

**CHANGING PERCEPTIONS, VARYING FORTUNES: REPRESENTATIONS  
OF THE SABBATEANS OF TURKEY**

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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SABBATEANS OF TURKEY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **CHANGING PERCEPTIONS, VARYING FORTUNES: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SABBATEANS OF TURKEY**

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Keywords: Sabbateanism, Conspiracy Theory, Anti-Semitism, Identity, Nationalism

This research basically examines the various representations of the Sabbateans and the perception of society in contemporary Turkey. From the second half of the 17th century, society has “raised concerns” over the Sabbateans being a closed community and keeping their covert identity. From the 19th century onward, emerging nationalism which was one of the serious problems in the Ottoman Empire led to some cleavages among different communities, including the Sabbatean community. Although the Sabbateans had converted to Islam under the leadership of Sabbatai Zwi, they continued some of their old Jewish rituals which caused an alienation towards their identity and the rise of conspiracies about them to this day. In doing so, this thesis aims to ask the questions why the Sabbateans began to be perceived as an enemy and a “scapegoat” by some in Turkish political history. Firstly, based on the publications about the Sabbatean community, the study analyses the content of the conspiratorial works and the rise and fall in the literature to understand the roots of conspiracy theories. Secondly, based on the memoirs of some well-known Sabbatean figures, this study intends to discover in what ways they represent themselves and their Sabbatean identities. As a consequence of these discussions, based on the silence of the Sabbateans for centuries, this thesis defends that the Sabbatean community would not be existing as a monolithic community in contemporary Turkey anymore and it would be an “imagined community” which has been created by the conspiracy theories.

## ÖZET

### DEĞİŞEN ALGILAR, FARKLILAŞAN KADERLER: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ SABETAYCILARIN TEMSİLLERİ

ESRA BALANLI

TÜRKİYE ÇALIŞMALARI YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2019

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi YUSUF HAKAN ERDEM

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sabetaycılık, Komplo Teorisi, Anti-Semitizm, Kimlik,  
Milliyetçilik

Bu araştırma temelde Sabetaycılarının toplumdaki çeşitli temsillerini ve günümüz Türkiye'sinde toplum tarafından nasıl algılandıklarını incelemektedir. 17. yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren toplum, Sabetaycılarının kapalı bir topluluk olmaları ve gizli kimliklerini korumalarından dolayı “endişelerini” dile getirdi getirmeye başlamıştır. 19. yüzyıldan itibaren ise, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki ciddi sorunlardan biri olarak ortaya çıkan milliyetçilik, Sabetaycı topluluk da dahil olmak üzere farklı topluluklar arasında çeşitli çatlaklara yol açmıştır. Her ne kadar Sabetaycılar Sabetay Sevi'nin öncülüğünde İslam'a geçseler de, eski Yahudi ritüellerini devam ettirdiler. Bu durum da onları kimlikleri üzerinden yabancılaşmaya ve onlar hakkında çeşitli komploların ortaya çıkmasına neden oldu. Bu tartışmalara dayanarak bu tez, Sabetaycılarının neden bazılarınca Türk siyasi tarihinde bir düşman veya “günah keçisi” olarak algılanmaya başladığı sorularını sormayı amaçlamaktadır. İlk olarak, Sabetaycılarla ilgili çıkan yayınlara dayalı olarak bu çalışma, komplo teorilerinin kökenlerini anlamak için komplo çalışmalarının içeriğini ve literatürde Sabetaycılarla ilgili komploların iniş ve çıkışını analiz edecektir. Sonrasında ise, bazı tanınmış Sabetaycı figürlerin anılarına dayanarak bu çalışmada, Sabetaycılarının kendilerini ve kimliklerini ne şekilde temsil ettikleri incelenecektir. Çalışmanın sonucunda ise bu tez, Sabetaycılarının yüzyıllardır süren sessizliğine dayanarak, günümüz Türkiye'sinde yekpare bir topluluğun artık ne derecede var olduğunu ve günümüzde bu topluluk hakkındaki algıların komplo teorileri tarafından oluşturulan bir “hayali cemaat” olup olmadığını tartışmaktadır.

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*To my beloved family Hilal, Murat, İbrahim, Kerem,  
and my other half Fatih*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Putting the discussion about their being categorized as a minority by aside, the Sabbateans have been a community that Turkish society tended to have biases and various representations. Having frequently been interpreted from a conspiratorial point of view, the Sabbatean community have been seen as a scapegoat on several occasions in modern Turkish history. Apart from this long-discussed side of the coin, their role in the Turkish modernization process can be considered the less-examined side of the issue that was under the shadows (Şişman 2017, 243). In fact, this framework of modernization gives an interesting insight to examine the relations between the community and Turkish society. Despite sharing the same lands and becoming neighbours with them, an “enemy” and “otherness” perception of this community was developed by some groups throughout the modernization period of Turkey (Küçük 1992).

This thesis aims to ask the questions why and how a community would keep their identity secret for centuries and in what ways the outsiders develop point of views towards this community. The problem with the Sabbatean community is that they have been active and effective in politics, economy, and media for a long time in Turkey including the last period of the Ottoman Empire. However, because they were converted Muslims from Judaism, the community could have been easily hold responsible for the socio-political problems of Turkey. This situation has made them “scapegoat” in Turkish political arena and it became a tool for stigmatizing the economic and political elite in Turkey. For this purpose, this research will try to understand the roots of hostility towards the Sabbatean community and the reasons of the silence of the community.

Basically, this thesis will focus on the specific books on the Sabbateans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also by touching some important books those were written in the earlier periods. These dates are important in terms of observing the rise and the fall of the interests and concerns about the Sabbatean community as a result of political

transformation in Turkey. However, this research will also include the dates when the earliest works were written because they represent the initial attempts to discover the system and the structure of the community.

For this purpose, this research will be conducted by using existing data that some scholars have priorly collected. The research also will be conducted through the analysis of the existing literature, especially the books and also journals about the Sabbateans by differentiating academic and conspiratorial ones. This thesis will base on cultural perspective in the review of the conspiratorial literature materials. Despite the rarity of academic publishing about the community, the historical background, or the political impact of the Sabbateans, they have become attractive and intriguing for many researchers who are outsiders. To deal with those problems caused by the silence of the members of the community, some biographies and autobiographies will be examined to have a broader perspective about how the members of the community represent themselves in these works and in which subjects they prefer silence. The three chapters of this thesis will handle different angles of this issue.

In the first chapter, I will try to examine the frequency of publishing of secondary literature about the Sabbateans, and to enlighten the causational relationship between this frequency and the political landscape of that particular period. This literature would also provide data to comprehend how they are perceived by society. While some books and journals focus on the political power and political elitism of the Sabbateans, some others focus on the "menace" and "fifth column activities" aspect of this community to the Turkish state. This chapter will discuss problems and roots of "marginalization" the community had and how has this representation been constructed through the literature (Ahmed 2000). The main purpose of this chapter is to analyze these works from different colours of Turkish political spectrum and understanding their driving force for marginalization of the Sabbateans through their works that have been influential on the sensation of society in different periods.

The second chapter will focus on the representations of the Sabbateans by themselves. One problem that can be iterated for this research comes from the fact that almost all of those analyses of the Sabbateans are largely subjective that mainly associating them with being a closed and secret society (Zorlu 1998). Zygmunt Bauman's description of the "stranger" can be used to interpret the position of the Sabbateans in Turkish society. It is important to emphasize that, although the Sabbateans lived on the

same lands for centuries, they have been perceived as "strangers". To deal with this issue, their works would be made available to give an ear to the Sabbateans. The biographies of Sabiha Sertel, Ahmet Emin Yalman, Zekeriya Sertel, and Halil Bezmen would enable us to analyze their features and emphasis on their living styles. The weakness of this chapter is that almost all these figures come from an elite background. Hence, this situation prevents us from having a broader perspective on the community. Another challenge is that these four biographies represent the mentality of a limited period. However, at the end of the day, their overlapping points, concepts, and problems would give a sense about their way of thinking.

The last chapter will mainly try to understand the reasons why the Sabbatean community still keeping their identities secret while some minority groups began to utter their identities in Turkey. Their silence leads to the perception of a monolithic community, but it seems that there is disunity inside the community such as Şişli-Terakki School case or disengagements among the members. To provide some examples of diversity among the community is important to interpret the structure of the community in a more accurate way. This chapter will also question whether the silence of the community grounds on the Kabbalistic doctrine or the external factors have been influential on their silence.

As can be inferred from the literature review below, however, that limited studies are available on the issue of Sabbateans and how they have been represented in Turkey and this has motivated the present study. Although this research contains some deficiencies due to the rarity of academic research in that area, I believe and hope that it will pave the way for further studies in the name of understanding the Sabbateans in a more proper way.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Sabbatean issue has drawn considerable attention of a wide variety of people. This subject has been studied from different points of view for decades. Notwithstanding, academic publishing on the subject of the Sabbateans takes a small place in Turkey. In contrast to this, conspiracy tradition has more developed in the field of Sabbateans. As mentioned above, one of the apparent reasons for this situation is the community's having been silenced for centuries, secondly the rise of anti-Semitism in Turkey, and last, would be the economic and political dominance of the community besides their distinct lifestyles. More or less, these factors seem to have been influential in social and cultural alienation of the Sabbateans in society. The literature review will basically introduce the works from different zones including academic, conspiratorial, and neutral ones. The literature will be mostly reviewed according to their years of publication. All these researches would provide a general outlook on how the Sabbatean community has been examined by different circles through the decades.

The earliest work which aims to give information about the social lives of the Sabbateans in the Ottoman period belongs to Ahmed Safi. He wrote the *Customs of the Dönmes* in 1879 and it was republished in 2016. This leaflet includes various representations and knowledge about the Sabbateans. In 1877, Ahmed Safi had been appointed to the army in Thessaloniki province as a clerk. His motivation in writing this leaflet was to understand the customs and traditions of the Sabbateans. For instance, Safi represents the Sabbateans as having a Muslim appearance, but actually living and worshipping according to Jewish rituals and ceremonies (Safi 2016, 15). Moreover, he asserts that they have a separate religious book from Qur'an, they were performing *salaat* without performing ablution, and they were having alcohol during the Ramadan while at the same time reading Qur'an (Safi 2016, 15-30). The aim of Safi is to demonstrate how the Sabbatean society is untrustable, hypocrite (*takiyyeci*), and deviant. It is possible to

say that, the community was possibly known by the others on that date because, in some parts, Safi gives hearsay information. This book was written in 1879 which could be considered as an early period compared to the subsequent works and its importance comes from being a prototype that examines the socio-cultural lives of the Sabbatean community. It only covers diversified lifestyles of the Sabbateans because there were not political activities of them yet on that date.

When we follow the literature on the Sabbateans after Safi's book, it could be said that there is a gap related to this issue until the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The later literature on them has been mostly surrounded by their elite position and political power. Based on this power, the community has been associated with many political incidents in Turkey. One overemphasized issue can be said that the relation between the community and the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) and the role of the Sabbateans in the March 31 incident. Related to this issue, Cevat Rıfat Atilhan gives a prominent place to the role of Dönmes, Freemasons, Jews, and the Zionists in deposing Abdulhamid II and their collaboration in the March 31 incident (Atilhan 1959).

To give an outline of Atilhan, he was known with his anti-Semitic writings and for being a Nazi sympathizer. He is also known as being one of the initiators of 1934 Thrace Pogroms which were a series of violent acts against Jewish citizens of Turkey (Webman 2009, 426-28). Atilhan attended the Harbiye Military Academy. Thereafter, he fought in various wars such as the Balkan Wars, World War I, and Turkey's War of Independence (1919–1922) and in 1920, he was appointed a militia commander by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Erbahar 2019). In 1952, Hüseyin Üzmez assaulted Ahmet Emin Yalman with a pistol in Malatya asserting that “Yalman was the main representative of those powers which run Turkey from behind the scenes” (Bali and Bessemer 2008). After the assassination, the names such as the president of the Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) and the vice president of the *Büyükdoğu* Cevat Rıfat Atilhan, the president of the *Büyükdoğu* Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, and the member of Nationalists Association Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti also got arrested (Çetinkaya 2016, 52). This crucial incident somewhat demonstrates the relation between the Sabbateans and Turkish society. Cevat Rıfat would be considered as the founding father of hate speech on the Sabbateans and conspiracy theories about them in Turkey.

Atilhan's *Bütün Çıplaklığıyla 31 Mart Faciası* was first published in 1956 when the DP was the ruling Party in Turkey (Atilhan 1959). The significance of the period

comes from the political atmosphere which was more tolerant for conservative and Islamist discourses compared to the Single-Party period. In addition to this, with the impact of the Capital Levy in 1942, the existence of the Sabbateans in Turkey had been discussed by the right-wing groups around some conspiracy theories. Atilhan's work also stresses on the "real purpose" of the Sabbateans which is to control Turkish politics for centuries. In doing so, the political tone of Atilhan has been swinging from racism to Kemalism, and from anti-semitism to Islamism and nationalism. In the book, Atilhan tries to prove that the fall of the Ottoman Empire was brought about by Dönmes, Zionists, and the Jews who had played role beginning from poisoning Mehmed II to the fall of the Empire. However, there are some contradictions in his claims. For instance, while Atilhan blames the Dönmes, Jews, and Zionists for ending the Empire, he speaks highly of Arminius Vambery, a Hungarian Jew, who was reputedly an English spy in Turkey. Vambery is also subjected to the works of Mim Kemal Öke as a spy who had a role in the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Öke 1983). Although these kinds of contradictions partly weaken his arguments, it would not be wrong to assert that this conspiratorial mindset and speculative approach have been influential in the anti-Semitic and racist voices in different circles of contemporary Turkey.

