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**Intermarriage, Conversion,
and Jewish Identity in
Contemporary Finland**

A study of vernacular religion in the Finnish Jewish
communities



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Helsinki, 19.05.2021

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mercedes Czimbalmos". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Mercédesz Czimbalmos

Abstract

With Finnish independence in 1917, long-awaited legislative reforms were put in force in the country. Jews gained the right to obtain Finnish citizenship. The same year, the Finnish Parliament implemented the Civil Marriage Act (CMA), allowing the country's Jewish citizens to marry non-Jews without converting to Christianity. In 1922, the constitutional right to freedom of religion was affirmed in the Freedom of Religion Act (FRA), granting the right to practice religion in public and private and allowing Finnish citizens to refrain from belonging to any religious community altogether. The FRA also addressed the question of children whose parents belonged to different religious congregations or who were unaffiliated. The FRA defined the religious affiliation of children after their father; this was, however, against the Orthodox Jewish law (*halakhah*) that the local Finnish Jewish communities wished to follow, which traced a child's religious affiliation matrilineally.

Due to the small size of the Jewish marriage market and to the secularizing tendencies of the Jewish congregations, the number of intermarriages started to grow in the early twentieth century, and soon, they became a characteristic phenomenon of Finnish Jewish realities. This resulted in a growing number of halakhically non-Jewish children. Thus, the communities faced several challenges in terms of their administration and everyday practices.

This article-based dissertation provides an overview of Finnish-Jewish intermarriages from 1917 until the present by analyzing archival materials together with newly collected semi-structured ethnographic interviews. The interviews were conducted with members of the communities who are partners in intermarriages, either as individuals who married out or as individuals who married in and converted to Judaism. The key theoretical underpinning of the study is *vernacular religion*, which is complemented by relevant international research on contemporary interreligious Jewish families.

The results of the study show that while most informants understand Jewish law flexibly and rarely consider themselves "religious," the differences between the practices of intermarried men and women are remarkable. Whereas women employ creativity and "do Judaism" to establish practices they consider meaningful for their Jewishness and Jewish identity, men tend to draw on their cultural heritage and often refrain from creative practices. The study also indicates that the adult conversion of women is far more common than that of men, making conversion a gendered phenomenon in the Finnish Jewish communities. Most informants of this study "do Judaism" in various ways and often choose to perform certain traditions to strengthen their connection to Judaism and ensure Jewish continuity through their children. Intermarried members and converts form a large part of the Finnish Jewish communities, and thus the results shed light on patterns that can be assumed to characterize multiple Finnish Jewish households.

Abstrakt

Vid Finlands självständighet år 1917 infördes efterlängtnade reformer i landets lagstiftning; bl.a. fick judar rätten att erhålla finskt medborgarskap. Samma år godkände Finlands riksdag borgerliga vigslar, vilket gjorde det möjligt för landets judiska medborgare att gifta sig med icke-judar utan att först konvertera till kristendomen. Religionsfrihetslagen, som antogs år 1922, gav alla medborgare en konstitutionell rätt till religionsfrihet, vilket inkluderade rätten att utöva religion offentligt och privat eller att helt avstå från religiös tillhörighet. Gällande barn, vars föräldrar tillhörde olika religiösa samfund eller inte var medlemmar i något samfund överhuvudtaget, slog lagen fast att barnets religiösa tillhörighet skulle följa faderns. Detta stred dock mot den ortodoxa judiska lagen (halakhah), som följdes i de lokala samfunden i Finland, enligt vilken ett barns religiösa tillhörighet följer modern.

I takt med att sekulariseringen ökade i Finland, och på grund av att den judiska äktenskapsmarknaden i landet var mycket liten, började antalet giftermål över religionsgränserna växa i början av 1900-talet. Snart blev sådana äktenskap ett allmänt fenomen i den finsk-judiska gemenskapen. I och med att allt fler barn som föddes i dessa familjer inte kunde definieras som judiska enligt ortodox judisk lag stod de judiska samfunden därmed inför flera nya utmaningar i sin administration och i den vardagliga praxisen.

Syftet med denna artikelbaserade avhandling är att ge en överblick över finskjudiska äktenskap över religionsgränserna från år 1917 och fram till idag. Studien baserar sig på arkivmaterial som analyseras tillsammans med nyligen insamlade, semistrukturerade etnografiska intervjuer med medlemmar av landets judiska församlingar som gift sig över religionsgränserna; antingen så att de gift sig med en person som inte tillhör den judiska församlingen eller så att endera partnern konverterat till judendomen i samband med äktenskapet.

Forskningsperspektivet *vernacular religion* (vardagsreligiositet) fungerar som den viktigaste teoretiska utgångspunkten för studien och kompletteras med relevant internationell forskning kring samtida interreligiösa judiska familjer. Resultaten visar att majoriteten av informanterna förhåller sig flexibelt till den judiska lagen och sällan anser sig vara "religiösa". Trots detta är skillnaderna mellan gifta mäns och kvinnors praxis anmärkningsvärda. Medan kvinnorna tillämpar kreativa metoder för att "göra sin judendom" på ett sätt som de anser vara meningsfullt för sin judiskhet och judiska identitet, tenderar männen att starkare förlita sig på sitt kulturarv och avstår ofta från att utforska kreativa anpassningar av traditionen. Studien visar också att det är betydligt vanligare att kvinnor konverterar i vuxen ålder än att män gör det, vilket gör konverteringen till ett könsbundet fenomen. Informanterna "gör" sin judendom på olika sätt och väljer ofta att utföra vissa traditioner för att stärka sin koppling till judendomen, men också för att säkerställa den judiska kontinuiteten till sina barn. Idag har en stor andel av medlemmarna i de finskjudiska församlingarna familjeband som sträcker sig över religionsgränserna eller där konvertering ingår. Resultaten belyser därmed mönster som kan vara centrala för flera finskjudiska familjer.

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List of original publications

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1 Introduction

Intermarriages and conversions are at the heart of Jewish discussions today, yet the Nordic Jewish context in general and the Finnish Jewish context in particular are understudied in this respect.

The questions centering around marriages between Jews and non-Jews have long constituted a significant topic for both Jewish religious decision makers and Jewish communities, but also in the research community. From a religious perspective, intermarriages raise theological questions and are often viewed with great concern, as they are thought to weaken the Jewish identification of the new generations, and thus threaten Jewish continuity. Academics, whether they study intermarriages quantitatively or qualitatively, often come to strikingly different conclusions. Sometimes their conclusions come close to those of the religious leadership, and sometimes they view the growing number of intermarriages as opportunities for Jewish community growth or increasing diversification of Jewish and non-Jewish populations in a broader societal context.

Marriage practices within Jewish communities are inevitable for understanding Jewish customs, practices, and identity. Jewish intermarriages raise great number of issues, including religious affiliation, self-positioning, and the views of the person's family, including their spouse (-to be). Furthermore, the discussions around intermarriages are often tempered by clashing views on the complicated matters of Jewish identity and conversions to Judaism.

Drawing on archival documents and semi-structured qualitative interviews with members of the Finnish Jewish communities, this study aims to tackle these matters, while specifically focusing on the legislative changes that affected the congregations over the twentieth century and still remain influential today.

The study consists of three main chapters. In the current chapter (*Chapter 1. Introduction*), I introduce the aims of the study and its research questions, as well as give a brief introduction to the history of Finnish Jewry. I also explain the terminology that is used throughout the study, introduce previous research on the topic and, address the key concepts of the study. Finally, I introduce the research articles on which this study was based.

In the second chapter (*Theory, Methodology and Data*), I introduce the framework of vernacular religion and give a detailed account of the methodology of the study, including the process of collecting and processing the research material. I also discuss my self-positioning and the theoretical, methodological, and possible analytical delimitations of the study. Due to the sensitive nature of the collected material, I find it important to elaborate on the management of the collected data, as well as the ethical considerations that arose during the research process.

Finally, in the third chapter (*Analysis and Results*), I give a detailed analysis of the research material, describe my findings, and draw my conclusions.

1.1 Aims of the study

By analyzing historical archival documents and newly collected ethnographic interviews, this study seeks to explore vernacular practices in the currently existing Finnish Jewish communities through the experiences of intermarried congregants.

The archival material was analyzed to gain a contextual understanding of the historical events that contributed to certain patterns of religious practice that emerged over the decades in the two Finnish Jewish communities in general, and in the Jewish Community of Helsinki in particular.

The oldest sources that are analyzed in the study comprise both documents related to legal changes in the newly independent state of Finland (material from 1917 onward) and documents preserved in the Finnish Jewish Archives in the National Archives of Finland, in the archives of the Jewish Community of Turku, in the Turku branch of the National Archives, and in the on-site archives of the Jewish Community of Helsinki.

The newest sources of the study are semi-structured ethnographic interviews that were collected as a shared effort with the *Boundaries of Jewish Identities in Contemporary Finland (Minhag Finland)* research project during 2019–20 (see *The Minhag Finland project*).

