

Kadioğlu Çevik, Nihal

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# THE JOURNEY OF CEREMONIAL FOODS AS AN EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN MACEDONIAN IMMIGRANTS SETTLED IN TURKEY (İZMİR)

Nihal Kadioğlu Çevik

Migration stories have similar aspects. The reasons forcing people to migrate represent a complicated process that includes the separation from the „homeland“ and the process of getting used to the „new homeland.“ In the expressions of the first generation who experienced the migration, the traces of evaluations such as „what was given up“ or „what was gained“ can be seen. In the next generations, images of migration are often carried into daily life with the memories of family elders. Culinary culture is an area where this transfer is embodied. The ceremonial food brought to İzmir, where Macedonian immigrants live intensely, has a prominent role in defining the „Macedonian immigrant“ identity.

## Introduction

The ceremonial meals reflect the commitment and cultural identity of the Macedonian immigrants who came to Turkey from Macedonia with the last mass migration and settled in Izmir, an old port trade and tourist city today, which constitutes the subject of this study.

Maria Todorova, in her work *Imagining the Balkans*, which she wrote from an „inside“ and „outside“ perspective, helps us understand the place of migration in Balkan geography and history. Todorova says, „In the process of establishing the Balkan nation-states, which was at the forefront of the great population movements that emerged in the 19th century as a result of political events, more than a million Muslims left the Balkans and settled in the part of Rumelia re-

*maining in the Ottoman Empire and Anatolia.“* (Todorova 2020 : 348) Stating that one million Christians settled in the place of leaving Muslims in the same period, the historian mentions that the migrations in 1912-1922 had a more dramatic structure. (Todorova 2020 : 348)

We know that in parallel with the Ottoman conquest of the Balkan lands, the Turkish population was transferred from Anatolia to the Balkans and settled in the newly conquered regions. Ottoman chronicles write that nomads from Anatolia were settled around Serez and Plovdiv in the second half of the 14th century. (Karapınar 2018:10) After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the effect of the Balkan wars, there were intense migrations from the Balkan region to Turkey. Migration from former Yugoslavia, later known as Macedonia and today's Republic of North

Macedonia, to Turkey is also included in this process. After the Ottoman-Russian War in 1877-1878, during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, there were mass migrations from the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 until 1951 and finally between 1952-1967. (Sinan and Kapan 2019: 431-445) Between these periods, migrations continued at the individual and family level.

Within the scope of the „Free Migration Agreement“ signed between Yugoslavia and Turkey in 1953, 104,372 immigrants came to Turkey with migrations from Yugoslavia (as it was called in that period) between 1950-1958. There is no official agreement text regarding this migration since the 1950s. There is only a protocol signed between the Republic of Turkey and the „Government of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia“. Article 4 of this protocol stipulates that „every person with Turkish citizenship shall be deemed Turkish“. (Altuğ 2011: 852) However, even though these conditions did not materialize in time, migrations took place, ethnically non-Turkish, Muslim Torbesh, Albanian, and Bosnian also immigrated to Turkey within the scope of free migration.

As in the previous migration processes from Macedonia to Turkey, including notably the concepts of religion and nationalism (Oran

1993: 109, 114)<sup>1</sup> the economic, social, and political reasons forcing the last mass migration are beyond the scope of this study. However, „agricultural reform policies aimed at removing the Ottoman feudal structure“ (Ağanoğlu 2013: 378-379), which is shown among the reasons for migration, may have negatively affected the food production capacity and strengthened the decision to migrate. In fact, according to respondents, this has been one of the main reasons for migration. Ayşe Y., who immigrated from Dedeli village in Macedonia’s Valandova Region in 1960 and settled in İzmir, summarizes the migration decision making as follows: „Our village was mixed with Macedonians. In Macedonia we had wheat, corn, barley, beans, tobacco, walnuts and vineyards, and herds of goats and sheep. The state took most of these within the collectivization process.<sup>2</sup> What to do

<sup>1</sup> Political scientist Baskın Oran, as a result of his studies in four Balkan countries, including Macedonia, mentions that religion and nationalism are two concepts that „blow like a storm“ together in the Balkans. He states that especially if the religion of the dominant nation is different, the religion of the secondary ethnic element supports its „national“ identity and becomes identical with this identity.

<sup>2</sup> The „Collective (zadruga) was implemented in Yugoslavia only in Macedonia. With this practice, which started in 1950 and was abolished in 1953, the fields of the villagers and some of the animals they raised were expropriated



1. Certificate of renunciation



2. The farewell of the first family who migrated from Izleva village of Radovish district, Yugoslavia, Macedonia (November 1954)



*with an acre of field! The elders would gather and talk secretly. They said we will go. We sold our belongings cheaply. This is how we arrived.*" (Informant 15) Today, it is possible to find traces of this dramatic migration in the collective memory of the memories of Macedonian immigrants, which they mostly listened to from their elders and told to the next generations.

