cooked meat in it. But I can go to a restaurant and eat beef if I want to.

Others pointed that it was mainly older people who kept the dietary laws, so for example her mother-in law had never tasted shrimps. As one informant put it: "Neither have I. There are so many other things to eat" and immediately went on to explain that *kosher* had nothing to do with hygiene but with symbolic cleanliness. Such explanations are quite recent and function as present justifications of religious symbolism.

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[24] Avoiding eating dairy products with meat is a basic Jewish dietary prohibition.

[25] Eating outside the domestic context is gaining increasing popularity in the "modern" era and it is considered a component of contemporary urban life and the pleasures associated with it. But eating in a restaurant is not a thing in itself. Harbottle (1997) argues that the restaurant should not be treated as a static environment but instead as a place of social interaction.

Yet most of my informants, either old or middle-aged people, agreed that *kosher* was nothing more than an endeavour to maintain a healthy diet but the reasons on which they based their argument were quite diverse. Hence for Linda all these rules "make sense" and they had an "inner logic". For her pork was forbidden in Israel because it was a very hot country and there was the danger of food poisoning. The same was true of mussels, oysters and other kind of shellfish because they were sensitive and their consumption could have caused disease.

When I asked Linda if she followed *kasrouth (kosher)* she gave a negative answer. But I soon found out that she never ate pork and yet she justified that on the basis of personal dislike:

> I like several parts of the animal except fat and tendons. But I have never bought pork and I have never cooked pork in my home. Because we don't like it. We like for example wild pig but we eat it outside the home. I have never cooked it in here.

She also avoided mixing cheese with meat but she nonetheless felt free to go to a restaurant and eat whatever she liked. Personal likes or dislikes were used as the basic explanation for keeping or not keeping *kosher.*

Other informants believed that numerous explanations could be given for the existence of Judaic dietary rules. They also believed that *kosher* was a healthy diet but the explanations for hygiene she gave me differed a great deal from those others I have already presented. For some *kosher* was to do with the slaughtering of the animal: it had to die immediately otherwise there was the danger of intoxication. As for the avoidance of mixing meat with dairy products most thought that such a practice was not only heavy for the stomach but also, according to modern research, fattening.

Some people who were in their thirties and forties admitted that *kosher* had always been a controversial topic among Jewish families. Even before the War the acceptability of *kosher* rules was not uniform: some people who were considered rebels and progressives refused to keep dietary laws and were often referred to as "open-minded people". Some argued that even before the War only a minority of Jewish families in Thessaloniki kept *kashrouth.* It was certainly a contested topic:

> Our families thought that practising kosher was not so important. I can't really explain this. My mother was very religious and my father in order to justify his non-kosher diet at home used to say that it is not so important what enters the mouth but what goes out. It's a very good advice, I follow it.

For others, a *kosher* diet was strongly associated with past family life and with motherhood. Barbara and Jacob in several discussions we had about this topic kept remembering their family and their mothers' obsession with *kosher* at home. However, non-home was equated with non-*kosher* territory since they were able to buy whatever food they liked. This was a favourite activity especially among friends: "We were deviants", said one laughing and soon added:

> For example we ate sausages but this was a forbidden, street food. We would never eat them at home.

In contemporary Thessaloniki *kosher* was a very sensitive issue especially for the younger generation. The schoolteachers talked about the Judaic dietary rules at school and tried to persuade children to choose a *kosher* diet. However, they avoided exerting much pressure on them. In discussions they argued that the influences on children's diet were so many and so complex that they did not expect them to keep *kosher* strictly. According to one of the schoolteachers, keeping *kosher* had become much easier because of the European Community and the opening of the supermarket: it was now possible to find several *kosher* products including sweets, ice-cream, and chocolate. The teachers at the primary school used to suggest to children that they choose these products. Thus even if their diet could not be characterised as a *kosher* one, it certainly included some *kosher* food.

Yet even for the teachers themselves a strictly *kosher* diet was not feasible and it often generated humorous and even self-sarcastic comments. I remember that I once went to a cafeteria together with a Jewish schoolteacher, Barbara, and some of her friends who were Orthodox Christians. I was surprised that although they had been close friends for more than fifteen years they knew nothing about *kosher,* or the fact that Barbara used to buy meat from a *kosher* butcher shop. When someone asked the schoolteacher if she kept these dietary laws she replied: "I am eating toast with bacon and cheese. What do you think?" and everyone laughed.

The issues I have highlighted so far - Spanish ancestry and *kosher* diet- emerged from my field research and according to my informants constituted their major preoccupations. Various interpretations, along with a degree of ambivalence were evident throughout: different ways to employ the discourse of Spanish origin, partial practice of *kosher* diet, negation of being religious and diverse interpretations of other Jewish people. There was no univocal acceptance of what Jewishness meant to people themselves: it emerged as a highly debated issue shaped and influenced by personal memories, experiences and expectations.

Chapter Two

Conceptual "ingredients" :

"We are what we eat" or we eat because we want to belong

> The anthropologist engages in a peculiar work. He or she tries to understand a different culture to the point of finding it to be intelligible, regardless of how strange it seems in comparison with one's own background. This is accomplished by attempting to experience the new culture from within, living in it for a time as a member, all the while maintaining sufficient detachment to observe and analyse it with some objectivity. This peculiar posture -being inside and outside at the same time- is called participant-observation. It is a fruitful paradox, one that has allowed anthropologists to find sense and purpose within a society's seemingly illogical and arbitrary customs and beliefs... Identifying with the Other... is an act of imagination, a means for discovering what one is not and will never be. Identifying with what one is now and will be someday is quite a different process. (B. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days,* 1980: 18)

The first part of the chapter presents some of the theoretical considerations that my analysis draws upon. This discussion aims to highlight the link between the topic of food and the construction of belonging and cultural distinctiveness. The aim is to explore how people mobilise everyday activities such as eating to delineate, enhance and recreate personal and communal boundaries. The example of Jewish communities cross-culturally is used to stress that their boundaries are ambiguous and fluid. The basic premise underlying this study is that there is nothing "natural" or given about communities. Rather, communities are daily defined and redefined through cultural processes like food consumption. Thus, after presenting some important theoretical approaches to the topic of food, I will discuss the importance of food and eating in creating, maintaining and perpetuating personal, communal and localised or in some cases globalised identities. Topics such as "ethnic food" and the role of eating in maintaining and releasing memories and recollections support the view that food is often used by people as an idiom of belonging, as a language of commensality which in certain cases implies communality. The literature review also briefly assesses studies concerning Macedonia, the area of my research. However, the area is not approached as a geographical unit but as a locus of complex political, social and historical confrontations, tensions, a series of appropriations and thus, as an arena

of multiple identifications. The second part of the chapter discusses some of the methodological and ethical implications of my research. People's different identities along with my own different and multiple selves in the field involved a number of research strategies. The main issue that was raised in the second part of this chapter concerned the fieldwork methods I have used in order to conduct my research. Methodological concerns in turn have generated important ethical debates such as "nativeness", "objectivity", "scientific truth" and anonymity. All in all the chapter is an attempt to provide answers to the above issues and give reasons for my choices.

Part A: Theories

Food as an indicator of social relationships

Studies of food have shown that, although the discussions around this topic popularly tend to be considered trivial, the symbolic power of food and commensality to reveal important cultural discourses cannot be ignored. A whole range of identities is solidified and constructed through the mundane processes of preparing, serving and eating food. Eating a specific kind of food and naming the food we eat as "our" cuisine are meaningful cultural activities; apart from individual, gender and family identities, such statements encode the will to belong or not to certain communities. Here authenticity is an important symbolic discourse. In spite of the fact that the range of theoretical orientations and debates on food within anthropology is very broad, some theoretical themes can be identified. Thus structuralists, mainly during the 1960's and the 1970's, emphasised the symbolic validity of attitudes towards food and the power of food itself to convey important cultural messages. Levi-Strauss in his article, "The Culinary Triangle" argued that: "We can hope to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to reveal its contradictions" (Levi-Strauss, 1965: 595). Here, food is approached as the mediator between nature and culture and the transformation of raw material to edible, cooked cultural products. It is a social signifier that enacts symbolic messages.

Douglas was more concerned with issues of cultural classification but also treated food and cooking as codes which convey important cultural messages. For her food and eating reflect social relationships and social messages like hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion and boundaries. The act of eating not only defines boundaries but also informs us about the transactions across them. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), a detailed ethnographic analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo, the anthropologist discussed the Jewish dietary habits as described in the Bible, in particular in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Food prohibitions rooted in religion are not meaningless but suggest instead a

systematic ordering of ideas: “To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind. The dietary rules merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines” (Douglas, 1995 [1966]: 55).

Soler (1997) shares the same view as Douglas that food prohibitions in the Bible constitute a code with symbolic connotations and at the same time the quest for order: “At this point, instead of stating once again that they do not fit into the plan of Creation, I should like to advance the hypothesis that the dietary regime of the Hebrews, as well as their myth of Creation, is based upon a taxonomy in which man, God, the animals, and the plants are strictly defined through their relationships with one another in a series of opposites. The Hebrews conceived of the order of the world as the order underlying the creation of the world. Uncleanness, then, is simply disorder, wherever it may occur” (Soler, 1997: 63-64).

In the book *Anthropological Studies of Religion,* Morris (1996) offers some helpful insights and constructive criticisms of the structuralist models. He argues that classifications have been developed as a product of Durkheimian thought. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) Durkheim stressed the primacy of the social and tried to account for the existence of dualistic classificatory systems within societies. Levi-Strauss worked within his directions whereas Douglas expanded this theory by focusing on anomalies and abominations. It is a common place among anthropologists that structuralism provided a useful impetus to anthropological approaches concerning food: it forged the realisation that food patterns are structured in a way that allows for the formulation of cultural codes. If we attempt to analyse and translate this kind of code we also come to understand the way a cultural setting has been organised. However, the model that structuralists proposed is only partially valid, its lack of dynamic relations results in analytical categories that are too static and abstract. Furthermore, food messages and food codes do not function outside the everyday contexts of production and consumption nor do they produce universally predictable situations. Everything depends on the interpretation and incorporation of such food messages which may vary considerably. By not including change structuralists treated food solely as a language, an analysis which should be the first, not the final analytical step. Hence, the issue of identity, and the broader historical, social, political and economic contexts tend to be ignored.

Generally speaking, the focus since the seventies has shifted away from purely symbolic explanations to a contextual explanation of changes in food habits. Several scholars -Goody and Mintz among them- did not overlook the symbolic validity of food but, within a historical framework, tried to provide material explanations of differences in food habits. In his study, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class,* Goody argued that: “The analysis of cooking has to be related to the distribution of power and

authority…and to its political ramifications" (Goody, 1982: 37). This has been a fundamental theoretical contribution because food and consumption escaped sterile classificatory systems and entered the real power structures in a society.

Mintz (1985) took the argument further by stressing that the researcher should decode the process of codification and not the code itself. Thus, he questioned how meaning affects behaviour and tried to read food products as a consequence of the productive process, in other words, to take account of the historical circumstances that gave rise to specific food items and practices. His work *Sweetness and Power* analysed the place of a single food item, sugar, in shaping modern history. It showed how the lack of a historical perspective masks the uses and meaning of food: "As the first exotic luxury transformed into a proletarian necessity, sugar was among the first imports to take on a new and different political and military importance to the broadening capitalist classes in the metropolis" (Mintz, 1985: 180). Power in the material world is always invested with meanings: people attach messages to the consumption of goods. Mintz (1996) also emphasised the concept of power in relation to food. Since people's behaviour is always affected by meanings the material world inspires various human responses and thus different behaviours. As power and knowledge are connected, as a Foucauldian view suggests, the meanings attached to the material world enact some form of power.

Goody, Mintz and other historical materialists adopted a perspective which took into account historical changes and shifts. They also took into account the political dimensions of food and eating and the stages involved like production, allocation, consumption. They stressed the fact that meaning arises out of use within social relationships and emphasised the specificity of time and place in analysing the internal conflicts and contradictions of negotiable structures. They also linked theoretically the everyday, the mundane and the political in the sense that food choices constitute everyday politics and convey messages of power and authority.

Barthes (1975) attempted to link the topic of food with wider issues such as the construction of a nation through food's "commemorative" and "nostalgic" functions.[26] While examining the role of French cooking he noticed the importance of this practice in promoting a sense of national continuity since there is a whole myth around French cooking sustained in France and abroad, invested with nostalgic value. The French themselves perpetuate and even create this myth particularly when travelling. The well known semiologist argues that through food the French experience a kind of national continuity and he concludes that: "By way of a thousand detours food permits him to insert

[26] See also Barthes (1972 [1957]) *Mythologies.*

himself daily into his own past and to believe in a certain culinary being of France" (Barthes, 1975: 55-56).

Dealing with the politics of the signifier, Barthes produced many analyses concerning the everyday production of French culture and the continuity and persistence of everyday cultural myths such as "French cuisine". For him, an entire world is present in and signified by food and this constitutes what he calls the "polysemia" of food: food items and the act of eating can reveal a lot about the feelings of "eating and being". The terms eating and being refer to the complex functions of food: belonging to a group, the structuring of gender relations, notions of health, the organisation of production and selling of products with special attention to the role of advertising. All these functions summarise the power of food discourses.

Further useful insights regarding food and social stratification were provided by Bourdieu, a French sociologist in his work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* For him "One cannot fully understand cultural practices unless "culture", in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into "culture" in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavours of food" (Bourdieu, [1979] 1996: 1). Thus he argued that the structure of consumption is the key to the reproduction of class relations. He stressed that food tastes also depend on the different images of the body that each class holds since each conceptualises differently what it means to be healthy, strong and beautiful Differences in eating patterns related to social class can provide a mechanism by which analysts can study social relations.

Theorists of consumption have emphasised the symbiotic relationship and often interdependence between consuming goods -including food- and the construction of multiple identities. However, they share the view that a distinction should be made between self-identity, which is an outcome of increasingly differentiated lifestyles and food choices, and social identity, which is the outcome of all the collective identities evoked by commensality at a domestic, class, ethnic or national level. Food choice is a theme given attention since the answers to how, why, what and with whom we eat can highlight and characterise social relationships (Fine and Leopold, 1993). A focus on consumption stresses that we can still find powerful homogenising forces in relation to food patterns and that food itself is used to express something common, social, collective. Thus when people engage with different spheres of consumption they use and enhance various aspects of their identities like style, status and group identification (Warde, 1997).

According to Miller (1995) the anthropology of consumption is a relatively new field of study and constitutes a promising transformation of the discipline. He argues that through consumption people resist and appropriate and thus: "Consumption has become the main arena in which and through which people have to struggle towards control over the definition of themselves and their values" (Miller, 1995: 227). Miller researched how people in a small Caribbean island, Trinidad, manipulated production, marketing, advertising and consumption. His main argument is that people in a remote area must not be seen as passive victims of any abstract capitalist system but as active interpreters who accommodate and modify the capitalist realities according to their local needs. In other words they appropriate capitalism and adjust capitalist conditions in their lives.

Food and the local-global interplay

The process of globalisation does not inevitably lead to the homogenisation of different cultures, rather it is a process which enables the re-valorisation and re-authentication of local, ethnic or other communal identities. The continuity between global and local conditions has been the object of many recent debates.[27] Thus it has been argued that: "Globalisation entails a corporate presence in, and understanding of, the 'local' arena. But the 'local' in this sense does not correspond to any specific territorial configuration. The local-global nexus is about the relation between globalising and particularising dynamics in the strategy of the global corporation, and the 'local' should be seen as a fluid and relational space, constituted only in and through its relation to the global" (Morley and Robbins, 1995: 117).

If food is an important marker of such identities, the existence of a distinctive ethnic cuisine is an integral part of global restructuring. However individuals are not passive recipients of such messages but active interpreters of them. Culture itself is not a unilinear, harmonious process, but one that is daily challenged and negotiated. People do invest their everyday life with constantly shifting meanings in their attempt to appropriate cultural messages. And the appropriation of global influences including food habits is part of the everyday politics consumers employ. Tourists and migrants in particular are facilitators of cultural change and inter-ethnic contact. Tourism and migration (internal and external) are to a large extent responsible for the flow of goods and at the same time the flow of cultural images. These processes are sustained and reinforced by the matrix of global marketing, advertising and the intensification of global transport and communication. The mobility of immigrants

[27] For a further discussion see Appadurai, 1990, Featherstone, 1990, Friedman, 1990, Hannerz, 1990, Morley and Robbins 1995. Also Williams (1996) "Globalisation in Rural Wales: some dietary changes and continuities on Welsh Farms".

goes hand in hand with the mobility of culinary worlds, and yet in the present era there are several dominant trends in relation to food consumption such as increasing individual diversity at the same time as an emphasis on the collective aspects of the food we eat. Thus the local and the global contexts are not sharply divided but instead linked and negotiated.

The creation of youth food cultures and the standardisation of their consuming behaviour that is related to the spread of globalised, westernised styles of life are themes attracting much attention. Thus the Americanization and Westernization of lifestyles are partly explanations for the massive success of the fast food industry, like McDonalds. Eating ready-made food could be marking several, different identities: assimilation to a Western lifestyle, breaking free from tight cultural boundaries, participation in a modern youth culture, differentiation from older, "traditional" food attitudes, rebellion against home, family and parents. However the success of *The McDonaldization of society* (Ritzer, 1993) has not totally diminished the importance of contexts like family, community or ethnic group. On the contrary young people often find themselves both eating at home and eating at fast food places and the two contexts are not perceived as mutually exclusive.

There have been some interesting studies concerning local appropriations of the globalised fast-food industry. In several East Asian cities (Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul) McDonalds outlets have turned into local institutions (Watson 1997, Wu 1997, Bak, 1997). Mintz has described this process of localising global processes as an attempt to "Swallow Modernity" (Mintz, 1996). Interestingly enough McDonalds restaurants in Greece do not have great appeal among young people; instead during the last few years Goody's, a local, Greek adaptation of fast food, seems to be gaining increasing popularity. Goody's prepares fast food dishes that are often in accordance with the Greek palate and others that are in accordance with Orthodox Christian fasting.[28]

As I have argued elsewhere (Kravva, 2000) the strong relationship between memory and the emotional connections associated with eating strongly affects personal likes and dislikes. Food preferences or avoidances are shaped and marked through recollections from childhood attached to certain food items. Yet such recollections are rarely a matter simply of individual experiences but rather a symbiosis of individual experiences with shared cultural experiences, values and events. It is also noted (Lupton, 1996) that memories of past food events and other experiences can be enacted through the taste, smell and texture of certain dishes. Such earlier food tastes could also guide food choices in the present. Memories and emotions are simultaneous in food situations. Thus a meal can

[28] During the major fasting of the Orthodox Christian world meat is forbidden for forty days before Easter. Therefore, MacDonalds adapting to the demands of Greek society included *Mac Sarakostiana,* meaning Macs without meat for the fasting period. For an interesting analysis of the ways the Orthodox Christian fasts and feasts have influenced Greek cuisine see Nestoros (1975).

evoke memories and emotions about when it was consumed in the past and the anticipation of a similar emotional stimulation in the future.

The act of eating expresses and at the same time reaffirms the collective experience of individuals. Goddard, in an ethnographic study in Naples, Italy notes that preparing, serving and eating food enhances family bonds and sustains feelings of belonging to a Neapolitan community. Emotional attachments are perpetuated through the power of food to evoke memories, in this case of family and community. The family is the main locus where such experiences are realised and motherhood the basic channel for their transmission. Food and eating are sensory channels for the transmission of sentiments, memories and wishes, for example being a person with particular values, belonging to a family or being a member of Neapolitan society. Thus "eating" becomes synonymous with "being" through the enactment of sentiments and memories and as such it has the power to permit participation in a selected, treasured past. So in addition she suggests that: "Food can mark history and create a sense of history" (Goddard, 1996: 207).

The ways in which "travelling food" constructs identities and also how and why food is memorable as a sensory as well as a social experience are themes discussed by Sutton in a recent study. In particular Sutton discusses transnational food exchanges, the receiving of "food items from home" by Greek students who live abroad in the United Kingdom or the United States. He calls this process "revitalisation" and "returning to the whole", through multisensory food experiences in an everyday context. Thus food and eating not only reflect social bonds but play a significant role in their construction and re-construction: "There is an imagined community implied in the act of eating food 'from home' while in exile, in the embodied knowledge that others are eating the same food. This is not to deny that real communities are created as well" (Sutton, 2001: 88)

Taking into account the above theoretical approaches to food we conclude that food functions as a polyvalent channel serving as a means of communication, it expresses something social through acts of "communality" and "commensality" and it can enhance one's sense of belonging to a family[29] and a place.[30] Food is an active component in the process of place making. It has the power to evoke memories and nostalgia in relation to times and places. Thus food consumption enables the individual to relate him/herself towards others and to build several identities in relation to them. The polyvalent significance of food and eating render them reflecting mirrors of social relations, inequalities and

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[29] Family dynamics are a theme to be discussed, in Chapter Four, which deals with food and the creation of families.

[30] The double process of remembering and constructing a place are further discussed in Chapter Six.

hierarchies. The deconstruction of what people eat, why and how may give us many answers concerning the multiple social dynamics of specific formations.

Ethnicity and boundaries

The fact that food functions as a marker of both sameness and difference is a key concept of recent anthropological approaches to food (Caplan 1997, Fischler 1988, James 1993 and 1997, Van Den Berghe 1984). Ethnicity has received much attention from theorists studying food patterns. Thus the acts of preparing, serving and sharing food enhance sociality and strengthen the experience of a group's boundaries. Food is a code, a language that communicates complex social messages like belonging to an ethnic group. Yet the realisation that our food is "ethnic" comes from contact with other culinary worlds; cuisines, like ethnicities, are not fixed but contextual processes constantly shaped by human interdependencies.[31]

Thus ethnic cuisine becomes a successful vehicle for crossing ethnic boundaries and at the same time serves as a reaffirmation of a group's cultural and historic distinctiveness. So it follows that cooking and eating are effective ways to reinforce, re-construct and revive ethnic communities. Van Den Berghe (1984) argues that what we call "ethnic cuisine" is not only perpetuated on the basis of already existing tastes but most interestingly it is the outcome of a re-construction and stands as a symbol of common descent. As such it strengthens and perpetuates social bonds. Food is one of the main arenas where "ethnic revivals" are realised mainly because food tastes are easily acquired and transmitted in contrast with other social phenomena like language or ideology.

The process of creating an ethnic cuisine in Indonesia is a topic that Klopfer discusses. Whereas Padang restaurants reflect Minangkabau culture, the cuisine they offer differs extensively from the daily diet of rural Minangkabau. During the formation of a standard ethnic cuisine, which incorporates "traditional" features, the author sees a constant process of ethnicisation and accumulation of mistaken assumptions about traditional Minangkabau cuisine: "As they are divorced from the practices and beliefs that originally made them significant in Minangkabau culture, the restaurants will be increasingly self-conscious in their promotion of Minangkabau identity by way of ethnic markers, such as Minangkabau music cassettes, posters of women in Minangkabau head-dresses and village scenes" (Klopfer, 1993: 302).

Eating may also constitute a kind of embodiment as in the case of Iranian migrants in Britain (Harbottle 1997). In a way eating Iranian food symbolises being an Iranian and projecting this identity.

[31] Eriksen (1993) argues that ethnicity is constructed through contact and never in isolation. As such, it could be described as an aspect of a relationship and not the property of a group.

However, there is an interesting process of protection of their ethnicity: the negative reputation of Iranian identity since the Islamic revolution has strongly affected the naming and labelling of certain dishes as Iranian by migrants working in the British catering trade. By not calling the food they serve Iranian they seek to disguise and protect their ethnicity. Harbottle calls this process "culinary invisibility" and draws some parallels between Iranian "culinary invisibility" in Britain and a similar Turkish culinary invisibility in Germany.

James discusses the "Britishness" of British food and argues that several cuisines such as the British, have been stereotyped and thus further ethnicised and nationalised. A culinary world that seems fixed and ordered sustains images of fixed cultural, ethnic and national identities. Thus the definition of otherness, in this case other cuisines, helps the creation of own, "authentic" tradition. Yet, James problematises the term "authenticity" in relation to food and cuisines: in the case of British cuisine there has been a noticeable process of accommodation and adaptation of other, ethnic tastes through the process of multi-ethnic contact. The result is that non-British food has been Britishised and vice versa. On the other hand there is a process of returning to the "traditional", "original" British tastes mainly through recent articles in food magazines. This nostalgic return to forgotten tastes could well imply a need for a revitalisation of Britishness (James, 1997).

Hence, national identity and eating habits are both modular and flexible, permitting the attachment of powerful feelings and sentiments; they both convey hidden messages, a-political on the surface, but deeply ideologically loaded and politicised. Murcott (1995) underlines this complementarity of food and nation and argues that the malleable and modular nature of national identity is often in accordance with the flexibility and ubiquity of food and eating patterns. Thus diet and eating habits could well be used as expressions of national identity. The process of creating a national cuisine is most relevant to the production and reproduction of ethnic identities and nationalist ideologies. Thus "gastro-nationalism" is seen an important resource for identity making (James, 1997). To show clearly the intrinsic links between food and the sense of belonging to a "bounded" and "homogeneous" nation, I discuss four examples, which deal with the national dimensions of food choices in different parts of the globe.

For the analysis of the contemporary Indian situation the term "gastro-politics" is employed Appadurai (1981). This process is involved in creating and maintaining several localised and ethnicised versions of identities. In a later article on "How to make a national cuisine", he illuminates the "fabrication" of a national cuisine in the Indian case and describes the central role of contemporary cookbooks in this process. According to the author, this process is also evident in other societies which have complex regional cuisines and have recently achieved nationhood. Hence he argues that the

creation of a national cuisine in contemporary India is a process that does not stand in isolation; it should be compared with similar post-colonial situations in other countries. This process involves not only regional and ethnic specialisation but at the same time the creation of crosscutting national cuisines (Appadurai, 1988).

Van Esterik analyses the process of "construction" of Thai food as a national and international cuisine. She argues that the formation of an ethnic cuisine has been linked with the efforts of Thailand's rulers to promote national identity and unity throughout the last century and this mass nationalism included an appreciation of the "unique qualities" of Thai cuisine. Certainly, the National Identity Board in the Prime Minister's office is aware of the importance of food to Thai identity, as the preface to its publication, "Thai Cuisine", indicates; here Thai food is seen as consisting of harmonious, natural ingredients. This successful combination, according to the National Identity Board, has given Thai food recognition and popularity within the last two decades (Van Esterik, 1992).

The promotion of a static ethnic identity in relation to the nationalist, communal and global dimensions in Middle Eastern food cultures is also a topic of analysis. It is suggested (Zubaida, 1994) that nation-states are increasingly interested in "maintaining", "creating" and sometimes "inventing" a static national culture and culinary tradition. Attention is paid to the role of cookbooks and broadcasts in creating a sense of the homogeneity of any national cuisine. And yet the people who live in a nation-state formation are not treated as passive recipients of the imposition of demands for static national characteristics. On the contrary, the process of ethnicisation is more a bilateral process: the "nationalistic project" constructs national cuisine but in turn global expectations perpetuate the process of nationalisation. "Countries and nations are expected to have things national, including a cuisine" (Zubaida, 1994: 44).

Obentos, the boxed lunches that Japanese mothers prepare for their children to take with them to the nursery school, reflect clearly the "traditionally" Japanese codes for food preparation and thus become media of communicating cultural messages and aesthetic values to young children. Allison argues that the whole nation is symbolised, "displayed" and "consumed" through these boxed lunches and the mothers are those responsible for the *obento* production. The family context becomes nationalised through the production of *obentos*: "The practice of the *obento* situates the producer as a woman and a mother, and the consumer as a child of a mother and a student of a school. Food in this context is neither casual nor arbitrary… Both mother and child are being watched, judged, and constructed; and it is only through their joint effort that the goal can be accomplished" (Allison, 1997: 296).

By presenting the above theories and studies related to food I do not claim to have exhausted this subject matter. These are only some applications of the study of food selected for the theoretical consolidation of my argument. It is apparent that food and eating are important cultural codes that need careful decoding. Such everyday processes could uncover social relationships and complex identifications whether personal, familial, communal, ethnic, national, local or global. Thus food could and should be treated as a "code" and a "multiple signifier" that enhances the understanding of a social setting.

Boundaries and communities

It has been argued (Cohen, 1985) that people attribute fundamental significance to their cultural distinctiveness. Yet belonging to a group is not a fixed notion but is the outcome of a series of individual and shared experiences. These lived experiences construct and define others. It is through otherness that individuals create a rhetoric of sameness and recognise belonging. The process of the creation of a community involves the daily construction of and confrontation with its boundaries. Facing the areas in which the differences with other groups are found and the confrontation with boundaries enhance the realisation of "own" culture.

The making of a community is created by the sharing of important cultural patterns like religious norms, origins (real or imagined or both) and also by the sharing of everyday, seemingly unimportant practices. If we accept that all cultural formations are daily faced with inter-cultural contacts, and that shared cultural patterns are effected by cultural exchanges then the notion of cultural stability and isolation becomes theoretically problematic. This theoretical inadequacy is further emphasised if we consider that in an era of intense global influences there is no place for notions like cultural isolation.[32] Thus, the notion of fixed communities is unable to explain the complex interplay of global cultural realities. Community cannot be analysed as a static entity but rather as an ongoing process constantly redefined and altered.

The concept of process partly explains the complex situation that minority groups experience in their attempt to define their boundaries. Members of these groups strengthen or loosen cultural distinctiveness through the employment of numerous cultural devices. Bell and Valentine (1997) argue that ethnic and religious communities try to maintain or even, in certain cases, to erase their differences

[32] "Increasingly, global influences, such as international tourism, migration, communication and trade links, serve to shape a 'national cuisine' and determine its popularity. In the West, those who have travelled abroad on holiday or read cookery books increasingly seek out authentic and exotic national cuisines" (Harbottle, 1997: 100).

through cultural processes and practices. If such communities are marked as different it is because members of these groups wish to be marked like that. The community itself is perceived as a dynamic process, which is daily maintained through shared cultural norms. In their analysis Bell and Valentine use the notion of "performance" in constructing various identifications.[33] By employing this term, they want to emphasise the malleability of communities and their performative existence. Therefore communal identity is a process experienced through various performances, meaning activities commonly performed. Cultural diversity and boundary maintenance must not be perceived as unchangeable but as subject to constant transformation by members of the community itself. Individuals appropriate - loosen or strengthen - cultural boundaries in order to underline or loosen their cultural distinctiveness. Barth (1969) notes that the creation of categories, distinctions and thus communities presupposes processes of exclusion and incorporation. However these ongoing categorisations are perpetuated through contact and mobility which are in turn processes that produce shifts.

In order to interpret the world around us we employ the experiences of the past.[34] The standardisation of a certain past serves as a legitimisation of present experiences and at the same time as a locus for the formation of collective identities. By sharing fragments of past or present identities community members are involved in discourses about common experiences and future expectations. The notion of continuity leads to the "digestion" of a shared past and present and to the re-affirmation of the community itself. There seems to be a strong nexus between the formation of a sense of shared belonging and the daily exchange of past experiences and memories. Thus a sense of familiarity to the present conditions of living is created so that our present conditions make sense to us and to others (Cohen, 1985).

It is problematic, therefore, to assume that the past is "a foreign country" (Lowental, 1985) because such a notion excludes any use of the past -or pasts- in the present. In the process of community-making, connections with a shared past are treasured. The past acquires a central position in shaping present communal experiences and enables the members of a group to create meaningful

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[33] "[The] dynamism of food shows the malleability of foodways in the negotiation of identifications. Eventually, of course, the traces can become all but lost, or incorporated into a hybrid culinary culture which over time comes to be seen as 'traditional" (Bell and Valentine, 1997: 116).

[34] "We engage in this process of appropriating our present lives in a specific past in order to be connected with a meaningful cosmos" (Lowental, 1985: 197).

connections. The relationship between the past and the present is dialectical; in their attempt to justify and cope with their present social needs people make extensive use of knowledge concerning the past.[35]

The creation of present discourses and the construction of present identities depend to a great extent on such knowledge. However, the present itself is not a fixed a-historical entity. Rather it is a process daily affected by the nexus of local-global changes. Of course the fact that nowadays we witness globalising forces that lead towards a world culture does not necessarily imply the erosion of cultural diversities or a kind of homogenisation. Life is organised out of diversities so that no notion of uniformity can be imposed. Hannerz (1990) argues that total homogenisation of meanings has not occurred and probably will not do so in the near future. The world must be perceived as a system of interrelationships perpetually in flux since there is a constant move of meanings, people and goods.

In the process of remembering the past, the notion of history is also mobilised. Since the process of remembering involves change and negotiation, history -or histories- is used as powerful rhetoric which is selected in order to legitimatise discourses about the present. Members of any group shape and reshape history as a response to their present social needs.[36] So if we accept that identities are partly constructed out of a desired past, then it is totally justified to claim that the members of a community try to create their "own" history which comes out of an experienced past which is appropriated in the present. Therefore memory, history and the past become processes which constantly interact with each other. Collard (1989) argues that the way history is thought about and used in the present reveals that memories are not only connected to the past but also to the present. Present discourses and experiences inform memory and render it an active process and an intentional construction Hence, the past becomes a form of “symbolic capital”[37] which enables people to negotiate their present concerns. Thus for Thessalonikian Jews the expulsion of Spanish Jews represented much more than just the official version of the Sephardic trajectory which stands as a living source of collective identification. Thus as will be seen, the various ways in which Thessalonikian Jews experienced and employed the past in their everyday lives is an application of the theories developed above.

The ambiguity of maintaining clear-cut boundaries, the ambivalence experienced as far as belonging to a distinct community is concerned and the shifting between a range of contextual

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[35] For an interesting discussion among anthropologists about the relationship between the past and the present see Appadurai, 1981, Peel, 1984 and Toren, 1988.

[36] Hobsbawm (1997) argues that if we accept that the past shapes present experiences then it follows that such influence must reach its height during periods of rapid social change.

[37] Herzfeld (1992) in a study of a Cretan village, *Glendi,* asserted that even the coffee shops were areas of contested sociability. Thus he used the term “symbolic capital” in order to describe the stock of knowledge that people daily accumulate.

identities are processes that take place among Jewish populations in many parts of the world. These communities find themselves within sovereign nation state formations and experience the interplay of belonging to a nationality, whether Spanish, French, English, or other but at the same time feeling Jewish and believing in or in certain cases questioning Jewishness. Jewish populations should not always be portrayed as victims of anti-semitism and discrimination. Although in a number of cases this is a reality quite often the plural identities that Jewish people themselves construct include some flexibility and choice. Most importantly Jewish identity is not abstract or homogeneous but it is filled with experiences of the past, current everyday issues and preoccupations for the future. All these differ to a great extent, yet there is some common ground for links and comparisons. At this point an analysis of the dynamics of the notions of "diaspora" and "diasporic identities" is most appropriate.

Cohen (1997) has argued of "nation- peoples" meaning groups evincing a "peoplehood" a sense of "togetherness". Such peoples are imperfectly held within the borders of nation-states and they are often treated with hostility and discrimination by the indigenous population since they are believed – factually and symbolically– to be 'imperfect' citizens, who 'lack' certain qualities which disable them from being included in the host society. Their common loyalty is often embedded in language, religion and traditions. Diasporas have been shaped by the processes of migration and colonisation but some signify a collective trauma, victimisation and persecution. According to the Cohenian scheme, Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians are cases of victim diasporic populations whereas the Indians are an example of labour and imperial diaspora. Yet Cohen recognises that the typology he proposed is ambiguous and rather fluid since some groups take dual or multiple forms and others change their character over time.

The idea of diaspora may vary to a significant extent however, diasporic communities which are settled outside their country of origins claim on their loyalty and emotions and adhere to their natal or imagined natal land. The concept of imagination is indeed important in conceiving the bonds between the members of a diasporic community but also their affinity with their country of origins and the citizens of that country. This loyalty is often embedded in language, religion and traditions. In a sense, as Anderson (1991[1983]) has argued for national communities, diasporas could be seen as "imagined communities" with a strong sense of imaginary kinship. Thus members of a diaspora have a strong sense of belonging together, being members of a brotherhood, participating in a fraternity.

In any case diaspora is a past invented –with no sense of fabrication– in the present. It can be argued that diasporic people are not a lived reality but part of a wider programme to promote continuity and coherence of broken down life stories due to migrancy and exile. For that reason "the past" either close or distant becomes a powerful, unifying symbol of diasporic communities. However diasporic

identities are clearly responsive to the conditions –social, political and economic- of the arrival societies. The process of dialogue is at the heart of diasporic claims. According to Nuhoglu-Soysal (2000) the axiomatic primacy given to the formation of nation-states, as geographically bound entities is seriously put into question by the post-war changes in the geography and practice of belonging.

Thus, belonging to a diaspora alters the concept of "space" and also our ideas on fixed and emplaced notions of "citizenship". For diasporic belonging is a mobile and displaced belonging constantly involved in negotiation and contestation. In the course of this paper I have tried to describe how everyday, trivial performances like eating, drinking, listening to the music and dancing can be considered as important ingredients that give meaning to the concept of diaspora and prescribe the notion of "citizenship".

What more diasporic identities do not exist in a vacuum; they contain meanings of displacement and forced –directly or indirectly– migration and the trauma of exile. But most importantly such identities are formulated trough the conceptualisation of 'difference' with the culture of the arrival society. But again lived differences and assimilation, inclusion and exclusion – some might argue – are always responsive to host social, political and economic conditions and found in a constant dialogue with them. As noted identity does not grow out of clearly bound communities and it is not a quality that can be possessed or owned by individual or collective social actors. It is instead, a mobile, often unstable relation of difference (Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996).

A study by Driessen (1992) on the Spanish-Moroccan frontier considers the case of the Jewish population of Melilla. This reveals some of the themes discussed so far: the common epic-historical narrative, the struggle to survive within a nation-state, the confrontations with Catholicism, and also contemporary ambiguity of any community that at times denies itself and yet often builds boundaries. The Jews of Melilla, about 1,100 people, constitute the third largest Jewish community in Spain. They are mostly Spaniards and share the narrative of Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492. The community is well established and most members claim to be gatekeepers of "traditions" and "Jewishness". However increasingly contested views are emerging: a significant number argue that they are secular and liberal, thus they are almost non participants at the synagogue but they still participate in most major religious festivals and maintain some of the Jewish "traditions" within the realm of the family.

In France until the Second World War a policy of assimilation of ethnic minorities took place. After the foundation of the state school system in the 1880s there was an endeavour to create a kind of homogeneity: all French people should share the same language, the same history and the same patriotic points of reference. But this was not a coercive process, at least not always. Jewish French citizens actively adopted assimilation policies and wanted to be viewed as French. After the general

anti-semitic climate during the Second World War and after the creation of Israel a kind of reawakening of non-secular Jewish identity gradually emerged. The creation of several Jewish educational centres and Universities was one of the main components of this reawakening and reasons for the rediscovery of family memories and traditions. The situation resulted in a return to Judaism and the rekindling of Jewish consciousness (Schnapper, 1994).

Yet this is only one part of the truth as it is discussed in a recent article about neo-Marrano identity (Morin and Piault, 1994). *Marranos* or *Conversos* are descendants of Jewish families who converted to Catholicism in order to seek better life opportunities. This happened to the family of Morin who emigrated from Thessaloniki to France at the beginning of the twentieth century. Morin, in a discussion with Piault, argues that he feels a neo-Marrano with all the ambivalence that his identity entails:

> I was not brought up according to the teaching of the Talmud. Later on I discovered with amazement the kabbala, but I do not belong to that culture. My culture is not found in tedious exegeses of the Bible which, by the way, I have never read. My culture consists of Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau. It is European culture. To me people who lived in a strictly Jewish world led a life that was obscure to me… I was neither wholly French, nor wholly Jewish and, on the contrary, I wanted to possess a certain frame of mind, which would help me become a worthy citizen of the world with ideas that were none too abstract. I have always felt a sense of ineptitude, a lack of something that convinced me I was exactly like other people, and not like other Frenchmen but also not like other Jews (Morin and Piault, 1994: 350-35).

A similar ambivalence characterises British Jewry whose boundaries shift between being defined as a religious and an ethnic minority. As has been noted, after the Second World War the Jews who emigrated to England from central Europe were made to feel less different and more English by their parents: “Jewishness became a matter of individual private belief. It had nothing to do with public and civic identities” (Jaleniewski-Seidler, 2000: 7). Nowadays self-styled secular Jews have adopted a more ethnicised form of identity and try to supersede purely religious identifications (Alderman, 1994). Yet it is noted that the 300,000 Jewish population of England can by no means be viewed as homogeneous; being Jewish in Britain varies from being Orthodox to being a progressive Jew or even someone who just follows some Jewish “traditions”. Thus the pattern of synagogue attendance, along with the adherence to several other Judaic principles, varies to a great extent. In a survey conducted among 1,500 Jewish families a serious tension between religious principles and practice was revealed. Thus

the majority identified themselves as being “traditional” but non-Orthodox and attended Jewish rituals related to the family such as *Pessah.* Yet a significant though smaller number claimed that they attended the synagogue regularly or kept *kosher* rules strictly (Alderman, 1994).

In the countries of Eastern Europe the situation of the Jewish population has changed with the end of the communist era. In the former Soviet Union there has been a significant wave of emigration to Israel, something like 185,000 people in 1991 alone. This is due both to the increasingly difficult living conditions in the former USSR and to incidents of anti-semitism. The Jewish situation remains ambivalent since the emergence of plural national identities within the Soviet Union. The fourteen nation-states that were created with the break up of the Soviet Empire in 1991 led to a consolidation of different national identities. The policy of assimilation that the Ashkenazi Jews had followed in the past did not prove very effective in helping them to adapt to the new situation. Thus “Jews are faced with the alternative of either ‘repatriating’ to Israel – where they will again form part of a minority, the Rusim [Russians], or staying as a minority in their old countries” (Chlenov, 1994). At the same time the Russian Orthodox Church and the more militant groups are gaining growing support. The situation in republics like Moldova, Azerbaijan and Tadjikistan causes extreme frustration among the local Jews because hostile civil confrontations have become full-scale military activities (Krupnik, 1994).