The theoretical perspective of vernacular religion was chosen to allow for the observation and comprehensive investigation of the embodied traditions that emerged in the two currently existing Finnish Jewish communities after the legislative changes of the early twentieth century. The objectives of the study are formulated in the following research questions:

- How did Finnish legislative changes affect the policies of the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku with regard to Jewish intermarriages over the course of the twentieth century?
- What kind of challenges relating to intermarriage and conversion are brought to the fore in the ethnographic material, and what strategies have the informants created to handle them in their practice and in their views of Judaism/Jewishness?
- Are there any differences between the vernacular practices of male and female informants of the study, and if so, how can these differences be described and understood?

In answering these questions, I aim to explore vernacular practices of the two congregations and their members through the lens of intermarriages, to fill a gap in the existing research, and to test the applicability of the vernacular religion framework on the field of Jewish studies, where it is so far only marginally represented (Illman 2019; Illman and Czimbalmos 2020). The current research is based on previously unstudied archival materials and ethnographic interviews. As the reader will see, the ethnographic material and the vernacular practices presented in it are by and large results of contextual attributes, such as the Finnish legislative changes of the early twentieth century.

Despite the relatively small size of the Finnish Jewish communities, the congregations are extremely diverse in terms of both the backgrounds of the congregational membership and their approaches to religious observance. This is partially rooted in the nominally Orthodox but culturally secularized nature of the two congregations (Vuola 2020a). By illuminating the Finnish case, this study does not aim only to offer new information on Finnish Jewish communities, but also to adapt the existing US scholarship on intermarriages to the more secularized European milieu. Thus, this study fills a void in the existing research on the topic in the fields of both Jewish studies and the study of religions.

1.2 A brief history of Finnish Jewry

To comprehend religious communities, their narratives, and the way they construct their policies, it is important to take into consideration their history and geographical location as well as other contextual factors. The aim of this chapter is not to offer a detailed account of Finnish Jewish history, as this has already been done e.g., in Taimi Torvinen's *Kadima* (Torvinen 1989) or in Karl-Johan Illman's and Tapani Harviainen's work *Judisk historia* (En. *Jewish History*) (Illman and Harviainen 2002). Rather, the aim is to arrive at an understanding of how the Finnish Jewish congregations are situated within broader Finnish history and within global Jewish history.

As Laura Ekholm states: "the formal institutional setting of the local Jewish community was set by the Imperial Russian military" (Ekholm 2013, 30). An important period of Jewish immigration to the territory of Finland started during the time when the country was still part of the Russian Empire and its Jewish residents were soldiers who served in the Russian military (Torvinen 1989; Illman and Harviainen 2002; Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2019). The cantonment system of military service was put into effect by Tsar Nicholas I (ruled 1825–55), who made the cantonist school system for military education compulsory for Jewish minors. The "Cantonists" were young Jewish boys who were educated in Russian schools. The statute of 1858 allowed them and their families to stay in Finland (Torvinen 1989; Illman and Harviainen 2002, 274–5). Prior to Finnish independence, Jewish citizens who formerly served in the Russian Army stayed in the territory of Finland as Russian subjects with special residential permits, which were listed and recorded by e.g., the police in Helsinki and the County Administrative Board, with the Finnish Senate collecting information on all Jews living in Finland (Ekholm 2013, 30). Jewish soldiers continued to settle in the territory of Finland even after the cantonist system was abolished in the 1850s, up until 1917 when Finland gained independence (Torvinen 1989; Illman and Harviainen 2002, 274–5). Today, Jewish individuals who are descendants of those who arrived in Finland "via" the cantonist system are still referred to as "Cantonists." The Cantonists, however, were technically a specific group among the Russian Jewish soldiers.

Strictly speaking, then, not all Finnish Jewish families are Cantonists but are nevertheless often referred to as such.¹

When Finland became independent in 1917, its Jewish residents who formerly served in the Imperial Army could receive Finnish citizenship. The law came into effect 12.01.1918 (Torvinen 1989, 100–101). The same year, the Civil Marriage Act (CMA; Fin. *Asetus avioliiton solmimisesta siviiliviranomaisen edessä*) came into effect. Providing the possibility of civil marriage ceremonies, the CMA allowed Jewish residents of Finland to marry non-Jews through a civil union without converting to Christianity (Czimbalmos 2018).

As noted by Simo Muir, assimilation was vigorous in the Jewish Community in Helsinki between and during the world wars. Muir references Herman Morath, a Yiddish writer from Latvia who provided insight into the life of the Jewish Community of Helsinki in the 1920s, mentioning that the congregation was characterized by assimilation, intermarriages, and secularization (Muir 2004, 214).

In 1920, 1,468 Jews lived in Finland, out of whom 1,097 were born in the country. During the 1920s and 1930s, the number of Jewish residents was on a gradual rise (Weintraub 2017, 117). In 1922, the Freedom of Religion Act (FRA; UVL267/122) was also put into force, introducing freedom of religion in the country. The general tendencies of secularization along with the legislative changes had significant effects on the local Jewish congregations, as will be described in detail in section 3.1.

During the 1930s, three-fifths of the Jewish residents of Finland lived in Helsinki, the rest in Turku or Vyborg (Weintraub 2017, 117). By this time, according to the available marriage registry records, the number of intermarriages started to rise considerably in the Jewish Community of Helsinki and prompted several debates, as they only affected the administration of the congregation but also raised questions about religious practices (NA Vih; Ekholm 2013, 33–34; Czimbalmos 2018). Shortly thereafter, as this study will also point out, intermarriages became an everyday phenomenon in the local Jewish congregations.

After the Second World War, a significant demographic transformation occurred among Finnish Jewry (Ekholm 2013, 33). The Jewish Community of Vyborg was evacuated to Tampere after Vyborg was annexed by the Soviet Union, and the community ceased to exist in 1947. Many families, however, decided to settle in Helsinki instead of staying in Tampere (JCH Ak 1947; Ekholm 2013, 33;). In 1981, the Jewish Community of Tampere also ended its operations (Ekholm 2013, 33), leaving Finland with the two currently existing officially organized Jewish communities: the Jewish Community of Helsinki and the Jewish Community of Turku (Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2019).

In the 1990s, Jews from the former Soviet Union started to arrive in Finland (Weintraub 2017) and, of course, Finland is and was no exception to the quick-paced globalization that takes place all over the world. Today, citizens from a

¹ I would like to thank Docent Simo Muir for the important reminder of the misconception around the word “Cantonist.”

variety of countries have started to settle in Finland, some of whom have decided to join one of the currently operating Jewish communities as well. The local Jewish communities—especially the Jewish Community of Helsinki—are extremely diverse: among their members are found not only Finnish but also Israeli, Russian, US, French, Argentinian, German, Austrian, Hungarian etc. citizens, who come from different religious backgrounds and consider themselves Jewish in various ways. Despite its small size, the community is very diverse.

1.3 Terminology

Terms such as intermarriage or mixed marriage are often used interchangeably in describing marriages between Jews and non-Jews—depending on the observer, the method, the field of study, and the context under consideration. This lack of consistency often hampers the discussion and results in misleading conclusions on the matter (DellaPergola 2003, 2017;² Reinharz 2017).

The term intermarriage mainly refers to non-endogamous marital unions. According to the simplest definition of the Merriam-Webster dictionary, intermarriage is “marriage between members of different groups” (MW). Intermarriage is therefore a broad term to describe marital unions in which the spouses belong to different groups, according to a classification of any sort (DellaPergola 2003, 6). In the Jewish context the word “intermarriage” can refer to several different marital unions, which are mainly—but not only³—connected to conceptualizations of who is a Jew and what constitutes Jewishness.

Throughout the articles that form the basis of this dissertation, I aimed for a consistent usage of terminology when describing the phenomena and the matters under study, primarily following Sergio DellaPergola’s (2003, 2017) terminology. I decided not to adopt the term “interfaith” as I found it problematic in the current context. I was aware that many of my informants and their partners did not have any sort of faith or spiritual inclination and did not perceive their belonging to a Jewish community as a matter connected to personal faith. As is also highlighted by DellaPergola (2003, 2017), the term “interfaith” has sometimes been adopted, but it limits the focus to religious identities. Judaism and Jewishness can be described in a variety of ways, and one can perceive oneself as Jewish based on several factors—one of which is, of course, religious affiliation. I elaborate on these factors and the issues related to them in section 1.5. Based on these considerations, I decided to categorize non-endogamous marital relationships as follows:

² Essentially, DellaPergola 2003 and 2017 are the same study. The former was presented as a working paper at Brandeis University, the second is an article in the publication *Jewish Intermarriage Around the World* (Reinharz and DellaPergola 2017), originally from 2009, reprinted in 2017. Nevertheless, I decided to leave both references in this study, as in the beginning of the research process I used the earlier one as my reference.

³ The term can possibly refer to intermarriages between Jews of different traditions, e.g., Sephardi-Ashkenazi. Ashkenazi Jews are Jews of Central and Eastern European origin. Sephardi Jews, by contrast, are from the areas around the Mediterranean Sea, including Portugal and Spain.

Intermarriage. A broader category that refers to officially registered marital unions in which the spouses belong(ed) to different religious communities, or in which only one of the spouses belonged to a religious community of any sort. This category includes both *mixed marriages*, *conversionary in-marriages*, and *conversionary out-marriages*: marriages in which both spouses kept the affiliations to their own religious communities (or remained unaffiliated), marriages in which the non-Jewish spouse converted to Judaism, and marriages in which the Jewish spouse decided to convert to a different religion than Judaism.