In a report prepared on the „Agreement with Free Migration“, it is stated that the individuals who migrated in this context were poorer villagers compared to the previous ones, and they found jobs in the agriculture and industry sectors (Ağanoğlu 2013: 290). It was also noted by one informant that immigrants coming with the free migration wave faced different social and economic processes than those who came in previous years. In economic terms, the Turkish state exempted immigrants from tax for five years. However, free immigrants could not benefit from social opportunities adequately, at least in the first years, with the understanding that they „did not migrate due to a compelling situation“.

In the context of free migration, the article of the Settlement Law of the Republic of Turkey, „*People of Turkish descent or adherence to Turkish culture will be admitted to our country*“<sup>3</sup>, also laid the legal groundwork for the migration of non-Turkish families with different ethnic origins from Yugoslavia.

### Methodology

The geographical focus of my work consists of the neighborhoods of *Çamdibi*, *Şemikler*, *Nergiz*, and *Çiğli*, also known as „immigrant neighborhoods“ where Macedonian immigrants are heavily settled. The data is based on the ethnographic field research I conducted in these neighborhoods between 2009-2019 with 36 informants on

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by the state. The author argues that the Collective system negatively affects agricultural and agricultural production and animal husbandry. (Vatan 2015 : 46)

<sup>3</sup> Settlement Law of the Republic of Turkey dated 14 June 1934 and numbered 2510 (3d).

various dates through in-depth interviews, and participant observation (including participation in some rituals). The study was limited to Turkish families who migrated from Macedonia to Turkey (mainly from North Macedonia). The people I interviewed consisted of people who immigrated from Macedonia to Turkey between 1952-1967 and defined themselves as „Macedonian immigrants,“ „immigrants,“ and „Macedonian Turks“. I used open-ended questions about the ritual organizers, the cook(s), the participants, the audience, the time and place of the ritual, and the preparation and presentation of the ceremonial meal. Informal conversations, and observations are also included in the data. In addition, my observations about the food culture of Turkish families living in Skopje and Valandova in Macedonia between 2007-2008 accompanied the study.

In the first part of my work, I aimed to holistically describe the ceremonial foods of the Macedonian immigrants in their „old“ and „new“ homelands, such as birth, circumcision, wedding, funeral, and religious rituals, including Ramadan and Sacrifice holidays. The meaning of food as a part of social identity can be best expressed by individuals who share this identity. For this reason, the ritual food will be described in exact actor's expressions in the first part of the paper. In the second part I explain ceremonial foods in the context of the expression and function of cultural identity using comparative approach.

In the study, I also deal with the perception of belonging based on immigrant identity and ceremonial food. Barth's approach is based on the view that ethnic identities are determined by the relations between ethnic groups and the boundaries in this relation.



3. Tea and börek break during field research

onship. According to Barth, the formation of the ethnic group does not have a holistic line; rather, it refers to an organization shaped by a historical process (Barth 2001).

Migration has inevitably affected the traditional knowledge and knowledge about ceremonial meals, which have been passed down from generation to generation in many ways. While emphasizing the changes that immigrants experience when they come into contact with other cultures Duru (2017:15) mentions that immigration affects the ritual in form rather than its content and actually reinforces the traditional functioning. With a similar approach we can observe how ceremonial meals in the rituals (subject of this study) strengthen/reinforce the Macedonian immigrant belonging.<sup>4</sup>

In general terms, culinary culture can be defined as the cultural structure that includes obtaining the nutrients, the process of preparation, cooking, presentation, consumption

<sup>4</sup> This has been one of the main conclusions I have reached in my field research among Georgians and Laz residing in Turkey, apart from Macedonian immigrants.

and preservation of foods, and the associated space and equipment, beliefs and practices. Ceremonial foods form the versatile and well-attended side of this culture. (Kadioğlu Çevik 2010 : 79) In almost every culture, we can say that the ritual includes food. Because „*Food has been used as a symbolic tool to examine cultural and social relations between and within societies. It can weave a bond between people of the same group through rituals. This helps the person to know those who live inside and outside the group.*“ (Duru 2017: 18)

### Rituals and food culture of Macedonian immigrants

The food culture of Macedonian immigrants in general and ceremonial meals in particular have important roles in the perception, representation and continuity of collective memory of the „Macedonian immigrant“ identity. In this context, I will try to follow the ceremonial meals in the religious rituals of the Macedonian immigrants, such as birth, circumcision, wedding, funeral, and religious rituals including Ramadan and Sacrifice holidays, in the context of the expression and function of cultural identity.

Mary Douglas sees ritual as an effort to establish and maintain a set of assumptions that control a particular culture and experience. (Douglas 2021:160-161) According to Douglas, rituals stage and enliven social relations and give these relations a clear expression, allowing people to get to know their own society. Rituals affect the social structure through the symbolic mediation of the physical structure. Based on this approach, I will try to discuss the connection between ceremonial meals and



4. Kachamak

Macedonian immigrant identity by interpreting ethnographic data.