When it comes to the year 1968, Atilhan wrote another book which covers the incidents and the individuals in İnönü Wars. *Bütün Açıklığı ile İnönü Savaşları ve Hakiki Kahramanlar* actually bases some questions such as “Was Ismet Bey the real hero in İnönü Wars?”. Although the book is about the personal disputes in İnönü Wars on the whole, Atilhan frequently refers to the Dönmes “stabbing in the back of the Turks” (Atilhan 1968). To give an example on the Dönme hatred of Atilhan, he mentions a Turkish woman, Corporal Nezahat, who showed heroism in the War of Independence. However, Atilhan reproaches that “she was not as appreciated as the Dönme Halide Edip Adivar who is a political actor that only produces facades, books, legends, and fairy tales” (Atilhan 1968).

Contrary to the speculative approach to the Sabbateans of Atilhan, Orhan Koloğlu examines the Sabbateans and their relations with the CUP based on particular documents. *İttihatçılar ve Masonlar* was written in 2012 and it provides an insight for the next studies on the relationship between the Freemasonry and the CUP. Koloğlu's purpose is to demonstrate in what ways the pioneers of the CUP had some connections with the Masonic lodges, especially with the Italian Masonic Lodge. He finds the answer where

most of the CUP members were from, Thessaloniki. He analyzes the circumstances in Thessaloniki where the Dönmes and the Jews were economically and politically active. The point that Koloğlu reached that the CUP was essentially founded in Thessaloniki to gain some basic rights, to protect the state, and to prevent separatist movements in Macedonia. Initially, the movement did not intend a revolution (Koloğlu 2012, 16). This suggestion is important in terms of understanding the driving forces of the CUP including the Dönmes in Thessaloniki. He attracts attention to the loyalty of the Dönmes to the status-quo for certain reasons. However, at this point, there is a question that needs to be asked. What conditions changed the positions of the Dönmes and the Jews towards the government? This is significant because most of the conspiracy theories have been produced around this question. These theories commonly assert that the converted Jews have had always the dream of ending the Empire. In the later periods, it is seen that these Dönme and the Jewish subjects of the Ottoman Empire have placed in the constitutive cadres of the Turkish Republic. Koloğlu does not explicitly mentions that issue, but it is significant in terms of explaining the driving forces of construction of conspiracy theories about the Sabbateans.

The Sabbatean issue in Turkey has been debated by different circles over the decades. As mentioned in the introduction, these debates can be sometimes associated with certain political events and turning points in Turkey. Related to this issue, in 1998, Ilgaz Zorlu who has a Sabbatean background wrote a striking book called “*Yes, I am a Salonikan*”(Evet, Ben Selanikliyim). Zorlu reopened the question of the Sabbateans’ existence from the 1920s concerning the “secret” identity of this minority group (Baer 1999, 68-75). Zorlu’s book was resounded that it declared many hidden aspects of the group. The time when the book was published is highly important that Turkey has experienced a transformation process in terms of economy, politics, society, culture, and identity through globalization since the 1980s. Tanıl Bora also lays emphasis on the publication years of these books and says that "Dönmes returned to broad public attention in the 1990s, when conspiracy theories became more widespread in Turkey. This was also when the globalization and pluralization processes gathered strength" (Bora 1994, 42-44).

Zorlu was one of the members of the Sabbatean community and one of the grandsons of Şemsi Efendi. If we mention historically important personality Şemsi Efendi, he was the pioneer of the new education system movement and the founder of the first Dönme School in Thessaloniki. In his book, Zorlu writes about how he had been

ignored by his family members when he declared the secrecy of the group. Related to this issue, Leyla Neyzi shares her interview with Fatma Arıĝ who has a Sabbatean background:

“I was seven or eight years old. We were walking in Taksim [a neighbourhood with a close friend of my parents I called "aunt." Accompanying us was acquaintance of my aunt. There had been some kind of talk about where we were from. Salonica," I declared with confidence. In my eyes, being from Salonica was no different than being from Istanbul. When we came home, my aunt pulled "From now on, you will never say 'I am from Salonica' to someone. This is very demeaning; people will look down upon you." I started to cry, protesting "Why?" All kinds of evil words came rushing to my child's mind. Were they thieves? Were they immoral? Why should we be ashamed?" (Neyzi 2002, 137).

Zorlu's book on kabbalistic and secret rituals of the Sabbateans has drawn the attention of both local and international circles and the media (Bali and Beesemer 2008, 26). Hence, the Sabbateans came back to the spotlight in the 1990s. Later on, this book was followed by a series of books which are mostly based on conspiracy theories about the community.

After the 1990s, the literature about the Sabbatean has gained popularity among both right-wing and left-wing milieus in Turkey. Tens of books about a "secret" community have been published in three decades. Furthermore, these books have drawn great attention by society as the sales figures demonstrate in these years. To give an example, from the left-leaning writers, Soner Yalçın began to publish popular books about the Dönmes and his books became best-seller. He first gained recognition in 1993 through his interview with Cem Ersever in *the Aydınlik* newspaper. After that, he worked with Doĝan Media Group for years including CNN Türk and *the Hürriyet* newspaper. Currently, he is writing in *Sözcü* newspaper which is known by its opposition towards the AKP regime. In 2004, his *Efendi: Beyaz Türklerin Büyük Sırrı* (Efendi: The Great Secret of the "White Turks"). At this point, Rıfat Bali Says that, by giving reference to the term WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) which is the traditional ruling class of America (Bali 2008), he describes the elitist position of the "White Turks". In his book, he basically describes Turkey's transformation process through the impact of the Dönmes. Bali believes that the Dönme community has been politically and economically influential in Turkey's transformation process. For instance, Yalçın identifies various political figures, newspapermen, merchants, and Islamic cult leaders and try to reach their

Jewish or Sabbatean family roots. Ironically, he asserts in his book that “We do not label the individuals as the Sabbateans in our work, if they do not express it clearly” (Yalçın 2006, 435). However, when his work is viewed, it exactly contradicts what he claims by condemning conspiracy theories (Nefes 2012, 423).

Another author Yalçın Küçük who is also from the left-wing frame and a Marxist professor in his definition, known by his publications including conspiracy theories. His books and journal articles about the Dönme community have been welcomed by many in Turkish society and taken place in the best-seller books. In his *Şebeke “Network”*, as distinct from Soner Yalçın, he traces the story back to the period of Suleyman the Magnificent. He describes Suleyman as “Poor the Magnificent” for accepting the Jewish immigrants in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Küçük 2002, 52). He asserts that a part of Sefarad Jews who converted to Islam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century later occupied significant positions both in the overthrowing of Abdulhamid II and in the Republican elite. Küçük also refers to Sabiha Sertel as a modernist and activist woman in the Republican era and also as a close friend of another Sabbatean woman Halide Edip Adıvar (Küçük 2002, 106). He goes a step further and claims that one of the characters who also named Sabiha in *Sinekli Bakkal* actually refers to Sabiha Sertel. There is not such information provided by Adıvar, but Küçük presumably tries to build a truth claim at this point.

The literature about the Sabbateans or the Dönme families in Turkey has encountered with great interest by society according to the list that indicates the sales figures (Habername 2009). For instance, in 2009, the sales of the book of Soner Yalçın *Bu Dinciler O Müslümanlara Benzemiyor* reached 130.000 (Economy News 2009). Likewise, many other books on the Sabbateanism has taken place in the best-seller lists and published in a large number of books to meet the expectations (Haber7 2007). This is significant in terms of understanding the curiosity and the interest of the public towards a society that does not prevail themselves. Thereby, it would be certain that these books include some conspiracy theories more or less to become more popular and attract more attention. At the end of the day, these complete works build a representation which may sometimes not be true or pretty misleading.

A repetitive, conspiracy work on the Sabbateans was written by Huda Darwish in 2006. Unexpected of her academic profession, her book cannot go beyond the arguments of the existing conspiracy theories. The title of the book suggests that it will provide new documents to the arguments on Jewish converts in Turkey, but the book only puts its

finger on the much-debated issues such as the claim of the death of Mehmed II due to poisoning by a Jewish physician (Darwish 2006, 10-37), the damage of the Jewish population to Turkish society and the names of the crypto-jews in Turkey (Darwish 2006, 10-37). In doing this, Derviş gives a passive image to Turkish society that was unaware of the “real aim” of Jewish people who expelled from Spain in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Darwish 2006, 10-37). As in many books based on conspiracy theories, Derviş begins the story by the roles of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The main point about the Jews is how they led the Ottoman Empire decline beginning from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Darwish 2006, 13). However, her book applies many inexact arguments about the Sabbateans in Turkey. To give an example, in one case, her narrative coincides with some researches whose works aim to reveal the names origins or onomastics of Sabbatean people. Rıfat Bali writes about Hüda Derviş as she also "took part in this frenzy" (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, 314-15).

In 2002, Abdullah Muradoğlu followed the trend of research about the Sabbatean families in a different way. In his *Selanik'ten İstanbul'a İpekçiler ve İsmail Cem* (The Ipekci from Thessaloniki and Ismail Cem), he specifically focuses on the last hundred years of the Ipekci family which has been a phenomenon in Turkish social and political life. The work is not directly related to Sabbateanism. However, since the Ipekci family has Sabbatean origins, this "Sabbateanism" issue is also mentioned. This book was written in a neutral manner and in style, it sheds light on the events of our recent history. In the book, although it is not possible to speak of the Sabbateans at that date, he mentions the Sabbateans who were expelled from Spain to the Ottoman Empire in the 1490s and changed their religion in accordance with the doctrine of Sabbetai Zwi. The book concentrates on the Sabbateans' family roots, marriages, and business strict in general. Based on this, Muradoğlu describes this community as a "clan" (Muradoğlu 2002, 6). Parallel to the same representations, he focuses on different sectors that the Sabbatean individuals have taken place for decades such as journalism, education, politics, cinema, fashion, and music. The book is significant in terms of supporting the upper crust or elitist representation of the Sabbateans in Turkey.

Unlike the similar publications, Muradoğlu seems that he stands apart from conspiracy theories and speculative narratives. Instead of this, he gives place to striking anecdotes, dialogues and family bonds of important political and literate Sabbatean figures. Likewise, the content of the book also demonstrates the curiosity and interest about "uncovering the truth" of a secret community which has been influential in Turkish

social and political life. For this purpose, Muradođlu dwells on the impact of Ismail Cem a democratic ruling of Turkey. As an outstanding weakness of the book, it can be asserted as its complexity and hardness to follow the connections. In addition to this, there is a sparseness in the reference part which weakens the arguments of the book.

In the same year, Ahmet Almaz also published a book called *Tarihin Esrarengiz Bir Sahifesi: Dönmeler ve Dönmelerin Hakikati* (A Mysterious Page of the History: Converts and the Reality of the Converts). This book covers various topics about the Dönmes in Turkey changing from the history of Judaism, the Jewish migrants in the Ottoman Empire, the converted Muslims, Şemsi Efendi, Karakaş Rüştü, the customs of the Dönmes, and the names of some important and well-known Dönme figures. At the beginning of the book, Almaz asserts that he objectively presented the crucial place of the Dönmes, who was a part of "our" society, in history. Within this direction, he says that "This work is in no way intended to humiliate a person or group" (Almaz 2002, 10). However, the book bases on two leaflets that can be considered pejorative which are an anonymous leaflet "Dönmeler" written in 1919 and its response "Dönmeler Hakikati" written by Binbaşı (Commander) Sadık. These two leaflets are the backbones of Almaz's book and contain many accusations about the Dönmes such as they were the causes of immorality in society (Almaz 2002, 71) and they were spreading diseases because they were an endogamous society (Almaz 2002, 69).

As many others do, he finds the roots of the problematic of the Sabbateanism issue in gaining political and economic power of the Jewish population in the Ottoman Empire. As a weak argument, while Almaz was discussing the positions of the Jews in the period of Bayezid I, he refers to a Dönme Torlak Kemal whose name was Samuel before (Almaz 2002, 17). However, this argument is historically incorrect because we cannot talk about Dönmes between the dates 1389-1402 when we consider Sabbetai Zwi lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When we analyze the titles of other books of the author, it is possible to catch the tendency towards conspiracy theories or crowd-pulling subjects such as *How was Fatih Sultan Mehmet Killed?*, *How was Prophet Muhammed poisoned?*, *The Turkish Children of Torah*, *The Book that Atatürk read in 3 days: Is it possible to reject God?*

As an overall criticism, one of the problematic of these kinds of conspiratorial works is that they have considered the Sabbatean community from a monolithic perspective. Most of the time, they do not take the internal alterations or the community's structural and ideological change into account. This problem has led the way for

invalidating the claims and the arguments of conspiratorial works. As it is seen above, the Sabbateans in today's Turkey have been evaluated in the same pot with the Sabbateans in the Ottoman Empire from the 17<sup>th</sup> century disregarding their visions, mentalities, and the structure of the community.