Civil marriage. A category that applies to marriages that were officiated by a state official—that is, not by any religious authority—in Finland or abroad. I consider all marriages that were officiated in Israel as Jewish religious marriages. A civil marriage may be an endogamous or exogamous marriage.

Mixed marriage. A subcategory (of “intermarriage”) that refers to marital unions in which both spouses remain(ed) affiliated with their original religious congregations (or with the civil register in the case of no religious affiliation). Whereas the category of “intermarriage” includes all partnerships regardless of whether the non-Jewish spouse changed their original religious affiliation, this category refers to only those unions in which the individuals retained the same affiliation as they initially had before the marriage.

Conversionary in-marriage. A subcategory (of “intermarriage”) that applies to marital unions in which the non-Jewish spouse converts to Judaism before or after the marriage.

Conversionary out-marriage. A subcategory (of “intermarriage”) that refers to marital unions in which the Jewish spouse joins the religious congregation of his/her spouse.

I find it important to point out that I have no normative intention in defining my informants as “Jewish” or “non-Jewish.” I have decided to follow their self-definition and to consider the definitions upheld by their communities. This categorization is made for purely analytic and descriptive reasons. When I refer to some of my informants as “halakhically non-Jewish,” I regard their status based on the official stance of the Jewish Communities of Helsinki or Turku. It is not a normative evaluation on my part. As both currently existing Jewish communities in Finland are nominally Orthodox, I decided not to reflect on intradenominational marriages⁴ in this study. I do, however, point out the cases of conversionary in-marriages, in which the non-Jewish spouse converted to a non-Orthodox denomination of Judaism. I also find it important to mention, that due to the spatial limitations of the study, I decided to focus on legally registered marriages and thus to exclude cohabitation.

⁴ Marriages between individuals who belong to different denominations of Judaism.

1.4 Previous research on the topic

Due to the significant socioeconomic and religious transformations that followed the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, intermarriage rates started to rise in Western Europe. In the mid-nineteenth century, intermarriage became a prevalent phenomenon of Jewish life (Bleich 2015, 3). The topic of marriages between Jews and non-Jews has been widely discussed in scholarship and religious communities. Debates on the subject concern various aspects of Jewish life, leading to discussions on religious practices and Jewish identity (see e.g., Dencik 2003; McGinity 2009, 2014; Glenn & Sokoloff 2010b; Thompson 2013; Bleich 2015; Hirt, Mintz and Stern 2015; Diemling and Ray 2016).

Over the past decades, numerous studies have dealt with intermarriages and their perceived consequences. Previous studies on similar subjects have outlined that European secularization has impacted the marriage patterns of European Jewry, often generating growing numbers of intermarriages or discussions around intermarriages within the Jewish communities of the Netherlands, Sweden, Hungary, and the United Kingdom (Graham 2004, 26–27). Yet, the majority of the studies reflect on the subject from a quantitative point of view, often from a broader perspective. One example is David Fischer’s dissertation “Judiskt liv: En undersökning bland i medlemmar i Stockholms Judiska Församling” (En. *Jewish life: A Survey Among the Members of the Stockholm Jewish Congregation*) from 1996 (Fischer 1996). Fischer’s work aims to find answers to a number of questions about Jewish life among the members of the Stockholm community. As such, his study also touches upon the question of intermarriages. According to his results, there are generational differences between the members of the congregation in terms of, e.g., their religious practices and attitudes towards intermarriage. Whereas the older generations, and those born outside of Sweden, tend to uphold a stricter level of observance and to find it important for Jews to marry Jews, the younger generations tend to be less strict and more open to the idea of intermarriages. In the same study, Fischer also points out that among his respondents, Jewish traditions practiced at home decreased strongly in homes, where only one partner was Jewish (Fischer 1996). Another example is Lars Dencik’s relatively recent study on “*Jewishness*” in *Postmodernity: The Case of Sweden* (2003), which deals with the broader context of religious practices and Jewish identity within Swedish Jewry. According to the results of the study, most informants reported a tolerant attitude toward intermarriages in the studied congregations. A similar study was done in Norway and Finland, and the results were similar to those of the Swedish one (Dencik 2017). The volume in which this study on Nordic Jewish intermarriages is published, *Jewish Intermarriage Around the World* (Reinharz and DellaPergola 2017), was edited by Shulamit Reinharz and Sergio DellaPergola and was first published in 2009. In addition to the study on Nordic Jewry, titled “Kosher and Christmas tree: on marriages between Jews and non-Jews in Sweden, Finland and Norway” (Dencik 2017), the volume includes several essays that deal with intermarriages in various geographical contexts from Europe, through South Africa, to Latin America. As the editors also point out, the different sets of survey

data used as the basis for the studies were not gathered at the same time, nor necessarily for the same purposes. In 2016, David Graham published the report *Jews in Couples: Marriage, intermarriage, cohabitation and divorce in Britain*. He seeks to clarify to whom Jews partner in the United Kingdom, taking the type, the timing and, where applicable, the dissolution of their partnerships into consideration. The study suggests that even though the intermarriage rates are high in the UK, they are still potentially less significant for demographic development than other factors that may have negative ramifications for the Jewish future. According to the results, one in five Jews has been divorced at least once; cohabitation is increasing rapidly, marriage is stagnating, and women's age at first marriage is approaching a point where childbearing becomes difficult (Graham 2016, 82).

Not surprisingly, however, the bulk of research on Jewish intermarriages focuses on the situation in the US (comprising of both quantitative and qualitative studies). This may be partially explained by the size and diversity of the North American Jewish diaspora. The number of available studies also implies that the financial resources directed toward research in Jewish studies are significantly bigger in the US than in most other countries of the Jewish diaspora. In addition to the US-based scholarship, there are a growing number of studies that touch upon the subject of intermarriages in Israel, often in relation to the complex and problematic aspects of conversions (e.g., Kranz 2016; Kravel-Tovi 2017).

When it comes to quantitative and survey data in the US, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has repeatedly investigated Jewish intermarriage in the country (e.g., Pew Research Center 2015, 2016). Although many of the surveys have been criticized due to their conceptualizations of who is a Jew and due to the data collection processes, they unmistakably identified a rise in intermarriage rates (McGinity 2014, 33–34). In addition to the considerable number of quantitative studies, several qualitative studies have been produced on the matter. Most of the studies, both qualitative and quantitative, conclude that intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews appear to have increased over time in non-Orthodox communities (see e.g., Fishman, 2004, 2006, 2015; Hirt, Mintz and Stern 2015; McGinity 2009, 2014; Mehta 2018).

Sylvia Barack Fishman has conducted several studies and written several scientific contributions to describe intermarriage and its implications in the Jewish communities of the United States. In her works, she often demonstrates the US situation while drawing on examples from Jewish population surveys. Her book entitled *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* (2004) focuses on individual stories derived from interviews and follows the “thick description” approach of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1973) in order to “illuminate the broader psychosocial dimensions of mixed marriage” (Fishman 2004, 12). Her primary interest is how her informants interpret their own lives and negotiate the ethnic and religious character of their households with their husbands or wives. In a later work, *Choosing Jewish: Conversations About Conversion* (2006) Fishman approaches the topic of intermarriages from

another perspective. By specifically focusing on conversionary in-marriages, she builds her study around the analysis of 103 interviews conducted with intermarried couples. Her study shows that these families are far from monolithic, and, in the cases under study, the most frequent catalyst of conversions were considerations concerning the children's well-being and the wish to have a common religion in the household. A shorter contribution of Fishman's is a case study entitled "Diagnosing Challenges to Contemporary Modern Orthodox Families" in an edited volume, *Conversion, Intermarriage and Jewish Identity* (Hirt, Mintz and Stern 2015). In this study, she points out that intermarriage rates have remained significantly lower in Orthodox movements than in other Jewish denominations in the US. As a consequence, Modern Orthodoxy in the United States has been successful in offering an "effective model for cultural transmission" (Fishman 2015, 61), and instead of intermarriage, late marriage and non-marriage are the most troublesome challenges to contemporary American Orthodox Jewish life.

Most qualitative studies of families in which intermarriages influence everyday Jewish lives and religious practices have been conducted in the United States as well. In her work "Jewish on Their Own Terms: How Intermarried Couples Are Changing American Judaism" (2013), Jennifer Thompson demonstrates that intermarried Jews "conform to religious rules and traditions in their own ways, for reasons having to do with family and self rather than God" (Thompson 2013, 164).

Keren McGinity has offered multiple valuable contributions to the research on intermarried men and women in the Jewish context. One of these, *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America* (2009), focuses on intermarried Jewish women over more than a century. As McGinity concludes, her informants combined "ethnicity with domesticity and assertiveness and ingenuity to create Jewish identities that were personally meaningful" (McGinity 2009, 202). These women often reinvented traditions to create meaningful practices for themselves and for their children and became matriarchs of their households on their own terms. Consequently, *Marrying Out: Jewish Men, Intermarriage and Fatherhood* (2014) is a "companion book"—as McGinity refers to it—to the first one, and aims to "complicate the picture [of intermarriages] but not complete it" (McGinity 2014, 30). In this book, McGinity studies experiences of intermarried Jewish men and argues that the gendered identity of her informants, which grew out of their religious and cultural background, enables them to raise Jewish children—often in Jewish communities that are more liberal and thus accept patrilineal descent. This change in moving to more liberal communities "over time entailed an enhancement, not diminishment, of their Jewish identity." (McGinity 2014, 193). As opposed to intermarried Jewish women, intermarried Jewish men appeared to have been directly influenced by their relationships with their Christian wives and the traditional conceptions of gender roles in American families.