*„Food usually takes a long time to prepare because the product has to be converted from its natural state.“* (Goody 2013 : 95) Food for special days and occasions have lots of symbolic meanings and require more time and effort to prepare than everyday meals. These days (engagement, weddings, circumcision, death and religious holidays) have special meanings compared to everyday life. And food for such special occasions is prepared with great care and meticulousness. Birth, circumcision, wedding, death and religious rituals, where social participation and sharing are concentrated, create environments where the collaboration and sharing related to food can be seen very clearly.

### Birth

Birth is welcomed as an event that ensures the continuity of the lineage. During this period, the pregnant woman is advised not to do some behaviors that may have a negative effect on the baby. Avoidances created by analogy with not eating rabbit meat during pregnancy (the child does not have cleft lip) become more pronounced during puerperium (such as avoiding cold drinks, not eating chilled fruit). There is a common folk saying among Macedonian immigrants that *„The tomb of the puerperant is open for 40 days“*. This expression means that the puerperant is close to death for a period of 40 days, and it is thought that such prohibitions against food prevent possible negative consequences. (Informant 4, 5)

As in many cultures, Macedonian immigrants settled in Izmir organize a ceremony to celebrate the mother's fertility and the baby's birth. Special foods are served in this ceremony, which is called *„bebek görme“* or *„doğdu görme“* (seeing a baby). The guests, mostly women, who come to congratulate the mother who has just given birth, bring milk, soup, dessert, halva, and pastries, as well as gifts for the mother and child.

The meal at the center of the ritual of „seeing a baby“ is the *„kaçamak“* (kachamak). It is cooked directly in the hosting house and then it is served to the guests. The food is called *„haşlama, mamalika, mamalunga, bakırdanıtza“*; depending on the migrated region,

and can be served sweet or savory. For many Macedonian immigrant families, kachamak is one of the carefully preserved food traditions of the „homeland“. (photo 4)

Kachamak is simple food but requires skill and is generally prepared as follows: *„We put water in a pot. We add a little oil, a little salt and a pinch of sugar. After the water boils, we add corn flour little by little while stirring constantly. When it reaches a thicker consistency than pudding, we take it on a large plate. We drizzle the heated butter on it. If desired, we can top it with slices of white cheese or pieces of bacon and sausage, or we can eat it with baked and peeled pepper and ayran. If we want to make kaçamak sweet, we pour molasses on it as well as butter.“* (Informant 1)

Participants in the ritual would often bring milk, pastry, halva, bite or rice with them when they went to visit the house of the woman who gave birth. This practice was common in their former „Macedonian homeland“ as we as in their new one in Izmir (it persists from past to present).

*„We used to cook kaçamak with the corn flour that we grow in abundance in the homeland. While the water was boiling, we used to stir it constantly with a rolling pin and pour corn flour with one hand. If you don't mix it, it will be lumpy. When it reached its consistency, we poured it into a tray and sprinkled white cheese on it. Some ate it with molasses. We would heat the butter and pour it on top. Kaçamak is a must when you have a baby.“* (Informant 2)

Kachamak is also cooked in the „children's mawlid“ held seven days after the baby's birth<sup>5</sup>. It is usually served with chicken and rice, yogurt, some vegetable dish and halva. In this ceremony, *„pişi“* and *„lokma“*; a kind of leavened dough fries, are also served. *„For the lokma, a runny yeast dough is prepared and placed in a bowl. Take it with the left hand, take it with a spoon dipped in oil, fry it in oil, and add syrup if desired.“* (Informant 3)

<sup>5</sup> This ceremony is associated with the separation of the baby's umbilical cord from its body, usually at the age of seven days. The baby, which has been wiped clean until that day, is bathed and dressed with care. Family, relatives and close acquaintances are invited to the ceremony.

### Circumcision

The name of the ceremony related to circumcision, an important event in Muslim societies, is the „circumcision feast“. Following the completion of the circumcision operation, the boy, defined as the „child of circumcision“ in the ritual, is congratulated by the family and the guests for „stepping into manhood“, and gifts are given to him. The meals at the center of this ritual are similar to the meals in wedding ceremonies. In the circumcision ceremonies of Macedonian immigrants, there are mostly chicken soup, *kapama*, dried beans, and dessert. (photo 5)

„*Kapama*“ is described as follows, with its change from past to present: „*Büryan and Kapama are the same thing. We boil the meat. Fry an onion. We fry the rice. We put the tray on the stove. Then pour some water. It was cooked in the oven with meat and onions. We don't do that now. When you fry the onion in a separate dish and add it to the rice, it will smell better. If we add more water than rice, it will be juicier. We draw the water on the stove. In the oven, the*

*meat and rice are baked well until it will turn brown; they do not get covered. It will be more delicious. It is better with lamb meat. Depending on the season, we put a fresh or dried mint on it.*“ (Informant 4)