The year 2002 seems like a bumper year of publication on the subject of the Sabbateans. Rıfat Bali and Cengiz Şişman together prepared a special edition for *Tarih ve Toplum journal* on the Sabbateanism issue. This magazine is full of articles of various experts in this field such as Marc David Baer, Gershom Scholem, Uriel Heyd, and Paul Bessemer. Besides their works, taking some other researches into consideration in the early 2000s, it seems that there is a tendency to discuss the Dönme issue in Turkey in academic field. The reason for this advance would be that by the 1980s, some non-Muslim minority groups in Turkey began to get political recognition within the impact of globalization, pluralization, and identity politics throughout the world. This shift has led to both gaining popularity of conspiratorial works again and proliferation of academic literature which is not much popular as the former (Nefes 2012, 419).

In this edition of the magazine, Cengiz Şişman has two articles touching on two different subjects. In the article of "Sabetaycılığın Osmanlı ve Türkiye Serüveni" (The Adventure of Sabbateanism in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire), he briefly summarizes the historical adventure of Sabbetai Zwi and his followers in the Ottoman Empire. In addition to this, as distinct from other concerned with this subject, he touches upon the importance of Sabbateanism movement also in different places such as London, Morocco, Boston, Moscow, and Yemen other than Turkey and he also gives some important details from the birth of the Sabbateanism and some significant figures in the period of Zwi. Apart from these, in the article, the primary target of Şişman is to point out that how the reputations and information on the history of the Dönmes in Turkey have been ruined by different circles in Turkey. Although he gives some examples of the Dönme interests of both right-wing and left-wing circles including Mehmet Şevket Eygi, Ertuğrul Düzdağ, and Yalçın Küçük, he does not amplify the problematic of research on the Sabbateanism.

At this point, both Bali's and Şişman's works can be considered the efforts to sustain objective, illuminating and non-aligned researches compared to existing conspiratorial works. Cengiz Şişman, who is an expert in the field of the Sabbateans, gives various works on this subjects. His doctoral dissertation "A Jewish Messiah in the

Ottoman Court: Sabbatai Sevi and the Emergence of a Judeo-Islamic Community (1666-1720)” is one of his most comprehensive researches on the Sabbateans.

Different from his other works, in his Turkish version book *Sabatay Sevi ve Sabataycılar: Mitler ve Gerçekler* (Sabbatai Zwi and the Sabbateans: the myths and the facts) Şişman carries out a methodological analysis on the existing literature. In a general manner, this interview-book draws attention to the common problems that the conspiracy works have made for it. He begins the book by saying that “this book is for the ones who aspire to understand the Sabbateans rather than answering the questions such as ‘who are Sabbateans’ or ‘who's related to who’” (Şişman 2008, 4). More or less Şişman states the purpose of the book as to talk about the Sabbateans whose threshold is still quite high despite hundreds of conspiracy theme publishings. In the first chapter, Şişman provides a general historical background of the Sabbateans in the Ottoman Empire. He corrects some false facts like the different characteristics of the community in different periods. In the next chapters, he gives answers to the positions of the members of the Sabbateans in Turkey's transition to Republican administration and at the present time. The strength of this book is that Şişman makes a distinction between the dynamics of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic to account for the presence of the Sabbateans in different centuries. However, yet this book cannot be considered a comprehensive resource about the Sabbateans. Because the book is an interview book, it is limited and more likely a book of “100 Answers to 100 Basic Questions”.

The most original and far-reaching work of Şişman is his *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*. This book has been one of the most referenced work for thesis because it has a way-out point of view towards the Sabbatean community and it is filled with unique narrations and information. His main question in this book is that “why and how a community could carry such a burden of silence for centuries?” (Şişman 2017, 1). As a monograph, this research gives both theological and structural answers for this question considering the historical and social changes in Turkey. Tracing back to the beginnings of the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the movement newly emerged, Şişman gives place to the traditions, symbols, customs, and rituals of the Sabbateans until today. In this way, it becomes possible to observe the changes and transformations among the community. Şişman’s book also gets attention due to it embracing the Kabbalistic point of view as Gershom Sholem also did in his work called *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah: 1626-1676*. *The Burden of Silence* makes one

question whether the silence of the community is based upon efforts to survive under the Ottoman regime, and later Turkish Republic or the Kabbalistic doctrine which suggests spiritual punishment.

It can be asserted that there are significant changes and transformation in the social positions of the Sabbateans since the late Ottoman period and the modernization process has affected their social status in society. Some of the crucial and detailed studies about Sabbateans were written by Rifat Bali. His works are fundamental in terms of having his arguments sociological, historical, and political bases. Rifat Bali has various books, pieces and articles on the Sabbateans which were diligently written.

As a recognized historian who particularly has given works on Turkey's Jews, Rifat Bali published a book called *A Scapegoat for All Seasons: the Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey* in 2008. In the widest sense, this book brings Turkish media's increasing interest in the Sabbateans to the table. As a matter of fact, in this book, Bali gives wide coverage to the same critics in his former works such as the demonizing of the Dönmes by Turkish media. His main point in this part is the deficiency and conspiracy theories in the research area of the Sabbateans. He criticizes the researchers who have conducted pseudo-scientific research about the Sabbateans without the ability to speak or read certain European and Hebrew languages (Bali 2004). The book brings several anonymous, oral, and written sources together to get a deep understanding of the 'hidden' identities of the Sabbateans. One remarkable point about the attitude of the author that he acts more reactively towards the pseudo-scientific research on the Sabbateans compared to the ones on the Jews in Turkey. One possible reason of this reactive attitude can be related to the publication year of the book (2004) when the debates about the Sabbateans had been intensified with the AK Party's coming to power in these years.

*Devletin Yahudisi ve Öteki Yahudi* (The Jews of the State and the 'Other' Jew) is also one of his books which consists of various biographies of Jewish citizens of the Turkish Republic. While touching life stories of a particular Jewish people under Turkification policies, he delves into the much-discussed issue of the Sabbateans in Turkey. In the book, he brings up how the Sabbateans were intertwined with the state, and in which periods their relationships have been broken. This subject is quite interesting in terms of observing the acceptable and non-acceptable Sabbateans in the Turkish Republic. While some Sabbatean figures were seen as a part of state elite within their secularist, positivist, and revolutionary mindsets which inherited by their Ottoman pasts,

a part of the community was kept out by the government. For instance, the biographies of Ahmet Emin Yalman and Sabiha- Zekeriya Sertel are apparent examples for this distinction.

Despite the dominance of the literature by the outsiders, it is difficult or sometimes impossible to get the opinions of the Sabbateans about their community. This thesis will examine some important political Sabbatean figures' biographies such as Sabiha-Zekeriya Sertel and Ahmet Emin Yalman. The rarity of these kinds of works produced by the Sabbateans themselves is a challenge for extensive evaluation and interpretation of their positions in society. When the biographies of these two well-known political figures Sabiha Sertel and Ahmet Emin Yalman are examined, the distinctions clearly stand out compared to the outsiders'. These Sabbatean figures wrote biographies, about their memories and lifetime in Thessaloniki and their alliance with the state. Nevertheless, these two works include highly significant points related to the position of some Sabbateans in the newly founded state. Both Sertel and Yalman interestingly appear as the members of state elites in the early Republican Turkey. It is interesting because as Feroz Ahmad explains in his words that "Turkey did not rise phoenix-like out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. It was 'made' in the image of the Kemalist elite which won the national struggle against foreign invaders and the old regime" (Keyman and Gümüşçü 2014, 98). The Kemalist ideology has constructed its modernity program on the basis of Orthodox-Muslim and Turkish nation-state. By doing so, it has also created the 'other' which does not fit into this program. Hence, the Sabbateans as being converts do not fit the project of Kemalism although they were among the founder elites of the Turkish Republic.

Zygmunt Bauman, for example, in sociological terms describes the 'other' as, "Surely the other is not merely a face, but somebody's face is misguided" (Ahmed 2000, 143). According to this perspective, the Sabbatean issue can be considered in terms of being silenced, frozen, and assimilated by the Kemalist discourse (Keyman and Gümüşçü 2014). At this point, when we come back to the biographies of these elites, they can give clues about how the Sabbateans could take place in this cadres and meet under the same ideology.

### **3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SABBATEANS IN THE OTTOMAN LANDS**

The Sabbatean movement began with the declaration of Sabbatai Zwi himself as the messiah in Gaza in 1665 (Rodrigue 1994, 167). Within his esoteric doctrine he gathered many admirers and followers from different regions such as Smyrna, Istanbul, Edirne, Jerusalem, and Thessaloniki. In Smyrna, his birthplace, he gave himself the title of "The One who will establish the Kingdom of God" (Bali and Bessemer 2008, 22). For this purpose, he dedicated himself to rebuild the Temple of Solomon and got the attribution the title of King to Sabbatai Zwi by his followers. Zwi's and his followers' improper ideals were heard by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV and considerably disturbed him. When he was arrested in Istanbul by the Sultan's forces, he was brought to Edirne. In 1666, Rabbi Sabbatai Zwi chose to convert to Islam to escape from the death penalty in the presence of the Sultan (Bali and Bessemer 2008, 22). The influence of his conversion to Islam lasted until the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Ottoman Empire. After his conversion, most of his followers lost faith in him and returned to normative Judaism which means adhering to the basic ethical and historical monotheism of Judaism (Baer 2010, 2). The remaining group continued to believe in him and his doctrine for decades in secret.

In 1683, hundreds of Sabbateans in Thessaloniki converted to Islam and lived there as a Dönme sect until the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey in 1923 (Neyzi 144). Many prominent figures, some members of the well-known families, and the leaders of Thessaloniki Jews joined the Sabbatean movement. However, although the Dönme sect is seen as a homogeneous group, the death of Sabbatai Zwi generated three sects which are the Yakubi, the Karakas and the Kapanci. The term "Dönme" means one who has changed his/her religion; in modern term it is used to refer to the followers of Sabbatai Zwi (Scholem 1989). The Dönmes followed

the rituals of Islam in the sense that they fasted during Ramadan, performed prayer, and they were officially considered a Turkish-Muslim group. At the same time, they still continued some Jewish traditions, rituals, and practices. One significant inheritance is that they prayed in Ladino which is a Judaeo-Spanish language. Despite performing the rituals of both religions, the Sabbatean people avoided relationship with either the Jewish or the Muslim communities. They established a distinctive structure where they buried their dead in different cemeteries, they married only among themselves (endogamy), built separate mosques to pray (Baer 2007, 143). In this way, they could preserve and continue their own specific culture and social construction. Beginning from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they founded their own schools and sent their children to these Dönme schools to have a Western type of education including teaching of foreign languages. This life style continued until the Lausanne Peace Conference (Bali and Bessemer 2008, 23).

Sabbateans have been called as *Avdeti* or *Sazanikos* for centuries in Anatolia. *Sazanikos* is a type of fish that changes its colour in accordance with its environment (Ortaylı 2004, 115). The name of *Avdeti* is also interesting because it refers the community's conversion for twice. In one of his interviews, Halil Bezmen expresses that "At one time, we converted twice (he laughs)" (Haber7 2006). Denomination as "Sazanikos" of the Sabbateans could facilitate understanding how they have been perceived by Turkish society, and their variant positions and attitudes in terms of religion. At this point, it would be suitable to give the floor to Jeremy Walton who investigates the concept of "sites of memory". In his research, Walton emphasizes how the sites of memory manifest the politicized discourses about the religious community of the Dönmes. It is important to remark that Thessaloniki's New Mosque has taken its place in the "silenced" memories and histories of the Ottoman past (Walton 2016, 514). Walton narrates his own experiences in his visit to the New Mosque, which was entirely unmarked as a historical building, and there were absence of memories (Walton 2016, 523). As a matter of fact, the situation of the New Mosque actually demonstrates the position of the Sabbateans in the Turkish Republic. They remain largely forgotten in history.

Along with the modernization attempts in the Ottoman Empire, Thessaloniki, as a province, had also a substantial role in this process. Its location and cultural and interactions with some European states made the city special in the Empire. Such certain

conditions of Thessaloniki made most of its settlers be more integrated with the Ottoman modernization process. In a broad sense, the economic development of Thessaloniki due to its geographical position and modernization attempts in the empire paved the way of progress of Sabbateans in terms of trade, culture, and education. It is geographically located in the Thermaic Gulf, the northern side of the Aegean Sea (Anastassiadou 2001, 1). Thessaloniki has one of the most important ports, as it serves commerce between the Mediterranean and the Balkans (Akıncı 2017, 77). Thessaloniki's harbour was quite lively in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to its trade with European states. These trade relations led to financing networks and global trade. Thanks to these conditions, the Sabbatean community have been represented as living a divergent life in the empire.