A couple of years after McGinity's contribution on intermarried men, and somewhat in line with her thought of "complicating but not completing" the

overall picture of Jewish intermarriages, Samira K. Mehta contributed to the research field with her work *Beyond Chrismukkah: the Christian-Jewish Interfaith Marriage in the United States* (2018). As the title indicates, her specific focus is on Christian-Jewish marriages in the US. Mehta analyses religion and culture in the lives of what she refers to as “interfaith families” and explores how Christian-Jewish families bring religious practices into their homes. Her interest primarily lies in “how interfaith nuclear families are imagined, policed, and innovated” (Mehta 2018, 7). Her findings suggest that robust creativity is applied in the privacy of the interfaith homes she studies.

As the above-listed examples show, most of the scientific contributions that study intermarriages in an in-depth and qualitative manner place US Jewry into their foci. Of course, smaller qualitative studies (e.g., Buckser 2003; Ewence 2016; Frank 2016) exist and examine matters of intermarriage and conversion in the European context, but the majority of the countries in the Jewish diaspora—including Finland—have been understudied from this perspective.

Religious intermarriages in Finland, in general, have not attracted much scholarly attention. This may be due to the fact that the vast majority—68.6 percent in 2019—of Finland’s population belongs to the historically dominant Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). Recent contributions relating to the issue of interreligious marriages (intermarriages) have focused on Orthodox Christian and Lutheran unions (see e.g., Honkasalo 2015; Kupari 2016). Prior to these studies, the theologian Voitto Huotari implemented a quantitative study on Christian Orthodox–Lutheran intermarriages (Huotari 1975). These studies indicate that intermarriages bring about changes in religious behavior and may influence religious practices. Even though many recent academic and non-academic contributions mention the rising number of intermarriages within the Finnish Jewish congregations (e.g., Torvinen 1989; Smolar 2003; Muir 2004; Ekholm 2013; Weintraub 2017; Banik and Ekholm 2019), the consequences and effects that these marital unions have had on the communities have not been studied in detail.

In the early 2000s, Svante Lundgren (2002) distributed a questionnaire that resulted in a comprehensive study entitled *Suomen Juutalaiset. Usko, tavat, asenteet* (En. *Finnish Jews. Beliefs, Customs and Attitudes*), which also addresses the issue of intermarriages. As Lundgren concludes, intermarriages are especially common in the Finnish Jewish communities and the younger generations tend to view the idea of intermarriages more openly than the older ones. Lundgren used a survey that had already been distributed in the Stockholm and Gothenburg communities by Karl Marosi and Lars Dencik and was later distributed in the Jewish Community of Oslo as well. Lundgren’s study—as also indicated in Dencik’s later contribution on Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish Jewish life—shows that Finnish Jews are open to marrying non-Jews and often construct their religious family practices flexibly (Dencik 2017). The latest study that considers intermarried Finnish Jewish men is a Master’s thesis by Marianne Kivijärvi, with a focus on the views of Finnish Jewish men about the conversion processes of their spouses (Kivijärvi 2002). Kivijärvi’s thesis points out that the

participation of Jewish men in the conversion process —e.g., helping with the studies— of their spouses varied significantly depending on whether they had an interest in Judaism or not.

In addition, some studies of the local Jewish communities' culture and traditions have been published, in Finnish and Swedish, by the communities themselves (e.g., Kantor et al. 2006; Weintraub 2017), along with some works on the cultural and linguistic diversity and the socioeconomic status of the local congregations (e.g., Muir 2004; Ekholm 2013; Ekholm, Muir and Silvennoinen 2016). Moreover, in the 2010s, an increasing number of Master's theses were written on subjects relating to Finnish Jewry. Whereas Julia Larsson (2014) focused on matters of Jewish identity, I dealt with questions of religious practice and Jewish identity (Czimbalmos 2016). According to Larsson, her informants experience Judaism primarily through the common notion of belonging to the group of the Jewish people. They perceive themselves primarily as Jews, whose homeland is Finland. The results of my own Master's thesis revealed that members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki appreciate many Jewish traditions and find Judaism and Jewishness important in their lives. They do not necessarily identify as Orthodox, and religious aspects have low importance in their lives. Daniel Shaul (2017) studied matters and attitudes related to circumcision. He points out that the practice of *brit milah*⁵ was still considered to be necessary for ensuring Jewish identity among the participants of his study, even though it was also often criticized. Sabina Sweins reflected on experiences of antisemitism among Finnish Jewry, pointing out that antisemitism has risen in Finland over the past fifteen years, and that Finnish Jews often experience anti-Israelism as a form of antisemitism (Sweins 2018). In her thesis, Kira Zaitsev (2019) studied experiences of converts who had no previous connection to Judaism before their conversion. According to Zaitsev, the individuals she studied mainly converted to Judaism out of —what she called— “theological” reasons (Zaitsev 2019, 35). The most recent Master's thesis connected to the experiences of antisemitism among Finnish Jewry is that of Evi Lemström (2020), whose findings are somewhat in line with those outlined by Sweins.

In 2019, a special issue of the journal *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies* included contributions to the research on contemporary Jewry with reflections on congregational rabbis (Muir and Tuori 2019), the intersections of gender and minority status among female congregants (Vuola 2019), Finnish-Jewish foodways (Pataricza 2019), theoretical aspects (Illman 2019), and a contribution on the history of intermarriages, which is Article I of this dissertation. In 2020, Elina Vuola edited a volume in Finnish on lived religion (Vuola 2020b), which includes a study on lived Judaism in Finland by Vuola herself. The article is based on fifty interviews with Finnish Jewish women during 2015–2016, conducted by Vuola together with Dóra Pataricza. Vuola argues that even if her informants may not adhere to certain Orthodox religious

⁵ Circumcision (of men).

obligations, e.g., visit the *mikveh*⁶ or keep kosher, Judaism still formed an important part of their lives (Vuola 2020a).

This general overview is of course far from complete, but it highlights the most important studies specifically focusing on Jewish intermarriage, religious intermarriage research in Finland, and research on contemporary Finnish Jewry. In the upcoming section, I argue that intermarriage is a useful tool for studying contemporary Jewish practices in the diaspora and reflect on some of the key concepts that are regularly used in this study.

1.5 Intermarriage as a prism for studying Jewish communities

1.5.1 Why study intermarriage?

The phenomenon of Jews marrying across ethnoreligious lines has had different and diverse meanings throughout biblical, historical, and present times. Even during periods when intermarriages rarely occurred, the phenomenon carried powerful symbolism, as it was regarded as a betrayal of Jewish families and the Jewish people (Fishman 2015, 47).

Until the early modern period, most Jews lived segregated, isolated lives. Marital liaisons between them and people of other faiths were limited (Bleich 2015, 3) and often legally impossible. Jewish life, by and large, was shaped by the shared notion of tradition and the clear boundaries that distinguished Jewish society from non-Jewish society (Katz 1986, 3). As the rights of Jews were expanded due to the socioeconomic and religious changes in Western societies, the previously evident boundaries and markers between the Jewish minority and non-Jewish society began to dissolve (Webber 2014; Bleich 2015). With the emancipation of European Jewry, by the mid-nineteenth century intermarriages between Jews and people of other faiths had become a frequent trend of Jewish lives in the diaspora, and today rates of Jewish intermarriage have risen remarkably in most countries (Bleich 2015, 3). As described in the section on previous research, Jewish intermarriages have received a great deal of attention in both scientific research and congregational conversations during the past decades. Attitudes toward intermarriage are often connected to discussions about Jewish identity (Hartman and Hartman 2010, 45) and revolve around questions of assimilation. The topic of intermarriages is controversial and has generated various discussions in Jewish communities of the diaspora. For some, it indicates a community's loss of distinctiveness and vitality; for some, it is connected to questions about Jewish continuity and demographics (Krael-Tovi 2020, 51–52).

Discussions about intermarriages almost always revolve around questions of Jewish identity, and they are tempered by conversations about the non-Jewish spouse converting and about whether conversion is a legitimate rite of passage

⁶ Ritual bath.

for Jews. Throughout the history of Judaism, ambiguities and redefinitions of boundaries have occurred (Hartman 2007a; Hartman 2007b; Webber 2014; Diemling and Ray 2016). Boundaries can take multiple forms and may operate in relation to different aspects of Jewish practice and belief (Hartman 2007b; Bronner 2014; Diemling and Ray 2016). They are often blurred, fuzzy and, of course, their existence may be subject to debate (Webber 2014).