The dried beans or „*davçe grevce*“ is one of the other symbolic dishes of immigrant weddings. „*We used to make tafche grafche in casserole dishes. But now we do it in the pot. Dry beans are washed in the evening, soaked. Cold water on low heat, a little olive oil or sunflower oil is put in it so that it does not stick. After cooking, we chop the onion and, if desired, the garlic into small pieces. We put tomato paste, vegeta, ground pepper. If desired, hot pepper can be added and cooked. A little oil is put in the earthen pan and the beans are placed in the pan. Put the onion mixture on the beans. The other half of the beans are placed on top, and the onion mixture is placed on top. Some dry bread is crumbled on top. The dish is garnished with red pepper and baked in the oven. It used to be cooked in outside ovens.*“ (Informant 1)

The foods at the circumcision feasts, which are primarily held in open areas in Macedonia, are described by the informants who migrated from different regions as follows: „*In Macedonia, circumcision rituals were always with food, we used to make soup, dried beans, buryan and semolina halva. It would be in at least four varieties and in this order.*“ (Informant 4)

„*We used to make tripe soup in Macedonia. Since we had a lot of animals there, offal foods were eaten a lot. In the circumcision feast, meat, rice and semolina halva were also made. There would be pot dishes, too. Relatives brought the desserts on trays to help the household.*“ (Informant 5)



4. Kapama



Not only in Macedonia but also decades after the migration circumcision feasts were organized in the gardens of the houses or in suitable open areas. Today they are held in the wedding halls. There were some changes in the ceremony menu. *„Today, lokma dessert is prepared and accompanied by cheese or rice and casseroles or chicken rice. The feast is now held in wedding halls.“* (Informant 6)

### Wedding

Wedding ceremonies are perhaps the most important of transition rituals. The foods prepared for this ritual differ in the process. The symbolic dishes of immigrant weddings are beans, kapama, semolina halva, and *„keşkek“* (keshkek). (photo 5)

Kapama is named also *„biryana, piriñ tepsisi, piriñ tepsiya“* according to the former Macedonian region. It is rice with meat or chicken cooked in the oven.

The main dish of the wedding ritual, especially by those who migrated from the Strumica region, is *„keşkek“*. It is prepared in the following manner, *„after the butter and oil in the cauldron are heated, the meat, which is thoroughly washed and cleaned in large and bony pieces ... especially in wedding ceremonies ... it is placed in the cauldron with good luck wishes. While the meat absorbs its water, chopped onions are added, and frying continues; water is poured on it and it boils well. The soaked wheat is washed and drained into the boiler. Mix well with wooden spoons until cooked.“* (Informant 8) Cooking the keshkek to the desired flavor and consistency requires paying attention to the timing, as it can quickly stick to the pan. It depends on the knowledge and experience of the keshkek master. Cooked keshkek is left to rest. Afterward, they gather around the cauldron, pray and wish for blessings. After the tip given by the wedding owner, the young people *„beat“* the keshkek with a wooden spoon, in a way, crushing it to make it consistent. Those who immigrated from Macedonia to Turkey always include keshkek, halva and *pilav* in a *„real immigrant wedding.“* (Informant 8)

### Holidays

Ramadan Holiday, also known as *„Sugar Feast“*, is a religious ritual that lasts for three days after the end of Ramadan, the fasting month of Islam. Sacrifice Holiday continues for four days within the timing determined according to religious rules. In this festival, an animal is sacrificed, and the meat is divided among the relatives and poor people under religious traditions. Prepared pastries and sweets are served during both holidays. On Sacrifice Holiday, desserts with syrup, roasted meat, and finally, baklava is served.

Along with the pastries there are plenty of foods such as chicken soup, dried beans, kapama, baklava and rice pudding during the holidays. In addition, the making of chickpea bread has a special ceremonial quality, within the symbolic foods of the holidays:

*„It is still a tradition for Ramadan and Sacrifice Holiday. A handful of chickpeas is pounded in a press, mixed with warm water, a spoonful of flour, a little salt, and a little sugar are added to it. It is made in a small pot. This pot is placed inside another larger pot filled with hot water. When the water in the outer pot starts to cool, it is refilled with hot water. It is covered and left to rise. Then we check in the morning. If the water and flour are separated, the dough needs to be remixed. When the two combine and start to bubble, it means it is leavened. Four or five loaves can be made of this leaven. Take a handful, mix the dough with warm water, put it on the tray, and let it rise again. When it is well risen, it is placed in the oven. If it was not well-risen, it was called *presna*, meaning unleavened. It is not desirable to give this leaven to anyone else. Because it is believed that the person who takes it should bring a piece of the bread she has*



5. Keshkek

made, and if she does not get it, there will be no more leaven. There is also a belief that if anyone mixes it, leaven will fail. While preparing the laven, we say, *gel kaşa yetiş kaşa*<sup>6</sup>. It becomes a sponge-like bread. We're dealing with the bread all night. It is fermented at 4-5 AM in the morning. The baking is done at the breakfast in the other morning. It is done only on eve days. It is a bread that we make in our homeland and here." (Informants 4 and 9)

Another traditional meal is the pastry prepared by a thin layerers of a fluid dough called „*valangi, valangiya, valangiti, lalangi, akıtma*“ locally. The dough is prepared similarly to very thin pancakes in the manner mentioned below. Later it is layered, oiled and baked in the oven.