The Sabbateans' dissimilar way of life and *sui generis* religion led them to be dissociated from both the Muslim and the Jewish subjects in the Ottoman Empire (Rodrigue 1994). The Sabbateans being a secret society would be a reason of their disintegration. As George Simmel points in his *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies* that "All relationships of people to each other rest, as a matter of course, upon the precondition that they know something about each other" (Simmel 1906, 441-498). The insufficient knowledge about them has led society to develop unrealistic biases or to fabricate unrealistic family roots. These kinds of misrepresentations would be possibly due to the Sabbateans keeping their identities in secret. Various misrepresentations of the Sabbateans can be clearly observed in the literature the following chapter will cover. In addition to this, the third chapter which will review the literary works composed by the Sabbateans is also crucial to perceive how they represent themselves in their works, and their roles in the emergence of modern Turkey.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Sabbateans were at the forefront of Ottoman Modernization process. The economic developments of Sabbatean families led them to raise children more capable in trade relations and have a command of foreign languages. In this way, they could achieve a greater economic growth. Their financial demands brought about new Dönme schools where the children obtained modern type of education that would enhance their efficiency in trade and industry. In the biography of Sabiha Sertel, she mentions that her friends, Atiye, Seniye, and other girl friends were living in mansions and most of their families were intellectual, highbrow, and open to Western influence. Most of their

fathers were the members of the elite class (Sertel 1994, 35). Within the Western influence, many cafes, movie theaters, bars, and hotels became popular (Baer 2007, 151). Notably, the Sabbatean community had an experience of social exchange which reflected every area in their lives.

Along with the modernization efforts in the empire as exemplified by the Tanzimat Edict (1839) and the Edict of Reform (1856), the Sabbatean community founded their own schools to raise competent individuals to take part in Ottoman bureaucracy in the coming years. In addition to this, the education that the state supported was mostly concentrated on military and bureaucracy education. The education of the population was provided by some Muslim religious endowments (waqfs), the non-religious communities or by private teachers (Levy 2002, 128). Many journals such as the *Meşveret* and the *Mizan* being published in Thessaloniki and the city was developing culturally and economically. During this period, the cultural and economic elite of Sabbateans in Thessaloniki founded progressive schools such as Şemsi Efendi primary school, Terakki and Feyziye Schools. The founders of these Dönme schools used the patterns of new education system of the state. Within these reforms, central administrative organisations became more powerful and the Sabbatean community had the opportunity to participate in Ottoman civil administration (Somel 2013, 10). For instance, according to 1303/1887 Provincial Yearbook of Thessaloniki, the bureaucracy in the province was composed of almost 230 people. However, the number of bureaucrats was over 475 in a decade (Anastassiadou 2001, 302-303). This rise could be explained with different reasons but the impact of the reforms cannot be ignored. At this point, it could be mentioned that to be able to take part in bureaucracy as a member of Ottoman society, the Sabbateans placed emphasis on founding their own Dönme schools. The reason establishing separate schools would be explained by the language barrier of the Sabbateans. They were mostly speaking in Ladino in their closed society. They adopted Ladino for their literary works, both religious and secular (Landau 2007, 2). The private Dönme School was an option to be more competent in Turkish and to be situated in bureaucracy. In the light of being in integration with global economy and globalization and the consequences of modernization in the empire, an upper crust emerged in Thessaloniki.

#### 4. HOW THE SABBATEANS HAVE BEEN PERCEIVED BY TURKISH SOCIETY?

The transition from Ottoman Empire to secular modern Turkey, or from *millet* system to nation-state model has affected the social status of the Jews of Turkey and ultimately, altered the perceptions on this community. The integration of the Jewish population in modern Turkey would have some parallels with the Sabbatean community. The aim of this chapter is to understand the approach of Turkish society towards the Sabbatean community and how they represent the Sabbateans in the literature. One of the widely-used themes in the conspiratorial works about the Sabbateans focus on the migration of the Jews from Spain in 1490s. Some “conspiracy authors” call shame on Suleyman the Magnificent for welcoming the Jews and call him as “Poor the Magnificent” (Yalçın 2006). They assert that Suleyman was headed for the fall of the Ottoman Empire by accepting the “Jewish Agents” at the first stage.

As opposed to the popular belief, Jews were already settled in the Balkans and Anatolian region around the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Imber 1996, 3). In the Ottoman Empire’s early formative years, the Byzantine Empire had a Greek-speaking Jewish population known as *Romaniot Jews* (Imber 1996, 3-7). Within the 15<sup>th</sup> century, *Ashkenazi* settlement began in the Ottoman Empire and it was followed by the migration of a part of Spanish Jews, the *Sephardic Jews*, as a result of expulsion of the Jews from the European countries (Imber 1996, 4). Over the centuries, the Jews occupied an irreplaceable and, in some way, a unique position within the empire’s socio-political order (Levy 1992). The Ottoman Empire provided security and social inclusion for the Jewish population for centuries. In addition to this, Ottoman-Jewish cooperation was founded within the economic and cultural contribution of the Jews.

The plural character of the Ottoman Empire began to dissolve within the influence of nationalism and modernization process. The emergence of nationalism flow led to

demographical change and dismemberment of many regions such as Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro by declaring war against the Ottoman Empire (Levy 1992). Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, which was imported from Western Europe, paved the way for dividing people according to their identities, languages, and history (Todorova 2004, 6).

The symptoms of the disintegration in society can be found in the anti-Semitic discourses among Muslims. Baer suggests that “Turkish anti-Zionism fed into Turkish anti-Semitism, as did Nazism, and these played a role in the articulation of anti-Dönme conspiracy theories between 1923 and 1945” (Baer 2013, 534). Notably, Anti-Semitism takes its initial form from anti-Zionism which was surrounded by the Palestine issue in 1908. Esther Benbassa also puts that “Zionism’s goal was to prepare the way for negotiations over Palestine with the Ottoman authorities” (Benbassa 1992, 225-51). At this juncture, the most suitable mediator should have been the Jewish community which made them become a target for the betrayal accusations. One of the most ardent anti-Semites in Turkey, Cevat Rifat Atilhan who had Dönme origins himself also continually puts his finger on the cooperation of Jewish, Dönmes, Zionists, and Freemasons “in order to bring the entire Turkish nation to its knees, tear our great fatherland into pieces, and establish their own sultanate on a section of it” (Atilhan 1956). It would be said that the conspiratorial point of view towards the Sabbateans and anti-Semitism in Turkey primarily manifested by Atilhan. He was followed by other figures from different wings such as ultra-nationalist Nihal Atsız and Islamist Necip Fazıl. Their ideas about the Dönmes and the Jews mostly promoted that they were the secret rulers of all lands, including Turkey” (Baer 2013, 537). Especially, the words of Atsız about the Sabbateans demonstrate the hatred towards the Dönmes:

“There are two types of Jews. One is the authentic Jew, who can be recognized by his speech. Another is the Dönme, who cannot be so identified. In order to identify this type, it is necessary to look carefully for the degenerate Jewish features of his face. There is no difference whatsoever between the Jew and the Jewish Dönme. One says, ‘We Jews,’ while the other says, ‘You Turks’” (Bali and Bessemer 2008, 254).

Apparently, the Sabbateans in Turkey have become a common enemy for different ideological camps in Turkey. Another proof of the failure of integration Dönme community into Turkish society can be exemplified by the 1942 wealth tax implementation. Faik Ökte, who was the head of the financial department in Istanbul at that time, says that “In the 1942 Asset Tax event, non-Muslims and Dönmes were levied

more tax than Muslims as a result of the "G" and "D"<sup>1</sup> rulers created in practice even though it was not in the law" (Ökte 1951, 135- 243). According to the wealth tax, the Province of Istanbul was categorized as Muslim, non-Muslim, foreigner, and Dönme (Baer 2010, 83). This discriminatory taxation policy includes many questions in itself. For instance, why the Sabbateans, who assert that they converted to Islam, had to pay more taxes than ordinary Muslim subjects? Or if the Sabbateans were the "secret rulers of Turkey" why did they also have to pay more taxes which risked their assets?

These arguments about the positions of the Sabbateans in Turkey prove that the community could not succeed completely being a part of Turkish society. They were believed that they never quit being a Jew which is their real identity and they become dominant in every area in Turkey (Oran 2004, 117). As it is seen that, the notions such as the Sabbateans are the "secret rulers of Turkey", they control the economy and the trade, or they betrayed the Turkish nation are the popular views in today's Turkey those take their roots from the past. Interestingly enough, in spite of the Sabbateans' playing the leader role in conspiracy theories, they keep their silence for centuries. One of the most significant reasons that has generated such conspiratorial outlook would be the silence of the Sabbateans about their identities as the last chapter will cover.

#### **4.1. Conspiracy Theory Culture in Turkey**

Conspiracy theories occupy an important place in Turkish political culture and the media particularly from the 1970s onwards. Şerif Mardin draws attention to the conspiracy theories for shaping Turkish people's historical perspective (Nefes 2019). Even decades after the specific incidents, some conspiratorial ways of thinking remain on people's agendas. Occasionally, these conspiratorial approaches prompt people to have a connection between relevant or irrelevant events. However, at the end of the day, these approaches deviate the discussions from the reality.

Related to these conspiratorial works in various countries, Daniel Pipes asserts that "Blaming others, especially former rulers, has been a fashionable pastime in a number of decolonized countries" (Kumaraswamy 1997, 72-74). When the prevalence of the

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<sup>1</sup> "D" refers to "Dönmes".

conspiracy theories in India or in many Arab states is taken into account, it sounds reasonable that the decolonized countries are more prone to produce conspiracy theories. At this point, Turkey should be examined in a different context. My first argument is that although Turkey was not colonized, it has always carried the fear of being colonized since its foundation. The threat of the external forces since the WWI has influenced the political atmosphere in Turkey.

Secondly and more importantly, the roots of these conspiracies would go back to the cleavage between the center and the periphery in Turkey. While mentioning the reasons of rising conspiracy theories, Saliha Akbaş claims that “‘conspiracy mentality’, is a particular way of understanding the world and history by means of categorization of society into ‘us’ vs. ‘them’” (Akbaş, 2016, 78). From this point of view, it can be asserted that the periphery, representing “the other” in Akbaş’s case, utilizes these conspiracy theories in order to delegitimize the power at the “center” and become a new center by making out of a new “us” with a collection of “other” identities.

This cleavage in the Turkish Republic inherited from the administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire. Şerif Mardin points out that the powerful lineages of the periphery that raised difficulties for both the Ottoman bureaucracy and later for the Kemalist policies. In the traditional system of the Ottoman Empire, localism, which had been developed as a reaction to the Ottoman social segmentation and cultural preeminence (Mardin 1975, 1), was mostly tolerated by the center. At this point, based on the argument of Mardin, it could be said that the periphery aimed to gain its autonomy as a response to the centralization efforts of the state. However, these problems became more crucial in the 19<sup>th</sup> century modernization process. The attempts to create a nation-state model were challenged by the structure of the periphery despite the objectives of Abdulhamid II and after taking power, the Young Turks. Mardin also argues that “Turkey inherited a sociocultural division from the Ottoman Empire that pitted the ruling elites of the ‘center’ against a culturally heterogeneous ‘periphery’” (Aytaç and Elçi 2018, 90). The alienated periphery tried to be developed in terms of being in communication and be integrated in political issues within Kemalist reforms to have a control over them and to prevent their oppositions to the reforms. To summarize the argument above; the social, political, economic, and the cultural conflict between the center and the periphery over the decades would have established a ground for developing conspiracy mentality towards the ruling elite in the center.

People may be in need of explaining the character of power. Under the light of these arguments, conspiracy theorizing has been a utilitarian way of stigmatizing the political and economic elite (Bora 1996, 90). The Sabbatean community has also been in the center of these discussions particularly in the emergence era of Turkish Republic. The conspiracy theories about the Sabbateans mostly ground the social and cultural reasons in Turkey. The first conspiracy theories about the Sabbatean community begins within the claims that the CUP was being ruled by the secret Jews in 1908 (Baer 2013, 530). This allegation is true to a limited extent that some of the pioneers of the CUP were from Sabbatean backgrounded families or they had close relations with the Sabbatean community. To give a specific example, Mehmed Cavid, as a leading member of CUP and the Minister of Finance, was graduated from a Dönme school in Thessaloniki, and according to some claims he was a “secret Jew” (Kedourie 1971, 92). Notably, the Dönmes’ being at the forefront of Turkey’s modernization process, their partly involvement in Young Turk movement, and their opposition to the Hamidian regime have been used as evidences for the conspiracy theories in Turkey.

The allegations towards the political or the economic elite has gone through a different phase in Turkish Politics in 2007, Ergün Poyraz wrote a book asserting that Tayyip Erdoğan, who was the Prime Minister of Turkey at that time, was educated by Jewish and Israeli intelligence agencies and was prepared to be the leader of Turkey for years (Poyraz 2007, 12). The book *Musa'nın Çocukları* is full vitriolic statements of Poyraz which are based on conspiracy theories about the family roots of Erdoğan. Poyraz connects Erdoğan’s having Georgian origins with his possible tendency to betray the Turkish Republic.

The examples about the Dönme conspiracies or the family roots of political figures demonstrate how conspiracy theories have been used for political and economic interests in Turkey. From time to time, the conspiracies rise or fall in line with the political situations. The next part will try to understand what conditions affect these rise and fall in the political arena in Turkey.