For these reasons, Jewish intermarriage reflects a great number of issues, including those of religious affiliation, self-perception or identity, agency, and those of the person's family, including their spouse (-to be). Intermarriage characterizes Jewish communities and their members in a way that goes far beyond demographic considerations. It can reflect on the vernacular experiences and religious practices of the individuals who are engaged in it. In addition, it also sheds light on the gendered nature of certain practices. Thus, it can serve as a useful prism when studying diverse religious communities, particularly those of the diaspora, where the high ratio of intermarriages is often a defining characteristic of the congregations.

1.5.2 Identity and Jewish identity

When studying Jewish intermarriage, one cannot ignore matters of Jewish identity and the context in which identities are constructed and negotiated, especially when these negotiations are connected to principles and boundaries that are unclear or difficult to conceptualize.

The concept of identity has been employed and debated in various academic disciplines in both the social sciences and in the humanities (Moberg, Sjö and Lövheim 2020, 14; Verkuyten 2005, 39⁷). However, the term seems to remain as unclear as it is necessary (Liebkind 1984, 157).

As Nimmi Hutnik asserts, "most people have multiple group affiliations which may be emphasized or minimized according to the situation" (Hutnik 1991, 20). Identities may be ascribed by others or may be self-proclaimed. A person may have a certain view of themselves that others do not necessarily share. Ascribed and self-proclaimed identities therefore can be very similar to each other but may also differ from each other significantly. An individual may have multiple identities based on their own self-perception and based on the way they are regarded by others. At the same time, the same individual can take up multiple roles in society, which allows them to claim other identities as well (Joseph 2004, 8). Identities are also bound to specific historical, social, and cultural contexts, and may be individual and collective. In the Western social and cultural context, personal identities are often talked about as an individual's ways of making sense of themselves as unique, whereas in the same contexts, collective identities are often tied to ideas of local, national, or even family history or traditions (Weedon 2004; Moberg 2009; Moberg, Sjö and Lövheim 2020).

⁷ I would like to thank Professor Emerita Karmela Liebkind for the important exchange of thoughts on Verkuyten's work on the matter.

Zygmunt Bauman asserts, based on Siegfried Kasauer, that identity arises only with exposure to communities “that are welded together solely by ideas of various principles” (Bauman 2004, 11). Identities may be individual and collective, and identities in general have a relational character (Moberg 2009, 37). Thus, they are shaped through and in “social relations and various types of, either direct or indirect, and more or less clearly articulated, types of association, non-association, and/or disassociation with particular ‘others.’” (Moberg, Sjö and Lövheim 2020, 15). Identities, therefore, are constructed, defined, and interpreted based on complex social relations. They are intertwined with numerous aspects and positionalities of cultural and social life, such as gender, social class, religious affiliation, or ethnicity, and thus they are also fundamentally intersectional (Moberg, Sjö and Lövheim 2020, 15). These collective identities, as well as identities in general, are constructed through active processes of identification and may involve a conscious counter-identification against socially or institutionally assigned identities, or the values these identities may represent. Identities can be performed and are made visible through cultural practices, signs, or symbols (Avishai 2008; Moberg, Sjö and Lövheim 2020, 15; Weedon 2004, 7).

Jewish identity

The flexible and dynamic view of identity outlined above is relevant also when examining the more specific question of Jewish identity. As a result of the emancipation of European Jewry, Jews were granted the opportunity to participate in the life of the surrounding cultures, and thus elements of Jewish life and Judaism, including its boundaries, were challenged, changed, and often set aside (Hartman 2007b, 3). Jewish identity has been thoroughly studied and conceptualized in numerous ways throughout religious and academic discourses: it remains one of the most contested and vexed issues of modern religious and ethnic group history (see e.g., Unterman 1981; Pinto 1996; Gitelman, Kosmin and Kovács 2003; Graham 2004; Glenn and Sokoloff 2010a; Glenn and Sokoloff 2010b; Stern 2015; Diemling and Ray 2016).

Jewish identity, like other forms of identities, is contextual and may be emphasized or concealed depending on the situation. As a result, being Jewish—like identity in general—has become increasingly voluntary (Hartman 2007a, 168; Glenn and Sokoloff 2010a; Glenn and Sokoloff 2010b; Waxman 2015, 153). One can be Jewish in multiple different, often intersecting ways and senses, including (but not limited to) intellectually, ethnically, based on religious affiliation, or in a political sense. This of course implies that the halakhic definition of Jewishness, which is essentially a religious definition, does not reflect many individuals’ self-perception (Glenn and Sokoloff 2010a; Glenn and Sokoloff 2010b; Stern 2015).

In this particular study, Jewish identity is understood in a broad sense, through an individual’s perception of their own Jewishness. This is of course affected by how the person is perceived by their social circles and surrounding society. This identity may take explicit forms and be made visible through

practicing certain Jewish religious or cultural traditions, but it may also be demonstrated in more abstract notions such as feelings of belonging, whether those feelings are based on a collective, ethnic identity or membership in a Jewish congregation.

1.5.3 Conversions to Judaism

Conceptualizing conversions from and to any religion is a difficult undertaking. As I point out in Article IV, various theories and methods have been proposed to describe and understand conversion processes, and the definition of conversion is dependent on the definitions of “religion” and the field of study itself.

Within Jewish studies, a variety of studies have been published on the laws and complexities of conversions to Judaism, connecting the matter to questions around Jewish identity and Jewishness (e.g., Finkelstein 2003; Hirt, Mintz and Stern 2015; Waxman 2015; Hadari 2016). One can convert to most religions, including Judaism, but converting to an ethnicity, or adopting an ethnicity that one has not been ascribed, is not possible (Hartman and Hartman 2010). Hence, conversion to Judaism, *giyur*, is an especially sensitive matter, as it often goes hand in hand with discussions about definitions of Jewishness and Jewish identity: how a person is perceived by themselves and the surrounding society, and how they are accepted by a family, in certain Jewish communities, or even by the State of Israel, which legally defines a person’s Jewishness based on the strictest definitions of Orthodox Jewish *halakhah*⁸ (Hartman 2007a; Samuels 2015; Waxman 2015; Diemling and Ray 2016).

Conversion to Judaism, however, is very much dependent on the perspective of the spectator. A Reform Jew who has been brought up Jewish and has been observant all their life but whose mother is not Jewish by the *halakhah* followed by stricter denominations will most likely have to go through a conversion process, e.g., a *giyur le’chumrah*,⁹ if they want to join a more observant community. When a secular Jew becomes Orthodox, their act is not described as a “conversion.” The person becomes a “master of return,” a *ba’al teshuva* (Thangaraj 2015: 30).

A halakhically valid conversion has three fundamental elements: the physical acts of the conversion ritual, *brit milah* and immersion in the *mikveh*; the candidate’s act of acceptance of God commandments; and the participation of the rabbinical court (*bet din*), which accepts the convert into “the community of Israel” (Finkelstein 2003). Prior to these steps, the candidate is required to study and live according to Jewish law. The extent to which the candidate accepts the commandments and how thoroughly the rabbinical court ‘investigates’ the case and the motive for converting depend on the denomination and the specific

⁸ *Halakhah* is the entire body of the Jewish law. It guides matters connected to religious practices and beliefs, including several aspects of one’s day-to-day life. The extent to which a person observes *halakhah*, as well as the regulations of *halakhah* itself, are dependent on the denomination the person considers themselves to belong to.

⁹ Conversions performed as precautionary measures, when doubt exists about one’s Jewishness (by Jewish law) or about the validity of their previous conversion.

Jewish community itself. Conversion with an “ulterior” motive, e.g., conversion for a romantic relationship with a Jewish person, is generally not accepted by rabbinical courts. The “proper” motive for conversion should be an inner desire to accept the yoke of the commandments (Finkelstein 2003; Hirt, Mintz and Stern 2015). Lynn Davidman, who has published an ethnographic study on women who turn to Orthodox Judaism, *Tradition in a Rootless World* (1991), proposes that conversion is a “shift in one’s discursive universe, social relationships, and embodied practices, a new role learned through language, behavior, and interpersonal boundary maintenance,” as individuals who go through with the process and procedure of conversion to Judaism are primarily required to adopt a set of practices, as opposed to a set of beliefs (RSP). During the final steps of the conversion, however, the candidate must accept the commandments of God upon themselves, making conversion a complicated and often controversial matter.

When conversions are discussed in this study, several different processes are accounted for, some of which are specific to the Jewish context. Among the informants are persons who have converted to Judaism from another religious affiliation (most often Christian). There are also persons who, as described above, were born into Jewish families but were not regarded as Jewish in the strict religious sense, and therefore either chose to undergo the formal conversion process to claim full membership or were converted at an early age at their parents’ decision. Based on Davidman’s view of conversion as well as on the theoretical perspective and material used for the current study (see section 2.1 and Article IV, which particularly focuses on converts to Judaism), my main purpose is to reflect on the practices and Jewish engagement of the converted informants in order to provide an understanding of their own perceptions of “being Jewish.”