In post-War Hungary there is a great diversity and ambiguity as to what Jewishness means to people. For some there is a total denial of their Jewishness whereas for others their identity is more confined to the domestic sphere. There is also a process of eradicating symbols that convey one’s identity as a Jew. For example, people have changed their Jewish surnames to Hungarian ones. Yet recently a significant number have started seeking their roots and they are interested in re-discovering Jewish history, culture or even religion (Kovacs, 1994). And whereas some are denying any association with Jewishness, others are intensifying their bonds with Israel and perceive themselves as members of Hungarian Jewry. Thus there is a variety of Hungarian Jewish responses some of them eradicating and others solidifying their Jewishness while others are still reconciling their Jewish and Hungarian identities (Mars, 1999).

The Jewish presence in North America is at least 300 years old. The first Jewish immigrants were Sephardic, the second wave of Jewish immigration which took place mainly in the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries consisted mainly of Ashkenazi Jews from Central Europe, and the third massive wave from 1881 onwards consisted mainly of Russian Jews who were also Ashkenazi. Nowadays complexity and diversity characterise modern Jewish life in America. The Jews are not an insignificant and powerless minority but a prosperous and active community with strong political influence. Yet there remain several internal divisions that characterise this community, namely the

different origins and the degree of religious devotion and attendance not to mention the generational differences (Epstein, 1987).

The situation is much more fluid in Southern America, especially in the communities of the Lower Amazon, such as Santarem, Belem and Alenquer. Amazonian Jews are descendants of Sephardic Moroccan Jews who migrated to the area in the early nineteenth century. In a recent ethnographic film (Nugent and Anthias, 2000) the ambivalence and uncertainty of Amazonian Jews is evident. Whereas some people argue that "Jewish life is the same as it always was" and "tradition persists" for others "The community is in retreat" and "dead" but they "still feel themselves as Jewish". Of course there is a generational aspect: many young people have migrated to Israel because they think that there is no prospect of growth in the Amazon and not many chances of practising their religion since all the above communities apart from Belem, lack a synagogue. People believe that family dispersion is one of the explanations for the absence of organised communities and yet others think that Jewish life has remained unchanged, as always *"como sempre"*.

Eating food, constructing boundaries and making communities

The transmission of shared cultural patterns constructs meaningful lives in relation to shared cultural codes. In the term cultural codes I include both highly valued cultural products -like history, religion, traditions, customs or language- but I also include everyday and seemingly unimportant cultural products which also communicate sameness such as everyday cuisine or ritual meals. Through the act of incorporation, the sharing of everyday or ritual food becomes a kind of bodily social memory, of habitual memory.[38] It has been suggested (Connerton, 1989) that incorporation and embodiment provide metaphors of sameness and otherness. Specifically bodily memory or else the mnemonics of the body are sustained through specific cultural performances.

Cuisine thus incorporates the exchange and transmission of memorial knowledge[39] and food is a powerful discourse of shared identity and origins. Food narratives and the culinary complex become powerful means of denoting membership to a particular group with a shared sense of history. By sharing food, members of any given group share a sense of history and common origins. According to Van Den Berghe (1984) cuisine acts as a symbol of common descent and a marker of social bonds. Thus food sharing serves as the repository of collective memories and images, of a shared past and present. Food is itself a discourse about power since it enacts and mobilises socially meaningful discourses. Food practices and narratives are employed by individuals in order to signal inclusion or

[38] On a discussion of *habitus* see Bourdieu (1999[1977]) *Outline a Theory of Practice.*

[39] The concept is used by Lowental (1985) in his book *The Past is a Foreign Country.*

exclusion and thus to construct meaningful boundaries. Such processes inevitably lead to the evaluation and reaffirmation of communal identities. The flexibility and ubiquity of food patterns strongly relate to the malleable nature of identities. (Murcott, 1995). Thus food could be treated as the locus of shared identities and a channel for expressing feelings of sameness and belonging. Food sharing and especially the sharing of ritual food permits the attachment of strong emotions.

The social significance of incorporation in the process of creating a collective belonging is a starting point for analysis (Fischler, 1988). It is argued that the act of incorporation helps a group to define itself, its boundaries, diversity, hierarchy and organisation. Eating often implies the hope of being or becoming more than we are. Incorporation helps us to be what we wish to be. Thus "the food makes the eater" (Fischler 1988: 282) means that food allows us to realise who we are, who we are not, and who we would like to be or not to be.

Cultures are not fixed and static entities but ongoing evaluations of past and present relations; the way humans create alliances and oppositions is crucial in maintaining or negating cultures. A number of theorists view culture as a process that is dialectically and discursively shaped and agree that identifications are situational and flexible. The opposite view reduces culture to a rigid essentialism where – to use Bauman's (1999) words – children are seen as "cultural photocopies" and adults turn into "cultural dupes"; in this way all cultural differences are intentional acts of differentiation and cultural identity is nothing more that an act of identification. However differences, identities and cultures are not homogeneous, static entities but ongoing processes constantly informed by others. Human interrelationships nourish identities, which are marked by translation and interpretation.

People experience community through meaningful symbols and relations; the sense of belonging is among the most important processes that define membership. Thus the term community implies similarity and difference, alliance and opposition. Communities are meaningful repositories of symbols and symbolic markers that distinguish one community from the other. Yet, "the symbols of a community are mental constructs: they provide people with the means to make meaning" (Cohen, 1985:19). Symbols could refer to a reality invested with sentiments attached to everyday processes such as kinship, friendship, and familiarity. Communities are filtered by symbols and meaning that are constantly experienced and interpreted by individuals. It is almost as if cultures are no more than arenas of distinctiveness and yet distinctiveness is not only experienced but also evaluated and judged. An important point for the argument of this thesis is that cultural distinctiveness is to be realised not only through special rituals and ceremonies but mainly through participation in everyday activities.

The realisation of belonging to a particular group is achieved daily via food: by sharing common food patterns individuals reaffirm the boundaries of the smaller and wider communities they belong to (neighbourhood, region, nation etc.), and invest their everyday lives with powerful meanings of membership and belonging. Thus eating becomes synonymous with being, and what is more, being a member of a city, an ethnic group, a nation, a particular past and a distinctive, “authentic” cultural heritage. Food can enhance all these identifications at the same time but also highlight some and hide others.

Thus food practices and food narratives contribute to the demarcation of a community's boundaries. In the case of Thessalonikian Jews the sense of belonging to a distinct community is partly achieved through the celebrations that take place at the community's institutions like the primary school, the synagogue and the Old People's Home. In my experience, food sharing -especially on ritual occasions- proved an effective channel for the reworking of Jewishness and Jewish belonging. Of course, I am not claiming that all discourses revealed the same degree of belonging. On the contrary there was a great deal of differentiation mainly based on age: the first and the second generations of Thessalonikian Jews expressed a strong association with their Sephardic past whereas the third generation was quite reluctant to make such associations explicit. For them "not being different" was a statement that was often employed in order to express their ambiguous belonging. By tasting food the Jews of the city tasted, transmitted and selectively evoked their pasts: their Spanishness, their Jewishness, their attachment to Thessaloniki.

Greece “through the looking glass” and the study of Macedonia

I have chosen to present and discuss particularly the literature on Macedonia rather than the anthropological studies on Greece conducted so far. Although I do not challenge the importance of such studies I argue that the history of Macedonia and the complexity of the politics in the area are to a great extent different from the history of other regions of Greece. I am not assuming that other local histories in Greece lack complexity. Yet it is unhelpful to approach the history and present identities in Macedonia in the context of the historic development of other parts of the Greek nation-state like the southern areas (Peloponnese), the Cyclades or the Ionian Islands. Although the basic prerequisite for a nation-state’s existence is the formulation of a national body of history, a closer investigation of this seeming homogeneity reveals fractures, tensions and, inevitably, differentiation. National history submerges several local histories. People themselves mobilise or highlight different versions of national history in order to justify their claims. Thus, in the case of Macedonia, multiple and often

overlapping discourses stress various loyalties that render the area a conflicting arena of different belongings.

Before the presentation of ethnographic studies concerning Macedonia it would be appropriate to mention the work of Herzfeld (1982) one of the first anthropologists who stressed the link between the emergence of the discipline of Folklore and the making of modern Greece. In his early work *Ours Once More* he tried to analyse the process of creating an ideology of national continuity in modern Greece. In this process he argued that the discipline of Folklore studies played an important role by providing intellectual reinforcement for the political project of nation building. Thus the construction of a national character contributed to the creation of a solid, homogenised national consciousness. This has not only been a political but also an educational programme.

Some years after the publication of this book Herzfeld (1987) published *Anthropology through the looking-glass*, a critical ethnography of the margins of Europe as he called it. This work analyses the production of anthropological knowledge concerning Greece and at the same time it constitutes an investigation of the dilemmas that Modern Greeks faced in the search for their identities. Thus he approaches critically western anthropological endeavours to homogenise the area by producing theoretical models like the Mediterranean model[40] or the Honour and Shame model.[41] At the same time he argues that Modern Greeks rejected *Romiossini,* a value which draws from their Ottoman past and embraced instead *Ellinismos* (Hellenism) which refers back to the period of classical antiquity. Because, he adds, national emancipation and inclusion in the European present at the beginning of the twentieth century could only be achieved through the "purity" of their classical past.

But let us investigate more closely the gradual Hellenisation of the different Macedonian populations. With the undermining of Ottoman authority in Macedonia during the nineteenth century and the eviction of the Turks during the Balkan Wars (1912- 1913), the neighbouring newly born

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[40] The unity of the Mediterranean and the existence of similar values were proposed by Peristiany (1974) in *Mediterranean Family Structures* and Davis (1977) in *People of the Mediterranean.* Although the usefulness of these commonalities was not challenged, yet since then it has been argued (Goddard, 1987, Herzfeld, 1987, Sant Cassia with Bada, 1992) that there are several limitations in generalising the values of different societies. The most serious objections were the inefficiency of English language glosses to explain the wide variety of indigenous terms and the methodologically problematic creation of stereotypes and categories. Such schematism, as it was argued, is unable to explain the complexity of real life.

[41] The Honour and Shame literature was produced through the binarism that the Mediterranean model proposed. Early examples of such literature in rural Greece are the ethnographic accounts of Campbell (1964) *Honour, Family and Patronage* on Sarakatsani, a pastoral community in Northern Greece. This model has been re-approached by a number of anthropologists (Herzfeld, 1980, Goddard, 1987, Lindisfarne, 1994 and Wikan, 1984). Among their arguments was the "absence" of women who found themselves trapped in a male-oriented discourse.

nation-states, namely Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, strengthened their efforts to incorporate Macedonia into their territories. Balkan nationalisms, the processes that have shaped the history of the region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries until today, were mainly the outcome of such conflicting claims. Anderson (1991 [1983]) traces the emergence of national ideologies to the development of print capitalism. Wealthy proponents of the middle-class, mainly the intellectuals, were able to systematise and centralise knowledge: along with other national mechanisms like language, the museum, the census and the map the national body of history was formulated. He uses the example of Greece and the "re-generation" of the Greek nation-state from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, a historical, linguistic and ethnic "re-generation" that was mainly fabricated by middle-class intellectuals of the nineteenth century such as Adamandios Koraes, a wealthy merchant of Greek origins living in the diaspora. Anderson argues that "In Europe the new nationalisms almost immediately began to imagine themselves as 'awakening from sleep'. Already in 1803 the young Greek nationalist Adamandios Koraes was telling a sympathetic Parisian audience: "*For the first time* the [Greek] nation surveys the hideous spectacle of its ignorance and *trembles* in measuring with the eye the distance separating it from its ancestors' glory… Koraes's sweet eyes are turned not ahead but back, to ancestral glories" (Anderson, 1991 [1983]: 195, emphasis in the original).

Similarly, Kitromilides (1989) stresses continuities between the European Enlightenment and the development of Greek and other Balkan nationalisms. Thus language, geography, history, education and religion (including the institution of the Church) became nationalised and in turn served as channels for the promotion and perpetuation of national identities. In the case of Greece, the Macedonian mosaic of linguistic and religious groups consisted mainly of Orthodox, Greek-speaking Greeks but also groups using other local vernaculars: Jewish Greeks speaking *Ladino* and Greek, Muslims speaking Turkish and Greek, Muslim-Jews[42] speaking Turkish, Macedonians speaking Slavo-Macedonian, Vlachs speaking a Latin-derived vernacular known as *Vlachika* and many others that were gradually undergoing the processes of nationalisation and homogenisation. Within this complex ethnological picture "The Macedonian question in the second half of the nineteenth century essentially involved the conflicts generated by the frantic attempts of the new national states to incorporate local ethnic groups into the "imagined communities" they represented in order to lay claim to the territories these groups inhabited" (Kitromilides, 1989: 169). Gradually the "Macedonian Question" emerged as a problem in national, political and diplomatic relationships not only for the Balkan nation-states but for the whole of Europe.

[42] On the topic of Muslim-Jews see the following chapter which deals with past and present histories.

Anthropological studies concerning populations in the area of Macedonia by scholars such as Agelopoulos (1997), Cowan (1997, 2000), Danforth (1995, 2000), Karakasidou (1993, 1997) and Veremis (2000) and have pointed to some interesting aspects of the construction of national identities.[43] For example, Cowan's book *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference* (2000) draws our attention to the fact that individuals are not always passive recipients of a national programme imposed by state apparatuses like education and religion but on the contrary should be approached as active creators, sometimes shaping or even questioning their own national belonging. This literature stresses the centrality of the everyday levels of belonging and highlights the fact that private aspects of life, including family values, can become loci for the promotion of certain national aspirations. This shift from official, public processes to more everyday and intimate dimensions suggests that the imposition of national identities is rarely harmonious: it consists of tensions, fractions, shifts and negotiations.

Generally speaking, historical approaches to the construction of national consciousness provide explanations from the top down: the individual is almost absent, often viewed as a recipient of higher hegemonic powers and authorities. This risks giving the false impression that national identities are imposed and individuals are unable to react. However some recent anthropological studies have shown that the process of national ascription must be dialogical. On the one hand the hierarchies and centralised apparatuses like education and the Church do impinge upon national consciousness but, on the other, much also depends on individual perspective at an everyday, personal level. Thus individuals are active agents in the creation of nationalities often selecting, rejecting or interchanging identities but certainly interpreting them. Their interpretation may depend on trivial but equally important processes like their life experiences, their family life, economic activities, social expectations, alliances or even rivalries. Anthropological explanations, precisely because they engage with the everyday, could offer a more complete picture of the accommodation, appropriation and negotiation of national messages.

Karakasidou (1993) explores the topics of politicising culture and the negation of ethnic identity of Slavic-speaking inhabitants in Greek Macedonia focusing on family and households. This choice challenges the boundaries between public and private domains and re-assesses the family unit as the primary locus of the enculturation process. She suggests that ethnicity is a social and cultural construct found in the cultural exchanges of everyday life. Thus the private sphere becomes nationalised and the

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[43] *Emic* voices are much more sceptical on naming the distinct groups in the area as "ethnic" or "ethnicities". In (1997) *Identities in Macedonia* (in Greek *Taftotites sti Makedonia*) it is argued that it is a methodological mistake to call the distinct groups living in Macedonia ethnic or ethnicities because such terms are recent historical constructions that do not correspond to previous historical periods. In particular there is disagreement with some foreign publications, namely Danforth, 1995 and Karakasidou, 1993.

family is shown to be a forum for national aspirations. Intimate, everyday relationships are transformed into fundamental national issues. The key to the analysis of the process of ethnic identities can be analysed in terms of the social interactions within the family domain.

Karakasidou also suggests that women are misleadingly believed to be marginal actors with no influence at all in the so-called public or political sphere. In fact they play a fundamental role in the nation-building process, since apart from being reproducers of family life, women are also reproducers of the nation in the sense that national enculturation is promoted through motherhood. Her examination of the *zadruga,* the Slavic name for the extended family in early twentieth century Florina, and its gradual replacement by the national form of Greek nuclear family, highlights the way that women acted as the main agents of family acculturation. Since Florina became part of Greece in 1913 the *zadruga* family has almost disappeared from the area: "Instead, nuclear families are now the most typical form… Today, families continue to be the principal social milieu for most of the local population, but families are now more often than not small economic units of nuclear form, directly dependent upon the state for many necessary services and upon the national market for their income and provisioning" (Karakasidou, 1997: 98).

In her book *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood,* (1997) the anthropologist attempts to explain the gradual process of nationalisation of the township of Assiros in the basin of Langadhas in northern Greece. She combines archival sources with anthropological data such as oral histories, local narratives and interviews. Visits to local *kafenia* (coffee shops), and oral accounts are shown to be no less valid than local archives in the deconstruction of the nation-building processes of the Slav-speaking inhabitants of Assiros (in Turkish *Guvenza* and in Slavic *Gvos*) that has taken place since the mid-nineteenth century. She takes into account local narratives and tales of supernatural occurrences arguing that: "While the empirically minded may be tempted to dismiss such accounts as products of the imagination, these tales nevertheless suggest lines of inquiry and offer insight on the development of local expressions of national historical consciousness" (Karakasidou, 1997: 32). This combination of historical methods with contemporary ethnography provides an important assessment of official accounts and anonymous, everyday experiences in the national ascription of Macedonia.

Agelopoulos (1997) explores the renaming of a village from Bulgarievo to Nea Krasia and the transformation of its multi-ethnic and multi-lingual composition to "One Village", meaning a homogeneous, Greek-speaking village in south-central Greek Macedonia. His research in the village of Nea Krasia covered a period of fourteen months during 1991 and 1992. He notes that the process of creating a single community out of ethnically and linguistically diverse populations has been a gradual

and often an unseen one. Villagers younger than thirty do not speak or even understand the languages spoken by older villagers. The middle-aged generation understands them but is not willing to use any of the non-Greek languages. Different categories of villagers, such as middle-aged housewives, those engaged in party politics, the educated elite and young people, highlighted totally different interpretations of what "One Village" means to them. It is significant that for most women commensality and the ritual of drinking coffee is the basis for the homogenisation of the Krasiotes whereas for the intellectuals of the village the present situation is the result of the assimilation of rural society and the introduction of western European values. By paying attention to all the local interpretations Agelopoulos suggests an ethnographic approach to ethnicity and nationalism more grounded than abstract structures and categories and reveals the complexities and discontinuities in the construction of local identities.

Cowan's fieldwork in Sohos, a village to the north-east of Thessaloniki, was initially concerned with gender issues but reached some important conclusions as far as ethnicity is concerned. Sohoians define themselves as Greeks in their everyday lives and yet they employ multi-lingual practices meaning that they still use their local vernacular 'Bulgarian' along with Turkish words and expressions. According to Cowan this polyglot practice mostly takes place when villagers call each other by their nicknames, *paratsouklia,* or when Sohoians narrate comic stories, *masalia* or *anekdota*. Wedding celebrations are also occasions for the use of polyglot practices. In particular musical experience has strong Turkish associations and the instruments involved, the *daoulia,* are referred to by many older Sohoians as Turkish [things], *ta Tourkika*. Thus, "non-Greek", polyglot practices were aspects of a collective and local identification of this particular Greek community. And yet the Sohoians were ready to downplay the importance of their local vernacular when compared with "pure" Greek. For them the "Bulgarian" they used should not be written down or taped because it was not proper Greek (Cowan, 1997).

The role of autobiography and the process of memory formation in constructing or challenging national identities is discussed by Vereni (2000). Vereni makes use of a diary written by an old farmer, Leonidas, in the Florina region and endeavours to deconstruct the formation of national consciousness focusing on the life memories of an individual. Leonidas's mother tongue is Macedonian and he calls himself *Ellinas Makedonas* (Greek-Macedonian). Yet national belonging is for him a matter of confusion and agony, as his notebooks reveal. Thus greater history, the history of a nation, is juxtaposed with lesser history, the specific history of his family and community. And Leonidas belongs somewhere in between and writes in one of his notebooks about his roots: "A big tree was planted. It

grew to be very large. And its roots spread beyond the confines of the field. But also beyond the confines of the village. What does this mean? This means our large kin. In Constantinople we have kin. In Serbia we have kin. In Australia we have kin. In Greece we have kin. And at our home, at our roots, what remains? Only two elderly people: Leonidas and his wife Sultana." (cited in Vereni, 2000: 64).

The construction, or more accurately the reconstruction, of national identity among immigrants to Australia from northern Greece is discussed by Danforth (1995, 2000). He assesses the individual life histories of several immigrants from Macedonia to Australia and poses the question of "naturality" in the formation of national identities: is it possible for two brothers born by the same Macedonian mother to possess different nationalities? His answer is positive, grounded in cases like that of Ted and Jim Yannas. The first chose to be an ethnic Macedonian and the second an ethnic Greek. Ted's and Jim's family comes from Kladorabi – *Kladhorrahi* in Greek – a small village in the district of Florina, only a few miles way from the border between Greece and Yugoslavia. The Greek government had confiscated his family's land because a relative had settled in Yugoslavia at the end of the civil war in 1949 and he migrated to Australia in 1954, a few years later. When Ted and Jim's family came to Australia they came as Greek Macedonians. They attended the Greek Church and although they knew both Slavo- Macedonian and Greek they (mainly their mother) decided to speak only Greek from that time onwards.

By 1995 their parents were dead and the national identities they had chosen varied considerably. Ted, who was an official member of the Heidelberg Alexander Soccer Club which had been pro-Greek in the past, objected strongly when other members of the same club stated openly that he had to collaborate in the destruction of the Macedonian race. Ted recalls: "At that moment I realised he was talking about *my* people. He was asking me to destroy *myself*. That's when I understood that I was truly a Macedonian. Whatever part of me felt Greek died; it disappeared. My whole life passed in front of me, and I realised I was false. I felt like an adopted child who had just discovered his real parents. All my life had been a lie. I'd been a janissary; I'd betrayed my own people" (cited in Danforth 1995: 190). On the other hand his brother Jim gives his own interpretation: "My parents would be ashamed of Ted now. They'd be ashamed of what he says he is. How can he be the only one in the whole family to be a Macedonian? It's an Australian disease. No one back in Kladhorahi talks like that. No one wants Macedonia; they all want Greece. People there say, 'What's the matter with Ted?' It's painful to see people laugh at him" (Danforth, 1995: 196).

Similar accounts stress that national identity is a long-term process often related and informed by personal life experiences that take place over the lifetime of individuals. There is nothing "natural"

or “given” in ethnic ascription which is often subjected to other kinds of everyday processes like interpretation, negotiation and selection. In certain cases ethnic identity seems to be a matter of personal political choices that are themselves influenced by lifetime incidents. As Cowan (2000) has noted, identity is produced through the interplay of social dynamics like “difference”. Ethnicity is thus not only constructed but it is also shown to be rather fluid and salient and the differences that are considered to be “real” might be so because they are conceived as such. National identities are highly contested and often challenged or rejected. The term “inflections” as used by Cowan to describe national identity is indicative of the various relations involved including that of power. Thus Macedonia is an area of contested and often conflicting discourses of belonging and as such it continues to be the locus of real and imagined identities and aspirations.

Recent studies on Macedonia have shown that groups create boundaries and build their distinctiveness mainly through the evaluation of everyday processes. The Jews of Thessaloniki eat food and talk about it while at the same time they perpetuate or reject discourses of cultural distinctiveness and highlight their Jewishness, Thessalonikianess, Sephardicness and Greekness according to the situation they find themselves in. Identifications are never unilateral and fixed but contextual, complex and subject to negotiations and transformations. As Hall argues, such an interpretation “sees identification as construction, a process never completed but always ‘in process’. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be ‘won’ or ‘lost’, sustained or abandoned” (Hall, 1996: 2).

Part B: Methodological and ethical issues

The advantages and limitations of being “a native”

I am a native who was partly educated abroad and I returned to my native city, Thessaloniki, in order to carry out field research. The fact that I was a “native” did not render my status as a researcher any less problematic. My research seemed to raise issues that rendered my nativeness distant and complex at the same time. I was a native Thessalonikian and yet I had been away from my city and from Greece for some years during the period of my studies abroad. The Greek political situation and social life were in a way things that I had to “rediscover” due to my long absence. At the same time although I was a “native” Thessalonikian I was also an Orthodox Christian researching Jewish identity among Thessalonikian Jews, a religious minority I knew little about. My status generated all sorts of ethical questions relating to power relations and issues of access to the Community. In the description of my fieldwork I explain how these issues emerged and how I confronted them. First, however I will briefly

sketch some recent diverse contributions to the idea of a native anthropology in my attempt to highlight the complexity and the various theoretical and methodological implications of being a native.

The concept of nativeness leads to the discussion of the way my research was conducted and the status that I was endowed with. However, nativeness proved to be more than just the romantic view of the "indigenous ethnographer" who could significantly "enrich" the understanding of a culture (Clifford, 1986). The status of a privileged ethnographer arises out of a stereotypical category that claims universally predictable situations, whereas in fact, the figure of an insider generates a whole range of questions about the nature of nativeness. Indeed it appears increasingly difficult to define nativeness and to draw some specific, unchangeable characteristics that could define the native condition. Loizos (1992) suggested that divisions between insiders and outsiders were no more than "slippery relativities". Instead a "user-friendly ethnography" was proposed as the kind of reflexive ethnography that avoids privileging natives or non-natives. Thus all observer statuses are imbued with strengths and weaknesses and the most serious question is not who is best equipped to tackle the difficulties but how one becomes aware of them. There are no ideal statuses and there are no more or less privileged insiders or outsiders. Loizos argues that nativeness is not the key to ethnographic research because everything depends on translation, contextualisation and the sensitivity of the researcher. A socially insensitive native ethnographer is certainly no more advantaged than is a sensitive non-native ethnographer.

The complexity of the native condition was also discussed by Hastrup (1995). In the postmodern era it is true that there are almost no natives left, in the sense that there are no cultural isolates. No researcher can thus claim to have privileged access to a culture just because he/she is indigenous. Hastrup argues that the processes of globalisation and the intensification of communication open a whole range of possibilities to everyone to decode "other" cultures. She maintains that although divisions between natives and non-natives are meaningless, the ethnographer's task is to provide as many "native voices" in the text as possible. So the problem is not nativeness *per se* but the sense of "responsibility" of ethnographic accounts. In other words the real issue is whether the researcher, native or not, tries to give a fair and realistic ethnographic account. Cultural differences (real or imagined) have to be lived and embodied and therefore must transcend and challenge the self. In other words anthropology is as much about self-knowledge as the analysis of others: "Whether privileged or inhibited by local social boundaries, for the native anthropologist there remains a problem of transforming self-evident cultural knowledge to genuine anthropological understanding" (Ibid.: 158).

It is not important whether fieldwork is conducted at home or abroad. What is significant is that the people we study are entitled to have a voice. Knowledge of them should necessarily be self-knowledge and constitute a challenge to personal assumptions. Strathern (1987) notes that auto-anthropology, that is anthropology consumed in the social context that produced it, has a limited distribution. Thus the personal credentials of the ethnographer do not depend on his/her nativeness but on the way he/she writes and represents others. In other words a "good" ethnographer is not necessarily a native ethnographer but one who can achieve a continuity between a textual account and the accounts of the people he/she studies. Strathern argues that in this sense "home" becomes a "slippery relativity" itself inasmuch as it rarely constitutes a homogeneous entity. Rather it consists of several known and unknown fields of social interaction.

At this point I would like to present some specific examples of researches that were conducted "at home" and yet challenge the supposed homogeneity of doing anthropology at home. The Gypsy population living in Britain was studied during the 1980's by Okely. A British-born and trained anthropologist was in theory a well-equipped native ethnographer. However, her fieldwork experience reveals a reality that this "home" was not familiar to her at all. The Gypsies constituted a minority population, with their own distinct cultural characteristics. Okely was British but not Gypsy and this raised all sorts of issues regarding access to the community and ethical representation. Although anonymity was guaranteed the researcher increasingly found that a neutral representation of such a socially underprivileged minority was unethical. Its is concluded that the anthropologist working at home is by no means privileged but instead he or she has to approach the whole endeavour with a greater sense of commitment and reciprocity (Okely and Callaway 1992). Being a native in certain cases entails greater responsibility and ethical awareness.

The anthropologist who originates from a country experiences several refractions of being open to new possibilities for the realisation of the native condition. Mascarenhas-Keyes is an anthropologist of Indian descent, who was brought up in East Africa, educated and lives in the U.K. In 1979 she conducted fieldwork with her British husband in Goa, a region situated on the West Coast of India from where her ancestors originated. She found herself caught up in a complex situation far from any simple, unilateral "native" condition: pre-existing kinship links, increasing responsibility towards friends and relatives of producing an "objective" account and the multilingual realities of the different groups living in the area. On the basis of her experience Mascarenhas-Keyes suggests the adoption of the notion of "multiple native". However this was not always a harmonious role but often resulted in considerable personal anxiety, personal disapproval and anger (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987).

In *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood,* (1997) Karakasidou, a Greek-born anthropologist educated and now working in the United States, assesses the process of Greek nation- building in Macedonia. Born in Thessaloniki, she was educated abroad, received a US college scholarship in 1975 and later in 1988 accepted an invitation to participate in an ethno-archaeological survey in the basin of Langadhas in central Macedonia. She admits that this topic was of great personal interest to her: born of a marriage between a Greek-speaking Macedonian and a Turkish-speaking refugee, she admits that it was a perfect opportunity for seeking her own identity and reflecting upon her own belonging.

Gefou-Madianou, a Greek anthropologist who was trained in the United States, successfully encapsulates the complexity of the native situation: "I am therefore continually forced to realise that I am not only caught between two discourses, an intellectual anthropological discourse and the indigenous social discourse of the people I study, but that I have to take into account my position within Greek society as well: I have therefore become a native with multiple identities, sometimes marginalising myself in my own country" (Gefou-Madianou, 1993: 169).

My "native" condition thus seems rather complicated and bewildering. It constantly generates ethical dilemmas and reminds me of the multiple selves I have to deal with: I am an anthropologist, a Greek citizen, a Thessalonikian, a practitioner of Orthodox Christianity and at the same a keen supporter of personal and religious freedom; a whole range of identities which raise all sorts of ethical, political and methodological issues. I constantly feel a sense of responsibility which keeps reminding me that it is too easy to accuse the whole of Greek society for its prejudice against minority groups. Yet Greek society is not one-dimensional but a process involved in change, influenced by several historical, political and social forces and thus "prejudice" is a very simplistic term to describe current Greek - Jewish relations. The situation seems to be much more complex and fluid than that.[44]

Field strategies and ethical considerations

In June 1998 I had finished my second postgraduate year at a college in London and within a month I had already returned to my native country, Greece and the city in which I was born, Thessaloniki. My research proposal was for an analysis of the relationship between food and identity and in particular ethnic identity. I had no idea about which group of people I could focus on in order to question this double-sided relationship. I admit that by the end of summer, when I had not yet started my fieldwork,

[44] See the last chapter and the discussion on the creation of images of the Self and the Other.

the choice of a group became a source of worry and anxiety. It was at the beginning of September when I decided to visit a friend who said to me:

> Well, food and ethnic identity is certainly interesting. Why don't you focus on the Jews of Thessaloniki? I know some of them but be careful: when I asked somebody if he was of Jewish descent he replied, rather annoyed, that his religion is Jewish and that's it. I can introduce you but be aware of what you ask.

For a moment I stood reflecting on my friend's story but I was totally out of words. I instantly remembered my grandmother narrating to me how her Jewish friend before leaving for the concentration camp during the War offered her his pharmacy and how she and her husband had refused to take it:

> I could never imagine that Elias was not coming back. You know before he left he wanted to give your grandfather his pharmacy. They were good friends, your grandfather could not accept it.

Since then neither my friends nor I had heard anything about Jews who came back to Thessaloniki and what is more, I knew nothing about the existence of Jewish people in contemporary Thessaloniki. In fact we never came across such a topic either at school or at University.[45]

The next day I started searching for sources on the history of Thessaloniki and I soon realised that the Jewish presence in the city had been continuous for many centuries. I mentioned before that Karakasidou's research was a search for self-identity and in my case it was not less so: although I was not Jewish I wanted to rediscover my city's past and present, an endeavour which in a way resembles the quest for self-identification. Through my friend I was introduced to some people who could provide

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[45] I remember a teacher at the University, a Social Anthropologist, who invited us to think about the ways that the Jew was depicted in Greek folk production such as fairytales. This figure was always a short, dark skinned man with a curved nose. He was always stingy and therefore not liked by people in his surroundings, always in the margins. In a journal called *Laografia* (Folklore) many anti-Jewish customs were found at the beginning of the century all over Greece. In a recent article discussing the cultural images held of Jewish people in seventeenth and eighteenth century narratives from Greece, it is argued that: "The Jews are always connected with traditions of blood soaking and dirtiness and are always considered to contaminate the wine (and other food items not to mention water) they come into bodily contact with. The Jewish feet are considered dirty whilst the Christian ones pure and clean. A climate that was cultivated for centuries considering the Jews as the ultimate evil, the *vrikolakas*" (Gherouki, 1998: 108).

me with insights into the topic of Jewishness in general. One of them, Albertos an ironsmith, became one of my key informants and the person who supported me most whenever I faced difficulties during my fieldwork. It was Albertos and Ruth, an academic to whom my friend also introduced me, who helped me build up a matrix of social relations: through them I was introduced to friends and relatives. The process of creating a functioning network took me several months and the same amount of time, almost four months, was required before people felt free to talk to me. This is mainly the issue of access I was faced with: I was a non-Jewish person trying to write about Jewish identity.

During the first days of my fieldwork I visited a bookshop owned by an old Thessalonikian Jewish family. Later I wrote in my fieldnotes:

> I talked with the mother of the owner who worked in the bookshop. She asked me if I was Jewish and my negative answer made her reluctant. She said that she knew nothing about my topic but she gave me the phone number of her Jewish daughter-in-law. I called and she asked me in what context I was pursuing all those questions. She also asked me if I knew the Judaic dietary rules. She advised me to study them, look for further information on the Internet and rethink the relationship between Kashrouth and the Mediterranean diet. Her answer was quite sharp: 'I don't want to have a teaching session with you but a discussion. Call me when you feel ready…

I realised that my nativeness was an empty category: although I was a Thessalonikian the fact that I was not Jewish was certainly an obstacle in gaining access to the Community. And yet my non-Jewishness could at the same time prove an advantage, enabling me not to take things for granted, be more neutral and thus more critical. I also realised that I could take advantage of another aspect of my status: although I was a representative of the majority I was educated outside Greece. The Jewish historian I talked to admitted that natives who have been educated abroad have a less biased perspective on the topic of "otherness" in their home countries. In effect being a native who had an insider's and at the same time an outsider's perspective proved very helpful. Not only did it enable me to gain access but it also helped me to be more critical of several cultural assumptions held by Jewish or non-Jewish citizens in Thessaloniki.

During the first few months of my fieldwork I used to visit people's homes and conducted formal, semi-structured interviews. In all I conducted forty formal interviews which I transcribed and translated in full since I wanted to have a detailed understanding of people's perceptions. These interviews were conducted with both men and women although I must note that women were more

eager to be “interviewed” than men. The age of my interviewees ranged from twenty to ninety three since I believe that a generational perspective makes a great difference and stresses the diverse approaches to Jewishness and Sephardic identity. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that for all of them I used to prepare the day before what I was going to ask and in which order. I must note that although the discussions that followed were in a way pre-prepared my interviewees changed most cases my focus, modified my questions and generated others that had not crossed my mind.

In those interviews I used a tape recorder although I soon realised that its use proved an obstacle at certain moments. My interviewees often felt uncomfortable in revealing their real thoughts and details about their personal lives. For example while talking with two women about the topic of Sephardic cuisine I asked something regarding the present Jewish community. One woman seemed rather annoyed and said:

> This has nothing to do with the topic of Sephardic cuisine!

Immediately I switched the tape-recorder off and replied:

> No, it is about Jewish identity, which also interests me not only as a researcher but also as a citizen of this city and as a person.

I am not sure what she thought of my answer but she started explaining aspects of the Community. Now we are good friends and we frequently discuss, without the presence of the tape-recorder, the multiplicity of the Jewish experience.

During the first months of my fieldwork I was more concerned with how to establish myself as a researcher. I realise now that it was my personal fear and insecurity that I wouldn’t be taken seriously. An anthropologist who hangs around observing is not what most people think of “a scientist”.[46] However, as time went by and I got to know people better the term “scientific establishment” became a meaningless abstraction. I had long discussions with my informants and soon I stopped using the tape-recorder. Most importantly I gradually experienced feelings like trust and

[46] The dilemma of “scientific production” generates all sorts of ethical, methodological and analytical problems that anthropologists deal with. The movements associated with postmodern writers propose as an answer that there is no “scientific truth”. For them realities are only partially true since everything depends on interpretation and translation. Postmodernism was never a coherent movement but a broad umbrella encompassing writers like Clifford (1986, 1988), and Geertz who were interested in the problems of representing and thus creating “others”. Yet postmodernist ideas have been heavily criticised (Birth, 1990, Gledhill, 1994 and Sangren, 1988) since it was argued that the power is not dismissed by writing about it since it is only dispelled onto readers.

reciprocity that took my fears away and strengthened my confidence. Even much later when I was invited to attend rituals and ceremonies at the institutions I never carried my notebook around with me. Instead I observed things, memorised all the discussions and I put them down on paper whenever I returned to my rented apartment in the centre of Thessaloniki.

My topic required a lot of observations, which were difficult to carry out at least in the first months. The more often I visited people in their homes the less formal our conversations became. It took a while to get to know each other and be able to participate in scenes of everyday life such as preparing food and buying kosher meat or sweets from the market. Later I was able to witness incidents in the dynamics of family life such as disputes and arguments between younger and older people about food. I gradually felt that I was in a sense becoming "an insider" especially when people started showing me photos of their children or when they started offering me the food they were cooking.

I was especially moved by survivors from the concentration camps who gave me their memoirs[47] to read and generally provided me with all the written material that was available to them: letters from the Community, booklets, magazines and other publications. For me all this written material was a meaningful cultural representation that I collected carefully, discussed with my informants and have drawn on for ideas, especially during this last period of writing up. Gaining access to the Community meant that I was often invited by friends to visit the community's institutions like the school, the Old People's Home and the synagogue. I never went there uninvited and always went with friends, for example with a teacher at the school who became a good friend and a valuable informant.

Creating friends in the field[48] proved the most effective fieldwork strategy. The term "reflexivity" gradually became more tangible since reciprocity and human interrelations gave some meaning to it. It offered me the opportunity to discuss and observe people's identities in several different contexts: in their homes, during everyday food provisioning, at local bars and restaurants, in the communal institutions and in official contexts like conferences. Their identities were not static but shifted according to the context; they were more "Jewish" in the synagogue but their Jewishness was certainly more fluid and negotiable in a bar or in a restaurant. Yet some people often emphasised their

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[47] A lady gave me her memoir and wrote in the first page: "With much respect to Vasiliki who admires the trajectory of our people, our culture, our tradition". It was one of the most important signs of recognition of my research.

[48] Crick has faced the same situation during his fieldwork. In an essay called "Ali and me: An essay in street-corner anthropology" he wrote: If I call Ali a 'friend' or 'informant', both labels would say too much and also leave something important out" (Crick, 1992: 177).

Jewishness in such contexts. I wanted to trace all these identity negotiations especially those when food was involved and thus I followed people as much as possible and I tried to fully experience “the other”: see it, hear it, taste it and smell it.[49]

Much of my fieldwork was inspired by what Okely and Callaway (1992) call “autobiography” which is nothing more than the experience of everyday field interactions and a kind of embodied knowledge, the outcome of participation. It is evident that any discussion about “reflexivity” becomes an empty category if the fieldworker fails to “see” his work through the eyes of the people he studied therefore to understand how the people studied “accommodate” and “respond” to this particular research. Towards the end of my fieldwork in January 2000, I was invited by some members of the organisation for the study of Greek Jewry, including Ruth the Jewish historian I mentioned before, to give a paper about the dietary habits of Thessalonikian Jews. I accepted instantly but I was deeply terrified by the thought that I had to present “them” as “other” to themselves. The process of writing that paper led me to rethink issues of ethical writing in anthropology, meaning the ways Thessalonikian Jews perceived themselves and their relationship with the “others” (in this case the Orthodox Christian Greeks). Ethical writing should take into account self-representations, in particular how people view themselves and which are the main themes that they give priority to.

The presentation of my paper proved a valuable experience and a challenge. Some of my informants, who were among the audience, identified in my quotations their own narratives and this enabled them to participate in the discussion that followed afterwards. They seemed satisfied that I had made “good” use of their words. Most of the issues discussed in the chapters of this thesis reflect in a sense some of the preoccupations of Thessalonikian Jews as they were addressed to me that night. Thus the topics of “tradition”, the ways “tradition” could resist “modernity”, the relationship between *kosher* food and “authentic” Sephardic cuisine and the possible connections between “traditional” and “healthy” food were some of the questions posed. This event enabled “the other” to shape my research, participate in my fieldwork and mould my research questions. It was they who acquired “voices”[50] and

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[49] Stoller (1989) in his book *The taste of ethnographic things: The senses in anthropology* describes in a very vivid way the importance of the senses in a fieldwork situation. In the introductory note of the book she poses the question: “If anthropologists are to produce knowledge, how can they ignore how their own sensual biases affect the information they produce? This book demonstrates why anthropologists should open their senses to the worlds of their others” (Stoller, 1989: 7).

[50] “Multivocality” and “Plurality” (Clifford, 1986, 1888) are the two main presuppositions which limit the authority that the observer exerts over the observed: “Once dialogism and polyphony are recognised as modes of textual production, monophonic authority is questioned” (Ibid, 1986: 15). However abstract this definition might be it is nevertheless helpful in realising the authority that some narratives enact and the asymmetry of relationships during and after the field research.

helped me to understand the meaning of reflexivity that had been until then an empty category. The event was made even more official by the presence of the Rabbi and the director's wife who apologised to me for the absence of her husband due to illness. In the end many members of the Community congratulated me:

> You have done such a good job. You have really worked hard. Now you know a lot about our cuisine. Come and visit me any time. I can give you more details about some recipes.

The event closed with dinner at a local restaurant.[51] During the dinner someone commented:

> Now that the whole Community knows about you, you will find many Jewish mothers and fathers.

Having a form of fictive kinship bestowed upon me was one of the most important steps in acquiring trust and acceptance among the people I studied.

In February 2000 I returned in Britain and started analysing the material I had gathered.[52] Yet although my fieldwork was officially ended, my regular visits to Thessaloniki -until the summer of 2001 when I finally decided to resettle in my native city- were occasions to visit Jewish friends and discuss with them. I also had the chance to attend important communal events like the conference on the Judaeo-Espagnol language which took place in March 2000 and visit loci of public memory like the new Museum of the Jewish Presence in the city that opened in April 2001. These visits and revisits to my field have been a source of challenge and remind me that identities do shift not only according to the context but also in relation to time. Identities never exist in a vacuum but are negotiated in a matrix of political and religious relations and are answerable to current social conditions. The way and the reasons why Jewish identities in Thessaloniki have shifted and continue to shift will be discussed later in the book.