#### **4.1.1. The Rise and the Fall in the Conspiratorial Literature on the Sabbateans in Turkey**

When the existing literature is covered, the representation of the Sabbateans as a “secret society” is a quite dominant phenomenon. A tendency towards uncovering the “true history” is observable in these publications. More precisely, as Ergin and Karakaya claim that “Popular culture’s perceived degraded position makes it easier to deem historical drama “false history” thus providing a platform that allows one to signal one’s political, religious, racial, and gendered position to the other” (Ergin and Karakaya 2017, 56). Notably, keeping Sabbateans’ their identities in secret paves the way of becoming popular these kinds of theories.

Georg Simmel, in his *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies* puts his finger on these secrecy and representation issues in different societies. He begins the story as “All relationships of people to each other rest, as a matter of course, upon the precondition that they know something about each other” (Simmel 1906, 441-498). According to Simmel, an individual cannot live an absolutely transparent life. He considers it as a myth. From this viewpoint, almost everyone has a tendency to learn and to make comment about the others. He names this situation as the “tension of secrecy” (Simmel 1906, 441-498). Notably, the Sabbateans as a secret society provide an opportunity for others to develop ideas about them.

Before referring to the literature on the Dönmes, the concept of “conspiracy theories” needs to be defined for analyzing the existing conspiracies. Türkay Nefes defines the conspiracy theories as social constructions (Nefes 2012, 413). This statement is important in terms of understanding that the conspiracy theories reflect the images, which built in times, in the minds of people. The question of the Dönmes has occupied a controversial place in Turkish political history and in Turkish society. From different ideological camps, many people have tried to reveal the Sabbatean community’s “secrecy”. This chapter will only base the conspiratorial works about the Sabbateans because the rise and the fall in the conspiracy literature are more likely related to the political conditions in Turkey. The conspiracy theories about the Sabbateans mostly emphasize on the social and cultural relations in Turkey. In order to analyze in what ways these conspiracy theories have been grounded, it is essential to consider the structure of the Sabbatean community, their political rise and great economic power in Turkey.

The literature on the Sabbatean community is mostly composed by the outsiders which may cause giving a false colour to the image of the community. On the other hand, the works about the Sabbatean community is quite limited as a result of the closedness and silence of the community. This situation has led to increase conspiracy theories about the Sabbateans and discrimination of the members of the community. Leyla Neyzi asserts that “The emergence of Turkish Jewish voices and their representation in the public sphere parallel the quest for democratization and the growing interest in history, memory, and identity in Turkish society as a whole” (Neyzi 2005, 167-189). Neyzi seems to be right when the publication years of the Sabbatean-based subjects are examined.

The earliest publication can be encountered in 1879 with the booklet of Ahmed Safi about the modes of living of the community in Thessaloniki. The earliest works on the Sabbateans generally try to understand who the Sabbateans were or what were their social and political objectives. Within the early Republican Period, the content of discussions began to change through the statements of Karakaşzâde Mehmed Rüştü at the end of 1923. Rüştü was a Dönme origin merchant and he lodged a petition about his community to the Turkish parliament (Şişman and Varol). To mention briefly, as a result of a dispute among the community, Rüştü reveals the secrets of his community and complains that they cannot be assimilated into Turkish society in his petition to Mustafa Kemal. Karakaşzâde Rüştü believed that all the Dönme traditional beliefs and customs should be abandoned within the Republican period (Şişman and Varol). After his petition was published in 1924, it triggered various discussions and debates about the past, present and future status of the Sabbatean community in several newspapers (Şişman and Varol). Following that event, the community has gone through the assimilation process and it triggered their silence for decades.

Until the era of WWII, there is a distinct silence about the Dönme issue in Turkey. However, with the impact of Nazism in Europe, a number of authors began to express anti-Semitic theories and discourses such as Atilhan and Atsız (Şişman and Varol). Some other well-known figures from different political segments such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, and Derviş Vahdeti also used anti-Semitic rhetoric in their writings (Baer 2013, 554). Parenthetically, the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, the “threat” of Zionism, and reaching the Palestine-Israeli issue in its peak should have been influential on the writings of these figures.

From the Islamic circles, journals such as *Büyükdoğu* and *Sebilürreşad* handled the subject of Sabbateans in Turkey. To give an example, in 1948, *Sebilürreşad* addressed the Dönme issue and gave a wide coverage to their status in Turkey. Related to this, in that edition, two other articles also deal with the issue of Sabbateanism which belong to Cevat Rıfat Atilhan and Eşref Edip. In Atilhan's article, his hatred towards the Jews and the Dönmes and the Jews' secret congress on traitorous cooperation in different countries are the main subjects (Atilhan 1948, 72). However, Edip' article differs from Atilhan's by introducing Dönmes within their customs and traditions. Rather than discriminating the community, Edip gives place to the narrations of Karakaşzâde Rüştü about the Dönmes' feast of sacrifice (Edib 1948, 77). It seems that, the publication on the subject of the Sabbateans showed an increase in 1948 with the influence of political atmosphere in Europe and the foundation of State of Israel.

A second rise in the publication can be observed in 1980s-90s with writings of Mehmet Şevket Eygi, Ertuğrul Düzdağ, and as the most strikingly Ilgaz Zorlu, from the Sabbatean community. Zorlu's book *Evet, Ben Selanikliyim* can be interpreted as an initiative that being a Sabbatean is not a shame as his family or his relatives tried to keep for centuries. Because of exposing the secrecy of the community, Zorlu gained hostility of his community. His book also triggered curiosity of people and it can be observed that there is a growing interest about the "secrecy" of the Sabbateans from 1980s.

As a minority group their status in Turkish Republic and the debates about "Turkishness" have been sizably argued in society and the media and it has become a fertile ground for the minority studies. Putting another way, due to the rarity of objective researches and academic interests, the Sabbateanism subject has been mostly stuck in the conspiracy theories and misrepresentation in Turkey. In 1990s, the rise on the publication continued via some magazines and books. For the 1990s and new millennium Baer states that "Küçük, Yalçın, and Poyraz have adapted the conspiracy theories expressed by Islamists and extreme rightists and made them conform to their worldview" (Baer 2013, 554). This statement is crucial in terms of interpreting the reactions of leftist circles towards the changing political elite in Turkey. In 2002, the AKP regime became a "trend" among the conspiratorial works grounding on the party was founded with the supports of Jewish and American powers (Yalçın 2006). Subsequently, the AKP got the majority of votes, the party was in the line of fire. The purpose of these writings may be to undermine the political legitimacy of the AKP which has Islamic roots.

In conclusion, it seems that “Sabbateanism” has been used for political and economic benefits for years in Turkey. Sabbateanism has been also used as a means of evil or betrayal. As Bali named that rather than being a minority issue, Sabbateanism has been a scapegoat in Turkey (Bali and Bessemer 2008). Apparently, the literature mostly builds on a misrepresentation by using a pseudo-scientific methodology. This methodology expresses trying to judge the lives of certain Sabbatean figures based on nonobjective assumptions, analyzing the names whether they belong to Sabbatean families, or attributing them to be the “secret” enemies of the state by associating to some historical events. However, this theme has been frequently produced Jewish conspiracies and used to refer to Sabbateans as the menace of the state (Nefes 2012).

## **5. HOW THE SABBATEANS REPRESENT THEMSELVES IN THEIR WORKS?**

One of the distinct problems about the Sabbateanism can be said that they have almost always been examined and narrated through the windows of the outsiders. There is a series of work on describing the positions of the Sabbateans in Turkey such as exploring their family roots and historical background in the Ottoman Empire and their functions in the newly founded Republic. However, the literature is mostly composed of researches from outsiders' eyes which would cause deficiencies in understanding the community objectively. It is undeniable that there would be common significant methodological problems since these works generally base the outsiders' views. In addition to this, as it is seen in literature, people who have a Sabbatean past have avoided from self-exposure. For this reason, the following part, will mainly focus on the reasons for the silence of the Sabbateans. However, returning to the problem that the non-Sabbateans have investigated the Sabbateans, it somewhat demonstrates the circumstances of the minorities in Turkey. This chapter will try to locate and listen to the voice of Sabbateans and also examine their works to broaden the viewpoints towards them. Another purpose of this part is to break the perception of the Sabbateans as a monolithic community by displaying the distinctions among various Sabbatean individuals.

In this chapter, I will explore the narratives of some Sabbatean figures to observe in what way they represent their identities, lifestyles, and political opinions. At this juncture, as primary sources, I will analyze the biographies or autobiographies of three well-known Sabbateans which belong to Sabiha Sertel, Ahmet Emin Yalman, and Halil Bezmen. Apart from these figures, this part will also include the biography of Zekeriya Sertel, the husband of Sabiha Sertel due to having close relations with some prominent

members of the Sabbatean community. These biographies are deliberately chosen since they have different colours among the Sabbatean community.

It can be expected that these works would provide a basis for understanding the Sabbateans' various relationships with the state and Turkish society. As a weakness of this thesis, this part could not include the narratives of non-elite Sabbateans depending on their silence about their identities or difficulties in accessing them. As a striking example, I tried to have a connection with someone who has a Sabbatean background, and he had disclosed many secrets of the community for a long time which disturbed some of the members of the Sabbatean community. As far as he asserts, he was ignored by the community for this reason. When I asked him if he could answer some of my questions for my thesis, he replied me that "I am sorry, due to the ongoing court proceedings besides my health problems I cannot help the thesis preparations anymore". This statement contains the ongoing problems of the community in itself.

### **5.1. Self-Reflection of the Sabbateans: Memoirs and Autobiographies**

Before introducing the memoirs and the autobiographies of the Sabbateans, the definition of the autobiography of French theorist Philippe Lejeune would crystallise some of the meanings in the Sabbateans' representation of themselves. Lejeune says that "We call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his personality" (Lejeune 1971). Notably, the following biographies need to be analysed by taking the issue of reconstruction of the life story into consideration.

Beginning with introducing Sabiha Sertel, she was a remarkable figure in terms of her writings in the newspaper *Tan* in the early Republican period. She was born into a Sabbatean family in 1895 in Thessaloniki. David Selim Sayers defines Sabiha Sertel as the first professional woman journalist in Turkish Republic in the introduction of the memoir of Sertel (Sertel 2015, 11). Her husband Zekeriya Sertel was also a recognized journalist who worked for the *Cumhuriyet* and he was also the founder of journals and newspapers such as *the Resimli Ay*, and *the Tan* (Sertel 2015). Sabiha and Zekeriya Sertel are known within their liberal and pro-democracy attitudes in Turkish political life.

However, according to some allegations, Sabiha Sertel supported Communist ideas in her columns (Vural 2008, 381-395). In the last days of the Ottoman Empire, Sabiha Sertel was one of the prominent woman figures of the Western type of educated people who became a writer and a journalist and later was supported by the Young Turks as a sign of changing times (Sertel 2015, 34). Notably, she took place in the opposition part in the Hamidian era, and she continued her dissenting opinions in the Republican period against the RPP policies which resulted in imprisonment sentence.

One of the primary sources is the biography book of Yıldız Sertel about her mother. The reason why Yıldız Sertel's biography was chosen instead of her mother's is because Sabiha does not touch upon her childhood life or other subjects alongside her political life. The book was first published in 1994. The publishing year has an importance in terms of repression and erasure of the living memory of Ottoman times under the modernization process of Turkey (Walton 2016, 513). Afterwards, by the 1980s, globalization has led to the emergence of politics of identity and Turkey has also been affected by the rise of identity politics. While writing this book which gives crucial details about the lives of the Sabbateans in Thessaloniki, Yıldız Sertel may have taken advantage of this liberal atmosphere in the transformation process of Turkey under globalization. The biography of Sabiha Sertel mostly concentrates on the childhood, educational life, and political stance of her.

Ahmed Emin Yalman wrote the second autobiography *Turkey in My Time* that this paper examines. He was also from a Sabbatean family and was a prominent journalist in the Turkish media with a secular-liberal stance (Nefes 2012, 422). Yalman was well-educated as the most Thessalonian Sabbateans were. As Landou says that "Many were also quite active in the affairs of their city, as described in a book by the journalist Ahmed Emin Yalman, himself a Dönme, *Turkey in My Time* (1956), even though they carefully preserved the secret of their Dönme identity" (Landou 2007, 111). This statement can be explicitly observed in the Republican period. Yalman took place in the opposition of the new regime, and he supported the transition to the multi-party system as Sabiha Sertel did (Yalman and Erdinç 1997, 12). He also took part in the foundation of some newspapers such as *the Vakit*, *the Tan*, *the Hür Vatan*, and *the Kaynak*. Yalman was a vigorous advocate of Republican and liberal ideas for the state's mind (Yalman and Erdinç 1997, 13). His opposition to the authoritarian regime comes to light within his support to the emergence of Democrat Party after the WWII (Yıldız 1996).

After touching Sertel's and Yalman's political positions in the early Republican Turkey briefly, we can introduce the two other sources. Along with Sertel and Yalman, who have become popular in media and political circles, another figure who should be also highlighted regarding the active involvement into the Turkish politics was Zekeriya Sertel, the husband of Sabiha. Despite his allegedly lacking any Sabbatean connection, Zekeriya was one of the leading figures of the press in that period. Moreover, in the discussion of Sabbateans of Turkey, Zekeriya takes an essential place by being around the contemporary of figures such as Yalman, Ziya Gökalp, and Halide Edip. Having pretty close relations with them, he also contributed to the establishment of Westernism-oriented and nationalism-oriented ideas in the Turkish intellectual community with his unique personality.