1.5.4 Understanding Finnish Jewish practice through intermarriages

The majority of the Finnish population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as mentioned above. The two currently operating Jewish Congregations, the Jewish Community of Helsinki and the Jewish Community of Turku, have fewer than 1,500 members combined, with the membership of the Turku community numbering fewer than one hundred members. This comprises approximately 0.02–0.03 percent of the Finnish population. Both communities operate as (Modern) Orthodox. The current size of the Jewish population outside of these communities is not known, and any estimate of the size of the nonaffiliated Jewish population would be influenced by which definition of Jewishness is employed. In addition to these officially registered religious communities, Chabad Lubavitch¹⁰ is also present in Finland. It is listed as a nonprofit association (*Suomen Chabad Lubavitch ry.*, The Chabad Lubavitch of Finland) without an official membership base. Moreover, in 2019 a new nonprofit organization, the Association of Reform Jews of Finland (*Suomen*

¹⁰ Chabad Lubavitch is a movement of ultra-Orthodox Judaism.

reformijuutalaiset ry.) was established. Currently this organization has fewer than twenty members.

Regardless of the size of Finnish Jewry, however, it is far from homogenous (Weintraub 2017; Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2019; Illman 2019). Members of both official Jewish communities come from a variety of backgrounds, holding various nationalities and practicing Judaism in very different ways. It is easy to see that the Jewish marriage market is, and always has been, very small. Hence, intermarriage is probably the most realistic strategy for finding a partner that one considers suitable.

The informants of this study are members of Orthodox Jewish congregations, yet their practices are seldom strictly Orthodox—as a variety of primary (e.g., NA Kii, Bmm 17.11.1947) and secondary sources (e.g., Torvinen 1989; Muir and Tuori 2019) signal. Orthodox Jews are thought to have “very little difficulty with boundary language and formation” (Hartman 2007b, 5). The boundaries they erect and their definitions of Jewishness and traditions are based on the definitions and requirements of the Orthodox Jewish halakhah. The current case, however, is special, as while members of the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku may belong to nominally Orthodox Jewish congregations, they rarely define themselves as Orthodox or even observant. Their communities were influenced by the legislative reforms of the newly independent state of Finland (see e.g., Article I). As this dissertation proves, these changes affected the practices of the communities and their members throughout the twentieth century and even today. The communities have also been significantly affected by intensifying general globalization and the diversification of the surrounding society (Ekholm 2013; Weintraub 2017; Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2019; Illman 2019).

Studying congregations through the frame of their own culture allows for exploring the constructed perspective in which the congregation builds its unique identity, understanding the group’s life together through the congregation’s symbols, rituals, and narratives (Ammerman, 1998). The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1966) suggests that religion and culture cannot be entirely separated and that religion must be seen as a part of culture. The boundary between Jewish religion and culture is especially blurry: the concept of Jewish culture cannot exclude religion, and the insistence on the boundary between these two concepts has a long and important history among Jews of the modern era (Webber 2014, 43). Religious congregations provide vital opportunities for gathering and belonging. They provide rites of passage, transmit values, and promote community and continuity (Ammerman et al. 1998, 8). The rituals through which a congregation shapes its culture also shape how people form their life together and how they create a community (Ammerman 1998, 84), and thus build their personal and collective identities. In this respect, seemingly routine activities and practices can be interpreted as a means through which individuals make their identities visible. Individuals use the cultural and social dimensions of congregational life to form and practice their Jewishness.

In the Finnish Jewish context the majority of the congregants have some kind of connection to intermarriages. They are mainly individuals who married out, married in, or who are descendants of intermarriages themselves. They operate within, but not necessarily according to, the frames of Orthodox Jewish law. Along these lines, they shape their own narratives and practices, as well as their identities.

Regardless of what definition is employed, Judaism is by its nature connected to religious practices and the conscious adherence to or avoidance of those. As is pointed out in all articles of this dissertation, traditions that used to be commonly practiced among the ancestors of my informants or their extended families are often adjusted to the Finnish context. They did not cease to exist, but they are changed, modified, and approached from a modern perspective. Some of them are preserved creatively to empower the individuals and their families (see, e.g., Article II, and later in Chapter 3). They often serve as a means through which individuals build their identities in the Jewish context, whether they are observed in a religious or a cultural sense.

Intermarriages offer potential for creating religious coexistence (Mehta 2020) and as such, shape religious practices. Interreligious families may make distinctions between religious traditions linked to official theologies or to culture (Mehta 2015, 84). Contemporary Finnish Jewish culture within the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku is, by and large, shaped by intermarriages. Thus, studying these congregations through the prism of intermarriages and the conversions that are often connected to them allows for a better understanding of vernacular religious practices in the communities. As Jonathan Boyarin (2013) contends, Jewishness is “inconceivable without Jewish families” (Boyarin 2013, 29). In congregations where intermarriages form a crucial part of everyday Jewish realities, intermarriage can both shed light on the origins of certain practices and contribute to the understandings of perceptions of Jewishness within the studied congregation.

1.6 Remarks on the research and writing process

Like perhaps all scientific works, this study is subject to a certain level of reassessment and is not without shortcomings or mistakes. Research is an ongoing process, and as such it may require some alterations and reevaluation toward the “end” of the process.

Being an article-based dissertation, this study includes several repetitions. It consists of four peer-reviewed articles, which, in addition to being connected to each other, also need to stand on their own. Another key reason for the need for repetition is the specificity of the subject itself: Finnish Jewry has been far from the forefront of international research. Hence, the articles are constructed to offer their readers a thorough understanding of the general context in which the case studies are located. Thirdly, as the reader will understand, some of the practices and attitudes of the informants presented in the study are formed by

the contemporary context and legislative changes of the twentieth century, and thus this context needs to be spelled out in this work multiple times.

The study analyzes material in several languages. The archival and historical materials include sources mainly in Swedish and Finnish and occasionally in English and Hebrew. The semi-structured interviews—as elaborated on in detail in Chapter 2—were mainly conducted in Finnish, English, and Swedish. Individual interviews were also conducted in other languages, but I have decided not to disclose these, as they would reveal the identity of the informants. The translations of the different texts and interviews into English are my work. However, I must note that almost none of the languages used in either the primary or the secondary materials are my mother tongue. Therefore, in problematic cases, such as archival sources written in old-fashioned Finnish and Swedish, native speakers were consulted to avoid contextual misunderstandings or misinterpretations.¹¹ Concerning the legal terminology of the legislative changes introduced in Finland in the beginning of the twentieth century, I found it particularly hard to interpret certain laws or to find their adequate English translations. I am not a professional in law, nor was it a particular aim of this study to give a detailed legislative account of the different laws and acts, the processes connected to their legislation, or the general societal discussions around them. Therefore, I am well aware that the wording I use in certain cases may be disputed by experts in the legal field. When existing English translations of the laws could be found I used them, but in cases where they were missing, I have translated the laws myself according to my best knowledge, keeping readability in mind. As for the transliteration of Hebrew expressions in this study, I have used the transliteration I consider to be most widely applied.

Keeping all these matters connected to potential reevaluation, structure, and language in mind, I take full responsibility for both the content and the form of this work, as well as for the articles that form the basis of it.

1.7 Introduction of the research articles

The analytical part of this dissertation is based on four articles published in peer-reviewed journals. A more detailed reflection on the findings of these articles is found in the concluding discussion in Chapter 3.

Article I.

“Laws, doctrines and practice: a study of intermarriages and the ways they challenged the Jewish Community of Helsinki from 1930 to 1970.” In *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies*, 30 (1): 35–54. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.30752/nj.77260>

¹¹ I would like to thank Sanna Aarnio, Eva Fagerholm, Ruth Illman, Jani Korhonen, Pekka Lindqvist, Simon Livson, Riikka Tuori, Ella Oppenheimer, Dana Graydi and Laura Wickström for their suggestions about certain translations.

This article analyzes the recent historical aspects of intermarriages and conversions within the Jewish Community of Helsinki. The article examines how Finnish bureaucratic and legislative regulations, such as the Civil Marriage Act of 1917 or the Freedom of Religion Act of 1922, affected the policies, customs, and habits of the Jewish Community of Helsinki. The study explores some of the aspects and decisions that had crucial effects on Jewish life in Helsinki (and in Finland) in the period of 1930-70. The results of the study show that the rising number of intermarriages brought about changes in the religious practices and administrative system of the Jewish Community of Helsinki and resulted in policies that affected not only the registration of membership, but also the later policies of the congregation.

Article II.

“Everyone does Jewish in their own way’: Vernacular practices of intermarried Finnish Jewish women.” In *Approaching Religion*, 10 (2): 53–72. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.91381>

The article concentrates on the vernacular practices of intermarried women in the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku. The article takes recent historical events (such as those explored in detail in Article I) into consideration. The main conclusions of the article show that the women it discusses often combine models from different traditions instead of abandoning Judaism altogether as they intermarry; they “do Judaism” in their own way by creating and (re-) inventing traditions they find meaningful for themselves and their families.

Article III.

“Yidishe Tates Forming Jewish Families: Experiences of Intermarried Finnish Jewish Men.” In *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies*, 31 (2): 21–40. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.30752/nj.97558>. 2020.

The study focuses on the vernacular experiences of intermarried Jewish men in the Finnish Jewish communities. By reflecting on the contradictory legal situation that prevailed in Finland between 1922 and 1970 (as outlined in Article I), the article highlights that, as opposed to their female counterparts (Article II), Jewish men used their ties to their cultural heritage to increase their ability to raise their children effectively. In addition to differences from vernacular practices of intermarried women, this article also reflects on the division of labor in intermarried Jewish men’s families. As the results of the study show, practices of intermarried Jewish men and their families are still polarized by certain attributes of the gender-traditional realm of Judaism.