I would like to end this discussion with an incident that happened many months after I started fieldwork and made me realise that at least some Jewish people in Thessaloniki found what I did moral and ethical. It was as if this incident worked as a justification of my entire project. I quote from my diary:

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[51] None that night requested *kosher* food. Yet all the discussions concerned the issue of "traditional Jewish food" and how it had been preserved.

[52] Which included interviews, field-notes from my observations, a field-diary and also written material like for example articles in newspapers and magazines, leaflets etc.

A few days ago I heard that the husband of a dear informant had died. Two friends proposed to take me to the funeral. While going the one said:

-It is not right and moral to study someone's personal moments!

Before I was able to say anything the other friend answered for me:

-Anthropologists are not like that. They don't approach things with cruel scientific interest. I tried to discourage her from choosing such a topic. It is like signing her unemployment. But what is the matter with you? Don't you have memory? The Nazis tried to destroy our people and our fellow citizens did nothing to prevent them! That's the end of the story! (sounding rather annoyed). Besides Mr David the deceased himself would have no objection to her presence.

In this final text product I tried to preserve the anonymity of my informants. It must be noted that my informants themselves often expressed their ideas on sensitive issues and revealing their actual names should be not only scientifically problematic but mostly dangerous. This does not mean that I mystified or hid the views they shared with me. On the contrary, although the ideas of Thessalonikian Jews will be expressed in depth through my thesis yet I ensured that the persons would not be easily identified. Thus names that will be found throughout the book are pseudonyms.

The theoretical orientations of my work do cover a whole range of issues such as food and its social meanings, food and ethnic boundaries and also the role of food in the creation of communities. I have also argued that classifications and food structures are indeed interesting and illuminating. In the case of Thessalonikian Jews, classificatory systems and food structures are important because they reveal hidden social structures and cosmologies. Yet such symbolism alone is unable to explain the complexity of everyday food consumption. For the Jewish people food can and does reveal a lot about the politics of everyday life and the everyday choices that have been made. Food and eating in my research convey messages of local adaptation and through the appropriation of memory my informants construct time and place and reproduce their belonging to a community. Food in this case becomes a characteristic emblem of ethnic boundaries and for Thessalonikian Jews eating becomes the process through which they try to maintain and perpetuate such boundaries. The literature concerning Macedonia points at the complexity of belonging and the multiple levels of identity. My research points exactly at this: the Jewish people that I studied feel Jewish, Sephardic, Thessalonikian, Greek and more or less attached to Israel. A range of notions and sentiments of belonging and potentially contradictory loyalties will be explored through the study of food practices in the following chapters. The discussion of the methods I adopted in the field and issues such as ethics, "objectivity" and reflexivity have been

central in my analysis so far. The advantages and limitations of being “a native” have also been assessed since my status as a researcher influenced and shaped my research to a great extent.

Chapter Three

Past and present histories

> Can a culture with no predominant geographical concentration survive without its language? *Or, conversely, can a language whose speakers are gradually losing their distinctive identity within the cultural uniformity of contemporary society, continue to exist?* It is the realisation of this unique nature of Judeo-Espagnol as the repository of the collective memory of Sephardic culture that has spurred in recent years a surprising and encouraging revival of the interest in the preservation of our distinctive cultural identity. This is further attested by the multitude of scholars and societies dedicated to this end. Thus, on the eve of the 21st century, Sephardim the world over, like the phoenix rising, declare their determination to infuse new life into their proud cultural and linguistic heritage.
>
> (Introductory note in the leaflet about the Judeo-Espagnol conference: *A Jewish language in search of its people,* Thessaloniki 16 & 17 April 2000. Emphasis in the original)

Chapter Three follows the presentation of the situation in contemporary Thessaloniki and the account of the shifts of contemporary Jewish identities. It is a historical exploration of the Jewish presence in the city along with a description of the major economic, territorial and social changes. It is argued that the historical changes which have taken place from the Hellenistic era until the end of the twentieth century have significantly influenced the status of the Jewish people in Thessaloniki and have resulted in their gradual marginalisation. An exploration of the term "histories" reveals that the official or national version of history is always interconnected with other counter-histories of different populations and their experiences. The present is not an autonomous entity but to a great extent is influenced and shaped by past events and processes. This is the case for Thessalonikian Jewry: from being economically viable and numerically significant, sweeping changes during the twentieth century resulted in their economic and social deprivation and their numerical attrition. Not only the events of the Second World War, but also the endeavours of the Greek nation-state to achieve homogeneity resulted in policies and politics of exclusion. However, although nowadays officially the Greek-Jews enjoy equal status, their sense of belonging often appears ambivalent. Thus, Jewish people shift between social visibility and invisibility in their attempt to state their presence in a non-Jewish environment and achieve equal treatment and acceptance.

The Jews of Thessaloniki over time: from domination to dissolution

> There is no ethnos that does not celebrate Sabbath which is followed by our fasts, lighting our oil lamps and practicing our traditional dietary rules.
>
> (Iosipos Flavios in Kat' Apionos II-39, cited in Nehamas, 2000: 37. My translation)

During the Hellenistic era, which began with the conquests of Alexander the Great, nearly all Hellenistic cities had a significant Jewish population. Thessaloniki was among them. This ancient city had been founded in 316 BC by Cassandrus, who named it after his wife, the sister of Alexander the Great. It is suggested (Goodman, 1994, Molho, 1994, Vakalopoulos, 1979) that a few decades after the city's foundation the Jews were already among the city's inhabitants. At that time Thessaloniki had commercial contacts with all the important ports of the Mediterranean and the Jews were involved in trade. Goodman (1994) notes that the estimates of the numbers of Jews in the Mediterranean cities of the Roman Empire vary considerably yet their influence in Mediterranean society is generally accepted.

After the conquest of the city by the Romans in 146 B.C. and the creation of the Roman province of Macedonia, Thessaloniki became an important trading centre and attracted many people from other cities of the Mediterranean such as Alexandria. A significant number of Jewish immigrants were added to the existing population. The politics of *Pax Romana* allowed sufficient space for the Jewish community to develop. Therefore, during the Roman period the Jewish community of *Romaniotes* or *Romaniot* gradually developed in the city. This community was Hellenised and spoke the *koine*[53] but at the same time maintained its own synagogues and Rabbis (Nehamas, 2000). During the early years of Christianity in 52/53 AD the Apostle Paul visited Thessaloniki and preached at the local synagogue for three Sabbaths.[54]

During the Byzantine era the city went through a number of wars with the Avars, Slavs, Saracens, Bulgarians, Normans and the Crusaders. The Jewish inhabitants faced difficult moments especially with the laws that the Byzantine Empire imposed, namely *Fiscus Judaicus* and *More Judaico*. By the first law the Jews were obliged to pay a tax for living in Byzantium, whereas the second law fostered their conversion to Christianity. In fact, under such political pressures many

[53] This was the vernacular used during the Hellenistic and post-Helenistic era.

[54] According to historical evidence (Molho, 1994) this was the *Etz ha Haim* synagogue near the port. This name stands for "The tree of life" in Hebrew. I quote from the Acts (17, 1-3): *"Now that they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went into them, and three Sabbath days reasoned them out of the scriptures..."*

Romaniotes converted to the new religion but nonetheless the Jewish community escaped total assimilation. The Spanish Rabbi, *Benjamin de Toudela* (Benveniste, 2000) visited Thessaloniki. Thessalonikian Jewry increased numerically after the *pogroms*[55] of 1376 with the first settlement of Ashkenazi Jews[56] mainly from Hungary and Germany.

The climate throughout the Christian west grew increasingly anti-semitic, especially after the Crusades, the holy wars that Western Europe undertook against the "unfaithful", meaning non-Christian populations in order to re-gain the city of Jerusalem. Accusations that Jews were responsible for water poisoning, the black plague, and disappearance of Christian children were made quite often. Byzantine Thessaloniki thus became a refuge not only for Central European Jewry but also for a number of Catalan Jews and Jews from Italy and Sicily. Messinas (1997) argues that although the Ashkenazim were almost isolated, the groups that arrived from Italy interacted with the local Romaniot population. The three Jewish groups settled around synagogues, the Romaniotes around *Etz ha Haim,* the Askenazim around *Ashkenaz* and those that came from western territories around the synagogues *Provencia, Italia* and *Sicilia.* Thus in Thessaloniki there were several different Jewish groups which, although practising the same religion spoke different languages[57] and maintained different synagogues.

"How can you call Ferdinando a wise king when he made his country poor and he enriched mine?"

This question is anecdotally attributed to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Bayazit the Second. Although the wave of Jewish migrants from the west never really stopped, it reached its height in the fifteenth century with the expulsion of Spanish Jewry. The Jews had lived in Spain for many centuries even after the Arabs conquered the Iberian Peninsula; the conquerors were tolerant towards all religious minorities. Within this climate the Jews had cultivated a great civilisation and created many centres of Judaism like Cordoba, Seville, Granada and Toledo.[58] But the situation rapidly changed when the Spanish began to regain all their territory from the Arabs and the religious homogenisation which Catholicism imposed left no room for Judaism.

[55] Organised, violent displacements.

[56] The Jews from central Europe are referred as Ashkenazim.

[57] The Ashkenazim spoke *Yiddish*, a German-Jewish idiom, whereas the Jewish people who came from Italian territories maintained their Latin derived languages.

[58] The well-known Jewish philosopher Maimonides is of Spanish origin (The Jews of Thessaloniki, D. Sofianopoulos, video documentary).

In 1492 the Catholic rulers Ferdinando and Isabella announced an edict which forced all Jews either to convert to Christianity or leave the country within six months. This edict, known as the edict of Granada was issued at the instigation of the Inquisition[59] and its outcome was the *Reconquista*, meaning the recovery of the entire Iberian Peninsula into Christian hands. Braudel (1972) notes that Christian Spain was struggling to be born and the political unity of the Iberians could not be conceived without religious unity. According to the edict, those Jews who refused to convert to Christianity had to leave the country without any belongings and were not allowed to return. It is estimated that 50,000 Jews were baptised[60] and remained but 250,000-300,000 left Spain and found shelter in France, England, the Netherlands and North Africa. The majority of them, around 90,000 settled in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the area of Macedonia and cities like Thessaloniki and Constantinople (Molho, 1994:20). More than 20.000 people settled in Thessaloniki which was a deserted city after the Turkish conquest.

The Sultan not only allowed but also encouraged Jewish settlement in such areas of the Ottoman Empire, seeking to enrich the city with new, urban populations. The Islamic Law considered both Christians and Jews as *dhimmi*[61] comparable to the followers of the true faith, the Muslims (Svoronos, 1990, Vakalopoulos, 1979). However, each group's supreme leader was responsible for their protection and this allowed a degree of inner religious and political autonomy. Jewish people were free to practice their religious faith, to own property and to travel. Ottoman rule was based on the *millet* system according to which all non-Islamic populations were allowed to settle in the Empire as long as they paid taxes.[62] Every religious community, including the Christian and the Jewish, was considered as a *millet,* an autonomous "nation" and was controlled by its religious leaders. Yet it must be stressed that the *millet* system had no connotations of ethnic or national identity. It was simply a kind of administrative mechanism that allowed some kind of autonomy to non-Muslim groups, although it certainly enhanced the demarcation of religious boundaries.

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[59] This edict was influenced by Torquemada, who was the leading figure of the Inquisition.

[60] They are called *Marranos* or *Conversos* and although they were baptised Christians they remained krypto-Jews. *Marranos* in Spanish meant pork. Braudel in his history of the Mediterranean argues that the converted Jew gave himself away by intentionally forgetting to light a fire in his house on Saturdays. An inquisitor once said to the governor of Seville: "My lord, if you wish to see how the *conversos* keep the Sabbath, come up to the tower with me. However cold it is, you will never see smoke coming from their chimneys on a Saturday" (Ibn Verga cited in Braudel, 1972: 807). For an interesting article on neo-Marrano identity see the conversation between Edgar Morin and Colette Piault in the *Journal of Mediterranean Studies, 1994: 344 – 357*.

[61] According to Islamic Law many religious groups were considered *dhimmis* which means people of the Book, people who also believed in a holy scripture like Jews and Christians. Therefore, they were protected groups.

[62] The heaviest tax, *kharaj* or capitation tax was estimated on the size of the population of a group. The religious leader of every group was responsible for its collection and payment to the Ottomans.

The wave of Sephardim migrants from Spain was followed by Jews from Sicily in 1493 and Portugal[63] in 1497, who were also forced to leave their homeland. The names of the synagogues founded in Thessaloniki from 1492 until the sixteenth century are a testament to the origins of the city's Jewish population. *Aragon* was built in 1492, *Guerush Sfarad*[64] in 1492, *Kastillia* in 1492, *Katallan Yashan* in 1492, *Kalabria Yashan* in 1497, *Sicilia Yashan* in 1497, *Katallan Haddash* during the fifteenth century, *Mayorka Sheni Yashan* in 1510 (Messinas, 1997). The existing Romaniotes were soon assimilated by the Spanish speaking Jewry who now constituted the majority and were agents of a "modernised", western way of life. Messinas (1997) notes that the old Romaniot community was numerically insignificant by comparison with the Jews from Spain. Yet frequent intermarriage resulted in assimilation and homogenisation of these populations. Gradually *Ladino* emerged as the common language and the Romaniotes were gradually incorporated into the large Spanish-Jewish groups.

The sixteenth century: a "golden age" for Thessalonikian Sepharadism

> Near the big Sea that surrounds the Ottoman shores God raised the mace of mercy and stopped the river of misery, people of Jacob! Thessaloniki is a faithful city. The exiled Jews come to find protection under its shade and are welcomed with warmth as if this city was our respectable mother, Jerusalem. This land is surrounded by many rivers. Her plants are wonderful and you cannot find such beautiful trees in the whole world. Her fruit is also special.(Samuel Usque, 1552 cited in Nehamas, *History of the Israelites of Thessaloniki*)

From the 15th century (from the time of the original settlement of Sephardic Jews), the Jewish population formed a significant part of the overall population in the Ottoman Empire. According to Molho (2001) Thessaloniki with a total of 4,863 households, had almost 2,645 Jewish households. Comparing them with the Muslim (1,219) and the Christian (989) households, it is evident that the Jews were the majority in the city of Thessaloniki, with the Muslims constituting the second largest population and the Christians the third. In other words, Thessaloniki was not always a Christian city and indeed, as some of my informants argued "this city was actually a Jewish city".

The sixteenth century is considered the golden era of Thessalonikian Jewry. Thanks to the well-organised administrative system the expelled Jewish populations from Spain, Italy and Portugal

[63] The King of Portugal, Emmanuel, followed the example of the Spanish Catholic King. In 1496, he ordered Portuguese Jews to convert to Christianity. At the end of 1497 Portuguese Jews followed the Spanish Jews into exile.

[64] This name literally means "expulsion from Spain".

enjoyed a period of economic and social prosperity The different Jewish groups of the city were centred around their synagogues and each of these communities enjoyed some degree of autonomy. The internal system of taxation[65] fostered the creation of charitable organisations for children and the poor and also of educational institutions. The establishment in 1520 of *Talmud Torah a Gadol* an important synagogue-school and home for orphans, is the outcome of this successful internal organisation. *Talmud Torah* served at the same time as a temple, school, charity home, poor home and administrative centre. The local Jewish boards organised their gatherings at *Talmud Torah.* The same institution approved or disapproved official edicts and *herem,* which means "public anathema" (Nehamas, 2000: 322).

During the sixteenth century Thessaloniki became a lively cultural and economic centre. Important and rich families of that time were those of the Bensussan, Nahmia and Benveniste. The first printing houses of the Balkans were established in this city after 1512. According to the traveller Belon du Mans (Chronika, 1984, special edition *Honour to Thessaloniki*) in 1548 the Spanish language "was spoken so well that no other language was used". The occupations of the Jewish population varied. The most important and profitable business was the production of woollen clothes mainly used by the army of the Sultan, the so-called *janissaries*. Textile production offered Thessalonikian Jews a period of prosperity.

From the end of the sixteenth century the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire affected the Jewish population of the city, especially their economic activities. The Empire became involved in numerous wars with its neighbours and the commerce of the port was diminished. The previously vast Ottoman Empire started to decline and new economic powers emerged in the world of commerce namely the Christian Greek-speaking populations and the Slavs in the east and also the English and Dutch in the west who had direct trade with India; these western countries started interfering in the economic life of the Empire. Other reasons for the decline of Jewish trade were the discovery of new sea routes and the decline of Venice with which Jewish merchants had had strong contacts. Cultural decline followed economic decline.

[65] Mainly these were property and profit taxes. There was also *aaraha* or *pecha* and *gabelles* which was taxation imposed on food items produced according to Kashrouth dietary laws. The Jewish community maintained a religious court *(Beit Din)* over which the Rabbi presided.

Venga el Maschiah, ma sea en nuestros dias
May the Messiah come, but in our lifetime
(Zografakis, 1984, *Sephardic Proverbs*)

The seventeenth century was an economically difficult period for the Ottoman Empire, a situation which saw the growth of messianism. Within this context of mysticism, Sabbatai Zvi, a young Rabbi from Izmir appeared in 1655 in Thessaloniki claiming that he was the Messiah and the saviour of Jewish people. His message caused turmoil and confusion among the Jewish communities of the city and the Ottomans condemned him to death. In order to avoid death Sabbatai converted to Islam. Following his example, 300 Jewish families of Thessaloniki converted to Islam as well. Thereafter they referred to themselves as *Ma'min (*plural *Maminim)* which meant faithful, but the rest of the city's Jews referred to them as *Donme,* which meant apostates.

Gradually, they adopted all Muslim habits and religious rules. So they attended the Mosques, avoided alcoholic drinks and sent pilgrims to Mecca. They also abandoned the Judaeo-Espagnol vernacular and preferred instead the use of the Turkish language (Dumont, 1979). Like all Muslims they were employed in the middle ranks of the civil service and they were also artisans, shoemakers, barbers, butchers and so on. Some of their educational institutions like *"Fevziye School"* – which Kemal Ataturk attended - acquired much fame. Many Turkish politicians - especially those involved in the Young Turk's movement - were *Donme* and it is believed that the family of Kemal was also *Donme*. Later in 1922, almost 15,000 Turkish-Jews were exchanged for Greek speaking populations of Turkey.

Although the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries were characterised by social and religious upheavals, certain economic activities of Thessalonikian Jewry remained alive. Svoronos (1996) argues that the privileges given by the Sultan the to the Jewish population rendered commercial activities easier. Although the Jews were still responsible for providing the Ottoman army with woollen clothes, they were subjected to a taxation system and they were gradually offered priority in buying the wool, an issue which always raised economic antagonism and tension with foreign merchants, like the French and Greek-Christians.

The nineteenth century: economic and cultural revival for Thessalonikian Jewry

Primavera en Salonico

Primavera en Salonico
Halli al café Maslum
Una nina de ojos pretos
Que canta y sona ud
No me manques, tu Fortuna,
Del café de Avram Maslum.
Tu quitas los muestros dertes,
Que cantas y sonas ud
El ud tomas en la mano
Con g ilves y con sacas
Los tus ojos relucientes
A mi me hacen quemar

Spring in Salonica

I found at Mazloum's café
A girl with dark eyes
Who was singing
While playing the lute
Oh Fortuna, please come
To Mazloum's café
It's you who take away our sorrows
Singing and playing the lute
You take the lute in your hands
With such airs and graces
Your bright eyes
Have set me on fire

(Sephardic popular song with Savina Ghianatou and the *Primavera en Salonico*)

The situation of the Thessalonikian Jews rapidly altered during the nineteenth century. In fact, the Jewish population in the city was exempt from heavy taxation and according to the Ottoman edicts

Gulhane Hatti Sherrif of 1856 and *Hatti Humayoun* in 1839[66] the equality of all the inhabitants of the Empire was recognised. Apart from the internal situation the trading contacts with Western countries became more frequent and as a consequence the Jews of the city were strongly influenced by the Western humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment. In 1860 a group of French Jews established the organisation *Alliance Israelite Universalle* in France. Its goal was to improve the social status of Jewish populations especially in areas of the Ottoman Empire. Its members, of whom there were soon some in Thessaloniki, emphasised the importance of education and therefore several educational institutions emerged in the city. Lessons were mainly given in French but the local vernacular (Judaeo-Spanish) was taught as well. The first *Alliance Israelite* school in Thessaloniki was inaugurated in 1873. Molho (2001) argues that between 1873 and 1904 the Alliance and the Jewish community founded more than nine schools in the city of Thessaloniki. Most of them gave training in a profession along with a general education. New ideas reformed the educational system and the separation of religious education from the secular reflected the general secularisation of Thessaloniki's Jewish society.

Educational reform was accompanied by a number of other changes in the city, leading to its overall modernisation. In 1880 the railway connecting Thessaloniki with Constantinople and Europe was inaugurated and in 1889 a new port was constructed. Other important transformations of the city into a modern urban centre included the redesign of the old districts and the widening of old, narrow streets. The installation of electricity and running water were also integral parts of the city's re-planning. Within this climate of "renewal" the Allatini family, a wealthy Jewish family from Italy, settled in Thessaloniki and established the first flour-mill. Other wealthy families were the Modiano, Fernandez and Mizrahi. The Modiano family introduced the first banking firms in the city. Families from Livorno -where a prosperous Jewish population could be found- came to Thessaloniki and monopolised the economic and cultural scene. As agents of western European economic innovations, those Livornian families helped the expansion of economic activities by founding modern banks and creating new industries.

Dumont (1979) argues that during this period Thessaloniki was in the process of change and modernisation, at the beginning of its industrialisation. All this economic transformation brought together an alteration in traditional professions and the emergence of a new economic elite, tradesmen and also new white-collar professions like brokers as well as an industrial proletariat with hundreds of porters, water carriers, donkey drivers and domestic servants. Thus the economic renovation of the

[66] With these two Imperial edicts all religious minorities were promised legal equality and thus, the separation of state affairs from religion was introduced.

society resulted in structural changes to the social strata. The local press also emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century. It is noticeable that the first Thessalonikian newspaper in 1864 was actually a Jewish newspaper, *"El Lunar"*. The press that followed was mainly in *Ladino* and French as the names indicate: "*La Epoca", "L'Indipendant", "Renacencia Judia", "La Esperanza"* and others. The articles in those newspapers were either written in *rashi*[67] or in Latin characters. It must be noted that the use of Judaeo-Espagnol helped the local vernacular to achieve popularity to a wider audience. Kandilakis (1998) argues that the Thessalonikian Jewish press was boosted by the Dreyfus affair[68] in France.

In the same century, in 1890, a large fire broke out in Thessaloniki. Until then the main Jewish neighbourhoods had been found in the centre and near the port where the major economic activities of the city were taking place. Two new settlements were built for the needs of fire victims namely, *Baron de Hirsh* towards the western section and *Kalamaria* towards the east. According to the Ottoman tax archives (cited in Molho, 1994) seventeen Jewish neighbourhoods with Spanish and Turkish names could be found at the time: *Kaldigro (Kal de los Gregos)*, *Poulia (Apulia)*, *Baru (Baruth)*, *Badaron (Beit Aron)*, *Kulhan*, *Etz Haim, Aguda, Levije, Malta* were all Spanish while the districts of *Djedide, Tophane, Findik, Kadi, Salhane* and *Yeni Havlu* had Turkish names. There were one hundred synagogues in these neighbourhoods and thirty-two of them also functioned as parochial centres.

The end of the nineteenth century, especially the period between 1850 and 1918, is considered the Jewish *renaissance,* the era of spiritual, economic and social renewal that was the result of a fundamental "modernisation" of the educational system. However this change brought tensions and conflict between the conservative rabbinate and the more secular persons that tried to take over (Molho, 1994). The early twentieth century found the whole Balkan area in a great upheaval in which the local Balkan groups turned against the Ottoman Empire and struggled to gain independence. Yet within this climate of ethnic emancipation the Jews of Thessaloniki remained neutral.

At the dawn of the twentieth century

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century nationalist ideologies had already emerged among the Balkan populations. Christian Serbia was the first to turn against the

[67] Rashi letters are Hebrew characters used for the Judaeo-Spanish language.

[68] The Dreyfus affair took place in France in the 19th century. Dreyfus was an officer of the French army who was accused of betrayal. This case boosted a general anti-Semitic climate in the whole of Europe but at the same time it helped the emergence of an organised Jewish consciousness. For a further discussion see the article by Schnapper, 1994 in *Jewish Identities in the New Europe.*

Ottoman Empire and to claim independence between 1804 and 1817. The Greeks followed in 1821. By 1830 there was a small Greek state supported for various reasons by the great powers, Britain, Russia and France. Yet this small state had a foreign-imposed monarchy and financial debts to the European Powers which were contributing to its liberation (Loizos, 1999). The overall intention of the European powers was to create a political climate for the consolidation of different national formations in the area. The Ottoman Empire was gradually losing its territories and the newly born Balkan nations enhanced their efforts for its further partition.

The area of Macedonia often became the locus of ethnic conflicts and confrontations. This was the case for the city of Thessaloniki as well, because it was a significant port that all ethnic groups, the Greeks, the Bulgarians and the Slavs, wanted to incorporate in their future "homogeneous" territorial formations. Within this context of emerging nationalisms the Ottoman Empire reacted to recover its losses. In 1908 the revolution of the Young Turks erupted in Thessaloniki and Sultan Abdul Hamitt was overthrown. The Young Turks announced to the populations of the city that they considered all groups to be equal. The climate that was created was one of enthusiasm and general optimism. From the beginning the Jewish-Turkish population *(Donme)* took the side of the revolutionaries. Many members of the Spanish speaking Jewish community also supported the movement.

A year later, in 1909, the first socialist federation was created by three important Jewish figures: Avraam Benaroya, Albert Dassa and Albert Arditi. *Federacion Socialista Laboradera* (in the local idiom) was the first syndicalist union of the Ottoman Empire. According to press sources the newspapers that covered the activities of *Federacion* were: "*Journal del Laborador"* (Journal of the Worker) followed by "*Solidaridar Ouvradera"* (Working solidarity) and "*Avanti"* (Forward). *Federacion* managed to incorporate more than 6,000 workers and it gradually became – after several alliances with other Balkan parties - the most important political organisation of the Balkan area during the Ottoman era (Frezis, 1994: 370-71).

It is generally accepted (Kitromilides, 1989, Kofos, 1989) that the first decade of the twentieth century was a period of conflicting national ideologies that had emerged earlier in the nineteenth century. There were widespread armed conflicts, for example the Greeks against Bulgarians, Bulgarians against the Serbs, Romanian-oriented Vlachs against the Greeks. The "Macedonian Struggle", which lasted between 1903 and 1908, undermined Turkish authority in the area but it was mainly a struggle among the Christian populations of the area in order to incorporate it into their newly born states. Therefore the Balkan Wars that followed between 1912-13 were only the confirmation that

Turks were no longer the superior power in Macedonia. National ideologies gradually acquired their central place in the long process of nation-state building.

The beginning of the twentieth century was also marked by the emergence of organised class-consciousness. Influenced by the political awareness of the time the middle class and the working class people began to state their boundaries more clearly. Not only did occupational and trade unions appear but also several cultural organisations, which promoted different ethnic identities. The union *Macabee* was initially a sports club but gradually became a kind of "brotherhood" for young Jews. Molho (1994) argues that between 1919-1924 the Zionist[69] movement in Thessaloniki found some appeal and as a result many Zionist unions were created and ten Zionist newspapers were circulated. Yet this movement was not extremely popular in the multicultural society of Thessaloniki.

Thessaloniki during and after the Balkan Wars

> After concluding various treaties of alliance and defensive parts, the four Balkan states - Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro - launched an offensive against the Ottomans in the Balkans…Bulgaria's reluctance to co-co-operate with Greece, Serbia and Romania over the decision of Macedonia was the cause of the second Balkan War…Now Greece occupied a central position, both in the network of relations in the Balkans and in the European balance of political and military power.
>
> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, *Service of Historical archives,* 1999: 22).

In October 1912 the Greek army entered Thessaloniki and proclaimed its liberation. On the 30th of May the following year Greece and Serbia signed a treaty of mutual friendship and defence which established the borders between the two countries and guaranteed the sovereignty of their territorial acquisitions. Bulgaria did not accept this territorial agreement and attacked both Serbia and Greece but the treaty of Bucharest put an end to the second Balkan War. According to this treaty, which was signed on 10th August 1913, Thessaloniki was officially granted to the Greek state. The Jewish community of the city generally accepted the recently imposed Greek rule. King George of Greece announced that all the city's ethnic and religious groups would enjoy equal political rights. One of the

[69] The Zionist ideology propagated the creation of a Jewish nation-state. Thus it was a philosophy of national emancipation forged by a Central Zionist Organization. The contact between the CZO and the Community in Thessaloniki started after 1912 (Molho, 2005).

major concerns of the Jewish people in the city was the economic fate of the Thessalonikian port. The position of the prosperous Jewish community which actively participated in most economic activities of the city was of major importance for the stability of the Greek rule. For this reason the Prime Minister of Greece, Eleutherios Venizelos, initially adopted a pro-Jewish approach. But overall the political ideas he stood for implied a strong nationalist ideology *Megali Idea* (Big Idea)[70] and this reality made many Jews sceptical. In 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War Venizelos proposed the entrance of Greece in the War but the King proposed neutrality. The Jewish community of Thessaloniki favoured neutrality so when Greece finally entered the War - after a series of internal divisions and disputes - the Community refused to support Venizelos at the elections. In June 1917 the King resigned and Venizelos returned to Athens as the Prime Minister of the united Greece.

The Great Fire

El incedio de Salonica
Dia de Shabbat la tarde
La horica dando dos
Huego salio a l'Agua Mueva
A Beyaz Kule quedo
Tanto proves como ricos
Todos semos un igual
Ya quedimos arrastando
Por campos y por kishlas
Mos dieron unos chadires
Que del aire se bolan
Mos dieron pan amargo
Ni can agua no se va
Mos estamos sikleando
Mos vamos ande el Ingles
Por tres grushicos al dia
Y pan para comer
Dio del cielo, Dio del cielo
No topates que fazer

[70] The term is translated "Big Idea" and it was the political program of a large, united Greece. For an interesting analysis see *The "Model Kingdom" and the Great Idea* (Skopetea, 1988, in Greek).

Mos deshates arrastando
Ni camiza para meter

The Fire in Thessaloniki
Late one Saturday evening
It was about two o'clock
When a big fire started at (the quarter of) New Water
Up to the White Tower
So rich and poor
Became one
And were left
In the fields and in the camps
They gave us some tents
That cannot stand the wind
They gave us bitter bread
That cannot be swallowed even with water
We complain
And we go to the Englishman
Only with three piastre
To give us some bread
Lord of the sky, lord of the sky
Didn't you have anything else to do?
You left us in our misery
Without even having a shirt (to wear)
(Judaeo-Spanish song of Thessaloniki with David Saltiel)

On 5th August 1917 a great fire, which lasted thirty-two hours, destroyed three quarters of the entire city and left more than 70,000 people homeless, of whom more than 50.00 were Jewish. The destruction of the Jewish quarters and main buildings was almost total. It is estimated that thirty-five out of thirty seven synagogues were burnt down along with ten of the thirteen schools, all the libraries, the *Talmud Torah* (a central synagogue and rabbinical school), the community's administrative offices and the chief Rabbinate. To meet the extensive needs of the fire victims three new quarters were created: District 151, Campbell and District Six (Hastaoglou-Martinidis, 1997 and Molho, 1994).

This fire created an opportunity for the government of Venizelos to expropriate the destroyed part of the city which was mainly owned by Jews. In the place of the old houses the first block of flats made from cement were constructed. A social and occupational division of the city's quarters began to emerge. The old Christian, Jewish or Muslim neighbourhoods gradually gave way to working, middle and upper class city quarters. Thessaloniki was slowly transformed into a more controlled, civil space where class rather than ethnic origins defined the dividing lines. Yerolympos (1997) argues that as far as the urban space was concerned the twentieth century city was moving towards homogenisation. The fire of 1917 was an excellent opportunity to re-structure urban space according to the national project of homogenisation.

The Jewish population in the city of Thessaloniki remained significant during 19th and early 20th centuries. According to table 11, in 1884 the Jews were 48,000 in a population of 48,000, and in 1902 they were 62,000 out of a population of 126,000. In 1912, when Thessaloniki became a city of Greece, there were 70,000 out of a total of 125,000, i.e. they constituted a percentage of 56% of the population.

Table 11: The Jews in Thessaloniki, 1884-1912 according to the Community's own statistics

	Year	**Jews**	**Total population**	**Jews (%)**
D. Levy I	1884	48,000	85,000	65,5
D. Levy II	1902	62,000	126,000	49,2
The Community	1912	70,000	125,000	56,0

(source: R. Molho, 2001: 40)

Table 12: Jewish census of the population in Thessaloniki 1917
<u>Guide de Salonique</u>

	1917
Jews	80,000
Muslims	20,000
Greeks	40,000
Other	10,000
Total	150,000

(Source: R. Molho, 2001: 45)

Whereas tables 11 and 12 utilise figures collected by the Community in Thessaloniki, the following two tables (13, 14) show the official Greek census figures for similar periods.

Table 13: Greek figures for Macedonia and Thessaloniki between 1904-1916

	Macedonia		Thessaloniki	
	1904	**1910**	**1913**	**1916**
Jews	53,147	88,000	61,439	61,400
Muslims	634,017	621,000	45,889	30,000
Greeks	652,795	660,000	39,956	68,205
Other	384,859	336,000	10,605	6,100
Total	1,724,818	1,705,000	157,889	165,705

(Source, R. Molho, 2001: 43)

Table 14: Percentages of different religious groups in Macedonia and Thessaloniki between 1904 and 1916, according to Greek statistics:

	Macedonia		Thessaloniki	
	1904	**1910**	**1913**	**1916**
Jews	3.1%	5.2%	38.9%	37.1%
Muslims	36.8%	36.4%	29.1%	18.1%
Greeks	37.8%	38.7%	25.3%	41.2%
Other	22.3%	19.7%	6.7%	3.7%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

(Source: R. Molho, 2001: 43)

The variation of figures in tables 11, 12, 13 and 14 is remarkable. According to the Community's own statistics in 1912 there were 70,000 Jews and the total population in Thessaloniki was 125,000 (a percentage of 56.0%). According to the Greek statistics a year later, in 1913 there were 61,439 (a percentage of 38.9%) in a population of 157,889. According to a Jewish census (*Guide de Salonique*) in 1917 in a population of 150,000 there were 80,000 Thessalonikian Jews and 40,000 Thessalonikian Greeks. Yet according to Greek statistics a year earlier, in 1916, there were only 61,400 (37.1%) whereas the Greeks of the city were 68,205 (41.2%). In order to understand these inconsistencies we

have to consider which authority conducted the research and the "political" ends behind every project. Thus the statistics of the Community and other Jewish statistics give a much higher percentage of Jews living in Thessaloniki (tables 11 and 12) whereas the Greek authorities (after the incorporation of the city in Greece) give a much lower percentage and deliberately set out to diminish Jewish presence (tables 13, 14). Thus these different tables must be read with caution and taking into account the historical context of the time.

The Asia Minor "disaster"

Eleutherios Venizelos and his party expressed the idea of a big united Greece, *Megali idea*, which would consist of all territories occupied by Greek-speaking populations. In accordance with this idea he tried to incorporate into the Greek nation-state the Asia Minor shores which belonged to the Ottoman Empire. On 26th of August 1922 Kemal Ataturk - the head of the Turkish army - managed a counter attack. Greece was defeated and Smyrna was burnt. On the 20th of November 1922 at the Lausanne Conference the Turkish claims on Asia Minor were officially recognised.

> The treaty of Lausanne ceded to Turkey all territory held by Greece in Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace… In effect, Greece failed to fulfil the national claims which had been satisfied by the treaty of Sevres (10th August 1920). In Lausanne Greece lost precisely what it had gained at Sevres.
>
> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Service of *Historical Archives,* 1999: 121).

As a consequence, a compulsory exchange of populations followed in 1923. It is estimated that more than 10,000 refugees from Asia Minor settled in Thessaloniki whereas the Turkish and the Donme population of the city were expelled to Turkey. This exchange drastically changed the composition of the city's population; Thessaloniki was now not only officially Greek but the majority of the population was Greek-speaking as well. Although the Jewish population was almost 70,000 these people instantly became a minority group. Several laws forced Hellenisation, such as the abolition of the Saturday holiday in 1924 and its replacement by Sunday and the compulsory introduction of the Greek language in primary education. In addition, Venizelos attempted to move the Jewish cemetery[71] but this caused strong reactions and the original plan was abandoned. Nevertheless, the friction between the Jewish and

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[71] This stood were the Aristotle University now stands. See Salem (2001).

the Greek populations of the city had become a reality. The arrival of refugees from Asia Minor caused further social and economic upheaval in the city. Unemployment reached a peak and the wave of refugees had no alternative but to live in poor conditions. The situation in Thessaloniki was also characterised by insecurity and antagonism. Within this climate the first fascist organisations encouraging the need for "ethnic cleansing" gradually emerged. Anti-semitic organisations, like *Εθνική Ένωσις Ελλάς,*[72] were held responsible for setting fire to the Jewish quarter of Campbell in 1931. The Jewish community was an easy target because the Jews belonged not only to a different religion but many of them supported the socialist, left wing ideas of the *Federacion.* The EEE was founded in 1927 and in 1931 the "National Union of Students" *(Εθνική Παμφοιτητική Ένωσις)* distributed leaflets accusing the Jewish population of having a "negative position with respect to national issues". The same day *EEE* attacked the offices of the Jewish club *Macabee* and assaulted its vice-president (Frezis, 1994: 385-6).

As a result of the anti-semitic climate during that decade and especially between 1932-34 thousands of Jews migrated to the land of Palestine and thus escaped the terrifying consequences of the Second World War. But still in 1935 Thessaloniki had a population of 52,000 Jews who maintained sixteen synagogues, twenty primary schools and a number of charitable institutions especially for the feeding of orphans and poor children. Two French newspapers *"L' Indipendent"* and *"Progress"* and two Judaeo-Spanish *"Accion"* and *"Messangero"* were published by the Jewish press. In 1936 after a series of strikes and inner upheavals the military dictatorship of Metaxas was imposed on the Greek state. This regime lasted until shortly before the German invasion in 1941. Metaxas held an ambivalent position towards Jews: although he declared all the anti-semitic organisations like the *EEE* illegal, he nevertheless excluded Jews from the youth organisations of his own party *(EON).*[73] Metaxas introduced compulsory methods for the linguistic and cultural assimilation of the Slavo-Macedonian speakers into the Greek nation-state. His pivotal aim was to promote Orthodox Christianity and the homogeneity of the Greek people. Thus discriminatory policies were adopted against all ethnic or religious minority groups.

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[72] The name means "National Union Hellas". The EEE influenced by the national movement in Germany, incorporated during the 1930s many members of the Thessalonikian society. This movement gradually became a kind of para-military organisation and a group with its own nationalistic anthem and flag (Byzantine emblem). The EEE, with the permission of the local administration participated in national celebrations and parades.

[73] EON stood for National Organisation of Youth.

The Second World War

> Without realising it the sheltered and protected life we enjoyed among our families started to change. First the War and then…I was only fourteen year old when suddenly the War started…"
>
> (video- documentary, *The Jews of Thessaloniki*)

On the 28th October 1940 the Italian-Greek War began and many Thessalonikian Jews fought for Greece in Albania. One year later in 1941 the Germans entered Thessaloniki. During the first months of the German occupation no specific action was taken against the Jewish population of the city. But gradually the foreign rulers managed to isolate and terrify the Jewish citizens through occasional assassinations, their sequestration into only five quarters of the city and the systematic destruction of all the libraries and other community property. In July 1942 all Jewish men aged between eighteen and forty-five were forced to present themselves at *Πλατεία Ελευθερίας* (Square of Freedom). It is estimated that after personal humiliation and torture at the Square more than 9,000 Jewish men were sent as workers to the German corporation Muller which was supposed to build roads and airports throughout Greece. Without the community's permission a few months later the Germans destroyed the ancient Jewish cemetery and used the gravestones as building material.

But the most fearful signs appeared in February 1943 when Hitler's representatives, namely Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner, came to Thessaloniki to organise the transportation of the Jewish population. The Jews were obliged to wear the Star of David and the same sign was made to appear on the front of houses and shops owned by Jews. Jewish people were not allowed to use any means of public transportation, to walk in the streets between 5pm and 7am or to make use of public phones. All Jewish property was recorded and eventually sold. The quarter of Baron Hirsch was transformed into a ghetto area and all Jewish families were forced to move there. The physical and social isolation of the Jewish population had been achieved within a few months.

On the 17th of March 1943, Rabbi Koretz announced at the synagogue the transportation of his people to Krakow in order to work there. The sources hold contradictory views[74] about his role in the compulsory displacement of Thessalonikian Jews. This finally began on the 15th of March of 1943 and was carried out in six convoys with around 3,000 souls in each. By August of 1943 transportation of

[74] Nehamas (2000) argues that he did collaborate with the Germans and betrayed his people: he encouraged Thessalonikian Jews to go to the camps although he knew already that they were death camps. Lewkowicz (1999, 2000) stresses that it is not so clear whether he really collaborated with the Germans or he was misguided himself. Yet most Thessalonikian Jews believe that he was a "traitor".

which three included workers for the Muller Corporation, had been completed. People were allowed to take with them only one suitcase and had to leave all their other belongings behind. The real destination was not working camps but the death camps of Auschwitz, Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen:

> They told us to put our things down, they were supposed to be given to us later. And the suitcases formed a small mountain in front of the train. Suddenly a suitcase opened and when it fell off the wagon the contents were spread all over. I remember I saw many photographs spreading here and there. The Germans, screaming as usual, stepped over the photographs with their boots. It was as if at the same time they were trying to kill the human beings in those photographs (Kounio-Amarilio, 1996: 68).

Of the approximately 60,000 Thessalonikian Jews that were sent to the concentration camps during the Second World War less than 2,000 returned to Greece.