The fourth autobiography belongs to a later-generation Sabbatean, Halil Bezmen. His father, Fuad Bezmen, was a well-known businessman and the founder of Mensucat Santral. Same as the many other Sabbatean families, this family also concerned textile manufacturing since 1929 (Bali and Bessemer 2008, 32). Fuad Bezmen was not on speaking terms with his eldest son, Halil. He always blamed his son for bankrupting Turkey's largest textile holding (Milliyet 2011). In the 1990s, Halil Bezmen was under the spotlight of the media due to selling expensive chlorine to İSKİ and illegal trafficking of historical works. In addition to all these events, in these years Bezmen came up with his controversial ideas about the difficult circumstances of the Jewish and the Dönme population in Turkey. His alleged accusations of Turkish society of discrimination increased the interest of the Turkish media in the Sabbatean community (Bali and Bessemer 2008, 32-33). Not surprisingly, the publication on the Sabbateans in Turkey also peaked in these years.

There is a point that requires to be touched upon before analyzing the biographies of these Sabbatean figures. The memoirs mostly represent the life stories, and this situation includes a problematic about the status of biographical knowledge. Graham Gardner writes about this problem and says that "Consideration of biographical knowledge involves, among other things, interpreting specific statements against the context of the whole of an actor's account(s). It requires understanding how it is that certain knowledge attains truth value" (Gardner 2001, 195). Apparently, because the biographies and the autobiographies related to memory, they can be thought in a way partially reconstructed and transformed over and through the time and space (Gardner

2001). This study will try to remain distant to the narrative and instead, it will focus on in what way the Sabbateans represent themselves in their biographies.

### **5.1.1. Analysis of the Memoirs and Autobiographies**

As aforementioned, the purpose of this part is to scrutinize how the Sabbateans represent their ideologies, lifestyles, perspectives on life, and political stances through examining some selected autobiographies and memoirs. First of all, it would be helpful to consider how these people picture Thessaloniki where they or their ancestors came. Secondly, this part will try to understand why and how the Sabbateans reflect their concerns about education and morality. Lastly, it will explore in what ways the Sabbateans represent their relationship with the state over their merging into Turkish society via marriages or political attitudes in different periods. This kind of research would be a fruitful source for exhibiting the differences of the members rather than perceiving them as a monolithic community (Şişman 2007).

## **5.2. Sociopolitical Conditions in Thessaloniki and Emphasis on Morality**

One of the distinctive and broad narrations of life in Thessaloniki takes part in the book of Yıldız Sertel. She portrays the atmosphere in Thessaloniki in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through her grandfather's narrative:

"Close by the Thessaloniki port, he had a seat in a kebab shop and was watching the ships in the sea. Most of them were merchant ships. How lively was the Thessaloniki port! How much the infidels were selling their products in this state! From machinery, fabric to the needle" (Sertel 2015, 16).

Yıldız Sertel begins her book by narrating how her grandfather Nazmi Efendi observes the Thessaloniki harbour where the trade takes place. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Thessaloniki was a province of the Ottoman Empire that hosted various ethnic and religious groups together. Under the light of all these, Yıldız Sertel represents Thessaloniki as a distinct part of the empire and later on, she correlates the influence of

these close relations with the West on the open-mindedness of the Sabbateans in the Ottoman lands. Another point in the biography is that the competition with foreign merchants gave rise to investment and gradually enrichment of the Sabbateans. For instance, the need for cotton in the European textile industry was supplied by Thessaloniki merchants who were mostly composed of Sabbateans. Yıldız Sertel tells that there were also foreign entrepreneurs such as the factory of Singer (Akıncı 2017, 35). Marc Baer asserts in his book that these financial factors played an active role in diffusing different ways of thinking and being in the world of the Sabbateans (Baer 2007, 146).

Apart from the general position of Thessaloniki, another significant point in the narrations of both Sertel and Yalman is the representation of the quality education at Dönme schools and moral values of the Thessalonians. The common point in the two figures is that they emphasize their education system had been influential in shaping their outlooks and political attitudes in the future. In her biography, Yıldız Sertel gives information about the education life of her mother and the schools of Thessaloniki around the 1870s. The city became a center of education within its popular Jewish schools Alliance Israelite, Mission laïque française, French schools, and many other schools which belonged to Greeks, Bulgars, Jews, and Serbians. Students from Macedonia were coming to Thessaloniki to have a quality education (Sertel 2015, 36). During this period, the cultural and economic elite of the Sabbateans emerged as a result of global trade and modernization process in the empire. This new class of elites highly attached importance to the education of their children for learning languages and having skills in trade and bureaucracy. Within the initiatives of these Sabbatean families, many progressive schools were founded in Thessaloniki.

Related to this issue, a similar outlook towards the privilege of the Sabbateans can be found in Leyla Neyzi's interview with a Sabbatean woman Fatma Arığ. Arığ says that "I had a grandmother who was highly educated. They even had an hour of sports in school back in those days. I am proud to have come from the European territories of the Ottoman Empire rather than from Central Anatolia because I can relate much more easily to a European" (Neyzi 2007, 152). This interview is substantial in terms of displaying the specific positions of the Sabbateans in the empire and their strong ties with the West.

In addition to this, Ahmed Emin Yalman speaks highly of the Dönme education system in a similar way. A quotation from his book forms an impression of the schools

of Thessaloniki. He first mentions the meaning of Thessaloniki, his birthplace and says that Thessaloniki is the Ottoman Empire's main window to the West and as more liberal any other part of the Ottoman lands. He continues that the leading position of Thessaloniki was due to the city's schools have been the best in the Empire and the most progressive (Yalman and Erdiñç 1997, 12). In addition to this, Yalman frequently stresses the moral education of his school. The same narration can be found in the memoir of Yahya Kemal who also attended a Dönme school in Skopje for a while. He tells that "A Dönme teacher came from Thessaloniki and they were dressed up in yellow uniforms. *Mektep* was written in the right collar, and the *Edeb* was written in the left collar" (Beyath 1983, 21-29). This representation reveals in the America adventure of Yalman. During his university education at Columbia University, he and his other friends were complained about that in the gymnasium for covering themselves with a towel. Yalman justifies himself to the director by saying "We were educated urbanely and well-mannered in our schools. These attitudes are a shame in our country (Yalman and Erdiñç 1997, 147). This story is significant in terms of demonstration that although the Dönme schools adopted Western outlook in their program, they also respected the traditional, moral mentality.

When it comes to Zekeriya Sertel's primary school life, it seems that he has a retrospective point of view. To give an example, when he analyzes his teachers; he defines them as "medreseden çıkma yobaz hocalar" (bigot teachers who were educated in madrasah) (Sertel 2001, 17). Zekeriya's views of the madrasah, evaluation of inter-family relations, and his frequent describing bigotry and ignorance give some clues about his childhood traumas. Besides that, his opposing attitude towards Islam of that day and severe criticisms against the Islamists would also be related to this issue (Clements 1999, 21-32).

As the last autobiography related to the issue of education and morality representations of the Sabbateans, in his *Neden? Halil Bezmen*, Halil begins his story by describing how his grandfather was a moral person like the previous ones emphasized it in their own biographies (Bezmen 2006, 28). When Halil mentions the days of his family in Thessaloniki, he expresses that the ultimate aim of his grandfather in his factory was to be loved by his workers. Concerning this, Halil states that "This highly developed sense of social responsibility was the legacy of the culture of a socialist industrial city such as Thessaloniki" (Bezmen 2006, 22). He adds that "My grandfather built his fortune

on integrity” (Bezmen 2006, 28). Although Halil Bezmen would be considered from the next-generation of the Sabbateans compared to the Sertels and Yalman, it seems that he shares a similar thought about the distinctive world views of the Sabbateans.

Apparently, in the voices of these figures, there is a construction of superiority through their quality education and the sociopolitical conditions of Thessaloniki. To support this claim, Rıfat Bali believes that the Sabbateans have moved away from the belief of Sabbateanism. Instead, they have an elitist approach which is “Thessalonianism” (Bali 2000, 3). Bali adds that they put forward; they are more Western and more cosmopolitan. He criticizes this view that this kind of thought brings an identity problem for the Sabbateans.

Furthermore, the Sabbateans and some of the researchers in that field assert that the Dönmes were at the forefront of Turkey's modernization process. To give an example, Cengiz Şişman writes about the impact of the Sabbateans on Turkey's modernization process and claims that:

“I suggest that the Dönmes were an important factor behind the Ottoman and Turkish modernization project. Salonica was the engine of Ottoman-Turkish modernization, and the Dönmes were extremely important-possibly the influential group of people in the city in this modernization...Dönmes played a key role in the economic, political, intellectual, educational, and media life of Salonica” (Şişman 2017, 11).

In a different study, Marc Baer examines that:

“...Leading Dönme financiers funded the construction of schools, which demonstrated how the Dönme adopted a modern view equating religion with morals and using education to effect social and cultural change before the central state became involved in modern education” (Baer 2007, 153).

However, this thesis challenges these kinds of arguments in a way. A point escapes from the attention that the attempts of the Sabbatean community to modernize their education system and their social transformation cannot be evaluated independently from the circumstances and of the empire. The characteristics of the Ottoman Empire in the long 19th century was reformation by transforming and modernizing the state apparatus (Ahmad 1993, 2). Since the 18th century, the Western ideas had also impact on changing mentality of the Ottoman society among the educated elite (Hanioglu 1986). Along with the modernization attempts in the Ottoman Empire, Thessaloniki, as a

province, also had a substantial role in this process. Specific conditions of Thessaloniki made them to be more integrated into the Ottoman modernization process. However, due to the Ottoman Empire was in a modernization process that also contributed to the development of education system of Sabbateans in terms of incentives for education of girls, new teaching methods and materials (Baer 2010). To give another example, the efforts of the center to increase trade initiatives in the periphery cannot be omitted too. For instance, although Yıldız Sertel does not mention it, the economy of Thessaloniki was enormously developed, and after the Smyrna port, a more extensive port was constructed in Thessaloniki with the efforts of Sabri Pasha between the dates 1860-1870 (Akıncı 2017, 68). Thessaloniki was very well integrated with rest of the Empire. There were investments in terms of trade and education despite the emergence of opposition towards the regime there.

### **5.3. Relationship with the State**

The biographies of Sabiha Sertel and Ahmed Emin Yalman mostly manifest their elite positions and being the ideologues of the Republic of Turkey. Encountering with a romance in their narrations is possible. According to their representations, it is quite evident that they were well-known figures in their times. For example, Sabiha Sertel illustrates how the new-born state needed the experiences of her husband because he had had education in the USA (Sertel 1994, 109). They were asked to participate in the reorganization of the state. In this way, Sabiha had attempted a “society for the protection of children” under a social research project (Sertel 1994, 111). However, according to all accounts, both Sabiha and her husband have been ignored from the state administration because of their accusation of “socialist demands and consequently, they returned to Istanbul and continued their opposition via various publications (Sertel 1994, 110).

A similar scenario can be found in Yalman’s biography that he also returns to Ankara by request of the new regime (Yalman and Erdinç 1997, 680). However, unlike Sabiha and Zekeriya, Yalman was well accepted by the new regime. The reasons for this difference are worth to be analyzed. While Sabiha and Zekeriya acted self-ordained in their decisions, Yalman first visits Mustafa Kemal and takes his advice after he returned from the USA. He acts following the directions of the new regime (Yalman and Erdinç

1997, 689). The narrations demonstrate that the new Republican elite was highly choosy in terms of including and excluding people.

At the end of the day, although Sabiha-Zekeriya Sertel and Yalman differed in terms of acceptance by the new regime, they both have acted a crucial role in the modernization process of Turkey. The reason why this thesis has examined these two figures is that they had crucial political and economic positions in the transition period and the emergence of the Republican regime. As it was asked at the beginning of the paper, while the new-born state was not ready to accept different identities, as Sertel and Yalman had, in the state administration, the how they could obtain such dominant and ascendant positions? In Yıldız Sertel's biography, Sabiha Sertel somehow answers to this question. Sabiha asks to Mazhar Müfit who is a member of the parliament that "Why the deputies are acceding through an appointment?" (Sertel 1977, 110). Müfit's answer is highly interesting because he confesses why the new regime contradicts its ideals in terms of ignoring different identities. He says that "What would you think? If we give a chance to this public to select its deputy, what kind of people would enter this parliament? Sheikhs, hadjis, hodjas..." (Sertel 1977, 110). Apparently, the founding cadre and the immigrant figures who also had Jewish identity besides Islam could meet on common ground. Probably, the self-representation of the Sabbateans as the pioneers of modernization in the Ottoman Empire, their economic conditions, having good relations with Europe, secularist ideas, and their Western-type of education would be effective in their acceptance by the regime. This situation can be observed in the literature written about the Sabbateans and the media. While archive documents support some of the literature, a certain part of it aims to reach the "truth" by using genealogical research. Naturally, this methodology may mislead the researcher and the readers at some points. However, regardless of these issues, such researches which are sometimes considered the "conspiracy theories" would enable to understand how the Sabbateans have been perceived by Turkish society.