Article IV. (under typesetting)

“Rites of Passage: Conversionary in-Marriages in the Finnish Jewish Communities.” In *Journal of Religion in Europe*. 2021 (forthcoming).

The study seeks to contribute to the field of conversion studies in general and the research on Jewish intermarriages and conversions in Europe and in Finland in particular, through adapting Sylvia Barack Fishman’s typology on conversionary in-marriages to the Finnish context. All informants of the study are individuals who went through the formal conversion process to Judaism after becoming romantically involved with their Jewish partners. The results of the study show that they did not convert for only personal reasons but also to secure the unity of their families and to be able to provide a Jewish upbringing to their children through a form of cultural transmission that was developed in the Finnish Jewish communities during the twentieth century. This form of transmission might not necessarily follow an Orthodox perception of tradition, despite the local congregations following a form of the Orthodox Jewish halakhah, but it is enhanced by the fluid approaches of both the congregations and their members.

2 Theory, Methodology, and Data

The aim of this chapter is to present the main theoretical and methodological considerations, the nature of the different data and their collection and management, and the analytical approaches of the study.

The first section of the chapter (2.1) gives a detailed account of the framework of vernacular religion, which is the main theoretical apparatus employed. The section also gives an introduction to the complementary literature used in the study and introduces the reader to theoretical delimitations connected to both the framework of vernacular religion and to its applicability in the current case. The second section (2.2) focuses on methodological considerations, introduces the broader project (*Minhag Finland* project) of which this study is a part, and elaborates on the collection of the historical, archival data and the new ethnographic material. Furthermore, it addresses the process of selecting relevant informants and matters connected to my self-positioning as a researcher and as a member of the studied group. The last two subsections (2.2.6 and 2.2.7) address both the analytical and methodological limitations of the current study. Finally, the last section (2.3) discusses matters connected to data management and research ethics, which are particularly important to take into consideration as the study focuses on a rather small group and its members.

2.1 Theoretical considerations

As a result of developments within the humanities beginning in the nineteenth century, academic fields such as anthropology, the study of religions, and ethnology increasingly placed their focus on the realm of contemporary urban lives, studying various forms of religions and religiosity. The disciplines were linked together by the attempt to engage with “others,” and soon human agency became the foci of these disciplines (Bowman and Valk 2012, 1.).

Over the past decades, the lived-religion approach has become widespread among scholars, who ethnographically research how religion is experienced and practiced as part of ordinary people’s everyday life (see, e.g., Orsi 1997; Hall 1997; Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008; Orsi 2010). Vernacular religion can be seen as a specific strand within this broader ethnographic tradition, stemming from Folklore Studies, Anthropology, and Oral History (see e.g., Primiano 1995, 1997, 2012; Bowman 2014; Illman 2018).

As Ruth Illman and myself conclude in a recent article (Illman and Czibalmos 2020), the vernacular approach to the study of religious communities and individuals has attracted growing interest in recent years, not only when studying Christian contexts (e.g. Howard 2011, Hovi and Haapalainen 2015; Romashko 2020), but also in research on Indigenous and Pagan groups, alternative spiritualities (e.g. Bowman 2014; Harvey 2000; Lassander 2014; Whitehead 2013), and Muslim communities (Purewal and Kalra 2010; Thurffjell 2019). However, these perspectives rarely have been applied to Jewish contexts to any great extent (Illman and Czibalmos 2020, 173).

In the Jewish context, Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus (2018) has used vernacular religion in *Gastronomic Judaism as a Culinary Midrash*, an extensive work that studies Jewish food and foodways, connecting them not only to textual sources, such as decisions of rabbinic authorities, but also to Jewish identity and to the everyday lives of Jews in general. In the Finnish Jewish context, the latest work utilizing vernacular religion as a key theoretical approach has been conducted within the *Minhag Finland* project (see later in 2.2.1) at Åbo Akademi University. Articles II, III, and IV of this dissertation are contributions to this project, as are Illman's recent contributions (Illman 2018; Illman 2019) and our joint contribution specifically on Finnish Jewry (Illman and Czimbalmos 2020). My own articles all engage in detailed discussions on the concept of vernacular religion. Thus, in the following section, I will mainly focus on why this approach was chosen as the key framework of this dissertation and summarize it only briefly.

2.1.1 Vernacular Judaism

The concept of vernacular religion is described as “religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it” by Leonard Norman Primiano (Primiano 1995, 44).

The concept facilitates the understanding of the continuous interpretation and negotiation that occur when individuals are affected by any number of influential sources while practicing their religion (Primiano 2012, 384). The vernacular religion approach considers the historical and institutional structures that set the conditions for and work to form the personal religious trajectory, paying attention to power relations and physical surroundings (Primiano 2012; Kupari 2020, 182; Kupari and Vuola 2020). Everyday practices and historically organized and theologized practices create a vivid interplay, which when taken into consideration allows for religion to be studied in a more comprehensive manner (Primiano 2012). As Primiano concludes, “all religion is both subtly and vibrantly marked by continuous interpretation even after it has been reified in expressive or structured forms” (Primiano 2012, 384). The vernacular approach enables multidimensional analyses that are sensitive to both overarching sociocultural power structures and the inner world of individual subjects themselves, as well as to narrative structures, local practices, and oral histories (Goldstein and Shuman 2012, 117; Goldstein 2015, 126; Illman 2019, 4; Romashko 2020, 195, 203). Researching religion through the vernacular is suitable when studying creative forms of everyday religiosities expressed in culture and customs (Primiano 1995, 43). Vernacular religion provides an analytic outlook that emphasizes the continuous dialogue between personal narratives and socioreligious structures (Illman 2019, 94). This makes it suitable for researching a Jewish community that is heavily built around the interplay of these aspects.

Jewish communities—like probably most religious communities—simultaneously function as religious, social, and cultural spaces. They may strive to comply with the regulations of halakhah and keep their own

traditions or may exist “only” in the form of cultural meeting centers, where religious obligations have very little or no importance. In countries where there are multiple Jewish communities of different denominations (e.g., in the United States, France, or the United Kingdom) people who wish to join a Jewish community have the option to choose the one that best suits their perceptions and expectations. In Finland, however, the possibilities are limited as there are only two, officially Orthodox, Jewish communities in Helsinki and Turku. The Jewish Community of Helsinki functions as both a community center and a religious space, running its own school and kindergarten and providing space for a variety of activities on-site, as the synagogue and other institutions and activities are essentially housed in the same building. The lack of congregations belonging to different denominations creates room for creative approaches and generates a membership that “does Judaism” in very different ways. The members of these communities may change, tune, and revisit the methods of performing religious practices, but the emotional connections to these practices can hardly be disputed.

The interplay and tensions between individual experiences and formal, informal, local, and even marginalized contexts constitute the primary focus of vernacular religion research (Howard 2011, 7; Whitehead 2013, 15; Riccardi-Swartz 2020, 124). According to Marion Bowman, vernacular religion incorporates at least the levels of “official,” “folk,” and “individual” religions, and can also manifest itself in the interplay between these (Bowman 2004, 6). Vernacular religion therefore also includes both the “folk” and the “personal” elements as part of religion as lived (Romashko 2020, 195). In Bowman’s understanding, “official” religion constitutes what is generally accepted by orthodoxy, whereas “folk” religion comprises generally accepted or transmitted beliefs, regardless of their official status. “Individual” religion reflects personal beliefs and interpretations (Bowman 2004; Bowman and Valk 2012, 4).

In the Jewish context, the “inherited” textual sources, their interpretations by the rabbinical authorities, and individual beliefs and practices in different sociohistorical and cultural environments create a vivid interplay in which the elements of vernacular religion take form.

The participants in the current study are members of two Jewish communities, which are officially Ashkenazi Orthodox. However, the membership base consists of a variety of backgrounds, including people from different countries and not necessarily Ashkenazi or Orthodox Jewish environments. Hence, the participants often interpret Jewish practice in an “unorthodox” way. Finnish Jewry is often viewed as not only one of the oldest but also one of the most well-integrated minority groups in Finland (see e.g., Illman et al. 2017; Weintraub 2017). The diversity within the congregations, including their approaches to Judaism and Jewish practice in Finnish society, is vast. This diversity is very well represented in both the archival and the ethnographic material of the study. This diversity often results in e.g.,

different administrative processes and rules, and regulations in the congregations, and e.g., in different perceptions of Jewishness and Judaism, unique customs, and different levels of knowledge of the halakhah and of Jewish traditions among their membership.

Vernacular religion is not to be understood as the dichotomous opposite of official religion, but as a concept that allows both official and nonofficial religion to be studied holistically. Vernacular religion offers a fruitful analytical focus on issues of power and is apt for combining diverse material; thus, it is suitable for analyzing the material of the current study.