„*For valangiye, we add the flour in a deep bowl, add a little salt, and whisk it well with water. In the homeland, we used to put metal sheet on the cooker stoves. Put the dough on the part of the sheet and spread it with a rolling pin. It will be a thin dough. The sheet is occasionally lubricated. 50-60 of them are made like this. It is placed on a large tray. Butter is melted separately. A little salt water is also made in a bowl. Oil and salt water are sprinkled between each phyllo. It is made by hand. Lastly, it is cut and baked like a baklava slice. It is made on holidays. It is served with meat stew, ayran, pickled yellow peppers, and rice pudding. Rice pudding is called sütliyaç. Less sugar is added. Previously, it was put on copper trays and eaten on wooden tables. Now we do this in the ovens at home*“ (Informant 1)

„*Taviçe mazniçe, maznitsa, akıtma börek*“ - often called „*bozuk börek*“ (bozuk burek) - is a ceremonial food that attracts attention with its different presentation.

The case of *bozuk burek* represents the boundaries of Macedonian immigrant food with local food as we know it from the often quoted Barth's approach. Known as „*göleze*“ or „*gömleksiz*“ by Macedonians, *maznitsa* (also called „*partal pide*“ or „*bozuk börek*“) pastry among Macedonian Turks is cooked in the same way. However, the way they are served is different. While Macedonians cut it in the form of pastry and ate it with cheese, Turks who migrated from

Macedonia served this pastry by breaking it with their hands or with a fork. The presentation of *maznitsa* in this form reminds locals the pastry leftovers. The researcher Gürçayır interprets this event as follows: „*Our Macedonian immigrant informant in İzmir says that the dough they send to their bride's family is perceived as leftover. In addition, the fact that they explained to them that this is one of their traditional dishes and that her daughter-in-law is now making this pastry and she loves it, and is proud of it, expresses the satisfaction of having their dishes approved by someone from another food culture, which they have made a part of their identity*.“ (2010: 72)

„*Flour is put into the dough bowl, the middle is opened, and boiling water is added. It is mixed with a spoon, not by hand. After waiting for a while, small pieces of dough are extracted. Then they are rolled to the size of a small plate and greased. After 50-60 pieces, it is rolled to the tray size. It is thrown into the oven. It is cooked very slowly. It falls apart when it comes out. You can eat cheese and jam with it*“ (Informant 10)

This pastry is not cut with a knife, it is cut into pieces by hand and eaten.

There are other meals dedicated to the Ramadan and post-Ramadan holidays, some of them have been abandoned after the migration to the İzmir region.

„*In Macedonia, we used to prepare a meal called Bayram kuşluğu during the Ramadan Feast, everyone would come together. But we didn't do it here. Çökelek would be sweet on this table. There would also be offal of the calf or sheep. We ate them a lot. Now they say it will harm your health, don't eat it*.“ (Informant 3)

## Funerals

The funerals for Macedonian immigrants who experienced the migration from 1955-1967 are closely related to the tragic dimension of migration. When they decided to migrate to Turkey, they carried with them the understanding that they won't be able to revisit the graves of their relatives. The grandchildren of those who lost their lives without being able to make these visits due to economic problems and distance express this situation as follows: „*My grandmother and grandfather had a great longing for the land they were born to. At that time, there was poverty, and they could not go*“

<sup>6</sup> The „*Gel kaşa yetiş kaşa*“ are the words of wish for the yeast to mature as soon as possible and for the fermentation to be completed. *Kaşa* is a food name. Its approximate meaning is „come and grow, multiply kasha“.

*They used to say they could not even see the graves of their relatives who died there. They were dreaming of it“.*

As in the rest of Turkey, the symbolic food of Macedonian immigrants at funerals is *halva* (halva). On the first day in the funeral home only flour halva or semolina halva is made. Commemorative religious practices are performed on the 3rd, 7th, 40th and 52nd day after death and they include special meals.

The habits of immigrants in bringing food to the funeral home vary according to the regions they come from. Relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances get the dishes they routinely cook at home to the funeral home in a sequence and often negotiate it in advance (in order not to take the same food in large quantities).

Flour or semolina halva, called „halva for the grave“, is made directly in the funeral home. Even if it is a small amount, it must be done.