What follows is part of a long life-history of an old Salonican Jewess born in 1924 which reminds us that history and what more the history of the 20th century Salonican Jewry was strogly affected by class divisions. In her story what is interesting is that there was not “a Jewish community” in the city in the sense that there were many Jewish communities and many people who belonged to different social and economic classes. This old woman's account in a way represents the upper class Salonican Jews and thus her narrative gives an account both of the lives of pre-War upper class Jews but also of the transition that the city itself experienced between modernity and traditionality. The upper class Salonican Jewry seemed at that time to be the agent of a more Europeanised and westernised lifestyle:

> My paternal grandmother was wearing traditional costumes but maternal grandmother Doudou used to dress herself exactly the way women used to get dressed in Europe, she was also wearing big huts with feathers. Diamante was still wearing the traditional Jewish costume with the kofya, the covering for the head, when I met her but after some time she took it off.

Class was also affecting people’s religiosity since the poor Jews were much more devoted to religion but rich Jews in many cases followed a more cosmic life, filled with westernised life-style habits, such as playing cards:

> My grandmother was not religious par excellence, well somehow she kept religious things done and she used to go to the synagogue. But she loved to play cards, a card game called ramie. She had some friends in the neighborhood and they gathered together and played cards. Once a week they used to come home and then they visited other homes. Those who played the cards were Jewish

> because my grandmother did not have any Christian friends as she could not communicate with them, she could not understand their language. In front of our house a family named Cases who were very rich used to invite my grandmother to play the cards. Everyday at about four until eight I remember my granny left home, she waited until my father had left for his work and she went to the Cases family to play cards. She used to go with all kinds of weather: she waited until my father left and then she rushed to that house.

This woman's memories fit well into this "tradition or modernity" dilemma that seemed to be central in the early 20th century Thessaloniki: She was born in a good family, followed the fashion of the time and of course spoke French fluently:

> My mother Loucie was born in 1885 in Thessaloniki and died in 1995 when she was 100 years in Athens. Her mother tongue was French because she had attended a French school but she could also understand Ladino. None knew Hebrew at that time they only read the Bible but they could not understand anything. Our languages were Ladino and French. So my mother attended the French school and this school was located in the market of the city. My mother was a fashion victim. She used to wear hats and every year she went to dressmaker to make new dresses but she also transformed the old ones, this was called in French "transforme". My mom always kept up with fashion and when she was a young woman used to wear little hats with veil. She used to wear costumes. She was really a modern woman. Special shops were selling hats so every year my mother was buying one or two and she transformed the old ones. Of course the new ones were also made on women. There was a shop selling hats in 25th March Street, which was near our house. At that time some dressmakers were really expensive but you could also find cheap ones who were paid for a day's work. Doudou Sounhami was one of the most famous dressmakers at that time. She was a fashion follower and Paximada was also a very famous dressmaker. Although she was Christian many Jewish women used to go to her. Those two were the most expensive in that profession and there were also others who were less expensive. And then some dressmakers were visiting women at home. Koen's shop was a famous shop, which was selling shoes, and it was situated in Venizelos Street. There were some stores, which were selling shoes, but they had to measure your feet. This is how they worked. And they made shoes especially for you. After the War I remember "Karakala" and "Loux". But before the War the only shoe-selling store in Thessaloniki was "Koen" situated in Venizelos and Vasileos Irakleiou Street. We always had a piano at home. And my mother used to play. At that time all the girls coming from good and respectable families learned French and how to play the piano. It is funny. Playing the piano, especially among girls was a tradition. The first book in order to get the first degree "Becker" was really difficult because we had to start at the age of eight. I remember my mother was playing only

one melody. Always the same. But you know many girls who learned the piano gave up after some time. I had a cousin who had a piano degree and she closed it immediately after she got married. Maybe they oppressed them to learn it this is why they eventually disliked it.

In what follows the old lady recalls all Jewish neighbourhoods before the War. In her narration it is interesting to note that city space is hardly neutral. On the contrary it is filtered by class perceptions. For my interviewee the end of the historical market signalized the end of the city and marked the boundary of an unknown, different, unexplored city: the poor districts -predominantly Jewish- in the Vardar area:

> Before the War Thessaloniki was full of Jewish neighborhoods. Especially where I live now in Vasilissis Olgas street. Our neighborhood was a mixed one, both Jews and Christians lived. Poor Jewish neighborhoods were supported by the Community; we called them in Ladino koulivas, meaning very poor huts. Palombita, a Jewish-Spanish mate we used to have lived in such a poor area. She was a young girl and her fiancé was named Mascista, he was also Jewish-Spanish. His job was to visit local festivals in the periphery and make shows with his strength. For example he was breaking chains and stuff like that. I remember once that Palombita sent him away he came in the middle of the night, and he was shouting at our doorsteps: "Palombita te cero". I remember when we were young we never visited the Vardar area; this was a neighborhood with a very bad reputation. Rezi Vardar was a Jewish neighborhood that was built near the railway station. I think the Community supported it as well as two other impoverished neighborhoods: "Ses" and "151". In the Vardar area one could find all that houses with the red light. I suppose ordinary people were also inhabitants of that area but I knew nothing about them. For my friends and me the city ended in Venizelos street where my uncle, the husband of my mother's sister had a shop with textiles called "Cosmos". This was the geographical limit for us…

A closer analysis to life histories can lead to a re-reading of identities and belonging and reveal the constant interplay between the local and the personal. Past conditions and past experiences can be also re-thought via a number of parameters such as gender or class. Because there is not just one history but a number of diverse historical interpretations depending on individuality and human agency. The past and the present dialectic touches the fundamental relationship between history and the community. To a great extent it can reveal reveals the social and economic divisions through which the past is brought into the present. After all it is not to be forgotten that the community writes and presents but also consumes its own version of history and people create and solidify the Self and sharpen their divisions

with the Others. And yet the Other can belong to "the same community" as in the case of other social and economic groups in the 20th century Thessaloniki.

After their return…

> While walking in the neighbourhoods that once used to be full of Jews I realised that now I knew nobody. I went to find the houses of my old friends Dorin, Main, Rita, but it was as if they had never been there. Some unknown people were living in them who didn't seem to know anything about the previous owners. The absence of my aunts, uncles and cousins who existed no more was so unbearable. Just from my family twenty two members had been lost… I felt like I had to talk about them, to explain what had really happened during the last three years. I felt like telling humanity that they should know what had happened so that it could not happen again. But I could see in people's eyes the denial. They didn't want to listen because they could not believe that what we went through was real. I could see the doubt in their eyes. They would certainly assume that I was almost insane..." (Kounio-Amarilio, 1996: 157)

In December 1944 the survivors came back to Thessaloniki. Many of them migrated to other Greek cities[75] or to Palestine. Thessaloniki was a destroyed city and most Jews found no homes or workshops on their return. They had either been bombarded by Germans or were now under Greek ownership. Loizos (1999) notes that those who returned engaged in a long struggle to regain private and communal assets. The Greek population who came to Thessaloniki after the War occupied homes and shops that had previously belonged to the Jews. So when the Jews arrived they had nowhere to stay and they were sheltered in communal housing and given food by relief agencies.[76] After seventeen months only 5% of Jews had gained back their houses (Molho, 1994). But most cases of ownership were settled only after the Civil War. The recreation of destroyed social and family networks was among the priorities of the Holocaust survivors. Group marriages took place at the synagogue and they were followed by a mini baby boom. Between 1945 and 1947 thirty-nine marriages took place and between 1945 and 1951 402 births were registered in the Jewish community of Thessaloniki (Lewkowicz, 1999). An old informant described to me her marriage in those difficult years but also her effort to create a new life from scratch in a city that was now in reality a "new" city, a city whose character and population had changed drastically:

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[75] Many Jews who returned from the camps settled in Athens. Thus nowadays they number almost 3,000 and they have a school, synagogue and a museum.

[76] Such agencies were the American Joint Distribution Committee, the Conference for Jewish Material claims against Germany and the Jewish Agency.

My cousin introduced me my future husband in 1948. Our acquaintance was short. We used to discuss about everything to see if our ideas matched. I was trying to understand his personality but I must say that he was an honest man brought up with morals. I had heard about him that he was honest and very capable. My mother's sister had married someone from his family so I already knew a few things. And I remember my aunt saying: "He is the most capable, clever and nice in this family". At that time we were going through brain washing: "You have to get married". This was a common mentality at the time; I mean to get married at a certain age. I think that my future husband was not really thinking about getting married but his mother was saying to him: "What is going to happen? You have to get married, I cannot take care anymore of you". It was a kind of brain washing. Our parents forced us to get committed but we were answering them: "We have a nice time together. We' ll see". But they insisted that we should get engaged. At that time especially with arranged love affairs after a short time you had to say whether you wanted to go on or not. So after all this pressure we finally got engaged. And we got married on a Sunday on the sixth of March 1949 in the big Synagogue and the same day the future mother in law of my daughter got married. A lot of marriages were happening then. I mean after the liberation, a lot of group marriages. During the first years of our marriage we stayed at my mother's in law house. Then after some years we exchanged it for a flat. This house was like the old houses: semi-basement, first and second floor. It was a beautiful house with a big corridor leading to the rooms. This house had a garden as well with flowers and many trees. During the first years after our wedding we lived all together: I mean my husband and I together with his brother's family and his mother. And we stayed at my mother's in law house since we did not have enough money to live alone. Anyway this house was quite big and one room was where my husband's brother his wife and his child lived in one room. My husband and I lived in another room. Of course my mother in law had a room for herself. We lived all together for four years. Certainly we did not have the money to live on our own so we decided to live all together and share the expenses. The rest of the house did not belong to us because other people lived. You know after the War you could not send away those people who had found shelter in your own house. This was a very traumatic experience: having a house but not being in a position to use it exclusively for your family. This was called "enoikiostasio" and was a common practice after the War. And those people were living in our house without paying any rent to us and we could not kick them out. In some cases they were paying a ridiculous amount of money. This was going on for many years after the War and the house prices had fallen down because at that time none bought a house since there was no money. In that house my mother in law cooked. At that time you could not manage all the housework, it was really heavy. I remember there was no electricity and we had to use coals. Of course in our case there were so many people and therefore there was so much housework to be

> done. In the meanwhile my sister in law who already had a boy delivered twins so she had three children to look after. After two years of living together I got pregnant so things were getting more and more difficult. Here in Thessaloniki everything started from zero and we really had to start from scratch. After the War there was nothing. There was not an organized Community in the sense that there is one today and none kept kosher. Before the War many butcher-shops were selling kosher meat and the Christians used to buy this kind of meat. But keeping kosher was not feasible anymore because there were no butcher-shops or bakeries for Jews. Nothing...

After the War was over[77] the left wing forces which had contributed significantly to the resistance against the Germans engaged in a struggle with the conservative forces. Thus the clash between the conservatives and the radical, left wing turned into a major Civil War which lasted from 1946 until 1949. In this period a clear anticommunist climate was cultivated and the communist party was outlawed and forced to operate outside Greece.

> But I must tell you we felt like paralyzed during the Civil War because we did not know what was going to happen. In Thessaloniki communists were in charge of the city. In Athens things were different, we managed to get rid of them. There was still this feeling of uncertainty. All that time even when I got married and returned to Thessaloniki in 1950-51 we still felt this danger that the Russians would come and take over Greece, which would eventually become a communist country. This rumor was in the air for many years. Even when I got married in 1949. We were afraid that the Russians would take over Greece. We had the feeling that this would happen anytime. This was the climate of the Cold War. And the guerrillas of EAM had taken over Thessaloniki. My mother's sisters were so much affected by this political uncertainty that they decided to leave Thessaloniki and go to Mexico. They were already married with two brothers and they all went to Mexico.

Those who had survived the Holocaust were forced by the Greek government to join the Civil War. A sense of bitterness about this treatment by the Greek state is evident even today in people's words:

> How could they send my husband to fight during the Civil War? He had just returned from the nightmare of the death camps. Tell me was there any logic at all in this decision? I had met my husband in the concentration camp and we had both escaped death. But as soon as we came back

[77] *After The War Was Over* (Mazower, 2000) is the title of a very interesting book concerning the Civil War in Greece and its consequences for the family nation and state in Greece.

> he was forced to put his life at risk once more. I wanted to marry him before he left but my father insisted that we get married when and if he came back. You can't imagine what I went through...

This anticommunist climate remained unchanged until the 1960s and in 1967 a military dictatorship, the so-called Junta, was imposed. The Junta which governed for seven years until 1974 intensified the persecution of communists and promoted the Orthodox Christian faith as the only religion of the Greek people.[78] Yet Lewkowicz (1999) argues that Thessalonikian Jews did not perceive the Junta years as a threat. Some of her informants stressed that the leadership change in the community was positive.[79] The inability of the military regime to cope with the crisis that broke out in Cyprus - with the overthrow of President Makarios and the invasion of the island by the Turks - led to its collapse in 1974. Democracy was restored again and a government of social unity took charge led by Prime Minister Karamanlis. The political scene altered drastically in 1981 when the socialist party of PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist movement) won the elections. Generally, the socialist government tried to maintain a high social and populist profile. In this climate several "modernisation" measures were introduced such as the introduction of civil marriages in 1981. In the same year Greece entered the European Community as its tenth member.

Thus from the last decade of the nineteenth century Greece and the whole Balkan area had experienced serious tensions and political antagonisms. One hundred years later, political confrontations were still in evidence. In 1992, Greece engaged in a long political struggle with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M.) for the latter state's name, while in 1999 a civil war in the area of former Yugoslavia broke out and in 2001 the ethnic Albanians of F.Y.R.O.M engaged in a military struggle against the Serbian government of the country in their attempt to gain equal political, constitutional and social rights. During the same period a massive wave of refugees from the Balkans and ex-Russian territory, settled in Greece and especially in northern cities and Thessaloniki. Thus, the wider area of Macedonia has experienced in the past but continues to experience in the present a series of conflicts, tensions and antagonisms that resulted in shifting identities and loyalties and a constant flux of local populations.

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[78] A famous slogan of this regime was *Patris, Thriskia, Oikogeneia* which means Homeland, Religion and Family.

[79] However drastic measures were taken: the Rabbinical council was abolished and the official language of the Community changed from *Ladino* to Greek.

So far I have tried to give a brief account of the historical changes that Thessalonikian Jewry has experienced over time. The time span is very wide, ranging from the Hellenistic times until the very last decades in the history of the Greek nation-state. In this historical account my endeavour has been to assess the changes that they have been exposed to and analyse their responses. I have argued that these historic changes were the outcome of historic blends and interactions between the ethnically diverse populations of Thessaloniki. Thus, there is not one version of history but several counter-histories which inevitably include the histories of all populations. The deconstruction of national of else official history and its breakdown into several other histories underlines the fact that minorities do not exist in a historical or political vacuum but they have been created by historic processes and specific political conditions. Nowadays there is only a small number of Thessalonikian Jews but it was not always so. The formation of the Greek nation-state and its endeavours to achieve national homogenisation have contributed to the numerical reduction of this community. This has other implications as well: the Jewish people and their community shift in contemporary Thessaloniki between social visibility and invisibility. However, they assert their presence, mobilise certain aspects of their identities and develop different and -at times- quite idiosyncratic life strategies.

Chapter Four

Food and Jewish families in Thessaloniki

> Informant: The topic of food is really interesting. Unfortunately there is no kosher restaurant in Thessaloniki. But we can find in the market kosher meat, cheese and sweets.
> Researcher: Oh, I didn't know about that.
> Informant*:* And anyway we keep our food traditions at home. The role of the family is very important in preserving Jewish history and religion. This is why we have a distinct cuisine. A lot of celebrations are performed at home by the family. Family was always a pole of attraction for us. And we always ask the older people how they used to celebrate High Holy Days and what they cooked. Because it is important to know. You know every Pessah I cook more and more. I try to find some free time. I feel increasingly "responsible" for the preservation of our tradition. (notes from my field- diary)

> *En casa yena presto se giza la cena*
> In a home where you can find everything dinner is prepared on time" (Zografakis, 1984)

This chapter is an exploration of the relationship between food and families. It is argued that preparing, serving, eating and talking about food are ongoing processes by which individuals create and recreate family boundaries. However, the topic of food and families proved rather complex and raised a number of issues like parenthood and upbringing, motherhood, "proper food" and the connection between ritual and everyday cooking. The exploration of such topics leads to the conclusion that "family" is not a bounded entity but a dynamic institution created and recreated by activities that take place in it - cooking and eating among them- and inevitably involve alteration and change. And yet change was often produced by conflicts and tensions; in this case the opposed views of men and women and of older and younger people concerning the consumption of food within Jewish families in Thessaloniki. Thus for women cooking was not only a source of pleasure but a time-consuming duty whereas for men the same activity was perceived as a hobby and a leisure pursuit. In addition, the younger generation of Thessalonikian Jews experienced differently the boundaries of the familial and challenged the ideas of their parents and grandparents. In the course of the analysis their reluctance to associate themselves either with a Sephardic past or with a distinct cultural present is presented and assessed.

Making families

It is well documented that the size and the form of the family have not been static but the subject of several historic transformations. This institution appears to be a set of relationships that experience shifts over time. Families are characterised by dynamism and power relations that inevitably lead to the construction and reconstruction of their boundaries. Therefore families should be approached as processes daily negotiated by individuals and inevitably involved in consensus, conflict and transformation. In this light Shorter (1975) discusses the making of the modern family in the West and consequently the rise of the nuclear family. He tries to account for the rise in domesticity in Western Europe, mainly in France, and argues that its development first took form among the bourgeoisie. In his study he argues that the nuclear family is a recent family type with strong emotional attachments between parents and children. But it was not always so: during the Middle Ages the size and the form of the family were totally different and much more dependent on the local community whereas the experienced emotions were not so strong. As he points out the formation of the modern nuclear family has been influenced by the building of the emotional fortresses that we experience today.

It is argued (Harris, 1981) that the anthropologist should move away from the supposed universality of family and household, and the assumption that the household is a natural unit. The naturalness of the household becomes rather problematic if we think that basic human needs are also subject to cultural and social definitions. According to Harris viewing the household as a natural unit and femininity as a natural quality enables myths, essences and dualisms[80] that perpetuate hierarchy and gender inequality.

Following this line Sant Cassia with Bada (1992) analysed the making of the modern Greek family by looking at 523 marriage contracts *(prikosmfona)* drawn up in Athens between 1788-1834. This period is rich historically not only for Athens but for Greece in general. They also draw from travellers' accounts and memoirs in their attempt to show that the institution of the family in Greece

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[80] The study of gender has generated endless dualisms such as nature/culture, domestic/public and in relation to Mediterranean cultures honour/shame. One example of the creation of universally predictable situations for women, was Ortner's article (1974): "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in which she argued that women's inferior status is to a great extent attributed to her procreative abilities. Thus women are everywhere associated with nature and thus devalued whereas men with highly cultural activities. However since the 70's this dualistic model has been the target of many fertile criticisms and the starting point for many interesting ethnographies of actual women's lives all over the world. For example for specific ethnographic examples see Dubisch, 1986, Counihan, 1988, Goddard, 1996, Hirschon, 1981, Hirschon and Gold, 1982, Strathern, 1984 and Wikan, 1984. For theoretical issues on feminism see Mc Cormack and Strathern, 1980 and Moore, 1988. All these studies have pointed out that there are no universal situations and gender is a complex and constantly shifting category linked to other issues like ethnicity, race, economic and historical conditions.

during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century was strongly influenced by the project of national emancipation and its related historic events. The scholars argue that there is a continuum between the institution of the family and the state: the state was influenced by the property transactions within and across families and the institution of the family was subjected to national perceptions of gender relations.[81]

We can perceive family as a process constructed and reproduced through daily activities such as eating together. It has been argued that family meals are not only indispensable activities of family life but also the production and consumption of food define what the family is (Charles and Kerr, 1988). Thus the trivialities of food provisioning, preparation and consumption maintain and reproduce family boundaries and strengthen family relationships (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). De Vault (1991) notes that meals are social events which create relationships and links between individuals. Feeding a family is perceived as a process that brings individuals together, creates social bonds, constructs sociability and reproduces a household group as a dynamic social unit.

It can be argued that feeding the family is equated with the process of "making a family". From several discussions I had the nexus between food and family proved to be reciprocal and strong. I realised that although he liked cooking he was only involved in it when the whole family gathered together. This did not happen often because his partner and children lived abroad, in Poland. Sharing food with them was a way for many informants to keep the family together:

> I like cooking very much but I only cook when I go to Poland to meet my partner and children. Generally cooking is tied to the sense of family and home. I rarely cook when I'm alone. I also cook for friends. Food is always connected to those you love.

This statement underlines the view that food preparation and consumption are significant aspects of family life. As several informants pointed out there is no family and no friendship without shared patterns of food and vice versa. This reciprocal connection between eating together and creating family

[81] In a very interesting article Bakalaki (1994) examines the gender-related discourse which dominated in Greece during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She argues that women's education was to a great extent shaped by national aspirations to promote the dominant type of gender relations in Europe at that time. Thus the newly born Greek State which was struggling for emancipation tried to follow closer European norms and perceptions partly through women's education. Seeing themselves as "Europeans" made feasible cherished identifications with Europe.

life was one theme that Thessalonikian Jews emphasised. As Rachel, a mother of three young children commented:

> I could say that gathering around the table sustains and solidifies the institution of the family.

Family is much more than the gathering of individuals, and eating together must not be considered a static, unchanging activity. Just as family life experiences shifts over time, so the act of eating within the family context alters through time. Murcott (1997) pushes the argument further by questioning the degree to which family meals in Britain exist nowadays. For her we must be extremely careful before declaring that family meals are "a thing of the past". It is stressed that each successive generation mourns lost practices and abandoned ways of sociability. However, there are no golden ages and the evidence we have for the abandonment of family meals is not sufficient. Other researchers (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997) emphasise that the family's continuous influence consists in its power as the basic and continuous arena of consumption.

In the field I realised that the family is not always a harmonious unit but often becomes the locus of different and often competing lifestyles and timetables. The demands of life in a city like modern Thessaloniki do not leave much free time for family gatherings around the table. This is an everyday reality especially for working married women. Most female informants admitted that everyday meals are largely abandoned during the week due to heavy timetables and lack of free time. Yet Saturday's meal was a major family event and a great opportunity for the gathering of family members:

> I try to gather all the family around the table. At least every Saturday. I am working so I do not find time during the week. I also know this gathering is extremely difficult because everyone has his own program but I think that family meals are important for the good functioning of the family.

Although family meals have been reduced significantly, a number of interviewees agreed that the institution of the family was still alive and influential. By preparing and serving food an entire world of cultural signs is transmitted. Food often becomes an important vehicle for expressing the parental and especially the maternal world. A number of ethnographic examples point out that the food that the mother has prepared is associated with security, familiarity and qualities of home. Providing food to the family serves numerous important functions: the creation and recreation of the family's boundaries, the

socialisation of children, and the mediation between the intimate realm of the family and the "outside" world as well as the construction of gendered realities. In a study of food and women in Florence it has been argued that food becomes the channel for the transmission of parental and especially maternal culture (Counihan, 1988: 59).

While carrying out my fieldwork I found that here too food proved an important social signifier, a medium through which families were maintained, children were brought up and the transmission of cultural continuity was ensured. The role that women occupied in all these processes was catalytic: they were believed to be the "bearers" of continuity and the primary socialisers[82] - not only physically but also socially - of the younger generation. Food was for Thessalonikian Jews a powerful channel through which women transmitted "Jewishness". Almost all my discussions touched upon issues of motherhood and upbringing and they linked the mother's food with wider identity considerations. Joshua, a middle-aged man, owner of a shop, expressed the nexus between food and cultural survival in this way:

> Although me and my wife don't keep much during the day of Hanukah we try at least to keep one tradition. We used to prepare for our children a Sephardic sweet, called boumouelos. This is a way to make them realise that they are Jews. Both their parents are Jewish and their grandparents spent two years in a concentration camp. They must have an idea.

In this man's words continuity and cultural survival were equated with the notion of "keeping the traditions alive". In fact "tradition" was often mobilised as a means to enhance cultural distinctiveness and thus the Sephardic palate. I soon realised that most Thessalonikian Jews held similar views; the keeping of Jewish High Holy Days together with the preparation and consumption of Sephardic dishes helped them to keep their Spanish-Jewish heritage alive. Mothers were the key figures in this process of maintaining and transmitting cultural values through their cooking. A frequent remark -slightly modified each time- emphasised the link between women, families and "tradition":

[82] Karakasidou (1993), in an article that refers to the Slavic speakers of northern Macedonia, argues that family could be seen as the vehicle for nationalistic aspirations and women as the key socialises are the main figures responsible for the transmission of these aspirations. Thus what is called the private or domestic sphere becomes nationalised. In another study of North Catalonia (1994) O'Brien stresses that women are closer to the reproduction of language use and ethnic identity because they act as the central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and the transmission of culture. Thus women are those responsible for the continuation of a Catalan ethnic identity, distinct from a French ethnic identity.

> You have to pay attention to the role of the family. Tradition as well as belief in one's identity is achieved and preserved mainly through the mother's cooking. She is the person who keeps the family together and makes sure that traditions are kept.

Therefore in order for traditional ways to be followed the family context and women's contribution were considered indispensable "ingredients". For Thessalonikian Jews women were thought of as gatekeepers of traditions and thus of family continuation. Women's role as socialisers and carriers of cultural continuity has been the concern of many discussions and debates. In the case of Thessalonikian Jews I argue that the transmission of maternal heritage was to a great extent achieved through food provisioning. By providing Sephardic food mothers acculturated their children in such a way that discourses of Sephardicness and Jewishness were prolonged and perpetuated. This responsibility for keeping cultural distinctiveness alive was primarily the concern of married women who had small children. Young mothers tried to gather the family together:

> In order to familiarise young children with the Sephardic dishes.

And added:

> Children are indispensable members in our celebrations. Mainly we celebrate because of them. Otherwise there is no point in maintaining all these celebrations.

By gathering the family together and especially by serving food Thessalonikian women not only contributed to the process of children's socialisation but also mediated between the microcosm of family and the "outside", non familial-world. If we want to restate this argument by using old-fashioned terms we can say that Jewish women mediate between the private and the public spheres and mainly this was achieved through nurturing.[83] Of course any sterile binarism distorts the complexity of women's realities. Partly through cooking Jewish women in the Thessalonikian context managed to bring together the cosmos of their family with the cultural aspirations and expectations of the wider community they belonged to. Thus home does not occupy only the private domain; private and public spheres are not diametrically opposed to each other but must be perceived as a continuum. The processes that are sustained within the family - and some of them are ensured by cooking and eating - successfully perpetuated the discourse of "being Jewish" in contemporary Thessaloniki.

[83] In "Culture enters through the kitchen: women, food and social boundaries in rural Greece", Dubisch (1986) discusses how through food provisioning women ensure continuity. They become maintainers of their own identities and transformers of natural to edible substances (both symbolically and pragmatically) suitable for the endurance of family life.

Major Feasts and Fasts of Judaism

"If the food is missing there is no celebration"

The Jewish calendar is based on the moon which means that the months are estimated according to the time the moon takes to move around the earth. This is why a month may have twenty-nine or thirty days. The lunar year has approximately 354 days -which means 12.4 lunar months in every solar year- whereas the solar (time needed for the earth to move round the sun) has 365 days. In order for the festivals to maintain their relation to the seasons, the lunar calendar had to be adjusted which is why one month is added seven times every nineteen years. Otherwise the Jewish calendar would be totally unstable. *Pessah* for example, a feast that symbolises the coming of spring, would be celebrated eleven days earlier every year, thus there would be years in which the feast of spring would be celebrated in winter, a contradiction in terms. So with the adjustment of the lunar to the solar cycle the festivals maintain their relation to the seasons and symbolise their change.

> The date of the Jewish holidays does not change form year to year. Holidays are celebrated on the same day of the Jewish calendar every year, but the Jewish year is not the same length as a solar year on the Gregorian calendar used by most of the western world…The year number on the Jewish calendar represents the number of years since creation, calculated by adding up the ages of people in the Bible back to the time of creation. However this does not certainly mean that the universe has existed for only 5,600 years as we understand years. (http://www.jewfaq.org/calendar.htm)

It should be noted that in a nineteen-year cycle, the third, sixth, the eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth years are leap years, during which a thirteenth month is added which is called *Adar Sheni* (second *Adar*). During leap years Purim is celebrated in this month.

The following are the most important feasts and fasts of the Jewish cycle:

Month	**Length**	**Day**	**Fast or Feast**
Nissan (March-April)	30 days		
		15th	*Pessah*
Iyar (April-May)	29 days		
Sivan (May-June)	30 days	6th-7th	*Savuoth*

Tammuz (June-July)	29 days		
Av (July-Aygust)	30 days		
Elul (August-September)	29 days		
Tishri (September-October)	30 days	1st-2nd	New Year – *Rosh Hashanah*
		10th	Day of Atonement *Yom Kippur*
		15th	*Sukkoth*
Cheshvan (October-November)	29 or 30 days		
Kislev (November-December)	30 or 29 days	25th	*Hanukah*
Tevet (December-January)	29 days		
Shevat (January-February)	30 days	15th	*Tu B' Shevat*
Adar (February-March)	29 or 30 days	14th	*Purim*
Adar II	29 days		

It has been argued (Benroubi – Epikouros, 2002) that religion is perceived as history and history as religion. Jewish feasts are linked to the calendrical cycle and thought to represent and mark the trajectory of the Jewish people through history. The role that food plays in Judaic feasts is central and rich in symbolic meanings. Thus for the Jews in Thessaloniki New Year's Day, which also stands for a celebration of the creation of the world, is called *Rosh Hashanah* and literally means "the head of the year" in Hebrew. Yet, Thessalonikian Jews rarely use the Hebrew name and prefer instead the Greek name, which is used to describe the Christian New Year, *"Protohronia"*. According to the Jewish calendar, which is based on the moon, *Rosh Hashanah* is usually celebrated the first day of the month

of *Tisri* at the end of September. During this important celebration the consumption of fish is very important. Thessalonikian Jews consume the fish with the head in order to make the following wish: "Like this fish we wish to be always the head and never the tail". On the table of Thessalonikian Jews must be pumpkin, pomegranate, date, leek and spinach. Before eating fish they used to have a sweet made from apple so that the following year will be sweet as well.

Ten days after *Rosh Hashanah,* the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur* is celebrated. Thessalonikian Jews call it *Kippur* and consider it the most important fast of Judaism. Although this day is in general dedicated to self-inspection and abstinence it has in recent times acquired a different meaning, at least for the older members of the Community. It is an occasion to think back and commemorate all the relatives and friends lost during the Second World War. The discussion I had with an informant already described in Chapter One is a good example: for her *Kippur* is an opportunity to commemorate and mourn all those beloved lost during the War that dramatically marked her life. So, mostly older Thessalonikian Jews fast because as I was told "fasting helps you clean yourself" whereas fasting is almost non-existent among younger generations. According to the findings of my research there is no special dish that signals the end of the fasting period as in other Jewish communities.

Sukkoth or *Sukkah* follows after *Yom Kippur* and lasts for seven days. Literally it means "the making of the huts" that the Jewish people as slaves used to live in and metaphorically it symbolises the temporal nature of our lives. Thessalonikian Jews referred to this celebratory occasion as *"ta kalamia"* or "reeds", the material used in the making of the huts. In the schoolyard and also at the synagogue two big huts are constructed and several fruits (apples, grapes, and pears) are placed in them. One informant told me that in the old days in Thessaloniki every home had its own *sukkoth.* During these festive days *merenjanes (*aubergines) cooked with *poyo* (chicken) are consumed and they are followed by a sweet called *rodanchas,* made from yellow pumpkin and by fresh and dried fruit.

On the fifth day of the *Kislev* month, in December, the celebration of *Hanukah,* meaning "inauguration" (of the temple) takes place. It is also referred to as *"ghiorti ton foton"* which means "celebration of the light". This eight-day celebration reminds the Jews of the Macabees' victory against Antiochos, the king of Syria. One interviewee argued that:

> When the Macabees won they came to the temple in Jerusalem to light the Menorah (seven-branched candle). But although the oil was not enough yet it lasted for eight days. The Jewish

> people consider this a miracle and call this day 'ton foton', 'the lights'. To commemorate that Day everything we eat must be fried in plenty of oil.

Thus Thessalonikian Jews consume *keftikes,* fried dumplings and they end their meal with *sufganiot,* a kind of fried *doughnut* served with or without honey.

Almost a month later, *Tu B' Shevat,* or the "celebration of the trees" takes place. One informant told me that this day symbolises the trees' blossom, the re-generation of the earth and the coming of another spring. This is why during *Tu B' Shevat* the school organises tree planting and dried fruit is offered at the synagogue. On the table of Thessalonikian Jews must be fresh or dried fruit. A sweet consumed during this High Holy Day is *ashure* made from wheat and dried fruit.

The celebration of *Purim,* meaning "lot", or as I was told "the Jewish Carnival", takes place in March, on the fourteenth day of the month *Adar.* Historically it symbolises the liberation of the Jewish people from the Babylonian king who was influenced by his chief minister Haman, an enemy of the Jewish people. Yet for most Thessalonikian Jews Haman was the Babylonian king and this indicates a relative lack of knowledge of Judaism. It is thought of as a day of great pleasure and joy and the main role is given to the children. A teacher at the school explained:

> Purim is a very important celebration for the children. During Purim, which is a very enjoyable celebration they visit the synagogue, the Old People's Home and they organise a carnival party at school. You can't imagine how creative their mothers can be! They dress their kids with such nice and funny costumes. Generally we try to make children understand that Judaism is not only [about] Laws and restrictions but also a source of happiness and joy. This is the reason why we offer them sweets which are called Haman's ears.

The celebrations of *Purim* I attended both at the synagogue and at the Old People's Home were characterised exactly by this spirit: children in funny dresses had a party at school, visited the Old People's Home and the synagogue where they were offered sweets, sang and laughed a lot. Offerings and food exchange are central aspects of this celebration. In the pre-war days Thessalonikian Jews exchanged *platicos,* plates full of sweets in *Ladino.* Nowadays people do not visit each other to exchange *platicos* yet the students of the primary school during their visit at the Old People's Home must offer sweets to the older people.

Pessah is the Jewish Easter, or as Thessalonikian Jews used to call it *"to Pasha mas"* meaning "our Easter". Normally it is celebrated in April, the fourteenth day of the month *Nissan.* During *Pessah,*

the exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery, to the Promised Land is remembered. As an informant told me:

> Pessah in Hebrew means 'to pass' because this celebration stands for the exodus of our ancestors from Egypt to the Land of Palestine. In fact this celebration like all Jewish celebrations are based on historic facts, they are memories…

Pessah was considered the paramount celebration of Jewishness and was performed in order to bring all the members of the family together. According to an informant:

> Every diasporic people celebrate an important occasion. This occasion is Pessah for us. This is the most significant and meaningful Holy Day of Judaism.

In the next chapter, where I talk about the *Pessah* meals and dinners at the Community's institutions I explain in detail the symbolism of the *Pessah* table along with the central role that this Holy Day plays for the Jews in Thessaloniki. All my informants, regardless of their age, agreed that this celebration encapsulates the real meaning of "being Jewish" and it is thought of as the perfect occasion for "the traditions" to be kept and continued. Thus, for them *Pessah* was the paramount expression of Jewish identity in the present and the future.

For the dinner of *Pessah* red wine *(kosher),* and a tray, *seder* (seder means order in Hebrew) would be served. The latter consists of the following items: a cooked foreleg of lamb, celery, a glass of vinegar (or salted water for non-Thessalonikian Jews), *harosset,* a kind of marmalade made from fresh and dried fruit (raisins necessarily), one lettuce, one *haminados egg* and three *matzoth.* The symbolism of these food items is as follows: the lamb's leg symbolizes the sacrifice of *Pessah,* celery and lettuce are the bitter green that stand for the bitterness of the exiled Jewish people; *harosset* symbolises the mud with which the Jewish slaves used to build pyramids for the Egyptians; the *haminados* egg, cooked with onions, symbolises life and renewal; the vinegar and in some cases the salted water recalls the tears of the enslaved Israel. This is indicative of the localisation of Jewish cuisines: only in Thessaloniki they use vinegar yet in other Greek cities salted water. M*atzoth* or unleavened bread is the only kind that is allowed to be consumed during this celebration. According to the Jewish religion the enslaved Jews when they left Egypt had no time to let the leaven raise the dough so they prepared unleavened bread. Generally during *Pessah* any kind of food that contains yeast is forbidden and must be removed from the house. At the *Pessah* dinner, after reading the *Hagadah* (ritual book of *Pessah*

containing the story of the Exodus) and making the *beraha* (wishes, blessing) the Jewish families consume the following food: at the beginning they have several *keftikes* (dumplings filled either with leeks or spinach), then they have *pesce en salsa* (fish, preferably carp cooked with vinegar, crumbled *matzoth* and pelted nuts) and in the end some kind of sweet like *tupishti* (walnut cake with syrup) or *boumuelos* (small doughnuts made from *matzoth*). Before the sweet they often have *pastel* (pie) made from *matzoth* and filled with the liver of the animal.

Seven weeks after *Pessah* in the month of *Sivan*, *Savouoth,* which is referred to by Thessalonikian Jews as *"apokalipsi"* (apocalypse), is celebrated. This Holy Day symbolises the joy of *Torah* (the Mosaic Law). In order to recall the joy that comes from *Torah* the food that is consumed consists of milk and honey; the milk is nutritious and the honey is sweet like the *Torah.* A famous Sephardic sweet is *sutlach* made from milk, rice and sugar.

Sabbath, the Holy Day for the Jewish people is thought to be a day of rest and prayer and it is a reminder that the seventh day of creation was a day of rest for God. The older and middle-aged people attend the synagogue and the families try to gather together at the table afterwards. People agreed that nowadays life is "complicated" and the "lack of time" affects negatively their gathering around the table and the keeping of traditions. Yet they thought *Sabbath* is a day of importance and it stands as Sunday for the Christians.

An important aspect of Jewish life in Thessaloniki today is relative lack of observance of orthodox Jewish practices which often means a rejection of religious rules and norms. Thus as I described in detail throughout the thesis, they keep kosher only partially, they go to the synagogue rarely and they are in many cases unsure of the real meaning of important celebratory occasions. For example, as I mentioned earlier they consider Haman to be the cruel Babylonian king who chased their people but the truth is that Haman was the king's chief Minister. Most older people have dedicated *Yom Kippur* – which they call *Kippur* – to friends and families lost during the Holocaust whereas it is actually the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

Yet in spite of their lack of orthodoxy, Thessalonikian Jews have a very strong "Jewish consciousness" (to use their words) which is partly based on their distinctive history in this city and it is certainly expressed through "traditions". Although religion and tradition cannot be clearly separated and distinguished the Jews in Thessaloniki are very open as far as this matter is concerned: they recognise that they do not follow their religion by the letter but they do follow their traditions. "Tradition" for them is epitomised in keeping family feasts and reminding to themselves and their

children of their cultural and religious distinctiveness. *Pessah* for them is the most important family and community feast. My aim here is not to diminish the importance of other Jewish feasts but to underline the fact that other important days such as *Sabbath,* are not so important for the Jews in Thessaloniki today. In a discussion I had with a middle-aged housewife she argued:

> In Israel Sabbath is one of the most important days for the Jews. It is celebrated by everyone, and everyone goes to the synagogue. It is not the same for us here. We sometimes go to the synagogue but otherwise it is a normal day. We cook, we do things. Yet sometimes we have on our table huevos haminados, you know the eggs Sephardic Jews cook. But things were not always so…

This is quite true because for the Jews in Thessaloniki and Greece in general prior to the Second World War the celebration of Sabbath was very important and it included a series of rituals. Stavroulakis describes vividly its preparation:

> In Greece preparations for Sabbath began on Thursday afternoon, when the *prozyme,* or basic leavened dough for the Sabbath loaves and for the bread of the whole week, was prepared and set to rise for the night. Early on Friday morning, flour, oil and water were added and the loaves shaped for the second rising…Sabbath meals varied according to region, economic condition, and to a great extent the Sephardic or the Romaniote background of the family. Predominant on all tables, however, *were huevos haminados,* richly polished, boiled or oven-backed eggs in their shells. This custom is an ubiquitous among Greek-Jews as geftile fish, a particular abomination to the Sephardim, is among Askenazi Jews. Sabbath morning prayers, or *Shahrit,* were said very early. While the men were in the synagogue, the women prepared the second meal of Sabbath outside in the courtyard: a table laden with bread, olives, cheese, haminados, cucumbers and sliced tomatoes. Liberal quantities of *ouzo* and *raki,* the spirits commonly drunk throughout Greece, completed the celebration feast, which was also a way of providing a meal for the poor of the community. At noon the family gathered at home for a third Sabbath meal. This could include any combination of beef, beans and sweets… As Sabbath evening was for the family and guests of honour, so Saturday evening was for friends and neighbours. *Dulces* or *glyka* in the form of candied fruit rinds, special jams made of quince, rose petals, and walnuts were served in shining silver containers fitted with spoons and surrounded by glasses of water. The guest made the blessing *Shavuah tov* – for a good week – ate the sweet from a spoon, took a sip of water, and placed the spoon

> in the glass back on the tray. If coffee were served, the blessing was made before taking a sip of water and then the coffee was drunk. Thus the new week would begin in sweetness and light". (Stavroulakis, 1986: 19-22)

Food was cooked on Friday before sundown since cooking was forbidden on Sabbath. Thus the Sabbath meals included food that was cooked in the oven the night before, Friday night, such as *huevos haminados* and *fijones* (beans) with meat or beef or meat sausages (see recipes). They often had *borekas* and *borekitas* (pies) which could be also consumed cold (see also recipes). The oven was slowly burning from Friday and thus the food that was to be eaten on *Sabbath* was cooked at a very low temperature and remained relatively warm. In *Ladino* the *Sabbath* night was called *"nochada de Salonik"* which meant "the night of Thessaloniki" (Benroubi – Epikouros, 2002: 52).

In modern Thessaloniki much of what happened on the *Sabbath* has been abandoned: people do not bake bread or light the candles and they do not attend frequently the synagogue. The food that is consumed is no more baked in the oven in the courtyard and in any case modern houses no longer have courtyards. But the most important change is that the Jews of this city consider Sabbath to be more or less an "ordinary" day on which they can do everything like any other day including cooking. The palate of people has also changed and this means that *uevos haminados, borekas* and *fijones* are not cooked or consumed by families with young members. Yet, as I have mentioned, on Friday night some older people do gather at the community centre to partake a communal meal which includes "traditional" food like *uevos, borekas* and sometimes *fijones* as well as modern foods like pizzas for the few young people - ten or less - who choose to spend their Friday night at the Centre. It thus seems as if the community centre has replaced family in this respect and community meals have become synonymous with family meals. An interesting example of the shift and the interchange of the boundaries between public and private.