The autobiography of Zekeriya Sertel was published in 1977 for the first time. Generally speaking, the book concentrates on the education life and journalism times of him. When it comes to his personal experiences in life, it could be asserted that he faced several difficulties in his childhood and family life. He lived his childhood in a town near Thessaloniki (Sertel 1977). Although his father took place among the landed gentry at the town, they did not live a very prosperous life, and his family relations broke down after

his mother passed away. It seems that all these traumatic experiences would lead him to become a more audacious person in life which can also be supported by his daughter's describing as "*Susmayan Adam*" (*The man who was never silent*) (Sertel 2019). One outstanding feature of Zekeriya is his being courageous which is supported by his daughter Yıldız's narratives. Allowing for the circumstances of media and political life, Zekeriya asserts that he always insisted on having the courage of his convictions (Sertel 2019). For this purpose, he runs the risk of being imprisoned or conflict with Mustafa Kemal (Sertel 2019).

#### **5.4. The Issue of the Dönme-Turk Marriages**

Regarding the issue of reconstruction the past, Cengiz Şıman says that the memories of the Sabbateans should be read carefully as well (Şışman 2002, 223). As it was seen above, they tell their stories in a constructed way as it commonly happens in most of the biographies. To give a specific example, the Sabbateans' joining into Turkish society began around the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Şışman 2002). Within this date, it is claimed that the Sabbatean and Turkish marriages began to increase following the marriage of Sabiha-Zekeriya Sertel. In the memoir of Zekeriya, he illustrates their engagement ceremony was in detail and says that:

"It was heard that I was about to marry a Dönme girl. One day, Doctor Nazım from the Central Committee of the Union and Progress asked me about that. He congratulated me. And he asked me if I knew the importance of this marriage. He then replied that "You're leading the fusing of the two communities which have hostilely looked to each other for centuries. You are devastating the Dönme cast. We should evaluate this event properly and celebrate the unification of the return of the Turks with this occasion. It is necessary to consider this as a national and historical event"(Sertel 1977).

Appreciation of this marriage reveals the significance of the Dönme community for the members of the CUP in the process of Turkey's modernization. İlber Ortaylı also touches upon this subject and argues that although the Sabbateans accepted the Muslim religion, they continued some of their old rituals such as endogamy (Olsson et al. 2004, 116). Following that, he remarks that "The exceptional cases of intermarriage with

Muslim Turks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of the assimilation of the Sabetaists” (Olsson et al. 2004, 116).

At this juncture, Ortaylı’s claims on the importance of highlighting the Muslim-Sabbatean marriages might sound accurate; yet, he has also shortcomings in portraying the Sabbateans getting assimilated. Considering this event from a different angle, it would be said that the pioneers of the CUP might benefit from this marriage depending upon of Sabbatean community’s familiarity with their social modernization reforms. Marc Baer also utters that “the Dönme were perfectly situated to play the major role because they were a transcultural group whose cultural location placed them in a unique position to promote modern change” (Baer 2007). The intentions of Doctor Nazım, Talat Paşa, Tevfik Rüştü (Aras), and the other notable personages of the CUP, such as announcing this engagement to the newspapers and making it a national even (Sertel 1977) would be the sign for this claim.

Apart from all these arguments, Hakan Erdem’s points bring the debate into a new phase. In Marc Baer’s review, he states that:

“I must say that this case is not the only one and that it is possible that similar cases will be revealed with more careful screening of the Ottoman Archives. For example, a group of five documents in the archive tells the story of Nigar Hanım, daughter of Karakaş Osman Efendi, who was married an Avdeti nicknamed Hunyos from Thessaloniki. In any case, it is necessary to go to the archives in order to understand that the presentation of the leaders (big guns) of the Union and Progress the marriage of Zekeriya-Sabiha [Sertel] to the Ottoman public as a first marriage between the Muslims and the Sabbateans was actually not too exceptional” (Erdem 2011).

Based on Erdem’s argument that this marriage was not unique at that time, it would not be wrong to imply that Sabiha-Zekeriya Sertel marriage was promoted as a role model to popularize Dönme-Turks marriage in Turkey.

As a conclusion, although many books have been written about the Sabbateans in Turkey, the works they reflect about themselves are quite limited. For this reason, such biographical works are essential in terms of understanding in what way they represent themselves. This thesis gives place to some Sabbateans’ voices to observe in what ways they represent themselves. In addition to this, at this point, it is also important to question how the Turkish state, which defines itself as Turkish and Sunni Muslim, accepted Sabbatean figures into its founding squad. In other words, it is important to find out how

the Sabbatean identities that the state does not accept can find a place in the administration. The works of Rifat Bali are seminal in the sense of discovering mutual affinity. This chapter displays some different colors among the biographies those were analyzed above. Another importance of these four biographies in terms of this thesis is to get an idea of how people with a Sabbatean identity have connected with the state and how they reflect these relations in their works.

## 6. THE BURDEN OF SILENCE OR THE SILENCE OF BURDEN?

In the matter of the silence of the Sabbateans, many authors address the issue of assimilation of the Dönmes under Turkish rule. One of the accusations is that the current government, the AKP regime, silences the Dönmes and forces them to adopt the Sunni Islam identities. To give some specific examples, Nick Ashdown writes in his column, in *The Forward*, "Began by a Jewish prophet, the Dönme helped educate the founder of modern Turkey, but now they remain secretive and afraid due to demonization under Erdogan" (Ashdown 2016). Another example is Ceylan Yeginsu writes in *The New York Times* that Turkey's Jewish population is declining due pressure of assimilation since 1923. She also adds that Turkish quickly replaced Ladino, the Judeo-Spanish language of Sephardic Jews (Yeginsu 2015). Although Yeginsu writes about the positions of the Jews in Turkey, the Sabbateans can be also analyzed in this frame due to the perception of some in society that the Sabbateans still continue their Jewish identity. Notably, the rising criticisms demonstrate that the silence of the Sabbateans is illusively attributed to the repression of the Turkish state.

Cengiz Şişman mounts a similar argument in his *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes* covering the Sabbateans' transforming socio-political positions in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic. One of the main questions of the book is that "how and why would anyone (or any community) carry such a burden of silence through the centuries?" (Şişman 2017). This discussion is noteworthy in terms of understanding the nature of the Sabbatean community. However, aforementioned above, there is a common view that the external factors have been influential in suppressing the Dönme community.

It is undeniable that some serious events have caused the disengagement of the Sabbateans from society such as the authoritarianism in the new Republican period, silencing the opposition party, closing some newspapers, the new political environment, assassination attempts on some well-known Dönme figures and the 1942 wealth tax

which was levied arbitrarily and in a discriminatory way on non-Muslims in Turkey (Bali 2012). Despite all these factors would be influential in the silence of the Sabbateans, it might be misleading when the Republican regime is regarded the sole responsible for the silence of the Dönmes in Turkey. The purpose of this part is to demonstrate that the Sabbateans have not been silenced only by the outsiders for centuries, rather they have been a secretive and a closed community from the beginning in the direction of their religious doctrine.

The secrecy of the community has led various allegations and discussions about the structure and the doctrine of the Sabbateans in Turkey over the centuries. At this point, Georg Simmel's theory on *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies* would provide to comprehend the impulsion of the Sabbateans to stay as a secret community. In this book, he puts his finger on the secrecy and representation issues. He begins the story as “All relationships of people to each other rest, as a matter of course, upon the precondition that they know something about each other” (Simmel 1906, 441-498). According to Simmel, an individual cannot live an absolutely transparent life. He considers it as a myth. From this point, almost everyone has a tendency to learn and to make comment about the others. He names this situation as the “tension of secrecy” (Simmel 1906, 441-498). Notably, the Sabbateans as a secret community provide an opportunity for others to develop unsubstantial ideas about them. Again in Simmel’s words, “Secrecy sets barriers between men, but at the same time offers the seductive temptation to break through the barriers by gossip or confession” (Simmel 1906, 441-498). As Taussig also notes that “secrecy magnifies reality” (Taussig 1999). Seemingly, secrecy and silence of the community would lead outsiders’ creating an imagined community in their minds. As the first chapter analyzed the conspiracy theories on the Sabbateans have mostly emerged from lack of adequate information about them. In this regard, it should be asked that why the members of the community still keeping their identities hidden whereas the other minority groups coming to light in Turkey. Şişman uses the term of “forced” in explaining the silence of the Dönme community (Şişman 2017). They have kept their private beliefs and practices secret because of their concern about repression. Leyla Neyzi predicates the silence, secrecy, and historically practice of dissimulation of some families of the Sabbatean community on fear, assimilation under Turkish Republic, and their social exclusion (Neyzi 2002, 147). Her points might be right when the Capital Levy or the historically experience of discrimination are deliberated. However, when the memoires

of some Sabbatean figures are analyzed, it is hard to encounter with discrimination or assimilation attempts contrary to Neyzi's argument. Rather, the Sabbatean families have been economically powerful, politically and culturally influential in their narratives. In addition to this, most of the families took part in the political circles of the new Republican regime. Hence, it would not be a substantive argument to think the Sabbatean community have not revealed their identities due to living in a Muslim society and the fear of misperception. This challenging situation questions why the Sabbatean families have continued their silence even they have not had to.

### **6.1. "Maasa Duma": The Angel of Silence<sup>2</sup>**

Afterwards, by 1980s, globalization has led to the emergence of politics of identity and Turkey has also been affected by the rise of identity politics. An attempt aiming at a democratic reconstruction of the political in Turkey emerged which sees a multicultural and differentiated understanding of constitutional citizenship as a constitutive norm of "living together in diversity." (Keyman and Gümüşçü 2014, 110). Now, it is questionable why the Sabbatean families have not adopted to the changing circumstances in Turkey. To make a comparison, the Kurdish issue can be also considered in this perspective in terms of being silenced, frozen, and assimilated by the Kemalist discourse (Şişman 2017). Since the inception of the Turkish Republic as a modern and independent nation state in 1923, the Kurdish identity has always been constructed as the "other" of Turkish national identity. However, in accordance with the cyclical change of the world and the transformation process in Turkey, the Kurdish question has become more audible in society. Afterwards, by the 1980s, within the impact of globalization and identity politics, Kurdishness demanded political recognition as a result of assimilation policies.

Despite the outcomes of this transformation process in Turkey, the wall of silence has not been broken among the Sabbatean families yet. My argument is that the silence of the Sabbateans would take its source from Kabbalistic doctrine as well rather than stemming solely from the external repressions. Cengiz Şişman gets the bottom of "the burden of silence" of the Sabbateans and finds that "the religious and cultural Dönmes

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<sup>2</sup> Şişman, *The burden of silence*.

internalized philosophy of a *burden of silence* or philosophy of *maasa duma*” (Şişman 2017, 3). Maasa Duma or Dumah “is the angel of silence and of the stillness of death” (Davidson 1999). Based upon the argument of Şişman, the silence of the Sabbateans has partly originated from their religious beliefs. According to Roni Weinstein, “Sabbateanism was immersed totally in the realm of fantasy and imagination, in the universe of kabbalist symbolism that intertwined divine spheres, allusions to biblical verses, figures and tales from ‘The Zohar’” (Haaretz, 2004). Supporting the argument of Weinstein, while Gershom Scholem mentions the commentators of the Kabbalah and conflicting traditions that were simply juxtaposed in the Bahir, he refers to the choice of symbols and appellations of the Sabbateans (Scholem and Werblowsky 1987). He says that “They liked to adopt as names of aeons abstract terms such as thought, wisdom, penitence, truth, grace, greatness, silence, or images such as father, mother, abyss, etc.” (Scholem and Werblowsky 1987). All these symbolic expressions which those can be found in the ancient documents still inspire conspirators for reaching the “real meanings” of the Sabbatean names. Thusly, when we consider the symbolic believing system among the Sabbateans, it would be more meaningful to answer why they still continue their silence.

According to some views, the Sabbatean community do not abide by the Sabbatean culture anymore and they got assimilated into the Turkish culture. This assertion is problematic when it is suggested by the outsiders. It would not be possible to suggest that the Sabbateans do not hide themselves because it is a closed community. In addition to that, the Sabbatean community is not a monolithic community. While some members continue their culture, some others would give up that. Yet already, Ilgaz Zorlu gave an interview to *Hürriyet* about his book which has made a tremendous impact on society. He says in his interview that:

“My grandmother has a very solid Sabbatean culture, but she's afraid. The reason of her fear is that she experienced the Wealth Tax incident and the Karakaş Rustu incident. Following these events, the community has decided to assimilate. When I was a kid, I was with my grandmother's group of friends. My grandmother's group was practicing religious rituals. Ladies used to come together at homes. We had a relative called Aunt Fatma. Suddenly she used to take out a book and say a prayer on “Sabbatai Zwi”. The Ladies used to say that “Oh, Fatos, let no one hear that”, the curtains would close, I would be taken to bed. These people still believed in Sabbatai Zwi, but they were hiding that” (Hürriyet 1998).