*„We make halva in a large, deep copper cauldron. We put the cauldron on the fire and fry the semolina for a long time. We do this by mixing with large wooden ladles and check the consistency with a small spoon. This process takes a long time. While halva is being made, the imam or an elder comes to the halva cauldron and prays. When the halva is cooked, the water is poured out. The edges of the copper pot are curved outwards. This detail ensures that the halva that overflows while mixing is easily peeled off the sides of the bowl. Wide-mouthed wooden sticks also help this process. After adding granulated sugar to the halva, it is continued to be mixed thoroughly. We smooth the top of the well-cooked halva, let it rest a bit, then distribute it to everyone.“ (Informant 12)*

### **Ceremonial foods and expressions of cultural identity**

After the first section describing the main ceremonial meals for the occasion of birth, circumcision, wedding, funeral, and feast rituals of Macedonian immigrants residing in Izmir, the role of these meals in the expression of cultural identity will be discussed in this section.

As Appadurai points out: *„food has an implicit semiotic power until it is brought to life by certain cultural concepts and brought to life by certain cultural contexts.“* (quoted by Mentini 2021: 24) For each community, the types of foods to be made, especially at ceremonial ritu-

als, the order of their arrival at the table, and how the host or guests will sit at the table have been determined. These differentiations or similarities are shaped culturally. The culture we grow up in teaches us what and how (much) to eat. This learned process fundamentally determines our future eating habits. The occasions in which these expressions become evident are the rituals.

The concept of migration is a fundamental phenomenon in the cultural belonging of Macedonian immigrants. Therefore, starting from the ethnographic method of my study, I wanted to briefly explain this shift in how Macedonian immigrants define their own identity through immigration: *„Our elders who came during the migration years see themselves as Balkan immigrants and Yugoslavian immigrants. We are Macedonian Turks. We were sent there in the 15th century. We came after being there for 560 years. We are the continuation of Anatolia. The concept of immigrants has changed somewhat with the arrival of many Syrian and Afghan citizens in Turkey. Previously, we wouldn't mind being called just immigrants, but this concept has changed recently. Therefore, it seems correct to be called Macedonian Turks or Macedonian immigrants.“* (Informants 8 and 12)

Immigrants from Macedonia and the population settled in Izmir are linguistically and religiously close societies. However, the Macedonian immigrants I interviewed (survivors of the later migration wave) expressed more satisfaction than the first arrivals. They proceeded through the corridor „opened“ by those who had come before. Settling next to relatives and acquaintances helped them overcome logistical and cultural difficulties. They were able to settle in pre-built dwellings and cook their meals. Since they came from similar areas, they could find similar food products grown there. It can be said that this geographical advantage of the Izmir region contributes to the continuity of ceremonial foods.

Most importantly, they arrived in communities where they would come together in rites of passage and holidays and did not feel alone. However, in my interviews with people from the first generation who migrated to Turkey, I realized that there is a constant comparison of „there“ and „here“ among the elderly. In this sense, it is noteworthy that Macedonian immigrants and subsequent generations I in-

interviewed who experienced the migration refer to Macedonia as their homeland.

It is seen that birth rituals are continued by immigrants today, in similar manner as in Macedonia. The symbolic relationship established between the boiling and blending of corn flour and water in cooking and the „unification of one’s destiny and fortune“ is expressed in the following words: *„We do kaçamak in all kinds of events, and we do it after birth as well. We are doing this so that it (the newborn baby) will be lucky.“* (Informant 13)

The connection between the kachamak (central dish of the birth ritual) and the immigrant identity is expressed in the following words: *„We do kaçamak when we are together with our families and relatives. Not everyone eats it; locals don’t. When people who know these dishes visit us, we prepare it for them.“* (Informant 4) The expression „we cook this dish for people who know it“, means in this narrative „for us“, and that is following Barth one of the virtual boundaries visible at the table. It is emphasized that kachamak is a dish of Macedonian immigrants with its unique taste and way of eating. Although kachamak is served on separate plates, traditionally - in accordance with its ceremonial nature - it is brought to the table in large serving bowls, and everyone eats from their own plate.

Other foods at the birth ceremony are prepared by the young, while the kachamak is mostly cooked by the older women. Young women observe how the elders cook and ask questions. Kachamak is a dish prepared with simple ingredients, but its preparation requires experience and mastery. This is gained through constant observation and repetition. Older women pass on the traditional knowledge of this ceremonial meal to the next generation through words, demonstration, practices and repetitions.

The foods cooked and served during the circumcision ritual consist of soup, dried beans, kapama, and dessert, which are also present in the wedding menu. In a circumcision ritual the rules regarding the order of meals has a close relationship with the immigrant identity. Circumcisions and weddings have not only similar menus but also similar locations in the last twenty years - they both have been held in halls. The menu can be prepared either by Macedonian immigrants themselves or by a chef, informed with the demands of immigrants.

An endogamous kinship structure is observed in the marriages of immigrants in the first years of their arrival in Turkey. The following changes are as follows: *„Then, in the 1990s, the interaction of the third generation increased. Our adaptation was complete. The third generation began to marry locals.“* (Informants 8 and 12) One of the apparent changes in wedding ceremonies is related to the time and duration of the ceremony. As in all agricultural societies in general, in Macedonia and Turkey, weddings are planned at the end of the summer with the budget obtained from the harvest. Wedding feasts, which lasted for three days in Macedonia and were held in the gardens and squares of the houses, continued to be held in the gardens and convenient yards until the 1990s. Over time, these areas gradually disappeared with rapid urbanization. Today, wedding ceremonies have been moved to the specialized places reserved for these ceremonies and took place in a limited time. Parallel to this situation, there have been changes in the wedding offerings made by helping relatives and neighbors. Wedding meals gradually began to be prepared either by hiring a cook or later by professional chefs.