Reaffirmation of a community's boundaries are partly achieved through such rituals and celebratory occasions which not only ensure the existence of the community as an organic entity but also reunite families and strengthen the emotional bonds between their members. Food plays a major role during such special days and as such it distinguishes them from the other, "ordinary" days. It could be argued that special food "creates" special days. Therefore major celebrations are accompanied by highly ritualised food (Lupton, 1996). Its consumption ensures that this specific celebration is still significant and that the family and the community is united and well.

The nexus between ritual food and celebrations came up several times while I was in the field. In a discussion I had with Teresa, a working mother, the topic of ritual food and its indispensable role in marking celebrations emerged:

> Food alone is not so important but in the context of special days it makes the day special, it gives the celebration a meaning. Children learn that during the major Jewish High Holy Days they must have this or that kind of food. And if the food context is missing there is no actual celebration...

Older and middle-aged people were responsible for the "proper" celebration of those days which was partly translated as the preparation of ritual dishes which marked such celebratory occasions. From my analysis of the ritual table that follows it becomes clear that people often equated religious rituals with the notion of "tradition" and ritual food with "traditional food". Most of the dishes I will refer to were described to me with their Spanish names and their consumption was associated with issues of "authenticity" and "cultural continuity". The celebrations and the food that people consumed re-enacted and transmitted the discourse of being Jewish and especially of being a Sephardic Jew. It was as if by consuming ritual food Thessalonikian Jews consumed at the same time their distant past and internalised their history. This history was highly privatised and was partly transmitted to the younger generation through commensality, which seemed a necessary prerequisite for communality. I was often told:

> I am not religious but I do keep our food traditions. And this is mainly achieved during our celebrations.

Although the eating habits of the younger generation have changed and according to them "things are free nowadays" I noticed that they willingly participated in celebratory occasions. Dinah, a married woman, explained:

> This Easter I cooked a lot. This is the only way you give meaning to the celebrations. Without food there is no actual celebration. This has nothing to do with religion. You know my sons feel exactly the same way.

Some young people positively valued the reunion of the family and considered the rituals to be an important part of their cultural distinctiveness. Lily, a young woman, refused to emphasise the fact that she was "Jewish" in her everyday life. Almost all her friends were from other cultural backgrounds and I was surprised that some of them, who had known her for many years, did not know her religious identity. Although Lily could not be called a religious person she nevertheless rarely missed family

celebrations and she willingly joined her family to celebrate important days with them. Once she commented about *Pessah*:

> This is a celebration of the family for us. The whole family gathers together, I mean close and far living relatives so that they can keep all the customs and traditions of Pessah. And we always eat lamb with peas, pie made with matzah and all the family sings and watches the ritual of the Seder tray.

It is very interesting to note that Lily in her discussion almost equated "Us" with "The family". The term "us" represented Jewishness as a general and abstract entity whereas "the family" referred to her own family as well as all the other Jewish families in the city. It is as if through rituals - and especially through ritualised food - her own family along with other families in Thessaloniki reaffirmed their belonging to a Jewish community.

The celebration of *Pessah* was presented to me as the most significant of all celebrations. People explained to me that there was no actual celebration without *matzah.* This was the unleavened bread consumed by Jews everywhere during Passover and it was the basic ingredient of other *Pessah* dishes as well: pies made with *matzah,* fried dumplings and *pesce en salsa.* This fish is prepared in the following way:

> We dip the fillets in the egg in which we have added the crumbled matzah salt and pepper. Then we fry the fillets in the oil and vinegar adding some matzah to make a sauce. And when fried we spread over them the chopped onions. This dish becomes a bit sour but really tasty. The fish must preferably be carp. This food remains fresh for fifteen days even if you don't have a refrigerator. That's why our mothers and grandmothers used to make it.

The rich symbolism of *Pessah* was evident in the ritual of the *Seder* tray. As I was told: "All our ritual food is rich in symbolism. It must always mean something". On the ritual table of *Pessah haminados* eggs were always found. The preparation of these eggs was a source of pride for all Jewish housewives and a culinary "proof" of their Sephardic origins:

> Only Spanish Jews know how to prepare such eggs. We boil them with fresh onions, one spoon of coffee, salt and pepper. So the eggs become light brown. Even the white part of the egg becomes beige. They are so tasty!

The preparation of these eggs was found not only in the homes of the older people; young married women prepared them as well. I remember one informant saying to me how proud she was:

> My daughter cooks them as well. She lets them boil for the whole night. My daughter's eggs become even more delicious than mine.

"Proper" motherhood means "proper" food

My field material generates another issue relating to food consumption: that of "proper motherhood". Cooked food is considered the appropriate food for a family and ensures that the home is functioning properly;[84] it is almost as if cooked meals are the 'proper' meals *par excellence* (Murcott, 1982, 1990). Food discussions proved a powerful vehicle for the expression of preoccupations concerning emotional life. Goddard (1996) in a study of family and work in Naples notes that women acquire a central role in the family as basic nurturers. She stresses the mediating role that food plays: between families and groups, the past and the present, the local and the national. Women's mediation and intervention is achieved via food provisioning and the food that is considered as emotionally as well as physically satisfying is always prepared by the mother.

Many housewives moved on from food discussions to questions about my personal and emotional life. They wanted to know if I shared my personal life with my own mother. One expression they commonly used was *"Mana Evraia"* meaning Jewish mother and by saying this they wanted to stress the fact that a Jewish mother is always caring and protective towards her children. They believed that the good mother always keeps up with her children's emotional life and that Jewish mothers possess this quality because they care a lot about their home affairs. People constructed the social image of proper fatherhood similarly; yet in the making of fatherhood food did not play a significant role. Dinah argued:

> Jewish men are good oikogeneiarhes (family men), they are not womanisers. They never cause scandals maybe because the Jews in Thessaloniki are so few and they don't want to be heard. My husband is like that.

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[84] Williams (1997) in a study conducted in south-west Wales asserts that food on holiday is perceived as enjoyable and "not healthy" in contrast to food consumed at home which is considered "healthy" and appropriate for families. As she notes most interviewees asserted that "We never eat like this at home".

Similar comments implied that a Jewish mother, in order to be a "proper mother", has to care for the children and feed them properly and a Jewish man in order to be a "proper husband and father" has to be loyal and not cause scandal. My interviewees agreed that the social pressure is much more intense upon Jewish people because they compose a relatively small group in Thessaloniki today.

The topic of "proper food" emerged several times. The term "proper food" has at least one significant connotation: it is preferably home-made. Thus women are mainly responsible for preparing a proper meal and thus keeping a proper family: proper food sustains proper families and home-made food was thought of as the only appropriate food for family life. This view was strongly held by Jewish families in Thessaloniki. The topic of home-made food as the food par excellence for family life emerged several times. Often people asked me if I lived alone and the fact that I only occasionally consumed home-made food was a starting point for many questions:

> Home-made food is always the best. Do you live alone? Do you cook? How can you eat all this ready-made rubbish that they serve you outside home? We always prefer home-made food. At least you know what you eat. Even when my husband and I eat out we go to specific restaurants where we have been customers for years. They know us and serve us the best quality of food.

Housewives often expressed their pride in home-made confectionery as well. I remember at the end of my fieldwork when I paid one of my regular visits to a family and bought them a *kosher* walnut cake from the Averof pastry shop. Sara thanked me but added in a very polite way:

> This ready-made cake from Averof has too much syrup. My children like it but they prefer mine; it has the right syrup and this makes it light. I will bring you some of mine to try. Then tell me what you think. I am afraid there is not much left because my children like this sweet a lot.

The notion of "proper food" did not only refer to cooked dinners but also to other meals or sweets that were consumed during the day. The accelerated rhythm of life did not leave much room for "sharing the same table" but the discourse of home-made food was still a powerful one within the family context

Food exchanges

Another issue that emerged from my research concerns the exchange of cooked food. Curtis and Theophano, in a study of Meryton, an Italian community in America, asserted that women through food mediated between families, created ties and ensured the continuation of cultural identities and of Italianess. Food and in particular food exchanges were used as a metaphor for expressing sociability. Thus food was seen "as a link among families, networks, individuals and generations. Food exchange and reciprocity are particularly the domain of women, and so also are activities through which women establish, maintain and express their social positions" (1991: 149).

Similarly women were responsible for the organic networking between the Jewish families not only in Thessaloniki but also in other cities. It was as if the Jewish families often took the form of extended ones not in the sense that there was any form of cohabitation but in relation to food exchanges which seemed to be important elements connecting distant and close relatives. The Jewish families of Thessaloniki can be characterised as nuclear and women had the responsibility for bringing these families together via their food exchanges. They often sent to relatives dishes that they had prepared and these dishes to a great extent were Sephardic dishes. By the term "responsibility" I don't imply that the women were in any sense obliged to distribute food but more that they are proud of taking the responsibility of linking the members of the wider family together. Goddard (1996), in her study of families in Naples also argued that food exchanges were used as a channel for the transmission of emotions and sentiments among family members. I believe that food exchanges functioned as a vehicle in order to express relatedness, solidarity and sameness and thus reproduced the idea of the family and community. Susan, an eighty year old woman, narrated to me that when she was younger she used to prepare *pesce en salsa* and sent it to her sister's family in Athens:

> During our Pessah I used to prepare large quantities of this dish and sent it with Olympic airways to my sister's family in Athens. You see, I was the only woman in my family who knew how to cook it properly, so I sent some to the rest of my family.

In her words there was a constant shifting between "my family" and "my sister's family" as if her sister's family and hers where two parts of the same family unit. Cooking and sending food was a connecting element between the different families that held them organically linked. Susan was a competent cook who gained not only a good reputation but also recognition from other family members for doing this. My informant was not capable of preparing that dish anymore because she was getting older and therefore -as she put it- weaker. But Susan's niece, a woman in her fifties, commented that

now she is responsible for sending food to her relatives. At some point she showed me some Sephardic dishes she had prepared:

> The funny thing is that now that I cook some dishes well, I am the one to send some to my aunt's family. It used to be the opposite but she can't cook anymore. She is old whereas I am young.

This issue of food exchanges was a preoccupation not only among older and middle aged Thessalonikian Jews but also among younger people. Barbara explained to me that visiting her parents, who lived in Volos, for the celebration of *Pessah* meant that she had to take some special food items with her. These were some nuts that Jewish people bought from a small grocery shop in the centre of Thessaloniki. In Volos there was no such shop. Barbara explained:

> Now that I am going to Volos to my parents' home I have to take to the whole family a large quantity of Jewish seeds. We prefer buying them here although they are more expensive because the double baking makes them really tasty. All my relatives have asked me to bring them some because in Volos they can't find any.

Everyday cooking

One of the major questions which preoccupied me during the research was whether Thessalonikian Jews cooked differently from the other, non-Jewish, Thessalonikians. Some of the dishes seemed to me similar or quite close to the non-Jewish cooking I was brought up with. Other dishes were totally absent from the palate of my parental home such as *pesce en salsa* or *huevos haminados.* But again some people described dishes - with similar ingredients but certainly a different name - that could be found in some remote Greek areas or even in the wider area of the near East and especially Turkey.[85] After several months of fieldwork this question remained still unanswered but to a large extent the issues raised had been modified. I was not interested anymore to "discover" the real origins of those dishes but to understand why, how and when Jewish people in Thessaloniki thought of them to be part of their cultural heritage.

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[85] For example a Jewish Spanish sweet which is called *Sutlach* is a kind of pudding often found throughout the Near East. The Turkish version of this sweet is called *mahallebi.* Another example is *pesce en salsa:* although a similar taste cannot be found in Christian Greek cuisine in a discussion I had with Sami Zubaida he mentioned that a similar dish can be found in the Middle East.

One dish that was often found on the daily table was *melenzanes* (aubergines). This was a quick and very delicious dish. According to Jewish housewives the difference between the ways Christian Greeks cook aubergines and the Jewish way is the following:

> We prepare something that is not known to you; aubergines that we grill. Then, without mashing them, we put them in a casserole with tomatoes, green peppers cut in small pieces, parsley and sometimes meat or chicken. I cook this dish quite often because all my family likes it. We cook this dish with oil. Everything is cooked in oil. We never use fat or butter. It's not a religious matter, we have always eaten that.

Another dish commonly found was *soupa de avikas* or *fasolada*. Generally throughout Greece bean soup is never served thick but as more of a liquid. When I first tasted the Jewish bean soup, apart from the appearance, which was different, I also realised that the preparation and the ingredients used must be different as well. The bean soup I knew was quite reddish because there is plenty of tomato in it but I was told that the Jewish people of Thessaloniki never add tomato so that its colour remains light brown:

> Our bean soup, which is called soupa de avikas in Ladino, differs from yours. We brown the beans in olive oil adding fresh onions and this way they became dark. Then we boil them and the beans become almost brown. We never add tomato. That is the way you do it. During the old times they used to cook this dish together with meat and put it in the oven. Today, there is no chance to find it cooked the old way. This is a dish I do very often, the Jewish recipe without the meat. We like it very much.

Another dish that could be found on the everyday table was *alinchougas areynadas*. The housewives used no other name for this apart from its *Ladino* name. It literally means "stuffed lettuce" and the filling is always minced meat. Northern Greek cuisine includes a wide variety of dishes with stuffed vegetables of various kinds: tomatoes, green peppers and cabbage and the filling is either rice or both rice and minced meat. Though I had never seen stuffed lettuce before the taste was quite similar to the taste of the stuffed vegetables I was familiar with. For the three dishes I have described people used either *Ladino* or Greek names or both: *melanzanes* was a Greek but *soupa de avikas* was certainly a Latin name. My informants in most cases used the Greek word *fasolada*, while *alinchougas areynadas* was known only by its *Ladino* name. It is noticeable that people claimed that all these definitely

belonged to the Jewish cuisine of Thessaloniki and housewives used the term “we” as if those dishes represented not only their own family but the totality of Jewish families in the city.

Despite the culinary differences -real or imagined- the boundaries between their Sephardicness and their Greekness were fluctuating according to context as in the case of the lady who gave me the recipe for preparing aubergines. In Linda’s words “we” changed meaning depending on the context. It was used in order to denote Sephardicness, for example in the phrase “We have something that you Christians don’t have” but it was also used to emphasise Greekness for example in the phrase “The olive oil that we Greeks have is the best in the whole world”.

When ritual food enters everyday cooking

Another interesting theme that emerged from my field research was the constant interplay between ritual and everyday cooking among Thessalonikian Jews. Not only special, ceremonial dishes but also food ingredients that were mainly used for celebratory meals became in many cases part of everyday cooking. The reasons for this shift between ceremonial and everyday cuisine were numerous. Some of them were related to ageing, perceptions about a “healthy diet” or even issues of tastiness, and of course the family’s food likes and dislikes. But it seemed to me that the notion of “making the food more tasty” or “lighter” or even “less time-consuming” could be translated into other symbolic discourses namely those of making the food more “acceptable” to Thessalonikian Jews, more familiar to them and eventually distinct from that of other Thessalonikians.

Although *matzah* stands for the Jewish Passover, it was also widely used among Thessalonikian Jews for many savoury or sweet dishes. In such cases it substituted for fresh bread and it constituted the basic ingredient that indicated a Jewish association. One dish quite popular among the Jewish population was zucchini and eggplant fritada, which was called *sfougato* or *sfougatico*. As Dinah explained to me:

> Sfougato is of Spanish origin. It is made with zucchini, cheese, eggs, olive oil, salt and pepper and we put it in the oven.

My informants explained that they often added some crumbled unleavened bread in order to make this dish “more solid” and “tasty”. The use of *matzah* either crumbled or just wet was commonly found in Jewish cooking. It was often used as the basic foodstuff in Sephardic fried dumplings. The filling consisted of cheese, spinach or leeks:

> I take one kilo of leeks, cut them in pieces, boil them and then I remove all the water. I have also bought half a kilo of minced meat, eggs, just a bit of celery, crumbled matzah, salt and pepper. Then I prepare the balls and fry them in plenty of oil. Do you know what we call them? They have Spanish names: keftikes de prassa o de spinaka. An authentic Sephardic dish.

Keftikes are always found on the ritual table of *Pessah* but they also accompany daily meals as well. Thessalonikian Jews also used *matzah* in order to make pies. Instead of using *phyllo* (pastry) they used *matzah* - after they had spread on it olive oil or simply water to make it soft - and they filled it with cheese, spinach or pumpkin and beaten eggs. Thessalonikian Jews referred to them as *pastel de spinaka* o *de kalavassa.*

Crumbled *matzah* was used in another dish called *bimwelos* or *boumouelos.* It looked like the loukoumades - a kind of doughnut - found all over Greece. *Boumwelos* were normally prepared for the ritual occasion of *Hanukah* but I found that some housewives included them in their everyday diet and sometimes by replacing the main course:

> This year I did not prepare any boumouelos because my children were away. In order to prepare these sweets I fry them in plenty of olive oil. But if you don't eat them immediately they are not so tasty. My daughter-in- law has kept up this tradition. I used to go to her place and we would prepare these sweets together. But now I prepare them on ordinary days and this is our lunch. We eat only this and nothing else, so we eat seven or eight of them instead of other food.

Conflicts and Tensions around food

Women and Men: Worlds apart?

So far the picture that I have presented concerns only issues of harmonious family relationships and idealised images of a past and present city life. Two major questions need to be addressed in order to complete the picture of the polyvalent role that food occupies among Thessalonikian Jews. The first question brings back the topic of gender in relation to the food agenda whereas the second takes into account the generational shifts in relation to eating preferences and the feeling of belonging to Thessalonikian Jewry. Charles (1995) and Charles and Kerr (1988) have argued that the inequality of power relations between men and women often finds its expression through the supposed responsibility for daily food provisioning. Thus women's subordination is perpetuated along with patriarchal family relationships. De Vault (1991), although she avoids the term "subordination", agrees that caring and in

particular feeding are considered as gendered work; women may draw pride and satisfaction from their role but in many cases this process of caring may become a source of discomfort, dissatisfaction and frustration.

I remember the first day that I started my field research and I decided to go to a famous bookstore in Thessaloniki owned by an important Jewish family of publishers. I approached one of them and I explained in detail the theme of my project. After a few minutes - looking quite surprised - he answered me:

> Oh, Jewish cuisine. You have to talk with women of course. Why don't you start with my mother?

The reaction to my inquiries was quite similar among other men as well: some wanted to put me in touch with their wives, their mothers and mothers-in-law. Cooking for them was associated with women, they were the persons responsible for "keeping a household alive". Even when I visited people's homes only a small number of men proved keen to share with me their past and present food experiences. Of course there was a noticeable difference depending on a man's age: most old men considered it unthinkable to engage in such a discussion whereas the situation was a lot easier with middle aged men. Some of them shared with me their food memories and experiences and were willing to give me recipes, adding: "I like cooking a lot. It is a very interesting and creative hobby".

For women, instead of being a leisure pursuit, it was an everyday compulsory task. Mostly middle aged married women viewed cooking as a task that occasionally caused them stress and discomfort.[86] Working women faced a lack of free time and this affected their culinary ability too. Rachel who was a working woman and a mother commented on this:

> My husband keeps asking why I never prepare a Jewish salad he likes. It's made from many boiled vegetables. But it's so time-consuming. I keep telling him that but he doesn't seem to understand.

Older women also expressed similar feelings at certain moments. Lack of time was one of the main reasons for the partial abandonment of some Sephardic dishes:

[86] The issues of frustration and the reproduction of a male-centred ideology through food have been discussed by Murcott (1983) in her article "It's a pleasure to cook for him: Food, Mealtimes and Gender in some South Wales Households". She notes that: "…the propriety of occasion such that a certain sort of meal is to mark home (male) leisure versus (male) work-time, and that such meals are cooked by women for others, notably husbands, in deference, not to the woman's own, but to men's taste" (Murcott, 1983: 87).

> It's so time and energy consuming. I rarely prepare this dish. It's not worth the fatigue. Nowadays I cook special dishes in large quantities and freeze them. For example I do that with keftikes. I just warm them whenever my grandchildren come to see me.

In fact freezing and frosting were common culinary practices for preserving food and women often associated these practices with the lack of sufficient time. So whenever they cooked, they prepared large quantities and then preserved the food. This way whenever their husbands, children or grandchildren felt hungry there was "always something to eat". Linda, when she decided to "invite" me to her kitchen, after a series of visits, showed me the cooked food she had frozen: aubergines, *keftikes* and beans.

"We think that there is nothing left but…"

Food attitudes and food perceptions and preferences are not fixed but are subject to transformation and multiple influences. Often young people express their resistance and their resentment of parental culture through their bodies. Refusing to eat what the parents provide or eating the "wrong" food could be seen as an embodied rebellion (Lupton, 1996). This was the case for the younger generation of the city's Jews. Most young people I talked to emphasised the fact that their diet nowadays was not restricted by any rules and that ready-made food, the food that they preferred, could be easily found and consumed.[87] In their attitude I witnessed a strong emphasis on sameness: Thessalonikian Jews were not thought as different from other Thessalonikians and the food they consumed was beyond doubt the same. Lucille, a young woman commented:

> We eat ready-made food and go to fast-food places. For example we eat at McDonalds. Things are the same now. We all eat the same.

Isaac, a student in his mid twenties was one of them, "a very free and open minded spirit" as his mother commented. Isaac, his mother and I had a very illuminating discussion regarding the "modern" shift in food preferences and the youth's perceptions of Sephardic cuisine.

[87] For an interesting discussion on the issue of fast-food eating see Reiter (1991) *Making Fast Food* and Watson (1997) *Golden Arches East: McDonalds in East Asia.*

Isaac: As far as cooking is concerned I don't think that Sephardic cuisine exists anymore and of course there is no such thing as Jewish identity.

Isaac's mother: What about the prassokeftedes that I cook for you? You do like them…

Isaac: "Okay, probably there is something left. But as far as the younger generation is concerned things have changed. For example I am a vegetarian[88].

His mother explained to me when he left:

I am sure that my son won't create a Jewish family. I can't say the same about my other son. I mean that Isaac will not seek to marry a Jewish woman and bring up his children according to the Jewish principles. I try not to press him. He is a very free spirit. I think inevitably as time goes by our identity will be lost...

For some younger people the term "tradition" was a sign of stagnation, backwardness and incompatibility with "modern" life. Thus they emphasised that life in contemporary Thessaloniki was more free and so were their food habits. Nevertheless a significant number of them participated in Jewish celebrations and ate at least some of the "traditional" dishes that the women in their families had prepared. Isaac's mother explained to me that what had changed is not the actual food but the contexts in which these foods are consumed:

I prepare keftikes and freeze them. So, whenever my sons feel hungry they can find something to eat. You know they love having them for breakfast.

The tension between the eating preferences of the older and the younger Thessalonikian Jews showed a noticeable degree of differentiation. The reaction of the younger people in relation to the food attitudes of the older and the middle-aged generation varied considerably. I remember once when I visited Sara's home and she was desperately trying to find the booklet that the Community Centre sends on the

[88] Vegetarianism is an important issue related to food choices and general lifestyle. According to Lupton (1996) the vegetarian philosophy is based on major objections to meat: its consumption is unhealthy, unnecessary and immoral. Abstinence from it also enhances spirituality and purity. In this case I believe that vegetarianism has another dimension: rebellion to parental culture and therefore refusal to consume "the same" food as parents do.

occasion of important Jewish celebrations. On the last page one could find many “traditional” Sephardic recipes. She apologised:

> I am sorry but I can’t find it anywhere. You know I hide it somewhere because when I cook I look at the recipes of this booklet. But my children laugh at me. They think I am too obsessed. I don’t think I’ll find it. I have hidden it for good.

Other young people held a more positive attitude to “tradition” and rituals. Andreas is a man in his late twenties who is studying in Paris. His grandmother argued that the celebration of *Pessah* was a strong attraction for him:

> Whenever he phones me he asks me if I intend to celebrate Pessah. I keep this tradition and he seems to enjoy it very much. Whenever Andreas comes I cook for him a pie made with matzah and meat with peas. You know just to remind him of our Pessah.

Although probably Andreas’s food preferences had nothing to do with the food prepared for *Pessah* he nevertheless consumed it as a sign of family reunion. Food for him became a metaphor of “return” physically and symbolically to his family.

“Komed ke de la vouestro komech”

Eat, because what you eat is yours. From your food eat as much as you like

Sephardic proverbs, Zografakis, 1984).

Throughout this chapter I have argued that food enhances family relationships and strengthens family bonds. By this token it is perceived as a basic “ingredient” in the process of constructing family boundaries. Families are not static and unchangeable institutions but ongoing sets of relationships created and recreated through daily activities. Preparing, serving, consuming or refusing to consume and exchanging food are some of those daily activities that take place within the family context. Thus, after a discussion of the Jewish calendrical cycle and the symbolic validity of the food consumed , Thessalonikian Jews talk about several issues that the topic of food and families raised such as parenthood and upbringing, “proper food”, ritual and everyday cooking. However, their experiences made clear that families were not always perceived as harmonious social units but as loci of tensions, conflicts and asymmetries. Inevitably, there were inequalities in the relationship of men and women

regarding food provision: for women caring for the family and being food providers was a compulsory duty and often the source of frustration whereas for men cooking was a pleasurable activity exactly because it was thought of as a hobby. At the same time younger Jews often argued that no such thing as Sephardic cuisine existed and certainly they were not different from other Thessalonikians because they ate “the same”. Fast-food places and vegetarianism were some of the young people’s food choices and yet these choices are indicative of several attempted identifications such as rebellion, emancipation and less culturally bounded lifestyles.

Chapter Five

Eating food and making the Community

> Brothers, this celebration, like all other school activities, contributes to the continuation of the tradition of our historic community. The existence of the Jewish School serves as a connecting chain for this community and a magnetic pole for its young members.
> (Speech of the Director of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki that ended the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Jewish school).

> *"Yo no vo a la meana, tu lo no vienes a la yesiva, como ke nos encontremos?*
> I don't go to the tavern, you don't come to the synagogue, so how are we supposed to meet?" (Sephardic Proverbs, Zografakis, 1984)

The topic of food escapes the domestic level of analysis and enters wider discussions of identity production. In reality, it serves as the basic "ingredient" in the process of constructing membership. My aim is to explore the ongoing processes involved in the creation of "a community" and food is used as a socially significant medium through which identifications can be made. The community - in this case the Jewish community in Thessaloniki- is not given and unchangeable but a matrix of complex and shifting interrelationships. It is also the outcome of processes like negotiation, interpretation and change. Within the processes that create a community it is noted that sharing food is an important activity which enhances belonging and solidifies collective bonds.

In the analysis that follows "belonging" is not treated as given for it is perceived as being subject to intervention and eventually, transformation. My intention in this chapter is to run through the complicated processes that sustain collectivity among Thessalonikian Jews and therefore to analyse what renders these people members of a distinct community, a group with some degree of coherence. My approach deals with the non-familial context in which Thessalonikian Jewish identity is being transmitted and reproduced. Yet it will be stressed that the institutions which make up the Thessalonikian-Jewish community are assessed by my informants as a familial context, an extension of the domestic arena and as the people's own, distinct space, in which open manifestations of Jewishness are allowed and encouraged. In a sense, all the Community's institutions belonged to a public sphere that had gradually been privatised and domesticated because the Community was viewed as a family. It

is interesting that there are several voices, varying interpretations, and different degrees of accommodation to the changes that were recently introduced. The primary school, the synagogue and the Old People's Home are analysed as institutions sustained through common activities -like eating together- that in turn contribute to the creation of the Jewish community and the perpetuation of discourses of cultural and religious distinctiveness in contemporary Thessaloniki.

People talking about the Community

Thessalonikian Jews held contradictory feelings and often contested views towards the Community. All my interviewees translated differently their participation and viewed themselves as either "active" or "non-active" members. For many middle-aged people going to the Community Centre was associated with family bonds. The lack of family, and especially a mother figure, was a serious reason for not keeping strong ties with it. Albertos explained:

> The Community has some kind of coherence because of the shared religious baseline and also due to the efforts of the Community itself. I used to go to a private school and the Community paid part of my fees. I remember I usually went with friends to the Centre and the synagogue during important celebrations, especially Kippur. I liked all these very much. I wanted to be different. Another pole of attraction was the Brotherhood. Our parents were afraid that we would lose our identity so they encouraged us to go to the brotherhood and socialise with other Jews. To be honest I don't know what is happening today. I haven't been there since 1990, when my mother died.

This was partly true. Although the man who made the above comment never went to the Community Centre or the synagogue he was very interested in the presence of the Community in contemporary Thessaloniki. He had published a book on the topic and regularly attended several cultural events that the Community organised: speeches, book presentations, and literary nights. He was also one of the active members of the conference I mentioned at the beginning of the thesis.

A number of people -especially older and middle aged men and women- used to go to the Community Centre every Friday night in order to chat, play cards and socialise with their friends. Some of them participated in the journeys that were being organised to Spain and Israel. Many women in particular attended lessons in Hebrew, religion and cookery at the Community Centre. However others had no real contact with the Community and refused to participate in its various activities. Despite this

there was an almost total acceptance of the importance and the significance of its role in maintaining Jewish identity. Susan presented this relationship to me quite clearly:

> The Community tries a lot to do the right thing, to keep our identity alive. This is achieved mainly via school. The children learn how to celebrate Sabbath. The Community also organises the summer camp. There are also feasts organised especially for children at the Centre, like Pessah. So, everything tries to be as it was before the War. We must try to preserve our identity. You are not only born Jewish, you are not only listed like that but you must also try to preserve your identity. So, even if children don't learn anything at home they become familiar with our traditions through the Community. The Community keeps sending to all of us booklets about the proper way of celebrating, the kind of appropriate food we must eat and even the addresses of the shops where we can buy the right ingredients. So yes, I think that our identity is being rescued. It is preserved mainly by the efforts of the Community.

It was the older generation and the middle-aged people who mainly adopted a general attitude of acceptance of the Community's initiatives. The younger generation, and especially teenagers, were more critical of its general project. In some cases they found all these efforts for the preservation of identity rather oppressive. I remember when I attended the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Jewish primary school. There I had the opportunity to chat with a twenty-three year old student. Andreas was at the time of my fieldwork studying law at the University of a near-by Greek city:

> We, the Jewish people, desperately want to preserve our identity. That's why we have our own school. If you don't attend the school you feel cut off from the Community. The school, the summer camp, the group of young people who go on vacation together, all these serve the continuation of Jewishness. If you don't follow all these groups you feel isolated, cut off. I remember as a child when I used to go to the Brotherhood or the summer camp they kept saying to us: 'Don't forget to question yourself daily what it means to be Jewish' I think that they are a bit obsessed with Jewishness.

It is interesting that this young man in his discussion uses both "we" and "their" when talking about the same thing: Jewish identity in contemporary Thessaloniki. In his words the ambiguous sense of belonging that younger people experience is evident. They feel that they belong to the Community but at the same time they seem to challenge their belonging.

The Thessalonikian Jewish community was involved in interpretation and re-interpretation. Cohen (1985) has stressed that relationships and bonds between members are not a set of mechanical

linkages but repositories of meanings. Since the community is involved in meaning and interpretation it is not subject to any "objective" description. People become active controllers of their lives investing them with meanings and giving sense and purpose to their actions. Thus interpretation, translation and the attachment of meanings were processes by which Thessalonikian Jews experienced distinctiveness and belonging to their community.

Changes within the Community and people's responses

Five years before my research a new Rabbi and his family had came to Thessaloniki. He was of Moroccan origin, educated in Israel. He had a doctorate in chemistry, but despite his educational background he was a deeply religious person. In our interview -which was conducted in English since his Greek was not good- he argued that his scientific knowledge proved very useful for becoming a Rabbi:

> I am a doctor of organic chemistry. I first studied in Israel and then in Paris. In parallel I did rabbinical studies and I also study the Kashrouth. The information from chemistry and my knowledge as a Rabbi were complementary. My knowledge in chemistry helps me a lot to deal with the diet issues of Kashrouth. For me Judaism is a way of life even from a medical, social, philosophical, economic point of view. Everything is discussed.

He and his family followed the religious rules meticulously and they all seemed to be very active as far as the reintroduction of religious observance to Thessalonikian Jews is concerned. The new Rabbi was particularly keen to teach people how to follow properly the *Kashrouth* rules concerning the Jewish diet. For this reason, he started co-operating with two food shops: the first one was licensed to sell *kosher* meat and the second *kosher* sweets. There was a general agreement that the Rabbi was "A very nice and educated man" and that "He is doing his best". The Rabbi thought that *kosher* is not something that you keep only partially:

> Look, there are many Jewish people here who don't keep kosher properly. I don't judge anybody. But diet is a very important aspect of Jewish life.

And yet most Thessalonikian Jews adapted Jewishness to their everyday needs. *Kosher* was indeed something that they kept partially, especially on occasions of intense commensality, like High Holy Days, or whenever they visited each other.

The butcher-shop was situated in Modiano, a central market of the city. It used to sell *kosher* meat, which had been approved by the Rabbi of Thessaloniki and Athens.[89] This meat was bought not only by Jewish people but also by Christians. Yet the shop was not authorised to sell pork, which is considered non-edible according to the Jewish diet. Sometimes though, the owner, Hamhougias, sold pork but he was obliged to keep it in a separate fridge. This was part of the deal that he made with the Community and the Rabbi himself. The butcher provided large quantities of *kosher* meat for the Old People's Home, the summer camp and also the Community Centre for certain celebrations when feasts were being organised there. This happened mainly during *Pessah.* Apart from meat, the butcher also produced *kosher* cheese. During the visit I paid to the shop the owner told me:

> It is mostly older people who buy this kind of meat. Young people don't come that often. I rarely have young customers.

It is interesting that most people considered him "one of us" and added that only "he knows how to slaughter animals according to kosher rules". In relation to the reintroduction of *kosher* to Thessalonikian Jews Hamhougias argued:

> As far as kosher diet is concerned the new Rabbi is very…(he can't find the word). He wants to impose, not impose really…it is a matter of health. They have families; that is why they want to eat healthy food. Every animal must carry the Rabbi's stamp. They want to know what they eat. The rabbi supervises everything.

Some knew that Hamhougias was not Jewish and others did not. Yet I often met him at the synagogue and what surprised me was that he was often wearing the ritual cover for the head, the *kipah.*[90]

The Rabbi had also given permission to a local pastry shop to prepare and sell *kosher* sweets. These sweets were prepared in a different unit especially designed for *kosher* food production. The owner of this shop was provided with *kosher* ingredients, like for example cheese, by the butcher but he also found *kosher* products in the market.[91] According to him:

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[89] The Rabbi of Thessaloniki at the time of my research supervised the slaughtering of animals together with the Rabbi from Athens.

[90] The ceremonial covering for the head that Jewish boys and men wear during ritual occasions.

[91] Several *kosher* products can be found in the Greek market especially butter, ice cream and red wine. Nevertheless, there is no specific section for kosher products either in super markets or in smaller food stores.

> My efforts are not really supported by the people. They accept it just because of the Rabbi. Although they respect him a lot I feel that the day he is gone they are going to forget everything about his initiatives.

and continued:

> When the Rabbi first came to Thessaloniki and he tried to apply kashrouth dietary rules he found nothing but ignorance among the Jewish people of Thessaloniki.

What is interesting is that kosher sweets had a kind of "invisibility" in the pastry shop. The only time when they were publicly displayed was during *Pessah.* On that occasion a great variety of kosher chocolate or walnut cakes were displayed on a big table. They were already wrapped and one could read on the paper that these sweets had been produced under the supervision of the Rabbi of Thessaloniki. On all other occasions, whenever I wanted to buy *kosher* sweets I had to ask for them.

Although people praised the new Rabbi's initiatives they were not willing to follow them totally and obey the religious norms to the letter. Thus, they continued to attend the synagogue occasionally and applied the religious norms in their lives quite selectively. The religiosity of their Rabbi was for them "not compatible with the modern way of life" and his "obsession" with kosher was even the theme of sarcastic narratives. I recall the story told to me by Rosa. Once she had invited the Rabbi to share a meal with her family. Because of the *kosher* prohibitions she had to wash the plates with hot water but he was not convinced that they were "clean" enough. Therefore, together with her son-in-law they took all the plates and utensils down to the port in order to wash them with sea water which is supposed to clean everything:

> Fortunately nobody watched this scene! After they came back I washed everything with chlorine because we all know that our sea is so polluted!

Relevant incidents were narrated to me in which "the Rabbi's family carried plastic plates with them" and thus, the hostess had to "buy glass plates".[92] Others expressed more neutral comments like "he doesn't bother me". In any case such comments implied a general consensus that he definitely ate differently. Others quite openly discussed the fact that he was a bit "heavy" for Thessalonikian Jews

[92] Separate utensils are also a law of the *kosher* diet. That is why the Rabbi's family carried their own plates from home. That lady who narrated this incident to me thought that glass plates were more appropriate and suitable for the occasion than plastic ones.

because he was very religious. In contrast, feelings towards the old Rabbi, who was a Thessalonikian Jew himself, were more positive. He was described to me as "the father figure of the Community". During my fieldwork he was a resident at the Old People's Home and he was in charge of all the ritual aspects of the celebrations.

The Rabbi's wife, Brenda, also played a central role in the reintroduction of the religious principles. Every week she used to teach religion at the Community Centre, she organised religious ceremonies like *Bar mitzvah,* and she actively contributed to organising celebrations at the school and the summer camp. According to her:

> Thessalonikian Jews are proud of their identity but they don't know many things about Judaism. For example they ignore the celebration of Sabbath or Holy days. They don't keep the Law. Two women approached me when I first came here. They wanted to know more about our religion. But still this mentality of sticking to the past and negating change persists. I think this is a typical Greek mentality. They hide their inequalities and pretend everything is fine. But by now I can see some families who want to know more. Some have even started keeping the basic kosher rules. Some years ago only one family kept kosher in Thessaloniki. The other day a wedding took place. Twelve people asked if there was any kosher food. It was totally their choice. In my lessons at the community centre the women's age is between forty-five and fifty. Young women don't come. They feel more embarrassed. They don't want to do things differently.

Brenda was a mother of three young children who were attending the primary school. As a mother and as the Rabbi's wife she interacted a lot with Jewish families in Thessaloniki. She described her first few months in Thessaloniki as very difficult, mainly because of the parents' negative stance towards *kosher.* In fact the first months after the Rabbi's family's arrival mothers felt uneasy in inviting Brenda's children's to their children's parties. Most mothers were apologetic and attributed their non-*kosher* diet to their husbands. Brenda remembered a young woman whose husband thought that imposing a *kosher* diet on children was an "unforgivable cruelty". But since then things had significantly improved. Some young mothers asked Brenda to show them how to prepare *kosher* food for their children's parties. She admitted that children would still eat at fast food restaurants yet their parents would not be totally negative towards *kosher* food.

The primary school

The Jewish school had been operating in Thessaloniki since 1979 and counted no more than sixty children whose ages ranged from three to twelve. It consisted of a primary school and a kindergarten. The average number of students per classroom was eight to nine. The school was situated in the building where the charity organisation *"Matanoth Laenionim"*, which distributed free meals to poor students, had been housed before the Second World War. As with any other educational institution, the school followed the programme and the instructions of the Greek Ministry of Education. There were both Jewish and non-Jewish teachers on the staff. The latter were responsible to the Greek State whereas the former took material and advice from Israel and often attended seminars that took place in European cities, like Paris. The Jewish teachers were authorised to teach Jewish religion, Jewish history, Jewish "tradition" and music. The students, apart from the teachers' children, were all Jewish. Along with the Jewish celebrations and festive days the official Greek bank holidays were observed such as the 25th of March or 28th of October.[93] The school was private and was funded by the Community, which was concerned with the children's education even after the age of twelve. This is why students were given loans or received scholarships.

During my fieldwork I noticed that the school maintained strong ties with the Community. Every Friday night children were taken there in order to have dinner and play. For the coming of the *Sabbath* children were gathered in the synagogue and after that at the Centre where a ritual meal was prepared for them. Communal meals also took place at the school itself. For example during the Jewish High Holy days *(Pessah, Hanukah* or *Purim)* the children used to eat together at school. In some cases teachers gave them foods like sweets that accompanied specific celebrations. For the day of *Tu B' Shevat,* children along with their teachers planted trees and were given fresh and dried fruit. For the day of *Sukkoth* a hut made of reeds was built in the schoolyard and here the children had their breakfast. Food seemed to be a significant part of all the Jewish celebrations that took place at the school.

Children themselves seemed to dislike "traditional tastes". Such tastes were not familiar to them and instead they preferred more "modern"[94] food like pizzas or burgers. Teachers were quite aware of that situation. Instead of pushing children to eat certain food they included in their menu both

[93] These are the main celebrations that mark the resistance of the Greek people against the Turks (1821) and the Axis forces (1940). Especially the rebellion against the Turks is attributed to the help of the Christian Orthodox clergy. It is a celebration with a strong religious "flavour".

[94] In Greece, as to an extent in all Mediterranean countries, "modern" tastes coexist with traditional home-made cooking. Although the younger generation prefers these "global" tastes they still value to an extent family meals.

traditional and non-traditional tastes. This way they were trying to avoid negative reactions and tensions. A teacher explained the situation:

> Every Friday night we gather the children at the brotherhood club where we try to provide them with the basic traditional food like haminados eggs and pies. Of course sometimes instead of pie they prefer pizza and other food that they like but we always try to include traditional food in their menu.

Awareness of cultural distinctiveness and the realisation of being Jewish were thus partly transmitted to the children through eating certain food. From the discussions I had with teachers at the school two key concepts emerged: “fun” and “responsibility”. According to members of the staff “fun, joy and playfulness” played a very important role in the learning process. As they put it to me:

> Because they are so young they must see all this as a game. If they don’t get any pleasure out of celebrations they simply refuse to follow them.

Game and pleasure were also associated with “responsibility”. Teachers tried to show children that they must be responsible for the adults in their immediate surroundings. They were taught about being responsible by “supervising” them, reminding them of the right way to celebrate. A schoolteacher commented that:

> The day after the celebration they come to school full of remarks such as: “My mother forgot to add this ingredient but I reminded her”. Responsibility is a kind of game for small children. They supervise the adult. During their lessons they write for us all the rituals to be kept and their associated foods. We check these lists, we give them back and this way they make sure that their mother will buy everything needed.

Keeping the ritual prescriptions given by teachers was perceived as a kind of challenge and a source of competition. Prompted by their teachers children tried to follow them the best way possible in order to gain the teacher’s approval and receive positive judgements.