The narration above demonstrate that the silence dominates the domestic relations in the Sabbatean family. Assimilation efforts of the community has set bounds to their past. One of my informants who came from a well-known Sabbatean family gave an interesting information that he learnt his coming from a Sabbatean family when he was 24 years old. What's more, he does not get informed by his family, but by one of his army friends. This situation is more than the goal of protecting their children rather it is a choice of denying or forgetting their identities. Aforementioned the internal and the external factors have been influential in the silence of the community, but also it reveals the truth about the minority and identity issues in Turkey. As Leyla Neyzi says that "Memory is as much about forgetting, and the violence embodied in silence, as it is about remembering" (Neyzi 2007, 139). Here another question emerges that how could this community succeed continue their identities and believing system in years?

At this point, the diversity in the community comes into prominence that the silence of the Sabbateans also varies by the groups. In Neyzi's comparison, she frames that historically, the Yakubi group have assimilated earliest while a minority of Karakaşlı families preferred to stay in Sabbatean beliefs and in endogamous structure. In addition to these, Kapancı families are located in the middle that they committed to get assimilation in Turkish society (Neyzi 2007, 146-147). Compared to other groups, the Kapancı families stayed as the most conservative group due to their historical commitment to public silence. The distinctions between the groups prevent having a general conceiving about the relations and the structure of the Sabbatean community. However, in practice, the outsiders ignore these differences and build a monolithic community in their works. The next part will try to find out what type of a community image do the outsiders have about the Sabbateans.

An important illusive perception is that the Sabbatean community have been seen as a monolith. The commitment to the public silence of the Sabbateans about their identities leads to the perception of a monolithic community. Furthermore, the outsiders put them in the same equation with their ancestors. All these problematic approaches dominate the majority of the works on the Sabbateans. When we look at the arguments of Rifat Bali, he says that it is problematic to consider the Sabbateans as a monolithic community (Neyzi 2007, 146-147). These examples suggest that a monolithic Sabbatean perception would be actually deceptive. Disunity inside the community cannot be ignored which have many examples.

Benedict Anderson's views on the perception of nationalism can provide a theoretical framework for the studies on Sabbateanism. According to Anderson's theory, nationalism is a cultural artefact of a particular kind and he clarifies nationalism as an emotional legitimacy (Anderson 2016, 4). One of the most striking ideas of Anderson is that he defines nation as an imagined political community (Anderson 2016, 6). His argument is sensible when it is deliberated that the members of a nation do not know or meet all their fellows. Hence, they have an image of a community rather than individuals which makes it imagined. The approach Anderson can be considered as a "new approach" because it breaks the perception of nationalism which has been built especially since the French Revolution.

The points of Anderson on the concept of nation can be adapted into the Sabbatean issue in Turkey since it is a creation and imagination in the minds of the outsiders. It would be asserted that the silence of the Sabbateans reinforces the perception of a monolithic community. So here, we can say that their silence would probably create an extraordinary community in the minds of people in accordance with the conspiracy theories. Clearly saying, on the basis of the theories of Anderson, it would be questioned if the silence and closedness have created a community or in other words, to what extent can we mention a community.

## **6.2. Diversity among the Members of the Community**

The history of the Sabbatean community traces back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century which is a quite long time for the survival of a community. Despite the differentiations and splits among the members of the community, it is a success that they could achieve staying together for centuries. Related to this subject, Cengiz Şişman divides the movement into four periods such as Sabbatai Zwi's coming into the picture and the emergence of the community, the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the community encountered with modernization and enlightenment, the transition from Empire to Republic and lastly, the current situations of the community (Şişman 2007, 25). The way of Şişman seems convenient while interpreting the Sabbateans as not a monolithic community, but rather showing internal alteration over the centuries. The transition from an organic community to individualism

has naturally influenced the dynamics and the structure of the community. However, we still could mention the unity of the Sabbateans today.

It would be possible to mention a monolithic Sabbatean community until the 19<sup>th</sup> century even if there were some differences among the Kapanci, the Karakaş, and the Yakubi sub-communities. However, with the impact of modernization and nationalism, the organic structure of the community began to dissolve. To give an example, during the period of modernization in the Ottoman Empire, the cultural and the economic elite of the Sabbateans founded new progressive schools such as Şemsi Efendi Primary School, Terakki, and Feyziye Schools. As it is understood that the different sects of the community began to establish different Dönme schools to satisfy the demands of the transformation process in the Empire. In a decade, following the Kapanci Şemsi Efendi Primaty School, the Kapanci and Karakaş sects had founded much larger schools in Thessaloniki. Terakki (Progress) Schools were opened in 1879 and the Feyziye (The one that enlightens) Schools were opened in 1885 (Şişman 2007, 217). These examples are important to demonstrate that the Dönme sects in Thessaloniki began to differentiate signally from each other at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The splits among the community began to increase in the Republican Period in Turkey. Aforementioned, Karakaşzâde Rüştü incident denotes that there was an uneasiness in the community due to the structural changes in the state. However, referring to the argument of Şişman, it would be said that individualism began to be more effective in the cleavages between the members. Ilgaz Zorlu, for instance, had some problems with his community and he shared and announced these in-group problems via publications and the media. According to his assertions, the Şişli-Terakki High School was under the threat of arbitrary regime under the administration of Haluk Arıĝ (Zorlu 2000, 17). In his article about the relations in Şişli-Terakki High School, Zorlu gives a place to reciprocal discussşon with Arıĝ. According to Zorlu's claims, he asks some questions to Arıĝ about the corruption allegations of his administration. In reply to this, Arıĝ asserts that Ilgaz Zorlu had demanded for money monthly because he was the grandson of Şemsi Efendi (Şimon Zwi), one of the primary founders of the school. As a conclusion, Zorlu pronounces that he asked for many for the restoration of the Bülbüderesi Cemetery where the most of the founding fathers and the initial board of trustees of the Şişli-Terakki Foundation buried. By doing so, Zorlu quoted the names of some Sabbatean figures such as Can Paker, Haluk Arıĝ, and Reşat Atabek which should have disturbed the community.

This scandal is substantial in terms of revealing the discussions and cleavages between the members of the community in 2000s.

In addition to these cleavages and splits from the community, there are some figures such as Cengiz Çandar and Halil Bezmen whose families have Sabbatean background, but they seem to be not interested in this identity. An interview with Çandar is quite impressive in order to see the positions of some Sabbatean families in Turkey. The interviewer asks a question about the Jewish friends of Çandar at Tarsus American College:

“In what position did you see them?

-We were the majority, they were the minority, but this was not a problem for me at all.

The fact that you bear the name Çandar comes from the Çandarlı, who played an important role in the early decades of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, do you feel yourself as a pure Turkish?

-No dear. The Çandarlı family dates back five hundred years. So, it is mixed. I consider myself essentially Rumelian. My mother’s side is from Thessaloniki, probably they are Dönme. My mother's relatives occupied a significant part of Valikonağı in Istanbul. I visited them in my childhood; and all of them, my cousins, my aunt, even my mother, seemed like Raschels in the cartoons, the Salamons. I grew up in a Thessaloniki culture. My grandfather used to tell me about Sabbatai Zwi. Therefore, unlike an average Turk, there is information embedded in my balance sheet about Jewish myth. I may not be a very typical example for your interview” (Öncevatan 2019).

This interview is highly striking that a well-known journalist and author declares that although he is known as a Turk because coming from the Çandarlı family, he has also a Sabbatean background by his mother. Apparently, he does not reject his Sabbatean identity and growing with Thessaloniki culture, but he sees his other Jewish friends as the minority. As a matter of fact, these examples demonstrate the unsettled positions of the Sabbatean community in Turkey in itself.

To sum up, under the light of these expressions, the Sabbatean community has been silent about their identities for some reasons as mentioned above for centuries. Both their Kabbalistic doctrine and their concerns about external repressions have prevented them from declaring their believing system. This situation triggered the rise of conspiracy theories about the Sabbatean community. In this way, they began to be perceived as a monolithic community which means that all the members of the community share the same ideology, views, and goals. However, as it is seen in the examples of this chapter,

it is a delusion to think the community as a monolith since there have been many splits and cleavages among the members. But still, it has to be asked that how could they succeed staying together and be silenced about their identities for centuries.

## CONCLUSION

In 2004, *Efendi* of Soner Yalçın which represented some Sabbatean families as the real masters of Turkey, in a matter of speaking, resonated with society<sup>1</sup>. Priorly, there were common and similar arguments and discussions like that, but the book of Yalçın broke the sales record and reached hundreds of thousands. It is still questionable what was attractive in this book for people. Is it possible to explain this with just the curiosity of the outsiders? The issue of the Sabbateans in Turkey dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> when Mehmed IV was informed about the activities of Sabbatai Zwi and his followers in Istanbul. The disturbances and complaints of the Jewish and the Muslim subjects necessitated making provision against the Sabbateans. From this date on, the Sabbatean community began to turn in on itself and keep their identities secret. This discrimination or isolation from the society continues even in today's Turkey. Despite the changes in social and political order in Turkey, the negative attitudes of society increasingly continue towards the Sabbatean community.

In this thesis, basically I tried to understand the reasons for the growing reactions of society. The Sabbatean community occupied an important place in the Ottoman Empire and their connections with the state and impacts on socio-political life have lasted for decades. The Sabbateans more easily adopted to modernization attempts of the state compared to other communities due to their affinity with the European states. In addition to this, some Sabbatean families gave importance to the education of their children for taking part in the Ottoman bureaucracy. At this point, it should be asked that what kind of factors have made some sections in Turkish society see the Sabbateans in a negative way. The first place I applied for this question was the written sources such as books and journals which are related to the Sabbateans in Turkey. Although some academic studies are available on the Sabbateans, there is a considerable amount of conspritual works which would reflect the outlooks of the outsiders. Analyzing the conspritual works provided an

understanding on how the Sabbateans have been represented in society because the outsiders have overtly expressed their feelings and thoughts about this community in this literature.

As the literature lighted the way for understanding the motivations of conspiritual writing, it also paves the way for two other matters. First, when the publications about the Sabbateans are analyzed, it seems that at some critical dates there are rises or falls in the literature. From this point, I reached to a conclusion that some specific political and social challenges in Turkey trigger society making someone the scapegoat. The Sabbateans have been utilized for these accusations for decades. In this way, I could have a chance to examine the common points and themes among the conspiracy theories. As the second point that I reached is that most of the outsiders have a huge interest and concern about the community and the Sabbatean subject has become attractive for them when the sales records of conspiracy works are examined. Simmel's and Ahmad's theories make sense that society have always a tendency towards the closed communities and secrecy. They have an impulse of revealing the secrecy which the conspiritual works have benefitted at most.

As the second argument, this thesis aimed to examine how the Sabbateans have represented themselves in their works. For this purpose, some autobiographies of well-known Sabbatean figures such as Yalman and Sertel were analyzed to have an understanding about their different perspectives. However, the conclusion that I reached is quite narrow, limited, and not overarching at this point because it is not possible to evaluate a community with a couple of arguments. One of the main reasons for this problem is the silence of the Sabbatean community. It would be possible to allege that the double-identity of Sabbatai Zwi initiated the silence of the Sabbatean community. The silence of the community has lasted for centuries, and today, it would not be possible to mention an engaged community as the differentiation among the members of the community demonstrates. Because most of the members of the community have disconnection with the Sabbatean identity or they keep their identities hidden, it is hard to comprehend the structure of the community. This problem led me to a new question whether the Sabbatean community is an "Imagined Community" in today's Turkey. Notably, it could not be possible to mention a united community and the community has entered into the process of individualism and secularism. In addition to this, the conspiritual works dominate the litera-

ture on the Sabbateans which would misdirect the perception of society towards the Sabbateans. Hence, the literature and the media would be influential in creating a delusion of a monolithic community in the minds of the outsiders.

To sum up, because the Sabbateans have always taken part in an elite layer since the Ottoman period, they have mostly had a perception of superiority in trade, education, politics, journalism and cultural fields. This position of the community has led to rising suspicions and the concerns of society. Parenthetically, the reactions of the outsiders give me a sense that they have an inferiority complex since the majority of the Sabbatean community be at the forefront of the modernization process of Turkey. Thanks to their leading positions in the newly founded Republic, they became effective in the policies of the state. Regarding this issue, Ayşe Zarakol examines the reaction of Turks after the defeat in WWI in her *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West?* Basically, her claim is that the defeat of the Ottoman Empire made Turks to feel like they are “outsiders” of modernization and inferior as a measure of civilization (Zarakol 2011). As a result of this situation, it could be said that a certain part of Turkish society has developed a feeling of enmity and it reciprocatively affected the rise of conspiracy theories and the sense of wonder of society.

The conspiracy is one of the greatest strategies that leads to dissociate and create dissident in society. Due to these reasons, this thesis has a relevance in terms of questioning the impact of conspiracies on society and changing their perceptions. The Sabbatean issue has been controversially discussed by the outsiders. To avoid the problem of single-sided point of views, new questions should arise from this research. As a weakness of this research can be the challenge of accessibility to the members of the Sabbatean community. Future research should consider the opinions of the members of the community more carefully. No matter how this topic will be studied in a limited group of scholars, this subject is needed to be reviewed to understand the roots of tensions in society. The debate surrounding this topic will continue to be a significant part of Turkish political history.

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