*„Until the 1990s, there were separate halva makers (cooks) who cooked wedding meals. There were four masters. One was cooking the food and the other was making the rice. For example, someone was making halva, he was the master of all of them. For example, my uncle was a halva maker. He used to make halva at weddings. They used to make halva from 20 kilos of semolina. They used to light the fire under the cauldrons. There are big halva sticks. It was mixed with them. Everyone was invited to the wedding, not just relatives.“* (Informant 12)

The role of the cook is particularly important in ceremonial food at a traditional circumcision or wedding. Cooking, as a concept socially identified with the female gender in Macedonia and Turkey, is technical knowledge and experience transferred from generation to generation through demonstration and expression. However, cooks preparing the contemporary wedding meals are generally men<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *„Men undertake not the daily cooking activity at home, but the task of cooking in the forest or outside, the ceremonial cooking.“* (Goody 2013 : 97)



The cook carries out all the processes related to preparing, cooking and serving the meals together with his assistants. Serving the food is also the responsibility of the cook. In particular, keshkek and halva are prepared in large cauldrons or pots and mixed with wooden spoons. Since the mixing process is done standing for a long time and the amount of food/dessert is excessive, it requires intensive labor. „*Men in Macedonia collectively cook the wedding dinner. In the past, only men cooked meals at weddings. Because it was made in big cauldrons.*“ (Informant 14) (photo 6 and 7)

Almost all the meals at the center of the rituals are routinely made at home. The food changes in quantity according to the ingredients used in the rituals. The meals in the rituals are not limited to the family members who carry out the ritual. The community participating in the ritual requires the desired taste and quantity of served food. The community functions as a mechanism controlling these features throughout the ritual. Since the ritual food is inspected by a large community, the opinions of the elders knowing the traditional taste

and cooking methods are taken into account. This process is functional in emphasizing the Macedonian immigrant identity and conveying information and routines regarding the ceremonial meal. Since these rituals bring together many young and old of the same migrant background. In fact, food preserves its place in terms of cultural identity through these rituals.

Meal preparation, ingredients, and dishes used in ceremonial meals ensure that the meal is produced in the desired quality. For example, the continuation of making ceremonial halva is related to the continuation of the handicraft of copper making, the continuous use of large wooden spoons for mixing halva relates to the continuation of wood carving craftsmen. These durable kitchen utensils are kept in a particular place. When needed, they can be loaned to prepare the ritual meals. For example, when the oven is required for valangi, people inform each other, gather there, and use the oven jointly.

The table is a sacred concept in the Turkish culinary tradition. It is accepted by the majority as a special environment where



6. Folk dance called Tepsiya: This folk dance describes the making of börek, which is the most important part of the Macedonian immigrants' food culture. We can say that there is no pastry without a tray. That's why the tray accompanies this dance.

7. Cooks (late 1950s)

the family gathers together and should be respected. The preparation of the meal is called „setting the table“. In rural areas, separate tables are usually prepared for men and women, especially in case of hosting the foreign guests. The tradition of eating on the floor table is a practice that continues to a certain extent both in Macedonia and Turkey. Before the meal begins in private gatherings, prayers or words of gratitude are said. It is a common wish that the family, relatives and acquaintances united around the same table can eat these meals together and healthily, as well as wish for the abundance of the food.

The table is also a place of exchange where verbal interactions take place. Elders read table prayers at birth, circumcision, and wedding meals. In the words of Maureen Duru, the sense of migrants belonging, manifesting through food, is strongly built around memories and nostalgia (Duru 2017:6). Ritual foods are prepared in variety and quantity, and everyone is expected to taste. But it is forbidden to throw it away. There are parts of oral culture that prevent food waste with warnings such as: *„Finish your food, don't leave your fortune, don't leave it on the plate, the food will cry after you.“* or *„In Macedonia, adults used to start eating first. Now it doesn't matter who starts first. It is eaten on the ground, and men and women always sit together. If the guest is a family, they eat together; if they are foreigners, they sit separately. One cannot sit down without saying bismillah before starting the meal. Everybody says alhamdulillah without praying while getting up. If there is a feast, the prayer is said when it is over.“* (Informant 3)

Tea production in Turkey, which started in the 1950s, coincides with the years of intense migration from Macedonia. Coffee and herbal teas were included in the ritual beverage offerings in Macedonia. In the interviews, it was frequently emphasized that Macedonians met the tea concept in Turkey. Ayran, consumed all over Turkey, especially during the summer months and also known in Macedonian cuisine, is the main complement to kebabs, meat dishes and various types of pastries. (photos 8, 9, 10)

In preparing ceremonial meals, young women carry out tasks such as cleaning and preparing the necessary materials for the older people. Young men are encouraged to mix

the halva. A division of the labor environment arises spontaneously. In Macedonia, information on how these works are done is shared with the young by the elderly.