There was a close connection between the institution of school and family. In fact, they constituted an inseparable matrix of institutions where Jewish identity was being produced and reproduced. During discussions I had with parents this topic frequently came up. Jacob, the father of a

child who attends the primary school argued that there is a mutual relationship between the two institutions:

> I have the feeling that my son brings home lots of things he learns at school. Tradition, family and the school are a matrix of institutions. He even learns at school about the proper functioning of the family.

In some cases the school became the common point of reference for different families. People and especially women who hardly knew each other - mainly because they rarely attended the synagogue or the Community Centre- became close because their children attended the same school. While interviewing two housewives I asked how they had met. They replied that they hadn't known each other but the fact that their children were attending the same school brought them closer. Since that time they had gradually become friends: "We had much in common, the same worries about our children's future".

Being at school

I was invited by one schoolteacher to attend the celebration of *Pessah* at the school. I arrived at the building which was surrounded by a big fence; there was no sign that a Jewish school was operating in that building. A man stopped me at the entrance. Although I said that a teacher had invited me he only let me in after he confirmed my name: "Yes, you may come in. I've been informed about you". I found my informant in the teacher's common room. Soon the teachers and I went to the main corridor along with the children. I felt that my presence was causing tension among them. They didn't seem very comfortable with it and it was clear that they were not used to visits by unfamiliar persons. A little girl came to me and asked: "Who are you?" When I replied that I was her teacher's friend she answered me back: "Oh, yes I remember you, I've seen you in the synagogue". The teachers were upset with the boys because they had forgotten to wear their *kipah*: "You should have brought it from home. Those who have it with you put it on immediately".

I followed the children and their teachers to the basement. We entered a big room where the ceremonial meal was about to take place. On each table - one for every class and one for the teachers - there were plates filled with all the symbolic items of *Pessah:* celery, lettuce, *harosset* and *haminados* eggs. There was also *matzah,* a bottle of *kosher* red wine and a glass with salted water. One teacher started explaining to them the symbolism of each food item:

> Celery and lettuce must remind us always of the bitter times our ancestors went through. We must put them in the salted water. The egg symbolises the rebirth and the harosset reminds us of the mud of the pyramids our people built. But be careful! Today we don't actually celebrate Pessah. We just want to show you the steps you must follow in order to celebrate it the right way with your families tomorrow.

After a while the wife of the Rabbi arrived together with a woman who played the accordion and who was present at most school celebrations. Accompanied by the accordion the children sang many songs in Hebrew and Judaeo-Espagnol. One student from each class read a part of the *Hagadah*[95] of *Pessah*. I noticed that most children knew a few words of Hebrew but didn't seem to understand any Judaeo-Espagnol. They kept looking at the photocopies they had in front of them: "If you don't have the Greek translation with you it won't be easy to understand anything" Barbara said. When everyone started eating many children shouted: "But we want to eat sandwiches". They soon found a way of pretending to do so: they filled two pieces of unleavened bread with *harosset* as if it was a sandwich. "Now it's good, it looks like a burger," they shouted quite content with their "discovery". A teacher explained to me:

> They don't like these food items. They are far away from their taste. You know children nowadays like only pizza, burger and sandwiches.

My presence aroused the curiosity of the adults as well: "Who is she?" a teacher asked my friend but soon we started talking about the reason for my visit and the celebration that was taking place. Our discussion centred on the topic of food as the teachers explained to me again the symbolism of the food items of *Pessah.* Another Jewish teacher made fun of the *kosher* diet*:* "Now that the celebration is about to finish I can buy a kosher pie with bacon and cheese"[96] he said and the others laughed.

At the end of the ceremony the children filled in a questionnaire, which was presented to them as a kind of crossword, concerning the persons and the rituals involved in the celebration of *Pessah.* Afterwards a teacher went into the courtyard and hid a piece of *matzah* for each class. The child who first found it won a present. I was told that this is mainly done for the children:

> So that they can understand better the spirit of the celebrations. We do it at home too. The one who finds it wins money or a present.

[95] *Hagadah* - as I described in the previous chapter - is the ritual book of *Pessah.*

[96] According to *kashrouth (kosher),* the Jewish dietary laws, mixing meat with dairy products is forbidden.

When the celebration had ended we all went to the teachers' common room. All the teachers were looking carefully at a leaflet about a series of documentaries that would be shown by a public TV channel. The series included a documentary about the Jews of Thessaloniki: "Let's record it and give it to the children" the director of the school said.

The Rabbi's wife was an active organiser of all celebrations at school. One of them took place at the American College of Thessaloniki. The programme of the celebration included many Hebrew songs and dances. In a video that was shown from previous school celebrations it was evident that before the coming of the new Rabbi and his family the celebrations included more Greek songs and dances. Some people from the audience commented on this change:

> It is clear that recent celebrations have been strongly influenced by the Rabbi and his wife. They used to have a different meaning.

For my informants the profile of their Community in former years had been more Sephardic with emphasis on Greekness. However the new Rabbi and his wife promoted a more "Jewish" identity with emphasis on *kosher* diet and Hebrew language.

The Old People's Home

The Old People's Home was an autonomous, charitable organisation funded by the Jewish community of Thessaloniki. It was situated in a busy neighbourhood, where the rich Jewish villas used to be before the War. The *"Saul Modiano"* Old People's Home was initially donated in 1932 by Saul Modiano, who was an important Thessalonikian Jew. The refurbished Home had been operating since 1981. It had approximately forty residents and a director was responsible for its operation. Men and women over sixty-five from Jewish communities all over Greece were allowed to live there. The Old People's Home was a six-floor building, which consisted of single and double bedrooms, a large reception hall and a small synagogue, called the *"Saul Modiano"* synagogue. An information leaflet published by the Community showed clearly that the Home was perceived as a private place, a shelter for the survivors of the Holocaust, for those people who stood as mother and father figures for the entire Jewish population of Thessaloniki:

> In the few years it has been in operation, thanks to the full and multi level support of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, the "Saul Modiano" Old People's Home has established itself as a

> genuine “Home for Our Parents” a warm shelter where Jewish senior citizens live in a happy, dignified and comfortable environment among people who embrace them with love and care. (Information booklet of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki, 2000: 40).

I had several discussions with the director, about the diet offered to the residents in the Home. She explained to me that the diet was not strictly *kosher* because keeping this diet “is a very difficult task anyway” and besides the old people “find it very difficult to be attached to the religious rules”. But she would soon add that: “Of course we can never cook meat with dairy products”. The Home was supplied by the *kosher* butcher shop with large quantities of meat, chicken, cheese and other *kosher* products that were bought from the market. The former Rabbi of Thessaloniki who was living at the Old People’s Home was the leading person in all the celebrations that took place there. He was in charge of the rituals, of praying and singing. According to the director:

> During Pessah we gather together, we prepare the Seder and of course we all eat together. We used to buy unleavened bread from the Community. But some old people buy leavened bread and hide it in their rooms (laughing). So, we certainly try to keep our traditions and follow all the Jewish celebrations.

I was told that when older people gather together for celebrations they always sing, tell stories and give accounts of their lives in the concentration camps. But generally, memories of that time seem to be private because:

> When they are alone and no celebration takes place they say nothing about that tragic period they went through.

At school children were encouraged to maintain strong relations with the Old People’s Home. During several celebrations the students were taken there with their teachers and parents and offered sweets, as in the case of the celebration of *Purim.* The sweets were *kosher* sweets brought from the *kosher* pastry shop. Once, I asked an old lady and she replied:

> I really don’t know what kind of sweets these are. I just know for sure that this is the way it has to be done.

The Rabbi's wife was always present when the school visited the Old People's Home. She seemed very keen to introduce children to the spirit of Jewish celebrations since the younger generation represented not only the future of Judaism but also the continuation of Jewishness in Thessaloniki. In what follows I will describe a ritual at the Old People's Home and stress how food consumption perpetuated the exchange of past and present experiences and how it enhanced the existing network of interrelationships. Thus through sharing food my informants created sameness and recognised others as "own" or "different".

Being at the Old People's Home

When I arrived at the Home I found the residents sitting at large tables together with their children and, in some cases, grandchildren. The hall looked like a big restaurant, and was very crowded. Most men were wearing their *kipah* and the women were nicely dressed. Some people talked in Hebrew to their relatives who had came from Israel. I shared a table with the old Rabbi, two old women and a man from Israel. The director of the Home introduced me to the people at my table. The old Rabbi asked me if I spoke Judaeo-Espangol. After my negative response he asked me if I knew any Hebrew. I responded no and I commented that I am not Jewish. "I know" he said "but tonight you must try to become one". The old woman opposite me asked me again if I knew any other Latin languages. I answered that I had a good knowledge of Italian since I had spent several months in Sardinia. She seemed pleased and started asking me questions in Italian about my stay in Italy. From then on people seemed more open to me. Maybe the fact that I spoke a language close to theirs made me "more Jewish" that night. In fact my knowledge of Italian did enable me to understand some parts of *Hagadah.*

An old woman asked the Israeli man about his family tree in Thessaloniki. When he gave the surname of a Thessalonikian-Jewish family the woman replied: "But of course you look like a true Cohen, I am surprised I didn't recognise you before". At some point the Israeli man was asked about *Ladino* by another woman. He answered that although he spoke *Ladino* he considered it a "dead language". This comment caused surprise and discontent: "What on earth are you saying now? You mustn't talk like that! It's a blasphemy!" The director of the Home tried to mediate and calmed down the old people by saying that it was not a dead language since all the people in the room were able to communicate perfectly in *Ladino.* He also commented on the absence of the Rabbi: "Where is your Rabbi? Why are you paying him? He is obliged to be here". The old people continued talking among themselves in *Ladino* and the director said:

> Today we are going to speak Ladino and not Hebrew. We will try to remember our tradition. You agree that Hebrew has nothing to do with it.

When the ceremony began the old Rabbi of Thessaloniki started to read the *Hagadah* in *Ladino* and Hebrew. The director started reading the same parts in Greek: "I read it in Greek because we have strangers among us tonight". This comment was an opportunity for the younger people who were there to speak: "Maybe this is a good opportunity to hear some Greek in this place because we definitely don't hear much of it". The young people started reading slowly and loudly parts of the *Hagadah.* They sounded very proud of reading it in Greek.

The ritual food of *Pessah,* unleavened bread, *harosset* and bitter vegetables, were found in large quantities on every table. There were also *haminados* eggs and bottles of *kosher* red wine.[97] But Sephardic cuisine was also present at the celebration: soon after we had finished with the ritual reading of the Holy Book the personnel brought to every table large quantities of dishes like *keftikes de prassa e de spinaka* and *pesce en salsa*. Some old people approached me saying: "Watch carefully! These are purely Sephardic dishes". The people I was sitting with started explaining the names of the dishes and the two old ladies opposite me gave me details about their preparation. A lady commented: "In the old days I used to prepare it like that. Do you know how we make it? Oh, how could you know how we make it…" At some point the Israeli man commented:

> In Israel we celebrate Passover differently. We never have haminados eggs and we never have this kind of fish you eat here. To be honest I have travelled to all the Jewish communities all over the world but I have tasted this fish nowhere else. Only in Thessaloniki!

For the old people this recipe represented the memories of the city, their harmonious pre-war lives and a significant part of their unique identity. An old man who was sitting opposite him replied: "This dish starts and ends only here. It is the city of Thessaloniki itself!"

When everyone finished eating the director started singing in *Ladino.* Soon, all the older people followed her; they seemed to know the lyrics of the songs by heart. The young people were trying to sing in this language but they kept looking at the lyrics in the photocopies they had with them. One old woman sitting opposite me had a really beautiful voice. I later found out from an article in a newspaper that she was among the three persons who were: "In modern Thessaloniki - unknown to the rest of the

[97] In Thessaloniki at the time of my research there was local wine industry, *Mpoutaris,* that produced small quantities of *kosher* red wine with the permission of the Rabbi.

population - still native speakers of the Spanish-Jewish vernacular, who sing Sephardic songs the way they have been performed over time".[98]

The synagogues

Monastirioton or *Monastirlis* synagogue was first established in 1927 by the Jewish immigrants of Monastir, who came to Thessaloniki after the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and World War I (1914-18). It was situated on a busy street in the heart of the city centre. The architectural plans of this religious building are signed by Eli Levi, a Jewish architect. The Red Cross used this synagogue during the German occupation and thus it escaped destruction at the hands of the Nazis. Later, during a serious earthquake in 1978, it suffered severe damage. After its restoration was completed it opened again for the religious needs of the Jewish population of the city. People called this "the big synagogue", which meant the official one, since it operated only for important days like the remembrance of the fifty years that distance us from the Holocaust or the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Israeli state.

Yad le-Zikaron synagogue was established in 1984 in the heart of the central city market, the market of Modiano. It was built on the same site where the *Plassa* (later *Askenaz/Burla*) synagogue used to be, which had been operating from 1921. The new synagogue was on the ground floor of a big office block. There is no evidence whatsoever that a religious place is maintained there. The museum of Thessaloniki's Jewish history[99] operates on the upper floor of the same building. Until the great fire in 1917 which destroyed three-quarters of the city, the area where this synagogue was found was a Jewish neighbourhood with historical synagogues and an important Jewish school. In Yad le-Zikaron there was a list of all the older synagogues of Thessaloniki. The interior space was composed of marble plaques taken from older synagogues: the *Ohel Yosef* and the one that was found in the Jewish city quarter *Baron De Hirsch*.[100] Yad le-Zikaron synagogue was open for the celebration of the most important Jewish High Holy days and religious ceremonies.

Neither *Monastirioton* nor *Yad-le Zikaron* synagogue were visited on a regular basis. During fieldwork I frequently came across a negative attitude towards the importance of the synagogue for both younger and older people. Thus, it was often explained to me that people tended not to be very religious and the majority of them rarely went to synagogue. Many old people justified this attitude by the fact that their family's lifestyle was not religious at all. I often came across comments like: "My mother was a rebel" or "my father was exactly like me; he was a free spirit. And the Rabbi of pre-War

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[98] The newspaper *Kathimerini*: 3 March 1996.

[99] This was the old museum whereas -as already mentioned- the new Jewish museum is situated in another area.

[100] Information from the book *The Synagogues of Salonika and Veroia* by Messinas, 1997: 103.

times was also a free spirit". But most people concluded that although they were not very religious, and therefore only occasionally attended synagogue, they nevertheless had a "strong consciousness" of their Jewish identity and maintained strong affiliations with the Community and the brotherhood.

The age factor was important and significantly affected the way people expressed their religiosity. Thessalonikian Jews who had survived the Holocaust adopted a more negative stance towards religion. The War had divided time for them and had influenced their present beliefs and way of thinking. Thus the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust and the ruptures it caused to people's lives led to a lack of belief in religion and religious activism. The only occasions when older citizens went to synagogue were during *Yom Kippur* and at the memorial services held for friends or relatives. Most people associated the Day of Atonement with the commemoration of their families lost during the War. Linda who was a Holocaust survivor, shared with me her feelings of gradual distancing from the practice of Jewish religion. Yet she still "felt" Jewish:

> Although in the past I tried to become an actively religious, I didn't manage to…My family was not religious at all. But maybe this was not so crucial. After my return from the concentration camp I realised that all religions are just made by human beings. We don't need any forgiveness. We have suffered enough so God will forgive us even if we don't fast or don't go to the synagogue. But I am perfectly aware of what it means to be Jewish.

Language was another issue for the older generation. Since the service was conducted in Hebrew they were unable to follow it. Of course this had always been the case since the language of the service was the Biblical Hebrew even in pre-War times. Yet people seemed familiar only with Greek and *Ladino* and following a service in Hebrew was largely impossible. Once Caroline narrated to me the following incident:

> The other day my husband wanted to go to the synagogue. I had several objections but to be honest I didn't want to go because the service is in Hebrew. I don't understand anything. If it were in Ladino I would go. I can't even follow the book.

The situation was different as far as middle-aged people were concerned. They seemed to attend synagogue more often at least during important Jewish celebrations. Most of them knew some Hebrew,

either because they had spent some years in Israel[101] or due to the fact that they had taken some Hebrew lessons at the Community Centre. Their perceptions about religion were not influenced so heavily by traumatic wartime memories. But even for them attending synagogue was not a weekly duty but rather a selective practice of their religion. The majority of them attended only some celebrations and felt no obligation to participate in all of them. The Rabbi's initiatives were aimed mainly at bringing young people - especially teenagers - back into the synagogue. Yet according to my observations, although the young generation often paid visits to the Community Centre, going to the synagogue was not a frequent occurrence among them.

Being in the synagogue

The small synagogue's entrance was always guarded and I was allowed to enter only after my informants reassured the guard that I was a friend. The average age of worshippers was seventy to eighty years old. During the visits I paid to the synagogue the younger generation -especially teenagers - seemed to attend only occasionally. The practising members belonged mostly to the middle-aged and the older generations. Men and women would stand in different parts of the temple: men's place was on the left and women's on the right from the entrance. Very few people seemed to know the service so most of them would hold the ritual book which was written in *Ladino* and Greek. The Rabbi's wife's participation was very active: she kept reading the Bible very carefully and making some corrections when necessary. Other women seemed to enjoy being together with their friends and engaged in quiet discussions and some of them looked as if they disapproved of her intervention. Men were wearing their *kipah* and seemed much more concentrated. During my first visits I must admit that I felt like a complete stranger but as time went by and I got involved more in my informants lives things grew easier.

The language issue seemed to cause a lot of confusion among the participants. Only the Rabbi, his wife, the teachers and a few others seemed to understand the Hebrew service. But the language issue was also a matter of concern among the teachers:

> You know, we keep these celebrations mainly for children. They have to learn the real meaning, the symbolism. Of course, it is very difficult for them to take part in the ceremonies. They

[101] There were several reasons for visiting Israel and most Thessalonikian Jews went there at least once a year. As I already mentioned some had studied there, others had lived in a *Kibbutz* (communal settlement) and others had distant or close relatives with whom they kept in touch.

hardly understand the Rabbi's words. He speaks in a language so removed from what they are used to hearing.

For children, Greek was their everyday language, not only within their families but also in their everyday interaction with their peers. Hebrew was only taught at school so for most of them it was an unknown language.

The school paid regular visits to the synagogue. For example, for the celebration of *Purim* most children were present together with their teachers. They sat at the front so they could hear and watch the service better. But they all seemed unable to understand much of what was going on. In fact, they had difficulty in keeping quiet and the teachers, together with the Rabbi's wife, were constantly trying to calm them down. Although children had to participate at certain moments and intervene in the ritual by making a noise with the plastic toys they had been given, they didn't know when to stop. For them all this seemed a kind of game and an opportunity to laugh and tease each other.

Food was a significant part of all the celebrations I attended at the synagogue. After the service people went to help themselves to sweet and salty dishes found on large tables near the exit or in the synagogue yard. All of them were brought from the pastry shop, which was co-operating with the Community. All the food had been produced under the supervision of the Rabbi and was made according to *kosher* dietary rules. I remember a middle-aged man told me: "Undoubtedly this is kosher food. The Rabbi would not allow anything else". It seemed to me that most of these dishes were not at all similar to what people considered "authentic" Sephardic dishes. I once attended the celebration of *Purim* at the synagogue with a teacher from the school. I described this ceremony in my diary as follows:

> At the exit of the synagogue there was a table with sweets on it: almond rolls from Averof pastry-shop. Everyone who was leaving the synagogue was having one of them. Barbara told me that you normally eat diples for the celebration of Purim. Their triangular shape symbolises Haman's ears. Yet in Volos, where she come from, they make them in shape of Haman's teeth. She added that this celebration is mainly for the children.

Thessalonikian Jews created a sense of shared sociability through sharing common patterns; eating together and exchanging food narratives were important aspects of the process of creating sameness and experiencing their commonalities. In this chapter I have described in detail some rituals that involved commensality. Yet all the rituals that took place in the Community's institutions involved

some sort of commensality and common consumption. By sharing food people shared a belief in belonging to a unique, highly valued past and present. Thus they created communal spaces and identities. The contestations over food and the multiplicity of Thessalonikian Jewish identities were experienced through communal food consumption. There were evident tensions but also continuities between being Sephardic and eating "traditional" food and being Jewish by eating *kosher* food. The different generational attitudes were also highlighted along with the Community's emphasis on childhood since children through understanding and enjoyment are identified with the future of Sephardic Jewishness in Thessaloniki. Belonging to the Community was not perceived as abstract, fixed and static. It was constantly being created and recreated by the exchange of cultural elements within which culinary activities were central. The fact that the Jewish people of Thessaloniki shared specific culinary discourses enhanced feelings of membership and belonging. By sharing the same food and constructing similar narratives they shared a sense of common history, common origins and generally common perceptions about the past and the present. For Jews in Thessaloniki food served as a repository of collectivity and this points to the uniqueness of food as emblematic of the uniqueness of Thessalonikian Jewish identity.

Chapter Six

Food is good to talk about and remember with: Narrativising the present and the past

> Food, of course, has a supremely physical presence, and we interact with this presence through our senses: we smell, taste, see and touch food, and sometimes hear it. We do not necessarily need language and discourse to experience food. However language and discourse are integral to the meanings we construct around food – how we interpret and convey to others our sensual experiences in preparing, touching and eating food – which in turn shape our sensual responses (Lupton, 1996: 13).

What follows is an exploration of food narratives about the present and the past. However such narratives are not only treated as ideological constructions but also as strategies that Jewish people in Thessaloniki employed in order to make a series of identifications. In particular, the creation and perpetuation of such narratives mobilised notions of “authenticity”, “originality”, “traditionality” in an attempt to create and re-create cultural boundaries and underlie distinctiveness. Thessalonikian Jews, by narrating their food differences, solidified their sense of belonging, legitimised their distinctiveness and constructed their Sephardic identities. The topic of cultural distinctiveness is inevitably linked to the process of synthesis and appropriation; in the case of Sephardic and Thessalonikian cuisine the term “culinary appropriation” describes the mutual influence and accommodation of the two culinary worlds. In this chapter I also discuss the role of food narratives in the enactment of memories. It is argued that my informants used food as a means to narrativise their past: their childhood, family life, the city’s past, their lives before and after the Second World War. Remembering was an effective way of re-visiting past identities, re-evaluating them and creating new identifications. And yet all these complex processes of narrativising Sephardic Jewishness were strongly influenced by translation and negotiation since narratives are always shaped by individual experiences and expectations. Hence, Sephardiness is not a homogeneous given identity but should be treated as a process of continuous overlapping, and quite often contrasting, identifications. In this process the role of individuality and human agency could not be overlooked.

Part A: Food is good to talk about

The search for authenticity

It is difficult to define "authenticity" the term used to describe most culinary worlds. On the surface "authenticity" entails several other notions like "being old", "being original", "being uncontaminated" and thus "real" and "pure". Yet the more concepts we employ in order to explain the claims to authenticity the more complex the issue becomes. Questions like "why" and "when" authenticity is claimed remind us that "being authentic" is not a natural fact, a given description but a conscious construction, a deliberate identification used by individuals. By this token it becomes increasingly difficult to define the criteria that identify something - food in this case - as "authentic" because there is a constant process of authenticating. Bakalaki (2000) argues that in relation to food these criteria multiply and change sometimes with unpredictable outcomes. People are active controllers of such discourses because they tend to search for and cherish authenticity. Thus "authentic" food is in a process of constant redefinition without having fixed and prescribed boundaries.

The issue of authenticity could be linked to questions like "how" and "why" people engage in processes of creating or sharpening already existing cultural differences. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) in a study exploring the connections between culture, power and the centrality of place, stress that a process of identification is often involved in any endeavour to define something as "authentic". This process could be described as an attempt to legitimatise and justify social choices. If we take into account the double forces of legitimisation and authentication it becomes easier to explain why specific cultural differences are sometimes considered important in the creation of identities and others are less so.

In a study of Jewish food in the Middle East it is noted that despite the processes of the standardisation of diet we can still identify the culinary complex of the Jewish-Sephardic world. And yet the question of whether this food is "really" Sephardic-Jewish is not so important; rather, what becomes worth studying is why and how Jewish people in the area consider this cuisine as "their own". Thus the process of "authenticating" could be approached differently: from the point of view of its emotional investment and its centrality in the creation of Sephardic-Jewish identities. It is claimed that: "People often ask me if there is such a thing as Jewish food. Because these dishes have such a powerful hold on the emotions of Jews, are so much part of their ancestral memories and so tied to their culture and identity, I believe that they should be considered Jewish" (Roden, 1994: 158).

An anthropological analysis of cuisine should enable the deconstruction and the critical re-reading of discourses on "originality" and "authenticity". Therefore what is interesting is not whether Thessalonikian Jewish cooking was "totally" different from the non-Jewish but to question and assess how, why and when Thessalonikian Jews employ discourses of authenticity and originality in relation to their cuisine. I soon realised that cooking was used as a channel, which enabled comparisons to be made "silently". By employing discourses of authenticity in relation to cooking Thessalonikian Jews managed and manipulated in various ways the discourse of cultural distinctiveness. I was often offered to taste this difference: "This is the way our mothers and grandmothers used to cook. Our cuisine has been influenced by theirs". Others added almost naively that these culinary differences were not actual differences:

> You know most dishes seem the same as yours. But they are not. I don't know why but they taste differently.

However the Jews in Thessaloniki attributed great importance to the issue of "authenticity". The regular references to the "authenticity" of their cuisine strengthened their discourse of cultural origins. They constantly employed their Sephardic past to describe their cultural presence and food was seen as an important part of their cultural make-up. As Skouteri-Didaskalou (1997-8) notes the history of a period is reflected in tastes and recipes. Furthermore the history of a certain period could be written through the dietary habits and the culinary practices of that time.

Thus their distant Spanishness acquired a sense of familiarity and timelessness and was employed by people in order to describe their present cultural status. I repeatedly came across issues of authenticity relating to Spanish ancestry and its culinary heritage. Even though the Spanish period of the fifteenth century constituted a distant and remote past it was perceived as a common point of reference and a period that marked their culinary culture. For Thessalonikian Jews their Spanish past was still alive, viewed as an experienced, incorporated and shared past; food often functioned as a means to participate and experience this sharing. This process of incorporation and embodiment was "consumed" actually and symbolically through food.[102]

[102] Seremetakis in her book *The Senses Still,* an exploration of perceptions and memories as material culture in modernity argues: "Commensality here *is not* just the social organisation of food and drink consumption and the rules that enforce social institutions at the level of consumption. Nor can it be reduced to the food-related senses of taste and odour. *Commensality can be defined as the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling.* Historical consciousness and other

I recall scenes where all this emphasis on authenticity sounded like a powerful statement of belonging: eating Sephardic food was equated with being a Sephardic Jew. A comment made by Sara further emphasised this link:

> In general Sephardic cuisine has remained the same. It is a diet, well it is more than that, it is a lifestyle that has not changed at all.

On several occasions, while I was paying visits to people's homes, talked with them about food, watched them cooking or when I participated in celebrations at the community's institutions, my presence generated a series of comments in relation to food:

> Watch carefully, because these are authentic Sephardic dishes.
>
> or
>
> This is purely a Sephardic dish. Only Sephardic Jews know how to prepare it.

It is important to note that my informants were aware that I was interested in their culinary habits so they were consciously trying to draw my attention to the fact that their cuisine was undoubtedly Sephardic. It was a conscious and yet meaningful effort: the process of authenticating was not "a given" but an active strategy in which individuals were contributors and controllers. In the case of Thessalonikian Jews it seemed like the discourse of authenticity was mobilised to solidify notions of Sephardic distinctiveness.

The fact that most dishes echoed Spanish names was the ultimate proof of this cultural and historical association. I recall phrases like:

> Sfougatico is of Spanish origin.
>
> or
>
> Maronchinos is a sweet dish we prepare and this is definitely a Spanish word.
>
> or
>
> In Greek you call this sweet loukoumades and in Ladino we call them boumouelos.

Spanish origins were invested with such cultural importance that some Jewish people in Thessaloniki attributed Spanishness to certain food items even where no equivalent word can be found in the Spanish language. I recall the explanation that one of my informants gave me without even being asked: "Haminados eggs are named like that by the term hamin, which means oven in Spanish". But

forms of social knowledge are created and then replicated in time and space through commensal ethics and exchange" (Seremetakis, 1994: 37, emphasis in the original).

another strongly objected to this explanation. For him *"hamin"* is not a Spanish but a Hebrew word and it doesn't mean oven but it is used to describe the food that is cooked on a Friday night and metaphorically means "warmth" and "embers". Sephardic identity was justified through certain dishes but depended much on personal interpretations; Spanish associations were highly treasured and yet they were subject to individual translation and thus negotiation.

"Keeping the traditions alive"

This section of my analysis deals with the different meanings that Thessalonikian Jews attributed to the term "tradition". Many scholars stress the fact that tradition is not something static and unchangeable but subject to intervention and eventually transformation.[103] The term involves a process of invention and implies continuity with a certain desired past. Therefore, tradition refers to symbolic and ritualised behaviour governed by repetition. He makes use of the notion of "invented traditions" in an attempt to argue that traditions are not natural entities but constructed processes. It is important to mention here the distinction adopted in relation to tradition: invented traditions are linked to the innovation of the state with its associated phenomena whereas customary practices include repetition but refer mostly to smaller scale human groups. The term custom refers to "any desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in history" (Hobsbawm, 1983: 2).

The processes of protecting, defending and reproducing a shared set of customs or traditions are involved with the search for originality and authenticity. An appeal to traditionality permits strong emotional attachments, and practices that are characterised as "traditional" have a great appeal to many people. Thus in many cases the validity and continuation of tradition are highly valued. In this case tradition or custom is equated with established conventions, proven procedures and tried practices. This symbolic baggage that traditions and customs carry attributes a sense of continuity and moral or even aesthetic justification. If something is characterised as "traditional" it is beyond doubt and thus highly recommended (Warde, 1997: 61-64).

[103] In an article concerning anthropological and indigenous interpretations of the wedding cake custom in Glasgow, Scotland (Charsley, 1987) it is stressed that what is valued as traditional is often the outcome of choice and is characterised by a continuous attachment of meanings. Thus experiencing present practices generates appropriations and translations. Sutton in *Memories Cast in Stone,* a study about the relevance of the past in the everyday life of Kalymnians Greek islanders, adds that tradition "is not a relic of the past to be preserved like a monument, but ironically it retains its vitality through the very debates over its significance. Its relevance, its applicability to different practices… is debated and recreated, along with 'modernity', in the words and actions of the present (Sutton, 1998: 115).

Yet it is important to note that tradition does not imply any sense of fabrication; more accurately it should be defined as a process of re-authentication and re-valorisation. Thessalonikian Jews laid a strong emphasis on the “preservation” of tradition. The majority of my discussions included several references to the importance of “keeping the traditions alive”. This way the active role of individuals in the use and perpetuation of tradition was emphasised. The interviewees perceived traditional ways not as an abstract entity imposed on them but more as a creation, a process in which their contribution was essential. Tradition had to be “preserved” or in other words individuals were responsible for practising it.

My informants drew a clear dividing line between tradition and religion. Natalie, a housewife in her fifties and mother of two children, explained to me:

> I don’t argue that we are religious persons. Bear in mind that tradition and religion are different things. We may go to the synagogue only occasionally but in general we keep the old traditions.

People tended to value more the local customary practice than the adoption of strict religious norms. In this case the term “tradition” was equated with the term “custom” whereas the process of invention signified a kind of repetitiveness and familiarity and thus a creative construction. This repetition in relation to cooking traditions implied continuity with the past and in a sense justified claims to historical continuities.

Although Thessalonikian Jews emphatically distinguished religion from tradition, after several months of fieldwork I realised that in fact the two terms could not be distinguished so clearly. Tradition, which was partly expressed through cooking, went hand in hand with the major feasts of Judaism: the occasions when “traditional” dishes were prepared and consumed were actually the important religious holy days of Judaic religion. People’s effort to connect celebratory cooking with tradition and not with religion was quite indicative of their non-religious perspective on life and their interpretations of contemporary Jewishness. Dinah had been formerly married to a Christian but was currently married to a Jewish man. For her “Jewish Easter” is equated with tradition and family:

> I keep Pessah because it is a very nice tradition. On this ritual occasion all the family gathers together. That night we keep all the customs. But I can’t say that during the whole week we don’t eat bread. Tradition and religion are not the same thing. It’s good to keep the tradition. Tell me why not keep celebrating Pessah? It brings the family together if not more.

What is interesting here is that in order for traditions to be followed the family setting was considered a necessary precondition; family was thought of as the indispensable prerequisite for the continuation of tradition. I recall Linda's words: "Traditions are mainly followed by those who have a family". Not having a family could mean two things: either family members were killed during the War or they were living outside Thessaloniki. This woman was living with her husband but her two daughters were living abroad, one in Poland and one in Israel. The reunion of the family and the coming of her children and grandchildren during important Jewish celebrations were opportunities to follow the traditions and therefore to cook traditional Sephardic dishes.

Keeping the traditions and therefore reproducing traditional dishes was a powerful statement of belonging. People considered cooking to be a means of denoting belonging to Sephardic Jewishness and the table was the appropriate context on which the feelings of belonging could be reproduced. For working mothers, the matrix of identity, tradition, cooking and the home was almost inseparable. The role of women as mothers and basic food providers was indispensable; they were considered to be the main agents of "traditionality" ensuring that everything is and will be followed without any ruptures:

> I try to preserve my identity. I try to keep some of the Jewish traditions at home, at least as much as I can. I still prepare traditional dishes. The other day I cooked our bean soup. I often do so. You know, the only thing we have left is keeping our food traditions.

It is evident that my informants considered women to be "responsible" for keeping the traditions alive and to make sure that everything is done as it used to be. I believe that these ideas were implicitly statements of belonging and women were perceived as the gatekeepers of Sephardic Jewish identity.

"We cook differently"

The way a human group eats may give us important information about its diversity, hierarchy and organisation. The distinction between "Us" and "Them" is among the most significant diversities that enable humans to create feelings of membership and belonging. At the same time food serves as a locus for denoting oneness and otherness. According to Fischler (1988) those who consume different food and in different ways are categorised as "others". He also argues that by this process of defining "otherness" human groups sustain and promote their sense of distinctiveness and belonging. Food could be considered an important context in which such distinctions are generated and perpetuated.

Otherness might refer to ethnic groups and thus food could be the register for ethnic divisions based on - real or imagined - culinary differences. The topic of ethnic cuisine and its symbolic associations have been analysed by Van Den Berghe (1984) who notes that the shared culinary complex is as important as language and becomes a basic bridge of ethnicity. He concludes that food and especially ethnic food could be seen as an excellent paradigm for ethnic categorisations: only through contact with the other do we construct our boundaries, notions of familiarity and sameness. "Us" and "Them" are categories mutually defined and perceived. And yet one of the most efficient ways to "taste" otherness is through food and eating.

Hence, in this section I attempt to address the issue of cultural distinctiveness and the importance that Thessalonikian Jews attributed to it. Cooking for them was a vehicle for expressing the feeling of belonging to a distinct group. During my fieldwork I witnessed people's efforts to create and maintain cultural boundaries. Food provided an excellent opportunity for the demarcation of boundaries and for emphasising the distinct qualities of Jewish cooking in the city. As most of my visits to people's homes took place mainly before lunchtime I was often prompted to "taste" some of this difference. While I was offered some food people made the following comment:

> Here, have some so you can tell yourself. This is the way we cook. You cook differently. Now you have an idea of how we cook.

The issue of creating and maintaining culinary boundaries was among the major preoccupations of my informants. There was a repeated attempt to define otherness, so that Jewish cuisine often stood in contrast to Christian cuisine. In fact the culinary complex was often employed to stress this dividing line. It is important to note here that although I was given different interpretations of the historical factors that influenced Sephardic cuisine there was a noticeable consensus -especially among the first and the second generations- on separating Greek from Jewish cuisine:

> In general the Jewish food is different from the Greek cuisine. You have too much heavy food and you fry it a lot. Of course this can be explained historically. Our ancestors were poor and always persecuted so that they had to move quite often. Our diet mainly consists of vegetables and bread.

Other informants pointed out that such comments were not historically accurate since Sephardic Jewry could be found in Thessaloniki uninterruptedly for more than four hundred years. Nevertheless for my interviewees, at least for the first and the second generation, food and cuisine was living evidence of cultural distinctiveness and a source of cultural pride.

Defining otherness and drawing a dividing line between Jewish and Christian cooking was a topic I came across a number of times. Going back through my fieldnotes I realise that people, mostly women, were keen to emphasise the differences between the two cuisines and stressed that although most ingredients were the same, Sephardic culinary culture involves different "techniques". An old woman who lived with her husband had associated the reunion of the family with cooking Sephardic dishes. Her daughters and grandchildren were not living in the same house. Although she initially argued that she cooks only on the occasion of a family reunion I realised - after a number of visits - that preparing and consuming Sephardic dishes was an everyday reality for her and her husband. After several visits, she invited me to her kitchen:

> I am preparing our bean soup. Here, taste some. You know our bean soup differs from yours. We fry the beans with fresh onions until they become brown. See? It must be served thick.

I still cannot explain the fact that although Linda's bean soup looked very similar to the soup prepared in my Christian home it did taste differently. Maybe I was well prepared by my informant to taste this difference. The same thing happened with all the Sephardic Jewish dishes that I happened to try; they had a similar appearance and some of them the same ingredients as non-Sephardic Thessalonikian dishes and yet they tasted differently. This woman's husband added to our discussions afterwards: "I have never tasted your bean soup but my wife is much more flexible. She can eat it". My informant was also proud of the "secret knowledge" involved in Sephardic cooking. I remember that during another visit the same lady shared with me an important "secret" technique of Sephardic cooking:

> Sometimes before baking a pie we twist it like that. You don't know how to twist pies the way we do. At least I don't think I've seen this technique anywhere.

I am almost positive that this "secret technique" was something that was also found in Christian cooking. Yet what is important is not if differences really exist but the fact that people themselves wanted them to exist. As was mentioned before Thessalonikian Jews interpreted, valorised and negotiated their culinary culture and therefore made statements about their identity.

The distinction "Us" versus "Them" came up frequently when Jewish cooking was compared to non-Jewish cooking. While I was in the field I went to a coffee shop with a Christian friend of mine who was very interested in Jewish cuisine the the director of the Old People's Home. Our discussion centred on the topic of Jewish cuisine. My friend said that the other day some friends had gathered and cooked the Jewish bean soup and he remarked: "We added some tomato juice as the cookbook recommends". The director was quite surprised:

> But why? We never put tomato in this soup. Some recipes in this book are not exact. I have noticed it with other recipes as well. For example sometimes it suggests many eggs. No, I never cook this way.

It is quite interesting to note that in her words she made use of both "We" and "I" as if the way she cooks is representative of what Jewish cuisine is, or as if Jewish cuisine was something fixed and strictly prescribed. In other words she considered that only "insiders" knew how to preserve their cuisine "correctly". A fixed culinary order was employed by her and other informants. Believing in a fixed, static and prescribed culinary world sustains and promotes fixed cultural identities. Therefore the thought of a culinary order becomes a powerful statement of being and belonging.

Apart from the different techniques of Sephardic cuisine and the different repertoire of recipes the use of different ingredients in cooking is what made dishes different. Thessalonikian Jews translated difference in terms of tastier, lighter and healthier cuisine. Thus my informants drew my attention to the frequent use of unleavened bread *(matzah)* in their cooking. *Matzah* is mainly associated with Passover and it is purchased during those days from the Community Centre. As explained:

> In the past friends or relatives who went to Israel returned here full of food items. There was no way of finding matzah here. But nowadays we buy it from the Community Centre.

The unleavened bread was the basic ingredient for most Sephardic dishes associated with the celebration of *Pessah:*

> We use matzoth as the basic ingredient in many of our dishes. We use it instead of bread or phyllo pastry in order to prepare fried balls, pies, sauces, almost everything. So the dishes become more tasty.

A number of authors have stressed the fact that there is an increasing preoccupation with the health effects of the modern high-fat and high-sugar diet (Bradby, 1997, Caplan, 1997, Lupton, 1996). Some of them consider the agenda of food information and view it as a powerful political medium through which food producers often construct notions of "healthy eating" in order to maximise their profit. In a relevant article (Keane, 1997), it has been noted recently that commercial considerations, in particular advertising, have been shaped to a great extent by the concept of healthy eating. Thus the concept becomes a political issue and the information concerning healthy food enacts political influence and power.[104]

The discourse of "healthy eating" is a powerful political tool not only for the reason described above. In the case of the Jewish people in Thessaloniki the concept of "healthy eating" was evolved in order to serve desired "political ends". Jewish cuisine was considered to be healthier than the non-Jewish - the Greek in general - and this statement could be considered a powerful statement of belonging and identity.[105] Susan asserted that:

> You have too much heavy food and you fry it a lot. Our cuisine is much lighter. Our ancestors' diet consisted mainly of bread and vegetables. Quite light and simple things.

Even the use of *matzah* to make pies, fried balls or sauces was thought to make the food "tastier" and "lighter" and thus, different. Of course such a belief was not scientifically tested since the preparation of some dishes with *matzah* still involved unhealthy culinary practices like, for example, frying with olive oil. The point I want to make is that Thessalonikian Jews employed the notion of "healthy eating", most of the time fairly inaccurately, in order to point to the distinct and more positive qualities of their own cooking. Their accounts of "cooking differently" and having a "healthier diet" were often statements of "being different".

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[104] Reilly and Miller (1997) discuss the central role of the media in the emergence of food as a social issue. However they argue that it is "important to go beyond media-centric explanations and understand that the way in which the media operates is a product of complex interactions between the media, the social institutions on which they report and the public" (1997: 249).

[105] The major food classification scheme that emerged from interviews with adolescent women in Toronto divided foodstuffs in two categories: "junk food" and "healthy food". Each category was vested with symbolic meanings. Hence "junk food" was associated with weight gain, friends, independence and guilt whereas "healthy food" was associated with weight loss, parents and being at home (Chapman and Maclean, 1993).

“When our cuisine meets yours”

Among the first questions which my research generated was whether Jewish cooking was notably different from the cooking of other, non-Jewish Thessalonikians and if so what was the degree of differentiation and the meeting points. My informants were constantly trying to demarcate Jewish from non-Jewish, or more accurately, Christian cuisine and to point up the differences between the two culinary worlds. Nevertheless going back carefully through my field-material I realise that several discussions I had with my informants suggest the blending of Jewish and non-Jewish cuisine. Cuisine, recipes and ingredients, like other cultural devices, are not bounded entities. Thus in my analysis I have used the notions of “synthesis” and “appropriation”. I prefer these terms to “culinary absorption” or “assimilation” because they imply a homogenisation process paying no attention to the multiplicity and the diversity of the contexts in which the process of food synthesis takes place. Lavie and Swedenburg (1996) are very sceptical of this search for an uncontaminated and uncorrupted original. For them hybridity - I have used the term synthesis - is no less “authentic”.