The order in which the ceremonial meals will be served and with which variety they will be served is predetermined. These ceremonial dishes are familiar dishes for immigrants. For those who attend the ceremony from outside, this meal indicates Macedonian immigrant identity. The dishes at the center of the ceremony have distinctive features in defining the group identity in front of the others as well as in front of migrants themselves. The ceremonial table is also the communication medium of close and distant acquaintances. Comments about food are also included in these conversations. Mentinis sees recipes as a discursive product that describes food and gives it meaning. The ingredients and directions in recipes can provide insight into community members' tastes, identity, geography, and tradition. In this sense, recipes uploaded to websites provide additional tools to investigate how the community connects with food. (Mentinis 2016: 43) Macedonian immigrants share the recipes, visuals and forgotten dishes of their food cultures in the food-oriented community they have created on social media. Especially young people often share recipes and images of pastries and desserts, which are a part of their cultural identity, on their social media accounts. In these digital channels, it is possible to see posts about cultural identities, such as *„this is how we Macedonian immigrants make pastry“* or *„our feast table would not be possible without valengiye.“* (Photos 11, 12)

## Conclusion

Birth, circumcision, wedding, funeral and ceremonial meals are cultural structures that strengthen social identity. These structures make food a cultural phenomenon apart from its biological need. In this sense, culinary culture, especially local culinary traditions, is a socializing and unifying action in strengthening the sense of unity on an everyday basis.

In addition to being a part of cultural identity, traditions connected to culinary culture also include dynamics that strengthen



8. Börek, pişi, cake



9. Pişi



10. Poğaç

the relations of solidarity between societies. Culinary traditions play a primary role in ceremonies such as marriage, birth and death, seasonal celebrations, festivals and all events that bring the community together. Ceremonial foods act as main actors in the celebration and commemoration ceremonies.

Macedonian immigrants, who came from plains, lakeside and even relatively mountainous regions and settled in Izmir brought the differences in cuisine/dining characteristics here. In the first generation respondents claimed a comparison of „there“ and „here“.

However, current generations have the chance to see the regions where their elders were born with touristic trips. Among the traditions shared on social media are ceremonial foods. These generations of immigrants contributed to the culture of living together in this area. In this way, they continue to live and develop together by establishing close ties with their new homeland through ceremonial meals that are an integral part of Macedonian identity.



11. Börek shop

## List of informants

	migrated to Izmir	interview	
R. K.	from Skopje in 1959	Çamdibi	2009
T. D.	from Valondova in 1952	Nergiz	2011
M. D.	from Strumica in 1956	Şemikler	2018
F. C.	from Köprülü in 1955	Çamdibi	2010
R. K.	from Valondova in 1956	Çamdibi	2011
F. A.	was born in İzmir Çiğli	Çiğli	2012
R. H.	from Strumica in 1955	Çiğli	2012
M. Ö.	from Strumica in 1955	Şemikler	2019
B. C.	was born in İzmir Bornova	Çamdibi	2009
A. Y.	from Skopje in 1960	Çiğli	2009
F. T.	from Skopje in 1962	Şemikler	2011
R. A.	born in İzmir	Şemikler	2022
V. K.	from Radoviş in 1955	Çiğli	2009
P. D.	from Dedeli in 1959	Nergiz	2022
A. Y.	from Dedeli in 1960	Nergiz	2012

12. An example of sharing Macedonian immigrant dishes on social media: Macedonian immigrants food Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1870931906312268>



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Nihal Kadioğlu Çevik (born 1967)

Graduated at the Department of Folklore at Ankara University and continues her PhD studies at Institute of Ethnology, Charles University in Prague. Her main focus is food culture, food in rituals, and the social roles of traditional female cooks. Works as a branch manager in the Izmir Provincial Culture and Tourism Directorate. At the same time she is Culinary Culture Program coordinator of the UNESCO supported Cultural Research Foundation.

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## SUMMARY & KEYWORDS

### **The Journey of Ceremonial Foods as an Expression of Cultural Identity in Macedonian Immigrants Settled in Turkey (İzmir)**

The article explores the role of ceremonial dishes in the food culture of the Macedonian immigrants who came to Turkey (İzmir region) within the process of "Macedonian immigrant" identity formation. Author present the ceremonial dishes of Macedonian immigrants living in İzmir in the comparative scope looking at their reproduction in their "old" and "new" homeland under rituals following the life-cycle (birth, circumcision, marriage and death) as well as religious rituals (Ramazan Bayramı and Kurban Bayramı) to reflect the cultural identity and its functional context.

► Macedonian immigrants, memory, ceremonial dishes, ritual, food and identity, Turkey, İzmir