The issue of proximity between Sephardic and Greek cuisine or more correctly between Sephardic and Thessalonikian cuisine was a recurrent theme in most food discussions I had with middle-aged and older people. In these discussions the boundaries between Greek, Thessalonikian and Sephardic cooking constantly shifted and were subject to negotiation and change. The older women considered the links between Sephardic and Jewish cuisine to be so strong that according to them it was not easy to distinguish between them. Sephardic dishes were considered at the same time Thessalonikian dishes and were seen as part and parcel of the history of the city. When I asked Rosa to briefly describe the origins of Sephardic dishes she replied: “These dishes are taken from the cuisine of Thessaloniki”. Her friend Rene added that:

> The culture of Thessaloniki has been strongly influenced by Jewish culture. You can’t study Sephardic cuisine if you don’t study Thessalonikian and Mediterranean cuisine.

In some cases people treated Sephardic cuisine as an integral part of Greek foodways. Some of their comments were conscious or unconscious efforts to stress the “Greekness” of several ingredients they used. Once Linda commented: “Our olive oil is the best in the world”. In her words the term “Our” referred to Greece and Greek cuisine as opposed to other non-Greek cuisines. The fact that the Jews had lived in Greece for hundred of years provided the justification for the local adaptation of their cuisine:

> All these are Greek dishes. There is no 100% Jewish cuisine. You know, we have been living here for more than 400 years.

The dynamic processes of negotiation and synthesis were even more evident among younger Thessalonikian Jews. In particular, families with younger members seemed to follow willingly some Christian festivities and the customs that accompany them. Dinah explained the situation as follows:

> I could say that along with the Jewish festive days I also celebrate some Christian festive days and the same applies especially to the younger members of my family. And during Easter we eat mageiritsa, the Christian Easter soup (Laugh). We like it. You know, it's inevitable.

The following incident illustrates this quite clearly. A young Christian woman, when asked about her Jewish friend, answered:

> She is Jewish but not like the others, she is modern. Lilly follows our customs. For example during the Christian Easter she eats our mageiritsa.

I soon realised that for many of my informants there are no real and objective boundaries between Sephardic-Jewish cuisine and local Thessalonikian. As they accurately put it "All the people of Thessaloniki like well-cooked food. That's why our cuisine is so tasty".

The process of synthesis involved in cooking was one of the themes I repeatedly came across while carrying out fieldwork. Negotiation, interchange and the shifting of culinary boundaries characterised people's accounts of their present day dietary habits. Not only the cuisine of Thessaloniki but also the Orthodox Christian food traditions had significantly influenced Sephardic foodways. In any case, Thessalonikian Jews, by negotiating their menu, shifted between "being" and "feeling" Sephardic, Thessalonikian and Greek. My informants mobilised these culinary discourses, whether Sephardic, Thessalonikian or Greek, in their attempt to construct identifications and negotiate their belonging.

Part B: Food is good to remember with

The present cannot be perceived as an autonomous entity for it is constantly shaped and reshaped by discourses about the past. By this token the present blends with the past and present realities become strongly affected by past images and memories. Connerton (1989) agues that our past experiences

influence and shape our present responses.[106] This leads him to conclude that it is difficult -if not impossible- to rigidly separate the past from the present. The process of past and present interaction could characterise a number of contexts, including everyday and seemingly trivial ones.[107] Past and present cannot be examined in isolation for they form a dynamic continuum, which variously shapes the individual's life.

I argue that in the process of constructing present realities the food culture we were brought up with constitutes a bridge between past and present experiences. The process of managing aspects of our identities involves a series of memory functions: remembering or forgetting selectively. People use all or some of these operations of memory in order to articulate discourses about the present. Discussions centred on food prove an effective channel for memory release; they enable the attachment of many sentiments and recollections and as such they constitute a central mnemonic device, a vehicle for expressing fragments of individual and collective identities. As Boyarin (1994) argues, the dynamic process of selecting memories shapes to a significant extent membership and individual identity. Thus we could define this process as constant reinvention and reinforcement that enable individuals to construct social boundaries, exclusions and inclusions.

The link between food and memories enables the construction of membership and belonging in relation to time and place and thus it can be perceived as one ingredient in the process of creating identities. Food plays a central role in releasing memories in relation to past times and places. On the other hand the formation of identities strongly depends on positioning towards the past and thus on memories. Thus memories - real or imagined - constitute a sense of being and belonging, a sense of identity.

In the case of Thessalonikian Jews a strong dividing line runs through individual and collective memories and as such it transforms present experiences and accounts of membership and belonging. For old and middle-aged Jewish people the Second World War experiences directly or indirectly divided their recollections of family, communal or city life. Partly these were recollections of a happy childhood and harmonious family relationships before the War but to a great extent they were traumatic experiences and tragic memories of the deportation of the Jewish population to Poland and their return

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[106] Though Connerton's account of the work of memory is important I believe he fails to picture how memory is used in everyday life. Thus the concept of "collective memory" does not explain how memories are translated, negotiated and 'digested' by individuals and to what extent - if at all - they shape individual lives.

[107] Hirschon-Filippaki (1993) examines the role of memories in the everyday construction of identities of the Asia Minor refugees in Kokinia (Pireus, Athens). Tsimouris (1999) in another study explores how songs become for a group of refugees from *Reisntere* in Asia Minor, songs of protest and memory and thus ingredients in the construction of their social identity.

to Thessaloniki. People's accounts, especially the survivors' narratives, were filtered by the dichotomy "before" and "after" which sharply marked their lives and inscribed recollections and discourses of belonging and membership. Food narratives were treated as a valuable channel for memory release and a tool which people employed in order to talk about their past, their childhood, their lost family life, the city of Thessaloniki and a way to share their "dark experiences" during the War period. Food proved an effective medium which people mobilised in order to recall scenes from their childhood and past family life and link them with the discourses of cultural continuity and Spanish origins. They often emphasised the nexus between Sephardiness and their parents', grandparents' or their own cooking: "Sephardic Jews still prepare the same dishes. I first saw them in my parents' home".

Although people highly valued their Sephardiness there was an evident tendency to emphasise the non-religious aspect of current Jewish diet. Moreover the older and middle-aged population of Thessaloniki tended to distinguish the local customary food practices from strict religious dietary laws. One interviewee commented that:

> I am not interested in keeping the Jewish dietary laws. I just keep the food traditions that I learned from my mother.

Food memories formulated an integral part of the discourses of Sephardic ancestry and the continuation of a Judeo-Spanish past through an important locus of cultural production: the mother's cuisine and family's food traditions.

Remembering childhood and family life

My informants often made references to childhood and past family life: the taste, the smell or even the thought of certain dishes was often the starting point for recollections. Thessalonikian Jews, by remembering, evoked images of their past and lost childhood. It has been underlined that "food nostalgia" is a kind of personal nostalgia, a reminder of homesickness, the feeling of loss, of warmth and security. For Seremetakis (1994) *nostalghia* is the sensory reception of life and personal history. Individuals try to recreate these rosy recollections of childhood and home by reproducing past activities. These attempts are perceived as providing the cherished warmth and security of their early life. In most of my interviewees' accounts there was an evident recollection of a harmonious past through remembering the tastes of childhood. Albertos commented:

> I remember a sweet that I can't find anymore called tupishti. It looks like your walnut cake. My aunt used to make it dark with a lot of syrup. I called her Nona. She used to make it for the day of Kippur. Generally I am a great fan of sweet tastes, but believe me this was something else. I am still looking for this taste but I can't find it anymore...

This man not only "visited" his childhood through remembering this specific sweet but also at the same time made strong statements of belonging as far as the present is concerned. According to this man the Jewish sweet he refers to "looks like" but "tastes differently" from a similar sweet that non-Jewish Greeks prepare. So instead of a mundane food narrative his words acquired almost political validity since they enhanced the discourse of cultural sameness and difference, of something being "own" or "distant". This man explained that he was "still looking for this taste" but he could not "find it anywhere". These comments sounded like nostalgic recollections of a lost Judeo-Spanish world which had produced such "tastes". But this world constituted, along with its culinary culture, an irrecoverable image of the past. Food and childhood is a topic that enters the discussion of the formulation of present food likes and dislikes. In some cases the food preferences that accompanied someone as a child are very likely to shape - or at least affect - present food preferences. Lupton (1996) suggests that the taste, the smell and in some cases even the thought of specific dishes that were consumed during a happy childhood may induce a kind of nostalgia. This nostalgia for a rosy and often idealised childhood could significantly influence present food preferences to the extent that it may affect food likes and dislikes, in adolescence.

In the field after intense interaction I came to the conclusion that for most people the term "tasty" was often equated with the term "familial". People searched for tastes that were familiar, which therefore reminded them of their childhood. Caroline still cooked for her son although he had his own family at the time of my research; in order to marry a Christian woman he converted to Christianity. During the Christian Easter he fasted, following the example of his wife. The woman explained to me:

> During Christian Easter my son was fasting. I cooked some of our food for Pessah which is called pesce en salsa. My daughter in law cannot bear to even taste it but my son loves this dish and he wanted to have his portion. So, I gave him some to take home. He loves it because it is tied to memories. Food you know is something that ties in with memory. My children love this dish because they were raised with this taste. They remember tastes. The food that someone loves is definitely the one he used to eat as a little child.

Food was employed as a powerful vehicle for expressing people's past experiences. It was often explained that cooking "traditional" dishes served as a medium for remembering. As my informants put it: "The main reason you cook some dishes is to help you keep the memories alive". These memories concerned childhood but also family relationships and the dynamic familial link between its members. In many discussions food was associated with early memories of past family life and motherhood. Mintz (1994) argues that we have feelings of "property" about the cuisine we are used to and love. We recognise a certain cuisine as "our own" because we were brought up with it, it was part of a known, familiar context.

As already stated, for Thessalonikian Jews the accounts of home-made food and motherhood were clearly interconnected. The best quality food was the one that the mother had prepared; "secrets" of maternal cooking had passed on to the successive generations of local Jews. I recall Alberto' s comment about a cookbook with recipes taken from the Thessalonikian-Jewish cuisine:

> The food writer proposes ready made pastry for making a pie. Well, I don't agree with that; it shows laziness. My mother before she died she gave me the recipe for doing it at home.

For my informants home made cooking was linked to the idea of motherhood and was undoubtedly a family affair.

But images of a past family life were also translated into present cooking methods and techniques. Ruth explained to me the reason she avoided food cooked with garlic; it was not a matter of individual taste but the outcome of lived food experiences. She preferred cooking with onions because this connected her to her family and apparently her growing up experiences:

> I like garlic but I don't use it when I cook; I prefer onions. My mother used to cook like that. This is the taste I've been brought up with.

Taste for her lay between individual choice and family experiences or, to rephrase this, her food memories shaped her individual food choices and preferences.

Food memories in relation to married life were often used as means of releasing implicit criticism of beloved persons. Thus food memories became a vehicle that people used in order to evaluate past family relationships and implicit comments about recent ones. This was the case for Rita, a middle-aged working woman, who recalled through food narratives her relations with her mother and mother-in-law:

> As far as cooking is concerned I learned a lot from my mother in law. My mother was a rebel; she refused to keep the traditions. For my mother in law cooking was a kind of ritual: she cleaned up, washed herself and then she cooked for hours. I remember I first tasted a sweet called sutlach at her home. At the beginning I thought it was a bit burnt but I found it so delicious. Of course I was embarrassed to say anything. After some time I realised that the more burnt it is the more tasty it becomes.

For Rita her mother was “a rebel” because she refused to keep the Jewish food traditions. So she learned the secrets of Jewish culinary culture from her mother-in-law. Entering another family by marrying someone meant that she had to learn how to cook traditional Sephardic dishes in order to become “a proper” wife. Not knowing how to cook them - in a marital context - was a source of discomfort and embarrassment.

Remembering the city

Gupta and Ferguson (1997) pose interesting questions in relation to “place” and agree that the concept of “place” is an active process that could be called “place making”. Furthermore Lovell (1998) argues that belonging is “in need of emplacement” and supports the localised understandings of belonging, locality and identity. Bell and Valentine (1997) add “we are where we eat” and therefore stress the importance of geographies of consumption, the body, the home, community, region, nation and the global. Although they all reject locality as something given and fixed they do argue that perceptions of locality are socially and historically constructed. Thus the process of place making involves a series of valorisations and appropriations. Humans are active creators in shaping their perception of locality and place. In my opinion individual memories, and in particular food memories are mobilised in the process of the “place making”.

For Thessalonikian Jews -mainly for the older but also for the middle-aged people- the topic of food was inevitably related to recollections in relation to the place, the city. Older people referred to the “glorious past” of Thessaloniki and talked with nostalgia about the “good old days” of living in the city. After several visits to her home Linda took me to her kitchen and showed me the preparation for salting fish; it had to be mullet, the kind of fish the Jewish people of Thessaloniki disliked because, according to her, they thought it was “unclean”. She explained:

> We, I mean my husband and I love salted fish. We call it souimekos in Ladino. It's very difficult to find this kind of food in the market nowadays. Native Thessalonikians know that it’s the best meze for ouzo.

This old woman emphasised the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish cooking. She used food as a medium to talk about her city and assert that only “real” Thessalonikians could appreciate Jewish food. For this kind of food represented a significant part of the city's past. It was common to find salted fish in the central market of Thessaloniki and yet my informant intentionally used the salted *souimekos* as a metaphor of a city life that was irreversibly gone.

My ignorance about the past of Thessaloniki surprised my informants but it proved an excellent opportunity for remembering and narrating how their lives in the city used to be. In such discussions the topic of food was central; they often referred to foods and tastes that they missed in contemporary Thessaloniki:

> I remember the old pastry shop, the big hotels, the centre. Life used to have a different quality in those days, beauty and luxury. Nowadays I don’t even want to walk in the city streets. I prefer staying at home. Everything seems so cheap. Do you remember the Jewish pastry shop? You don't? I don't think that you are well informed. Of course you were a little child at that time.

These memories were memories of a pre-War Thessaloniki with a flourishing Jewish population. In her account the division between pre-War and post-War Thessaloniki was a difference in the quality of life: life in the city before the Second World War included a strong and prosperous Jewish community and this rendered it “beautiful” and “luxurious”. Contemporary Thessaloniki, a city with an insignificant Jewish population, is thought of as a city that lacks quality, it seems “cheap”. Her food memories functioned as a channel which she used in order to denote the shift of being and feeling a Jewish person from Thessaloniki and thus of belonging to the city's present.

For many old Thessalonikian Jews the history and the past of the city were represented by the Jewish cuisine. In some way the city’s past was best represented and preserved by cooking certain dishes. It has been stressed (Bell and Valentine, 1997) that often cities are marked by the production of certain products or foodstuffs. Similar attitudes could be applied to certain dishes since they carry powerful images in relation to past city life. This was the case for *pesce en salsa.* According to the people I talked to this dish could not be found anywhere else because it was “the history and the city of Thessaloniki itself”. The consumption of this food gave the opportunity to Linda’s husband, David, to talk about the degree of “Jewishness” of the city: the fact that in the past there had been a large Jewish

population in it created a distance between this and other Greek cities where the majority of the population was Christian. He commented:

> Women used to prepare this dish only here, in the city of Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki was different from other Greek cities. Actually it was a Jewish city.

Remembering life before and after the War

The picture that I have presented so far is one of idealised life with happy memories from childhood and recollections of a past harmonious city life. Of course this is only one part of the picture. In this section I argue that the Second World War, and the consequent destruction of the city's Jewry, constitutes a strong dividing line that spans individual and collective memories. Food memories for the older generation of Thessalonikian Jews -those who went through the War experiences- included a series of recollections dealing with the sudden rupture of life in the city. People remembered through food narratives not only their own personal fate but also recalled nostalgically a Thessalonikian-Jewish world that would never return. Food provided a powerful medium through which old people mourned their lost family members, their lost family life and their lost childhood which was marked by tragic events and a turbulent physical and cultural displacement.

All these images of before and after the War could be considered as "unspoken" or even "unsettled" spaces in which memories can operate. The past consisted of "traumatised" memories which were sharply divided by War experiences. Those experiences divided not only memories but also separated social time and space in a pre-War and a post-War Thessaloniki. Older Jewish people in Britain are reluctant and felt uncomfortable to narrate their War and Holocaust experiences. Thus: "The past was to be passed over in an anxious silence. These histories were often not to be shared, for the sense of rejection and loss they threatened to bring on the surface was not to be tolerated. At some level it was as if these histories had not really happened" (Jaleniewski-Seidler, 2000: 6).

Food discussions were used by my informants as a means to remember the painful past and evaluate the effect of past tragic experiences upon their family and community life. People's accounts of their past were at the same time strong statements of the transition they had experienced as far as their belonging to the city is concerned. From being members of a lively and numerous Jewish population before the War they became after the end of it and their return to Thessaloniki members of a persecuted, minority group. For old people who had survived the Holocaust keeping food traditions was associated with having a "proper" family, a family that did not count any lost members.

Unfortunately this was not the case for most Jewish families in Thessaloniki: "We don't have a family, we are left alone. We don't have parents or grandparents". For old people like Caroline food narratives were a way to mourn not only their lost relatives but also their lost, and in some ways "stolen" childhood:

> Life before the War was so beautiful. But everything changed so quickly. My father was trying for months to get us foreign passports. But ironically the same day we managed to get them we were already on our way to Bergen-Belsen. All my family. I remember that I was just a young girl then…

The deportation to the death camps meant the disruption of family life and the immediate cessation of an untroubled, careless and playful childhood.

The War experiences marked people's feelings and perceptions not only about what it means to be Thessalonikian but also Jewish. Before the War they used to combine unproblematically the two identities. After the Second World War not only their belonging to their native city but also aspects of their religious identity, of their Jewishness, had suffered severe disruptions. Before they lived in a friendly city whereas after the War the Jewish community in Thessaloniki was almost non-existent and people are very sceptical about their own religious identity:

> During the old times when plenty of Jews lived in Thessaloniki…Well before the War there was a very big Jewish community here. I've lived in a concentration camp. My husband also. We met there. Anyway, before the War during our celebrations everyone had to pass by Flokaki, the old pastry shop. Well it does not exist anymore, I think there is some other shop nowadays but to be honest I don't know and I don't care because I don't walk in the streets anymore, I don't have the courage. Well in those years all the men went to Flokaki to buy almond sweets. Their wives were waiting for them and the dinner table was ready. A good meal after fasting. I don't fast anymore. I admit it. My children are away, they don't live here. Well in the old days this feast was so important. There was no neighbourhood without Jews. And everyone was much more devoted to religion.

With these words this woman - a Holocaust survivor - constantly equated pre-War Thessaloniki with a lively and prosperous Jewish community. The War signalled the end not only for Thessalonikian Jewry but also lead to the re-reading of people's religiousness. Jewish religious rules were treated with much scepticism and were critically questioned.

What has been attempted so far is an exploration of discourses and narratives that Sephardic-Jewish food generated. It dealt with important issues employed and perpetuated by the informants

themselves, such as “authenticity”, “tradition”, “culinary distinctiveness” and “synthesis”. Food narratives were also used as a vehicle to revisit and reconstruct the past: childhood, family life and city life before and after the War. Thessalonikian Jews employed food narratives as strategies for creating their present and evaluating their past identities. Thus food became a powerful metaphor for belonging and an idiom for highly valued identifications, whether Jewish, Sephardic or Thessalonikian or all of them together. And yet it has to be stressed that the processes of talking about the present and the past heavily relied on individual aims and expectations. Different past and present experiences raised different evaluations and underlined the importance of translation and negotiation. The actual sensory experience of food consumption must not be overlooked. However, I strongly argue that food narratives and memories are also socially significant dimensions of food. Food consumption does not include only eating and its associated activities, but also talking about the food we eat and remembering the past, through the food we used to eat.

The Past and the Present met in a life-history

> Although born at a particular moment of history and into a particular culture, people also take responsibility for whatever culture has made them (Hastrup, 1992: 11)

What follows is an exploration of some issues raised by a particular life history: an interview with an old woman who was an Orthodox Christian until the age of 18, “became” a Jew after that age and lived as “a Jew” ever after. Several issues emerge from this particular life history such as the conditions of the birth of the Greek nation–state, issues of belonging and membership and therefore the construction of various subjectivities and collectivities and the constant interaction between those two, seemingly separate, domains. What comes out is the constant interplay and shifting between local and national but also political and personal boundaries,

This old woman was born in 1910 in Egypt, her father was born in Constantinople around 1880. Greece at that time was at war with Turkey and he volunteered to fight on the Greek side. Except for Greek he knew Arabic and French perfectly and while in Egypt he wrote in a Greek magazine called *Cosmos*. Her paternal grandfather was born in the island of Andros and her paternal grandmother was born in Nikolayef near Odessa. Her maternal grandfather was from Gallipoli in Thrace. He was an Ottoman subject and apart from Greek he spoke French and Turkish. He worked for a company named *‘Agents des Phares’* responsible for the lighting of the Lighthouse in the Aegean islands. He had three

Turkish associates with whom he spoke in Greek. Her family had lived in Cairo, Athens, the island of Mytilene –because of a blockade during the First World War– and finally in 1928 had settled in Thessaloniki.

This life-history is a step by step explanation of the diasporic conditions that gradually led to the birth of the Greek nation-state, the consolidation of national consciousness and the conceptualisation of categories such as 'national' or 'foreign'. Furthermore it challenges stereotypes such as 'one nation- one language' but most importantly reminds the researcher that there is nothing 'innate' or 'natural' about national belongings. National identity is a gradual construction and as Anderson (1991[1983]) has remarked nations function like "imagined communities" *par excellence* which involve a systematic instilling of nationalist ideology. An ideology that presupposes the myths of "continuity" and "homogeneity".

In 1928 soon after my interviewee's family had settled in Thessaloniki she met a neighbour, a Spanish Salonican Jew and fell in love with him. As her narration goes on it becomes clear that tensions between Christians and Jews were an everyday reality in pre-War Thessaloniki. Her parents were quite open-minded and the family of her future husband accepted her but still there was some degree of reluctance and ambivalence as far as their different religious background. To quote her:

> Maybe his sister was the only one who was surprised. I had not had any such reaction with the rest of his siblings. They welcomed me and spoke to me nicely, they defended me when we had disagreements with Leo -as every couple does- they were always on my side... We loved each other and had a good time together. We did not think what would happen in the future. Only our landlady said 'Good, one more Christian'… I cannot say that there were no differences between Christians and Jews before the War. There was the rumor that during Easter the Jews slaughtered a Christian boy to prepare the unleavened bread with his blood.

And yet the old lady admitted that there were a lot of matchmakings among the people of their company both Christians and Jews from various neighborhoods.

The discussion of this woman's belonging reveals that there is nothing 'natural' regarding communities and what more they cannot be perceived as static and fixed. My interviewee was born as an Orthodox Christian, raised in a Christian family but fell in love with a Salonican Jew and became "one of them" unofficially immediately after she had met him and officially after the Second World War when they got married. She argued that after her conversion to Judaism nothing had really

changed and yet in her life-story there is a constant shift between being a Christian and being a Jew. This shift reveals there is nothing natural about membership and belonging but there is a constant interplay between the categories "us" and "them". Subjectivities and everyday identifications inform and most importantly transform collectivities.

Cooking and eating are everyday activities that enable individuals to construct, reconstruct and cross boundaries and barriers. The interviewed narrated to me that her husband's aunt, Doudou, had shown her how to cook Jewish dishes in order to please her father in law but also her husband. I quote her:

> As long as Doudou lived she used to cook, then I cooked and I also cooked them the Christian dishes. They did not say anything and ate them with pleasure. Except for the fish we also made enhaminados eggs which were put in water to boil with lots of onions and we added a little salt to taste. They had to boil in a low flame, or like we did in old times when we cooked them slowly in the oven. I remember my niece Lilica who told me how in Israel they used to bake them in the oven. We liked these eggs, and used to put them often in salads. My father in law, asked for those Jewish dishes. But he also ate others. He never complained, he was a very easygoing person. As far as sweets go, I had only learned the toupishti, and my recipe was published by Fytrakis publishing house, and I even got a price. Mari – my husband's sister - had taught me this recipe when she stayed in my house. It was very tasty and very easy to make.

My interviewee admitted that she used to prepare Jewish dishes because her husband liked them – because according to her you always ask the food you are used to- but anyway she was a 'good cook' so he never 'refused' to eat Christian dishes. Her narration reveals a continuous process of exclusions, inclusions and interchange. A process of not being born as a Jew but becoming one through everyday cooking.

Keeping or not keeping *kosher* was also a matter of discussion and a matter of constant preoccupation. Here the body could be seen as 'a space', a category. Thus it is not exclusively confined to individuality; it is rather a collective affair, a 'social body', upon which communities mirror aspects of their collectiveness: fears, preoccupations and ideal behaviours. The issue of embodiment uncovers not only issues of boundary maintenance but also issues of transitionality and ambiguity. The old woman also talked about her husband's Jewish identity and keeping *kosher*:

> I remember we used to keep kosher, mainly on certain days, not all year round. But I remember there was a kosher butcher-shop in Aghia Triada Street, owned by two brothers. I remember them

> all day cutting and cleaning the meat. It was hard. Many Greeks used to buy meat from the Jew because they considered that meat cleaner. The meat they give us here every Sunday has no fat at all, it is wholesome pieces. The old people cannot chew it and there is trouble. Jews don't eat pork or salami, but neither do Muslims. My husband ate salami. He was nevertheless a true Jew, you could not touch him, but go to the synagogue he wouldn't. All the family were true Jews, but only Isidor went to the synagogue regularly, the others didn't.

Interestingly enough her husband while he was hiding in Athens during the War he tried to prepare some *matzah* for the Jewish Easter, a basic food item of kosher diet. As Counihan argues (1999) people construct, perpetuate but also challenge their cultural distinctiveness through the medium of food.

According to the storyteller there is a quasi 'geographical' division as far as belonging is concerned: before the Old People's Home and inside the Old People's Home. This transition from the realm of the family into living in a Jewish Institution is signaling also a passage from a private to a public institution. And yet the Old People's home is far from an anonymous public institution for it represents the Community and functions in a sense as an extended family. This life-history challenges via a number of different ways her national belonging and prioritises community belonging and membership, which are not considered as "givens" but rather as conscious choices and constructions. I quote:

> My favourite Holy Day was Easter. It is not to be compared with the kind of Easter we celebrate in here. My husband and me we used to celebrate Easter at Loulou's home. She was like my sister. Her husband Albertos was reading the Bible and everyone kept silent. Here I don't really feel the celebrations. And yet I participate...

Her rejection of the life in the old People's home is immediately restored and in what follows my interviewee calls this institution and the Jewish Community "homes" contrasting her communal belonging with her nationality:

> Up until today I vote at the community's elections. I am interested to know how the Community is doing because I live here. This is my home. Who supports me today? Greece perhaps? No, the Jewish Community. But of course I don't agree with all the things happening here. I have my complains.

The analysis of the complex processes of membership and belonging leads to an anti-essentialist critique of identities. Rather we should argue that identities are never static or even given but always in a process of re-definition and transformation through inclusions and exclusions. Thus communities are far form fixed and completed but instead always altered and challenged from within exactly due to the dialectic between subjectivities and collectivities but also the dialogue between the Self and the Other. Only this way we come to an agreement with Hall's argument that identity is a process of articulation and identification is a construction "a process never completed – 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned" (Ibid, 1997: 2). It is by now a common place among social scientists that "objective knowledge", "scientific validity" and "indisputable accounts" can be no longer claimed since what we are living is a post-modern period of uncertainties and we are facing images that are far from static and unchangeable but involved in a never ending process of transformations and reconceptualisations. Thus traditional methods used in social sciences such as interviewing or observing can be seen as providing only some answers to the multi-layered social realities. We can no longer seek the truth just segments of several truths. As noted: "What appears as 'real' in history, the social sciences, the arts, even in common sense, is always analysable as a restrictive and expressive set of social codes and conventions… the simplest cultural accounts are intentional creations, that interpreters constantly construct themselves through the others they study" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986:10).

The life-history discussed could be "read" as magnificent example of how collectivities can be informed by personal views and subjectivities, how there is not just one reality but complex transformations of it, how identities are not static and prescribed but subject to transformations and negotiations. Above all the story of this old woman informs and challenges conventional notions of history reminding us that there are multiple, often debatable histories. What more there is a constant exchange between the past and present dynamics since the past conditions provide explanations for the present and vice versa. A personal narration strongly indicating that there is nothing natural, or innate or even unchangeable about communities, belonging and cultural distinctiveness.

Chapter Seven
The multiplicity of the Self and Other

> My grandmother who was a native Thessalonikian went to a French school, both my parents spoke Ladino, I am Jewish and I do not speak Hebrew or Ladino, my husband who speaks Hebrew is also Jewish and my sister is married to an Orthodox Christian. Can you tell who is 'more' Greek? (notes from my field-diary)

> "Culture becomes a multicoloured, free floating mosaic, its pieces constantly in flux, its boundaries infinitely porous" (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996: 3)

The last chapter addresses the issue of the construction of images of the Self and Other. In particular I refer to the ways the Jewish people in Thessaloniki view themselves and their relationships with "the others", in this case non-Jewish Greeks. Issues like prejudice, lack of education, mixed marriages and language are going to be discussed. In this chapter Thessalonikian Jews position themselves and analyse the difficulties they faced and continue to face in their country, Greece, where the majority of the population is Orthodox Christian. I argue that in Greece and Thessaloniki anti-semitism does not exist since I think that the notion has very specific historical connotations and does not accurately reflect modern realities.[108] However the degree of social acceptance enjoyed by the Jews in Thessaloniki varies considerably. Although there might be some isolated cases of prejudiced behaviour people's attitudes are much more complex, situational, contingent and constantly influenced by past experiences and future expectations. For "being Greek" or "being Jewish" are not solid and fixed categories but shifting processes subject to translation and negotiation. It will be evident in the analysis that follows that these identifications are by no means mutually exclusive. Identifications with Jewishness or Greekness are highly contextual and to a significant degree are an outcome of individuality and choice.

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[108] The *pogroms* could be considered as anti-semitic acts. By the term "pogroms" we refer to the organised expulsions of Jewish populations from European countries like Russia. A clear anti-Semitic program was the Nazi endeavour to exterminate the Jewish people. Yet in the modern era there might be isolated cases of anti-semitic behaviour in several countries but the Jewish people are placed under the laws concerning the protection of minority groups and cases of injustices against minorities are taken to a transnational court for the protection of Human Rights.

There is no anti-semitism but…

Thessalonikian Jews systematically avoided using the term "anti-semitism". For them this notion was incapable of accurately reflecting the "lack of comfort" that some co-citizens felt. The words they preferred using were "envy" or "hatred" or even "economic antagonism" but these were always in relation to life in Thessaloniki some decades ago. Today in their view the problem is rather one of a serious ignorance which often leads to prejudice and discrimination but there is no clear anti-semitism since this phenomenon presupposes organised and systematic actions. Yet even as people argued that anti-semitism does not exist in Greece their words often expressed bitterness and they pointed out that they were still often faced with prejudiced ideas and subject to discriminatory behaviour. Although my informants agreed to discuss this sensitive issue with me from a very early stage of my fieldwork, several months later their recognition of my presence and my role enabled me to understand more fully the complexity of Jewish experience in contemporary Thessaloniki.

On one of the first visits I paid to a family whose most members had survived the Holocaust, explained that anti-semitic phenomena were products of organised hatred that could not be found in Greece. Nevertheless, they thought that the incorporation of Thessaloniki into the Greek nation-state formation had led to economic antagonism, which could be considered a form of anti-semitism:

> This is a very big issue. Look, there is no anti-semitism as such. There is economic anti-semitism. When Thessaloniki became Greek she had a significant Jewish population. Everything was in their hands. On Saturday everything was closed. Then the imposition of Greek law changed everything. Do you know that there are still Greeks who remember the port full of Jewish workers? There are still Christians nowadays who know Ladino better than our children. When the Greeks came they found all the posts occupied. So anti-semitism so to speak made its appearance because of envy. Whatever they did they would find a Jew in front of them. Of course these feelings do not exist anymore because the Jews do not exist anymore in Thessaloniki.

For many informants anti-semitism only existed at the time when there was a lively Jewish community in the city. In contemporary Thesaloniki the insignificant number of Jews removed the cause of anti-semitic behaviour. Yet despite this for others even now, in contemporary Thesaloniki, they faced incidents of prejudice. One man narrated the following incident to me as an illustration of lack of sympathy and compassion:

> My wife some friends and I went the other day to a local restaurant. We heard a young man at the next table saying that Hitler should have killed all the Jews. I was very upset. How dare he! Of course we started fighting.

But such isolated instances of anti-semitic feelings did not justify seeing the whole society as intolerant. David and Linda tried to rationalise the situation by adding, "such cases are very few". Visiting them regularly showed me that although anti-semitism was never openly attributed, several past and present experiences were a cause for bitterness and disappointment in relation to their acceptance as Greeks.

Several old people expressed the view that the negative feelings against the Jews were so deeply rooted that it was not easy to erase them. They believed that the antagonism between Christians and the Jews had lead to envy, and that anti-Jewish feelings were the outcome of this tension. The roots of these negative feelings went back to pre-War Thessaloniki and had found their most "appropriate" expression in Hitler's ideology. The tragic Holocaust experiences and the anti-semitic post-War measures had had a long-term impact on the conceptualisation of the current situation in Greece. Thus old people often repeated to me stories of the past that served as explanations of the intolerance they experienced:

> Prejudice existed for many years. I think that it is the outcome of envy. The Greeks felt envy because the Jews held key posts in Greece. It is more like antagonism. I remember before the War during our Pessah a Christian boy had disappeared. At that time there were several bakeries that provided us with unleavened bread. So when the boy disappeared the Christians spread the rumour that we had prepared the unleavened bread with the blood of that boy! Can you believe it? There was a big fuss in those days. The Community was very upset. After a few days the boy was found. I don't know why they said those things. Hitler hated us very much. I can't explain it differently. The same thing is happening nowadays not only in Germany but in other countries as well. These days anti-semitism has various faces but it has not disappeared. It is like a fire that is spent but its hot ashes are burning deep down.

Susan, who was also imprisoned in camps during the War, argued that there is no anti-semitism in modern Greece. However, she admitted that prejudiced views are evident in all aspects of Greek culture. For her, these are all misconceptions that inevitably marginalise people and distinguish them on the basis of their religion. People's ideas are imprisoned within fixed and crudely defined categories. She explained:

> I can't deny the fact that there is prejudice. There is for sure and there is everywhere: in religion, in language, in traditions, in literature. Some questions that people address to us immediately set boundaries and underline the difference. Immediately we are set apart. There is prejudice. You can't deny it. They can't understand that the Jews of Greece are Greeks. They can't understand that the Jewish and the Christian religions are so closely connected.

In this woman's words the contemporary Greek reality sets boundaries between the "real" Greeks and the "others". The example she brought up was indicative of unintentional but deeply discriminatory behaviour. Several years ago she had worked for a charitable organisation which was based in Thessaloniki. At some point she was asked to join the administrative board. Yet the rules stated that only Orthodox Christian Greeks could become board members. Susan was told by other members of the board that an exception could be made for her. She remembered this decision as an incident that caused great frustration to her and it was the reason why she left that organisation:

> I did not want this exemption. What a good person I am despite the fact that I am Jewish. So, let's put aside the fact that I am Jewish. But I don't consider this incident as anti-semitic. After a while I left the organisation. I could no longer be a member of an organisation that does not accept Jews. My consciousness did not allow me to remain there.

Most people indicated that there were indeed only a few cases of anti-semitic behaviour and that they had not been treated in any negative way. For them in contemporary Greece there was no such a thing as explicit and organised hatred against the Jews. Yet the majority of them felt that there was ignorance, mis-information and prejudice which inevitably led to misconceptions about "the Jew" and discriminatory behaviour. Most Thessalonikian Jews had several such stories of prejudiced behaviour to narrate and remember although they claimed to have experienced these situations as isolated and un-representative instances.

Middle aged and younger people pointed to the changes that modern Greek society is undergoing. They shared old people's views and believed that anti-semitism does not exist any more because "things have changed nowadays" and therefore "ideas are more modern". Yet there was an underlying ambivalence and doubt as to whether the term "modern" was necessarily equated with the terms "liberal" and "unbiased". Dinah a married woman and the mother of three children, expressed this uncertainty. In fact she admitted openly that anti-semitic feelings did exist. It is interesting that she had not had any personal experiences of this and she interpreted as anti-semitic behaviour what was in

fact close to class antagonism and economic inequality. Once, while drinking coffee and eating cake in her home, she commented:

> There is anti-semitism, there is jealousy. My mother was sent to a concentration camp. What more can I say to you? Well personally I have never felt it. I feel just fine. I was never called a Jew in a negative way. Maybe it's the fact that most of my friends are Christians. Okay there are forms of anti-semitism everywhere. I communicate with people who ignore such kind of things. They are well off and open-minded. I am so close to my Christian friends. We love each other very much.

Yet I remember one informant who openly discouraged me from choosing any topic concerning Judaism because it would prove a disadvantage for my academic career in the future. I recall many long discussions that ended, for example, with a description of anti-semitic views expressed on television. The press was often accused for creating anti-semitic feelings. This informant argued that the Greek media "feel uncomfortable with anything Jewish". Other people shared similar views and attributed anti-Jewish behaviour to the anti-minorities policy that was adopted by the Greek state. For them contemporary Greece "remained an arena of prejudice" and this was directed not only against the Jews but also against other religious minorities. Once Jacob, a Jewish friend, Vasso, a Christian friend and myself were gathered in her house. Barbara narrated an incident which had happened in a government office:

> Once again the other day I faced problems with my National Insurance card. Someone who worked there noticed my surname, which is of course not typically Greek. She asked me if I was Greek. 'It's not your business. Your job is just to stamp it' I replied. Anyway we ended up shouting at each other and in the end she refused to stamp it. I was furious. So, I went to find the director. You know, you always face these kinds of situations if you are Jewish and your name is different.

Jacob objected to her interpretation of this incident. He thought that maybe Barbara was badly predisposed because it was not clear if the woman in the office had consciously reacted in a discriminatory way. For him discrimination was also found among the Jewish people:

> I work at the Community Centre and there are times when I hear almost racist ideas against non-Jews. Believe me , we are not always the victims!

The issue of education: "Did you learn anything about us at school?"

The other significant factor that, as my interviewees argued, has led to suspicion and prejudice is the lack of information which often leads to misinformation while a biased education excludes the history of minorities in modern Greece. Hence, it enables the construction and perpetuation of myths, stereotypes and misconceptions. The absence of an education which would sensitively embrace all the religious or ethnic groups was a theme that middle-aged Thessalonikian Jews stressed. Whereas the older generation perceived anti-Semitism as the outcome of "envy" or "antagonism", which was deeply rooted in religion, tradition and language, middle-aged people thought anti-semitism and prejudice were the outcomes of a very specific political programme of the state to exclude minorities and to construct a "homogeneous" history in which "the other" had no place. It was a commonplace among my informants that the lack of such an education facilitated the acceptance of generalisations and the perpetuation of stereotypes and myths about "the Jew".

But it was the quality of education that was significant. In many instances a partial and incomplete education was thought of as being worse than no education at all, and that some Thessalonikians who are considered to be "educated" might act in a very discriminatory way. In other accounts differences were noted between urban and rural populations:

> Most people in Greece are uneducated. There are very few educated people with whom you can discuss. These people are our friends. We understand each other, we can talk to them openly. Our friends have another level of understanding and a different quality. They do not pay attention to anti-semitic nonsense. Of course the others who come from the periphery don't even know what it means to be Jewish.

Despite the variations in views there was a notable consensus among the middle aged Thessalonikian Jews that there was a widespread ignorance about the history of this city. The fact that pre-War Thessaloniki had a numerous and powerful Jewish community was unknown by modern citizens because it was not taught at school. It was as if Thessaloniki only had a present; her past was forever lost. Some informants linked this ignorance to the exclusion of Jews from contemporary Greek identity:

> Were you taught anything at school? I seriously doubt it. They think that because nowadays in Thessaloniki there is only an insignificant Jewish minority it was always like that. They think that the culture of this city was never influenced by the Jewish element. They think that the Jews are not Greeks.

The lack of education was often held responsible for prejudice. And yet the state was condidered just an abstract entity while it was the family and the way people are brought up that played the most significant role in educating them:

> In Thessaloniki you can find only two or three private schools in which the history of the city and the histories of all the populations that have lived in it are taught. But generally you can say that there is too much ignorance and misinformation from the TV and from the family itself. I think that good behaviour towards the other must begin first of all in the family. Everything starts there.

The Greek state was considered only superficially liberal and tolerant towards minorities. This was an attitude that was shared by most people who belonged to the second generation. Thessalonikian Jews believed that the permission given to fascist groups[109] to organise demonstrations and conferences was a very worrying sign of the real ideology of the Greek State. At the end of October 1998 the supporters of Chrissi Avgi organised a European conference in Filiro, a Thessalonikian district. The "Pan European conference of Youth" was a gathering of all fascist organisations in Europe. The gathering was related to other similar conferences in Europe and included members of fascist movements from Germany, Denmark, France, Spain and other countries. Some members had even come from the USA or South Africa. In a relevant discussion one of my informants asked:

> Did you know about the neo-Nazi conference that took place in Thessaloniki? How did the Greek government allow such a thing to happen? They claim that they knew nothing about the content of this conference. I don't believe them. What can you say? I think that there is still anti-semitism

[109] The two most well known organisations are *"Chrissi Avgi"* which means Golden Dawn and *"Organosi Ellinopsihon Megas Alexandros"* which means "Organisation of those with a Greek soul, Alexander the great". The first one circulates a journal and a weekly newspaper under the same title whereas the latter is involved in the publication of the weekly fascist newspaper *"Stochos"* which means, "Target". The content of the printed material that these groups circulate is not difficult to guess: racial purity, the triumph of hellenism, anti-Turkish slogans, the issue of enslaved homelands and anti-Jewish slogans including the well established and rather old-fashioned myth of a Zionist world conspiracy. Indicative of the *Stochos* mentality is the following extract which refers to the publication of a book on the architecture of 19th and early 20th century Thessaloniki: "By reading this book one wonders to which country Thessaloniki belongs. It is well known that supposedly cultivated people try to show that she is a multicultural city of the North. The photos that come together with this appalling article describes how every language could be heard in Thessaloniki apart from Chinese. I didn't read anything about the Greek language and the worst is that the Greeks are presented as a minority among the foreigners. Wake up! They want to cultivate the idea that Thessaloniki does not belong to the Greeks. Don't allow these 'cultivated' people to promote their ideas" (*Stochos,* 26 May 1999).

> nowadays. The Greek government supposedly helps the Jews. All the support we get is for show only. There is anti-semitism everywhere, even in the media. You can find many journalists of this kind.

During the summer of 2000 members of fascist organisations destroyed part of the third cemetery in Athens in which Jewish tombs can still be found. Members of Chrissi Avgi also vandalised the synagogue of Monastiriotes and the square of Jewish Martyrs in Thessaloniki. The vandals had written in black paint "We are coming", "Juden Raus" and signed themselves "SS members of Chrissi Avgi". The vandalism was condemned by the ex-Archbishop Christodoulos and by the majority of the political class.

For most young people the position of minority groups in Greece and the fate of new immigrants were really bad. Once a young woman narrated to me how she found herself in a fascist demonstration. The dialogue with her friend, which followed, showed what it means to be "other" and "distant" in modern Greece:

> The other day I found myself by accident in a demonstration of Chrissi Avgi. All the immigrants who were selling things in the street disappeared at once. My friend laughed and said to me "Let's go quickly otherwise they will beat us. You know you are a stranger too". I laughed and I replied 'Yes I am Jewish and I belong to the left wing. Thank God I am neither black nor lesbian!

The multiplicity of belonging: Feeling Jewish, being Greek and vice versa

Belonging is shaped by discourses of "feeling" and "being" which often lead to contradictory conclusions. This is the case for Thessalonikian Jews: whereas they are considered Greek citizens in everyday reality, their belonging is highly contested and is often the locus for many ambiguous positions and competing ideologies. In this section I assess some of their perceptions of Greece and Israel and their views and feelings about Greekness and Jewishness respectively. Furthermore I explore the issue of "feeling" and "being" Thessalonikian and the feeling of belonging to the city's past and present. For my informants, one of the most important and decisive elements that defined Greekness was the fact that someone was born and raised in Greece. The older interviewees faced with anger any questioning of their Greekness since they themselves, their parents and their grandparents were all born and raised in Greece:

> I always felt Greek since I was born here. We were raised and lived in this country. All of us: my parents, my grandparents, and me. Most of my friends are Christians. I am not saying I am a Christian, I am saying Greek. They often ask me if I am Greek or Jewish. Of course I am Greek. I am not a Christian.

Older Thessalonikian Jews invested their Greekness with feelings and emotions of a lifetime. Thus Greece was not only the country they were born in but also the country they wished to die in. For Linda the topic of Greekness was a source of sadness and discomfort. She stated openly that camp survivors were not treated with sympathy by the post-War Greek governments. Her interpretation was influenced by post-War treatment of the Greek-Jews who had survived the Holocaust and returned to their homeland. They were treated with indifference and insensitivity and certainly not as "real" Greeks who needed support:

> We have a complaint not so much about the Greek society but about the representatives of the Greek State. They have treated Jews not as they should, not as Greeks. Do you know that when my husband came back from the concentration camp he was forced to complete his military service. Not only this but he was sent to fight in the front line. Seven Jews who returned from the camps died this way. This left us with some bitterness. Do you understand me? Even nowadays my husband still cries when he hears the national anthem. He still does. But they made us feel bitterness. There were so many offices in the army. Why not one for us? For three months he was lost and we didn't know were he was. My father didn't allow me to marry him. 'What if he dies in the army? You will be a widow before even getting married' So, don't ask me if we feel Greek. More than some other Greeks. But we have our peculiarities.

Rosa who was also a Holocaust survivor explained to me that for her, "feeling Salonican" was more important than any other identity. She could have chosen to live in Israel but instead after the War she returned to her native city which was her "home". Above all she felt she belonged to Thessaloniki and her past and present were tied to this city:

> After the War many things kept me here. Now I know that I could not live anywhere else. I feel so attached to Thessaloniki and I think that I would suffer very much by leaving here. These are not just personal feelings. All the Jews who were born here love Thessaloniki. I feel that this is

> my home. I feel that every change that happens in this city also happens in my home. Thessaloniki is my home. It was the right decision to return to Thessaloniki.

Jacob objected strongly to the term “double identity”. He explained that he fully experienced his loyalty to Greece and that Jewishness for him was only a matter of religious identification. He added that being a Greek–Jew does not mean that he or his family “lack” some aspect of Greekness:

> I am Jewish only as far as my religious identity is concerned. But every other aspect of my identity is purely Greek. I am a Greek citizen, my passport is Greek, my children will complete their military obligations towards this country, I work as a civil servant, and I pay taxes. You know I fully realise my identity when I happen to be abroad. I realise then that I am absolutely Greek.

Nonetheless most people admitted that Israel was their “second homeland”, their “security” and most of them had distant or close relatives living there. The existence of a nation-state in which the Jews could live without the fear of a new genocide was perceived as something positive which could prove beneficial to the future of Jewishness. After I entered Linda’s kitchen I saw a big calendar of the Israeli airline, showing a panoramic picture of Jerusalem. Although the calendar was old and a new one was hanging on the wall, it was still there. As my informant said to me:

> Look Israel is our saviour, our second homeland. There was never a Jewish State before. For my husband and I, when we happen to be among unknown people, our first job is to announce that we are Jews. Before they might say anything against us. There are such cases. Before the war when they said something bad about the Jews I couldn't react so I just passively accepted the insult. But now I don't accept even a hint. They don’t dare to say anything. We have support. We didn’t have a unity before and that’s why our attitude was different: we were afraid even to answer properly. Now Israel is there and we are proud of it. Of course you will ask me ‘Are you going to live there?’ Now that my life is short it’s difficult to leave my homeland. But if I am forced to I have a place to go.

Many old people that I interviewed had sent their children to study and live in Israel. This was the case for an old-woman who had spent three years in a concentration camp during the War. For her Israel was not only a place of security but represented the “proper” place in which the Jewish people should

live. Despite the fact that she talked so positively about the state of Israel she refused to leave Thessaloniki and go there after the War. No evident reasons for this decision could be found in her words apart from a strong emotional attachment to the city of Thessaloniki:

> My son who lives in Israel fought in the Six Day War.[110] I was so worried for him. I told him to come back and work with his father. I remember he looked at me and said: 'Mother how can you say such a thing after all you went through?' He was right. Even now when I think about that incident I blush. I raised my children with the idea that when they grow up they must go and live there together with other Jews. I go there almost twice a year. I care for that country a lot. I am interested in its news and development. It is the country of the Jews. They should all live there. But of course you will ask me why I am living here. Well many reasons have kept me in Thessaloniki.

For middle-aged people Israel represented security. As they argued "It is a country made for Jews" and "With Israel we feel safe at any time". Many Thessalonikians who belonged to the second generation had spent a few years in Israel studying. A middle-aged man who had studied chemistry there, admitted that those years helped him to realise the degree of his Greekness. Cooking the Greek bean soup -this is the recipe with tomato- on an important Jewish Holy day reminded him of Greece. Another informant of similar age, narrated to me that he had recently watched a basketball match on the TV between *Aris* (a Thessalonikian Team) and *Macabee* (an Israeli Team). He was supporting the Thessalonikian team Aris. In this case "feeling Thessalonikian" prevailed over any other identity.

However, the situation in Israel was also a matter of disagreement and debate. Some Thessalonikian Jews had prejudices against the Palestinians arguing that "Palestinians are dirty and uncivilised". Others, mostly younger people, rejected such views. Thus although Flora's sister lived in Israel her view was that Israelis do mistreat Palestinians and the fact that they live in poor conditions is not a "natural" thing but the outcome of Israel's restrictions. She admitted that most members of the Jewish community become "furious" whenever she expressed "such ideas".

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[110] In 1967 Israel got involved in a war with Egypt and its Arab allies. The Israelis captured the walled Old City of Jerusalem which had been in the hands of Jordan before the war: "The man who led Israel to victory over Egypt and its Arab allies, defence Minister *Moshe Dayan,* told the soldiers, 'We have returned to the holiest of our holy places never to depart from it again.' (*Chronicle of the World,* 1996: 1062).

The issue of mixed marriages: "I would like to marry you but…"

The issue of mixed marriages was treated quite differently among Thessalonikian Jews. For some people they were parts of the "modernisation" of life whereas for others mixed marriages simply implied uncertainty and ambiguity for future self-identification. Others condemned the institution of marriage *per se* and expressed the view that it poses barriers to people's identity choices. In all accounts the topic of mixed marriages raised important discussions about "what it means to be Jewish" especially in cases of personal life decisions. In the first part of my analysis the discussions I had with Thessalonikian Jews are going to be assessed whereas the second part deals with two specific cases of mixed marriages.

For Dinah mixed marriages were the outcome of cultural change and the influence of modern ideas. Despite the fact that she initially presented this issue as something positive, after a few months of fieldwork I realised that in her personal choices she had adopted a very different stance. When she was young she had married a Christian man but soon divorced him in order to marry a Jewish man. The first marriage was never accepted by her family and they ended up with a lot of problems. Dinah's second husband was actively involved in the synagogue and organised many community activities. She admitted that her husband loved family life and he was a very devoted husband but she attributed this quality to his "Jewishness" because "Jewish husbands love their family".

The majority of my informants considered that mixed marriages remain a controversial and sensitive issue. Some thought that the issue of mixed marriages made the issue of Jewish identity more complicated and, as they argued, "more difficult". They strongly criticised mixed marriages because he thought that converting to a religion in which you do not believe is not only unethical but also confusing:

> Nowadays things have become much more difficult. For the Jews living outside Israel I think that inevitably the end will be total cultural assimilation. Of course you can see it happening also with mixed marriages. Things become more and more difficult. I can see it happening with my brothers' children…. You can't tell whether these children have a Jewish identity or not. How can they search for their identity in the future? My brother's wife became Jewish just to get married. She had to do it. She doesn't feel Jewish at all. No external influence, not even marriage, must force you to become Jewish. It must be the outcome of your free choice.

Some expressed radical ideas not only about the issue of mixed marriages but about the institution of the family *per se* and yet all these discussions only partly represented any real acceptance of such

relationships. For others although civil marriages are not accepted by the Community they represent a solution for younger people who object to changing their religion. Others were explicitly “afraid” of mixed marriages. The vocabulary they used implied that such marriages impose “a threat” to Jewishness. Thus young people are “slipping away” through mixed marriages and as a consequence Judaism was fading, was “flagging” to use their words. Identity was not left out of such discussions: mixed marriages constituted a “threat” to the continuation of Jewish identity in general. Yet other parents viewed this situation as inevitable and the outcome of modern life and admitted that although it was not their will their children would never create “Jewish families”. Most parents had stories of mixed marriages to narrate to me. In such narratives what was most interesting was the tension that such marriage contexts generated between the future in-laws which often caused many unsolvable problems between the couple. Conversion was often confronted with suspicion and instead the solution of a civil marriage was preferred. I was explained the situation quite vividly:

> Both my sons have mixed marriages. One of them married at the Town Hall and the other in a church. The parents of my daughter in law, when they heard that she was in love with a Jewish person, were very upset and forbade her from going out again. I remember she came in tears to find me. She could not accept her mother’s behaviour so I said to her: ‘I don’t think that there is anything wrong with your mother. She was only trying to protect you. This is the way she was brought up. You were raised with the image of the bad Jew. You know I also raised my children with the stereotype of the Gypsy. Unfortunately this is the way we bring up children’ In the end they had a civil wedding.

During one celebration at school I realised how difficult relations with in-laws could be in the case of mixed marriages. This woman's son had come to attend the school celebration together with his mother, wife and mother in-law. At some point her son was upset because his mother had avoided talking to his mother in law and this made her feel rather uncomfortable. His mother later explained to me in the school-yard that her son was very upset with her. She had paid little attention to his mother-in law who had come to watch her grandchildren. She also admitted that maybe her son was right: a Jewish environment was unknown and perhaps unfriendly to her and the whole situation made her feel unwanted: “There are so many issues that you have to be careful of in such a marriage”.

For others, the fact that their sons had married Christian women was a reason for feeling excluded from the Community. It was as if marrying a non-Jewish person was equated with not being “a pure” Jew. Caroline, whose two sons had married non-Jews, explained to me how the situation was for her: “Generally I’ve been cut off from the Community because both my sons have married

Christian women”. Caroline added that although one of her sons was not “officially” a Jew any more he was still interested in Judaism. Her son admitted that he often searched the Internet for historical evidence of the Jewish population in the city and used to read all this information to his old parents. His mother explained to me that they felt very proud and they gladly participated in this “ritual”. However, when I asked Caroline’s son to give me some information about Judaism he refused in a polite way. The fact that he had converted to Christianity had created a distance from the Community and any information about his former religion was not to be exposed publicly:

> I don't think I am the right person to give you the information you need. It has been many years now that I have distanced myself from what you could call the Community and Judaic religion.

Young people in their early or late twenties approached the issue of mixed marriages quite differently; for them such marriages were inevitable. All the common activities either at the synagogue or at the Centre were constructing very strong bonds between young Jewish people and they considered each other almost a kind of family. For Elias, a man in his mid-twenties, marrying a Jewish woman was almost out of the question. Our conversation took place after a celebration at the Jewish school which he had come to attend as an old student:

> The main aim of the Community’s initiatives is to meet other Jews and get married. From a very young age they keep pushing us to marry a Jewish girl. They don’t understand that it is almost impossible to marry someone that has been your friend since you were a child.

Thus the Community’s desire for Jewish marriages was often viewed with reluctance and scepticism by the younger generation.

Two case studies of mixed marriages:

The story of Betie and Alexandros

The first case I want to look at is Betie's first marriage. This woman was in her early forties when we met and she had previously married a Christian man in a civil wedding. They had had an affair for several years before getting married but once they got married the problems in their relationship began to multiply. Unsolvable issues were raised like whether Betie and her husband would be accepted by their in-laws, their immediate kin and, of course, how they were going to raise their children. The question of "preserving" one's identity became crucial as time went by:

> While I was married to Alexandros I was trying to preserve some elements of my identity. For example during Kippur[111] I never cooked for him. But he respected that. I remember a time when he was in real danger and I went to a Christian Church to light a candle. You know this wasn't hypocritical because I felt like doing it.

The relations that the spouses had to face with their in-laws were often characterised by tension and lack of acceptance. For example Betie's mother-in-law said to her before getting married: "I went to the priest to confess because I feel like my son has committed a sin by falling in love with a Jewish woman". Betie commented that her ex mother-in-law was just "a naive, unsophisticated woman" and her intentions were not necessarily bad. In this marriage Alexandros also faced negative reactions and thus he was excluded from his wife's family activities. Betie explained:

> We had problems. For example during Pessah my mother invited only me and stressed the fact that my Christian husband was not welcome in her house. Well, I think that it was not fair. Sometimes we are the ones who cultivate secrecy and suspicion.

But also the Community in general held a very negative attitude and as soon as Betie and Alexandros got married it virtually excluded her from all its activities. Betie commented with bitterness:

> Now they keep sending invitations to attend their ceremonies. But you know something? I don't like their attitude. I find it very hypocritical.

The most serious problems started when the couple discussed the possibility of having a child. Betie explained to me that she repeatedly discussed it with her husband. She asked him to raise their child according to Jewish principles and he had agreed. She argued that:

> It was impossible for me to raise a child with a different religious identity than mine. What kind of principles could I give to it? I watch friends who have also married Christians. The most serious problems start with children. What will they become? Jews or Christians?

According to Betie, Alexandros had agreed with her about the raising of their children. Unfortunately their marriage lasted only briefly, and ended in divorce before any children were born. Alexandros married a Christian woman a few months later and had a daughter shortly afterwards. Betie had not remarried when I met her in her early forties although occasionally she had had some long-term

[111] This Jewish High Holy Day is referred to as *Yom Kippur* and yet Thessalonikian Jews prefer to use the term *Kippur* see Chapter Four on food and families.

relationships. The man she had been dating for about a year when I carried out my fieldwork was a doctor of her own age and still single. When I asked Betie if they were planning to get married at some point she replied:

> Remember I am Jewish and this means that his parents don't even know about me. For an open-minded person it does not make a difference. But they are two old, uneducated people who live in the periphery. For parents with conservative ideas it is unthinkable that their only son should fall in love with a Jewish woman. They won't accept me. This affair can never be accepted.

The story of Maria and Abraham

The story of this couple is almost the reverse of the previous one: Maria is a Christian woman and Abraham converted to Christianity in order to marry her. When I met them they had both reached their late forties and had two children who were studying at the University. For that couple getting married had not been easy. At the beginning Maria attempted to change her religion but this proved impossible for a number of reasons:

> When we decided to get married I agreed to convert to Judaism and took several training courses. The old Rabbi of Thessaloniki used to teach me Hebrew but I remember he was asking for a lot of money. When I was finally examined by a Rabbinical committee the Rabbis decided that I was not yet ready to become Jewish. To be honest the only reason why I wanted to change my religion was because I wanted to marry Abraham. I felt desperate. I had been preparing myself almost a year. Psychologically I was feeling awful. I felt as if I was betraying our God and that was the real reason for facing so many difficulties.

Maria was very desperate so Abraham decided to convert to Christianity instead. This of course generated reactions from his relatives. According to him his mother felt "betrayed" but Maria added that her attitude changed as soon as their children were born: "She loved them very much and this changed everything". But the immediate family was not the only problem. As soon as they got married the Community excluded Abraham from all its activities because he had married a Christian and converted to Christianity. She was very upset with their attitude and one day went to the Community Centre and said:

> The fact that my husband is not a Jew any more does not mean that we want to be excluded from the Community's activities. We want to receive your publications like before. My children and I want to be kept informed.

Abraham noted that this attitude had made him "the black sheep" of the Community. Yet he admitted that he was still partly Jewish and he could give me any information I needed.

The issue of language: from *Ladino* to Greek

The issue of language constitutes an important aspect of Thessalonikian-Jewish identity: although Greek was used in everyday interaction, the Judaeo-Spanish vernacular was selectively used in certain contexts. One of the themes that its use underlined was the people's cultural distinctiveness and their affiliation to Spanishness. *Ladino,* as mentioned before, is a mixture of Spanish, Hebrew, Portuguese, Italian and Turkish. It was spoken widely by the Jews of Thessaloniki before the incorporation of the city into the "body" of the Greek nation state. From then onwards the promotion of Greek as the official language of the new state together with the state's endeavour to eradicate *Ladino* from the educational landscape resulted in the gradual marginalisation of that vernacular. An old informant born in 1924 explained:

> When I was a young girl -before the War- I remember we were communicating with our grandmother in Ladino, we spoke French with our mother and in school with our schoolmates we spoke Greek. At school Greek was the only option. I remember we used to tease our grandmother by saying: "Hey granny you have to learn Greek". My grandmother knew no other language apart from Ladino but my mother learned also French and as time went by she also learned Greek because our neighborhood was a mixed one.

Nowadays *Ladino* is spoken only by Thessalonikian Jews and mainly among older and middle-aged people. Yet it is not a live language in the sense that it is not used as an idiom of everyday interaction. It is only used sporadically on certain occasions as a reminder of a Thessalonikian Judaeo-Spanish world. As for the younger generation, this local vernacular is part of an unknown past. *Ladino* is no longer taught at the Jewish school. The emphasis nowadays is on learning modern Hebrew. And yet older people try to keep this language alive but do not transmit it to the younger generation. Thus when a conference on Judaeo-Espagnol took place in March 2000 it was mainly attended by old and middle-aged Thessalonikians but the younger generation was not well represented, with only a teacher, a photographer and a few other younger Thessalonikian Jews present.

The stories that older informants could remember pointed to the gradual marginalisation of *Ladino* and its replacement by Greek. In their stories it was evident that the Jewish population of the city before its annexation by Greece was not at all familiar with the Greek vernacular. Within a short

time the stabilisation of the Greek State resulted in the predominance of Greek, as an official language, as the only "recognised" medium of communication. As one informant commented:

> While my father was alive we used to speak Ladino at home. It wasn't that we didn't speak Greek but it was easier for him to speak Ladino. So at home we spoke Ladino so my children learned and understand this language but they don't speak it. Now they learn little by little to speak. There are so many young people who don't know Ladino. Some of them understand it but some others don't. It depends if there is an old person in the family who uses it. Now most of the time we speak Greek. Sometimes it's hard for us to find the right word in Greek. But for example the other night when we went out we spoke only in Greek.

Talking with other old people I realised that apart from *Ladino,* the French language was extremely popular among them. Several Jewish schools that existed before the War taught not only *Ladino* but also French. Caroline was struggling to find the appropriate word in Greek and she first used the French equivalent. As she explained:

> My mother lived under the Ottoman rule when she was young. She went to a French school. Afterwards when Northern Greece became Greek my brother and me were forced to go to a Greek school. We had to receive at least elementary education in that language.

The same woman explained to me that the service at the synagogue was in Hebrew and this was a major obstacle for attending it: "I don't understand anything. If it was in Ladino I would go. I can't even follow the book". Very few old people speak Hebrew, even those who had spent some years in Israel. The older generation knew *Ladino* and French whereas for everyday interaction Greek is the main language used today. A male informant explained that although his parents went to a French school things were totally different as far as his generation was concerned. Greek became the compulsory language of the educational system:

> My parents went to a French school. There was no Greek school at that time. But of course when I was born I was sent to a Greek school. There was no discussion about that. In my family they spoke Ladino. That's why I have learned it. Our children understand this language but they cannot speak it.

For the middle-aged generation *Ladino* also represented the language they were brought up with. They had not experienced the transitional period of Greek state making and therefore Greek was the main language by which they communicated. Not all middle-aged people spoke *Ladino.* Some just had

recollections of *Ladino* sounds from the time they were children. Most middle-aged people commented with a kind of nostalgia that this language would be lost one day. The middle-aged Thessalonikians, do understand it because it is their parents' language, yet they are unable to use it properly in a conversation. An informant explained to me that he belonged to the last generation that understands that language. His childhood recollections presented a picture of a conscious effort to learn the Greek language. The children of his age born after World War Two didn't want to learn *Ladino* because they didn't want to feel different from other Greeks:

> There was a conscious effort to make ourselves more Greek. I belong to the last generation that understands Judaeo-Espagnol. When we were young we had this foolish attitude of showing that we were Greeks. So, we didn't try to learn this language. Our parents were speaking to us in Ladino but we kept answering them in Greek. This language will inevitably be lost. Of course I use some words or phrases with Jewish friends. This particularly happens when we don't want to be understood by others. But it stops there. We don't use this language between us. We find it difficult.

As far as the younger generation is concerned the teacher at the Jewish primary school explained to me that *Ladino* was unknown to the children. Maybe they knew a few words and they had to sing songs in this language during ritual occasions but they did not know the language. The main reason for that was the absence of any teaching of *Ladino* in the school curriculum:

> The children know just a few words. They hear them at home from their grandparents. Unfortunately Ladino is not a written language and this means that we don't know either the structure or its rules. It was an oral language used by the Jewish people of Thessaloniki. But nowadays none could teach it.

From all the above one understands that the situation of belonging is contextual, fluid and sometimes quite contradictory for different generations. Thus it is not "given" to be Jewish, Greek, or both. All these are complex identifications consisting of multiple and shifting discourses. The Jewish people of Thessaloniki have tried to account for the various ways in which they interpret Jewishness and Greekness. For them although Greece and the city of Thessaloniki cannot be criticised for anti-semitic feelings and behaviour there are cases of ignorance and incidents of social uneasiness. Several contested themes have emerged from the discussions I had in the field. However, one conclusion could be safely drawn: belonging to a place, a culture, a city, a nation is a complex phenomenon involving negotiation and interpretation. Thus there is not one sense but various degrees of belonging

experienced and translated by people as members of a culture, inhabitants of a city or members of a nation-state. What comes out of this argument is that belonging is not a natural, innate essence but an ongoing discourse daily shaped and altered by social interaction.

Conclusion: Food, Eating and the social dynamics involved

> Every cuisine tells a story. Jewish food tells the story of an uprooted, migrating people and their vanishing worlds. It lives in people's minds and has been kept alive because of what it evokes and represents. My own world disappeared forty years ago, but it has remained powerful in my imagination. When you are cut off from your past, that past takes a stronger hold on your emotions. (Roden, 1997: 3)

In this book I have addressed both theoretically and ethnographically the ways through which the Jewish people in Thessaloniki achieve and perpetuate their sense of belonging to a Community distinct from other Thessalonikians. I have argued that food and associated activities such as preparing, serving, eating, exchanging and even talking about food are vehicles and repositories of memory and community identification. A central concern has been the ways Thessalonikian Jews mobilise notions of difference and sameness in relation to food practices. In particular the what is discussed is how Sephardic-Jewish food has supported the construction of belonging and identity and has informed the construction of time, memory and place. Thus my research stresses the complex and multi-layered character of Thessalonikian Jews who negotiate their "being" as Jews, Sephardic Jews, Thessalonikians and Greeks. The identities they experience are multiple and like other Greek citizens see themselves as Greeks and yet as Greek Jews with a different degree of attachment to the state of Israel.

At this point it is important to address the question of why food should play such an important role in identity construction and thus justify my choice to talk about belonging and identity through food eating and associated events. The importance of food consumption and cuisine and their appropriation for the creation of cultural identifications has been well argued. A number of ethnographic accounts have pointed out that food preparation, consumption and exchange are everyday practices through which statements of belonging are made. And it is precisely this engagement with everyday life that proves the centrality of food practices in the making of identities. It would not be an overstatement to say that food "resists", enforces continuities and connections with a close or distant past. This is evident in the case of Thessalonikian Jews because the food they prepare and consume reflects myths of ancestry. Expelled from Spain during the fifteenth century the Jews of Thessaloniki claim their Spanish past through the consumption of Sephardic food and in this way they bridge the gap between the past and the present. The Jewish people, who are now a minority in the city, choose to

remember their origins and also maintain their cultural and religious distinctiveness through food. For them food is a means of everyday cultural resistance which at the same time enables them to keep a low public profile. It is important that the Jewish people in Thessaloniki claim to eat different food, their "own" food precisely because they feel different from other Thessalonikians and want to communicate their difference. Thus it is argued that food is treated as a "silent" strategy of keeping cultural and religious distinctiveness alive.

I have not argued that food is the only channel through which Thessalonikian Jews construct identifications and state their enduring presence. What I do argue is that food, along with other cultural products like language, is a means to express the Spanish origins, the Jewishness and the feelings of cultural distinctiveness of my informants. Thessalonikian Jews employ it as a channel through which identifications with a treasured past and a desired present are made, the Sephardic past and the Thessalonikian-Jewish present respectively. Eating, cooking and exchanging food are often displayed as a language, as a symbolic code through which individuals feel part of a Community, remember their past and envisage their future. Food and cuisine serve as media for constructing a rhetoric of past and present commonalities. For Thessalonikian Jews food and cooking are everyday vehicles to denote and communicate their differences, create a sense of community, remember their past and connect it with their present. Therefore belonging, identity, ethnic and (or) religious boundaries are partly created through individual and family choices and not through primordial programmes imposed upon people. Food serves as an effective code for understanding the conditions that the Jews of this city experienced in the past and still experience in the present. Through their everyday food consumption my informants make significant social choices about belonging or wish to belong. I believe that the study of boundary building -whether ethnic, religious, local or all of them together- enables us to gain unique insights through the study of the choices that people make in their everyday lives, and food can prove central in the process of identity making.

In what follows I will briefly summarise the issues which were raised during fieldwork and throughout the writing-up period. The ambivalence that Thessalonikian Jews experience is a theme that I repeatedly came across. In some cases my informants feel uneasy about their relationship to the Jewish religion and question any identifications with Jewishness. But they also wish to be identified with a Sephardic-Jewish past and present and their attempts to keep their traditions reveal their wish to belong to a community distinct from other, non-Jewish Thessalonikians. For them the Community's institutions along with the family serve as loci for the continuation and perpetuation of their religious

and cultural distinctiveness. Inevitably they also serve as loci for the preservation of their culinary distinctiveness which was an inseparable part of their Sephardic-Jewish identities.

In particular, my informants argue that the family is a set of shared activities that link its members together. Eating and exchanging food are activities which enhance and perpetuate family bonds so in a sense food creates families. I have approached notions that the people I studied consider important in the context of family life such as “authenticity”, “originality” and “tradition” in relation to the food that they prepare and eat. Going back to my fieldnotes and interviews the importance that is attributed to these notions appears remarkable. For my informants they constitute meaningful mechanisms which encompass individual experiences, family histories, recollections and expectations. By using these notions Thessalonikian Jews make statements about their Sephardic Jewishness, Thessalonikianess and Greekness, and in this way construct and reconstruct their identities. What is evident in the relevant chapter is that identities, even within the family context, are never fixed but constantly fluctuating and shifting.

My informants also employ the notion of “healthy food” as synonymous with Sephardic Jewish food. In other words the healthy diet is a rhetorical device used instead of “our own” food. Thus Sephardic culinary distinctiveness is stressed through a modern concept. Sephardic food is thought to be not only tastier but also healthier, lighter and thus suitable for a balanced life. The Jewish people of Thessaloniki successfully employ and manage a modern food debate in order to justify and encourage the consumption of “their” food. This appropriation is an excellent example of how people modify already existing discourses to meet their needs.

However, I am not arguing that the boundaries between cultures and cuisines are impermeable. For example, no clear-cut boundaries between Sephardic and other Thessalonikian cuisine could be drawn. My informants claim that the Sephardic-Jewish cuisine of the city has been strongly influenced by a variety of local cuisines. Some dishes taste and look similar and the processes of synthesis and local adaptation are themes I often came across. However, what is important here is not whether Sephardic food is really different from other city food but the fact that Jewish people treat it as if it is different and thus mobilise and appropriate discourses of distinctiveness. Thus the food they consume is different because they want it to be different in order to feel differently.

Food is approached as a means through which the Jews of Thessaloniki construct and enforce their belonging to the Jewish community. Communal boundaries are processes mobilised through institutional activities where eating together, eating “our own” food, exchanging it, talking about it and

remembering with it are important. For Thessalonikian Jews "keeping the traditions alive" and thus eating traditional food at the community's institutions is necessary in order to maintain cultural and religious differences and state their being, feeling and belonging. Throughout the book it is stressed that there is nothing "natural" about communities. My ethnographic data confirm that membership is not given and communities are not fixed and unchangeable. On the contrary membership should be seen as an active process in which individuals and common activities such as food consumption play an important role. By eating together at school, at the Community Centre, at the synagogue and the Old People's Home Thessalonikian Jews create, enforce and perpetuate their need or wish to belong, to be members of a distinct community.

My research points to the connections between communal institutions like the synagogue, the school, or the Old People's Home with the family and the private domain. Thus the public sphere becomes privatised and vice versa. The Community's institutions, the loci for creating and perpetuating the Jewish community, maintain their social anonymity and a low profile, and serve as repositories of Sephardic-Jewish identity in a non-Jewish city. As such belonging is reproduced in protected and controlled areas. In Thessaloniki where Jewish people nowadays constitute a minority, creating such a low profile is a survival strategy but at the same time an endeavour to maintain their own and their community's social anonymity. The boundaries between "the public" and "the private" are not so clear-cut: these two contexts are often blurred and food is among the everyday cultural products that brings them together.

Throughout the analysis the connection between food and memories appears strong both in the family and community contexts. The informants employ food memories and narratives as means to reconstruct their past, talk about the present and imagine the future. Time is filled with recollections, past and present preoccupations and expectations. There is also another aspect of past and present food narratives: as my ethnographic data confirm the discussions about food identified crucial thresholds in the history of the Thessalonikian Jewish population: the expulsion from Spain, the harmonious life before the Second World War, the tragic events during the War. Food memories and narratives inform the process of time and place making. For Thessalonikian Jews the city has been a homeland, a city of great importance and their feelings are expressed through Thessalonikian, Jewish food.

At this point I wish to stress that the processes of family and community making are not always harmonious but they often experienced tensions and antagonisms. On the one hand the most serious conflict between men and women and on the other hand between older or middle-aged and younger people. Thus for men cooking is a hobby, whereas for women it often becomes an everyday,

compulsory and time-consuming duty. The internal conflicts created by this situation should not be overlooked, along with the significance that is attributed to motherhood and women's role in the kitchen. Women often approach cooking as a duty but at the same time my female informants argued that they do enjoy the respect they elicit from all family members. This is because they are believed to be the gatekeepers of "tradition" and that through cooking they ensure the continuation of Sephardic-Jewish identity in a city that is no longer a Jewish city. Their centrality and indispensability is acknowledged both by their husbands and children. No Jewish High Holy Days can be properly celebrated without the ritual dishes and thus no "traditions" can be kept alive.

For older people, those who were born before the Holocaust, identifications with Jewishness are strong although religiosity is not highly valued. Middle-aged people, those who were born after the War, whose parents have been directly or indirectly affected by the Jewish genocide during the War, express stronger identifications with Jewish identity and religion than their parents' generation. Thus the Second World War constitutes a crucial line that divided the past, continues to divide the present, and runs through family, community and city life. For the younger Thessalonikian Jews the Community is something non-existent and they avoid visible and direct identifications with a distinct past or present.

By refusing to eat "traditional food" the younger Jews also reject a sense of difference *vis a vis* other Thessalonikians. As was evident through my examples younger Thessalonikian Jews do not want to be different but wish to be incorporated into the "modern", globalised city life. Yet there are certain times when they do cherish and search for the food they had grown up with, which is thought to be "traditional" Sephardic-Jewish food. In most cases they avoid stating this openly but it is evident that for them such food is tied to memories of their family and their childhood and as such it constitutes a point of reference and a return both physically and symbolically to their people.

The complexity of the boundaries of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki is partly expressed through the case of mixed marriages; there are a number of difficulties that the married couple has to come through and according to my informants no full social acceptance can be achieved. However in recent years, especially since 1997 when the city was designated the Cultural Capital of Europe, there have been many endeavours to revive her cosmopolitan character and celebrate Thessaloniki's multicultural past. But the publication of books concerning the history of Thessalonikian Jews or the release of CD albums with Sephardic music are not the only solution. Other fundamental changes are needed in order to achieve a multicultural reality. Agelopoulos (2000) argues that the 1997 model of multiculturalism failed to explore in depth "the Other" in modern Thessaloniki. In my view, the

unilateral celebration of the past seems an endeavour to "exoticise the present". As one of my informants argued:

> All this recent interest towards a multicultural Thessaloniki was a short episode. In Greece we have not been taught how to treat foreigners. This is why the wave of immigrants in recent years has caused so many reactions.

Thus cultural plurality should not be treated as a romantic relic of the past celebrated only via gastronomy or music but a constant quest for cities and a prerequisite for a harmonious and secure future. Multiculturalism can be achieved partly through an unbiased and broad education. And by education I mean both family and state education because family constructs behaviours and schools communicate knowledge. Only by analysing the formation of the national history and the realisation of a number of different counter histories plurality could be achieved. Because I believe that social phenomena such as exclusion, intolerance and discrimination are generated through the lack of historical knowledge and social acceptance. Of course it has to be mentioned that the above situation has changed significantly over the last years. Important publications and historical works have opened a quite recent discussion concerning the past and the present of Jewishness in the city. What was considered almost a "neglected" issue is now open to public criticism and debate even within the Greek academia. And -one could argue- the city of Thessaloniki is in search of her past and her own identity through time.

I would like to end with a gastronomic journey to the kitchen of Linda, an important informant and a competent cook. Maybe the recipe that Linda gave me is not the most appropriate way of finishing an anthropological book. However, by doing so I want to emphasise social anthropology's capacity to address everyday lives and experiences. Here food can be effectively used as a means to reveal these experiences. The quotidian value of food and recipes can tell us a lot about how and why people think, act and identify in the ways they do. As argued food is never "just food" and its significance can never be purely nutritional: "It is intimately bound up with social relations, including those of power, of inclusion and exclusion, as well as with cultural ideas about classification (including food and non-food, the edible and the inedible), the human body and the meaning of health" (Caplan, 1997: 3).

The activities associated with food can reveal why people choose certain identifications and reject others in their everyday lives. Thus for Linda the dish she has chosen to describe, which is prepared and consumed during *Pessah,* is typical of the Sephardic-Jewish cuisine of Thessaloniki. As

she argued, cooking is the only way “To keep the tradition alive”. And at least for the Jewish people of Thessaloniki “tradition” represents the continuation of their Jewish identities and their Sephardic heritage.

Ingredients:

Fish fillets (preferably carp)
Beaten eggs (one maybe two)
Matzah (as much as you like)
Chopped Walnuts
Olive oil
Vinegar
Salt, Pepper

Preparation:

Dip the fish fillets in the egg and then roll them in the crumbled *matzah* (to which you have added salt and pepper). Fry the fillets in the oil and vinegar adding some *matzah* to make the sauce. After you have fried them place them on a plate and cover with the walnuts.

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Recipes

Salty dishes

Arreynados (stuffed vegetables)

Any kind of vegetable like tomato or aubergines can be stuffed with rice and minced- meat yet the most "Sephardic" version of this food consists of stuffed lettuce leaves and is called in Ladino *alinchugas arreynadas.* The preparation is as follows: we clean the leaves, put them in boiled water for a minute and then wrap the minced-meat (in which we have added onions, fresh and dried and two eggs) with them. Then we put them in the oven after we have added olive oil, salt and pepper.

Fijones (beans)

The night before we put the beans into the water. The next day we brown the beans in the oil with onions. Then we add some water, salt, pepper and we let them boil. Sometimes we add meat or sausages.

Haminados eggs (eggs cooked in *hamin* = embers, ash)

We cook the eggs with many dried onions, oil, Greek coffee, salt and pepper. We let them boil for many hours, preferably overnight.

Keftikes (fried dumplings)

These fried dumplings can be filled with spinach, chicken, leeks, and potatoes and in Ladino they are called *keftikes de spinaka, de poyo, de puerro* and *de patata* respectively. In the preparation we have to boil and mash the spinach, chicken, leeks or potatoes and then we mix them with eggs (one or two), wet water or crumbled dry dread, grated cheese and we give them round shape. In the end we fry the round dumplings in hot oil.

For *Pessah* we prepare *keftikes* with *matsah* instead of ordinary bread.

Merenjanes with poyo (aubergines with chicken)

We cut the aubergines in pieces, salt them and leave them for some time. Then we wash and fry them. We put the aubergines in the oven the chicken (which we have boiled and added tomato sauce) together with the aubergines).

Pasteles / Borrekitas (pie and patties)

To prepare the pastry: we pour one glass of oil into boiled water (one cup) and then we slowly add the flour. We roll the pastry for some time and then we split it in two pieces. We spread one piece on the bottom of a sauce pan.We spread the filling (cheese, spinach, aubergines with cheese) and then we put the other piece of the pastry to cover it. We spread the pie with beaten egg and we bake it in the oven.

For *Pessah* instead of home made pastry housewives use *matzah* which they wet with water or milk and the filling could be the inner parts of the lamp, for example the liver.

Peshe en salsa (fish with walnut sauce)

This is a typical *Pessah* dish consumed by the Jews in Thessaloniki. Normally the fish preferred is carp. The recipe is found at the conclusion of this book

Sweet dishes

Ashure

It is a sweet made from wheat and dried fruits. The preparation is as follows: we leave the wheat in plenty of water for a night. Then we boil it and then we add raisins, chestnuts and sugar. At the end we cut in pieces and spread on the top of the sweet any dry fruit we like.

Bumuelos or boumouelos or bimwelos

For the pastry you we need: matzah, eggs, salt, orange scraping, milk. For the syrup you will need: sugar, orange juice and orange scraping, honey, water, lemon juice (you boil the ingredients together). Preparation: You wet the *matzah* into milk. Then you mash them adding the eggs, salt, orange scraping and sugar. You roll the pastry well. You fry some oil in a frying pan and then you put the pastry in spoons. When you finish frying you spread them with the syrup.

Harosset

This is a kind of marmalade made from mashed fruits (oranges, apples) plus raisins and dates. It is a sweet consumed exclusively during *Pessah.*

Orejes d' Aman or Haman's ears

For the pastry we need: eggs, pinch of salt, fresh orange juice, sugar, almonds, finely chopped, flour and olive oil for frying. Beat the eggs until frothy in a large bowl. Add a pinch of salt and the orange juice. Add the sugar and the almonds. Add the flour, while stirring rapidly and beat until flexible dough has formed. Turn out on a floured board and knead for 5-10 minutes. Roll out and cut each circle in half. At the mid-pint of the radius, pinch with your fore finger and thumb to draw the two pointed ends in slightly and make a hump or buckle in the center. They should resemble ears… Heat the olive oil, drop in the "ears" and fry until golden brown. For the syrup you need sugar, honey, water, lemon juice, cinnamon and ground cloves to taste and finely chopped almonds. You boil the ingredients until they begin to thicken and sprinkle the almonds.

(This recipe is taken from the book *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece* by Nicholas Stavroulakis).

Rodanchas

We need a yellow pumpkin, oil, salt, sugar, cinnamon and ready-made pastry (in the old times they used home made). Preparation: we peel the pumpkin, clean it and cut it in pieces. Then we boil it with oil and salt adding the sugar and the cinnamon. We use this pulp to fill in the pastry that we have cut in pieces. We give them the shape of snails and then we bake them in the oven.

Sutlach or Sotlach

This is a sweet called also *kazandibi* and it is also found in Turkey. It is made from rise, sugar and rise flour. We boil the milk adding the sugar and stir it well. After stirring well the cream begins to thicken. We remove it from the heat and spread it on a saucepan in which we have sprinkled sugar (before we have cooked the sugar over very low heat). Then we put the saucepan over extremely low heat until *sutlach* is thickened. We remove from the heat. This is a sweet that must be served cool.

Tupishti

For this sweet we need the following ingredients: oil, water, flour, baking powder, bitter orange sweet with its syrup, sugar, cinnamon, honey and crushed walnuts. For the syrup we need: honey, water, sugar and lemon juice. Preparation: We mix all the ingredients (apart from the flour, the walnuts and the baking powder) and stir well. We put the mixture on fire and when it starts boiling we add the flour, walnuts and baking powder. We stir well. We spread the baking pan with oil and put the mixture on it. Finally we bake the walnut cake and when it is done we spread the syrup (for the syrup we boil all the ingredients together) all over it.