2.1.2 Complementary literature

As articulated in detail in Articles II, III, and IV, in addition to the theoretical framework of vernacular religion, I found US-based scholarship particularly useful for the analysis of my material. I am well aware that Finnish Jewry differs significantly from American Jewry in terms of its size, its background, its history, and of course in the vast numbers of denominations that are present in the United States as opposed to in Finland. However, after studying the available archival material and starting to gather the new ethnographic material (see, section 2.2), I found that the patterns described in American qualitative scholarship on intermarriages and conversions among non-Orthodox Jews were relevant for the analysis of the Finnish data as well (for details, see section 1.4).

Above all, the works of e.g., Sylvia Barack Fishman (2004, 2006, 2015), Keren McGinity (2009, 2014), Jennifer Thompson (2013), and Samira K. Mehta (2018, 2020) have revealed patterns that are visible also in the Finnish data—despite the differences in size and denominational diversity among the Jews of the two countries. As the Finnish Jewish communities and their members are far from homogenous, I found these studies to be in line with the narratives of my informants. They also align in a fruitful way with the vernacular religion approach. Thus, I found them essential when analyzing my own material.

2.1.3 Theoretical delimitations

As shown in the analysis in Chapter 3, the informants often articulate their Jewishness in a modality that I described as “doing Jewish” —based on the “doing religion” frame of Orit Avishai (2008) which is described in detail in Article II. Their practicing of Jewish traditions, whether they feel they “know enough” about them or not, strengthens or weakens the way they perceive themselves as Jews. The modalities of “doing” and “being” were explored in the articles, but the modality connected to “knowing Jewish” requires more elaboration.

The usage of these three modalities in relation to identity and belonging were introduced by Margit Warburg in a study on the Danish Baha’i community (Warburg 2006, 332–373).¹² Ruth Illman and myself have formulated a similar

¹² The generic division into “knowing,” “being” and “doing” can be found in other scholarly works from different fields as well (see, e.g. Fishman 1980; Verkuyten 2005). However, to the best of knowledge, the terminology has not been introduced to “vernacular religion” research previously.

approach in an analytical model constructed on the basis of the *Minhag Finland* interview data set, modelled on the framework of vernacular religion. It is grounded in the “modalities being, knowing, and doing religion that are bound by the dynamic movers of continuity, change, and context” (Illman and Czimbalmos 2020, 194). This model was formulated as a result of the research reported in this study, after recognizing the need for an approach that showcases the flexibility of Jewish practice and identification in a more nuanced manner. As a scholarly category, vernacular religion is not a clear, separate, and distinct aspect of people’s lives. It may emerge as relevant and manifest itself in different ways, depending on the context and the situation (Illman 2019, 102–3). Moreover, as Primiano himself concludes, it is impossible for the religion of an individual not to be vernacular, as “religion inherently involves interpretation” (Primiano 1995, 44). This, of course, may generate confusion when one is to analyze certain material through the lens of vernacular religion. For this reason, I believe that the models presented above, are useful to specify and delimit the task and may offer interesting prospects for further research.

2.2 Methodological considerations and data

This study uses various historical and archival sources, as well as newly collected ethnographic material in the form of semi-structured qualitative interviews. The aims of this section are to offer a detailed account of the methodological approaches of this study and to introduce the reader to the data collection processes.

In 2.2.1, I will therefore describe the broader project in which the current research was conducted. The following subsection, 2.2.2, will reflect on the means of data collection from a general perspective, whereas 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 will offer a detailed description of the collection of the historical archival data and the new ethnographic material. In section 2.2.5 I describe my own self-positioning and its influence on both the processes of data collection and the analysis. Finally, sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.7 will introduce the reader to the analytical approach applied in this study and address the possible analytical and methodological limitations of the work.

2.2.1 The *Minhag Finland* project¹³

The new ethnographic material collected during the research process is the result of a shared effort by the *Boundaries of Jewish Identities in Contemporary Finland (Minhag Finland)* research team.

The interdisciplinary research project, led by Docent Ruth Illman, examines central notions of boundaries as they are negotiated and interpreted among Jews living in Finland today. It connects to recent developments in the research on vernacular religion and on identity and change in Jewish communities

¹³ The website of the *Minhag Finland* project: <https://polininstitutet.fi/en/boundaries-of-jewish-identities-in-contemporary-finland-minhag-finland/> (accessed 24 Feb. 2021)

worldwide. While taking the challenges set by the Finnish context into account, the project aims to explore contemporary Jewish vernacular religion in the Finnish Jewish communities. Its further aim is to compare these findings with Nordic counterparts to find patterns and contrasts. The research project is structured around four case studies designed to capture Finnish Jewish *minhagim* (customs, traditions) and general trends in vernacular religion: foodways, family life, customs, and relations to secular society. The current study is a case study of the *Minhag Finland* project.¹⁴ This means that besides the foci of my own study, multiple different topics were touched upon during the interviews, which I believe contributed greatly to my own research, as they allowed me to study intermarriages in a broad context.

2.2.2 General remarks on the data collection

The material analyzed in this study includes both archival and newly collected ethnographic material. As such, the methodology follows a qualitative approach that combines elements from ethnographic research with archival research.

The research was designed to analyze vernacular religion and religiosity, in line with Leonard N. Primiano and Marion Bowman (in e.g., Bowman 2004; Primiano 1995, 1997, 2001, 2012). The aim was not only to gain an understanding of the religiosity and identities of the informants, but also to uncover the power structures at play in the narratives. Primiano's theory on vernacular religion is especially suitable for this purpose.

2.2.3 Historical and archival data

Private and public belief, rituals, and habits—as well as identities—are influenced by and (re-)narrated depending on historical and contemporary contexts (Bowman and Valk 2012, 7–8). Vernacular religion understands religion “as a continuous art of individual interpretation and a negotiation of any number of influential sources” (Primiano 2012, 384). Religious communities and congregations have their own unique histories and traditions, which are shaped by the “theological traditions” of which they consider themselves to be part. Naturally, these histories and traditions are also affected by the larger (secular) society around them (Ammerman 1998, 78–89).

Being aware that the Finnish Jewish Archives in the National Archives of Finland are particularly rich in unprocessed material from the current and former Jewish communities in Finland, I found it important to study the historical documents of Finnish Jewry. The archival material mainly comprises of documentation from the early twentieth century up until the 1970s. The archival documents before Finnish independence in 1917 were not studied in depth within the scope of this study, as before the implementation of the Civil Marriage Act, intermarriages were legally impossible. Even though conversionary out-marriages may have occurred under Russian Rule, they most

¹⁴ For further elaboration on the case studies, see Illman 2019.

likely had significantly smaller impacts on the congregations than the intermarriages and conversionary in-marriages presented in this study. In 1970, the former Population Register Centre (Fin. *Väestörekisterikeskus*) introduced a computer-based registry system, which limited the number of archival documents and changed the internal administration of the congregations significantly.¹⁵

During the archival research, my goal was to find relevant documentation of the subjects of my present study. In 2017, I studied a significant amount of archival material from the Finnish Jewish Archives in the National Archives of Finland in Helsinki, and from the Jewish Community of Turku in the Turku branch of the National Archives of Finland. As the Jewish Communities of Vyborg and Tampere quit their operations in 1947 and 1981 respectively, and the National Archives of Finland in Helsinki holds only limited information on the two communities, I decided not to include them in the current study. When addressing my research questions, I partially drew on the diverse set of documents of the two current Jewish congregations. Due to the significant difference in the size of these two communities, most of the archival documents concern the Jewish Community of Helsinki. Most of the material consists of minutes from board meetings, marriage registries and birth registries of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, rabbinical correspondence with rabbis and institutions outside Finland, population registry documents, and general correspondence between the Scandinavian Jewish communities, the Finnish authorities, and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel.

In 2018, I worked on indexing, cataloguing, and digitizing the on-site archives of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, with Dóra Pataricza and Simo Muir. Thus, I was able to complement the information derived from the National Archives with relevant information from the on-site archives of the Jewish Community of Helsinki.

In 2020, I had the opportunity to study some of the archival material of the Jewish Community of Stockholm deposited in the National Archives of Sweden. Due to the emerging COVID-19 situation in Sweden, my possibilities for visiting the archives regularly became limited, and thus I was not able to use the full potential of this opportunity. In the short and limited period, I did not find any documents that would have been especially relevant for my study.¹⁶

As a result of the archival research process, I succeeded in uncovering an abundance of documents from the twentieth century. This helped me gain a deep historical understanding of the issues that arose in the Finnish Jewish

¹⁵ On January 1, 2020, the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (Fin. *Digi- ja väestötietovirasto*) was launched, merging the Population Register Centre, the Local Register Offices, and the Steering and Development unit for the Local Register Offices (DVV).

¹⁶ When visiting the National Archives of Sweden, I was aware that before the first adulthood group conversion in the Jewish Community of Helsinki in 1977, individuals who wished to convert to Judaism often did so in Sweden. The archival sources of the Jewish Community of Helsinki also point to this fact. My primary goal in the National Archives of Sweden was, therefore, to find documents on the matter. A further aim was to locate correspondence related to the issues that were raised in Article I of this dissertation.

communities after the legislative and policy changes following independence in 1917.

To complement the information I located in the archival material, I contacted Rabbi Uri (Ove) Schwarz, who served as the rabbi of the Jewish Community of Helsinki from 1982 to 1987. He provided me with valuable information concerning the Jewish Community of Helsinki in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In addition to conversing with him over the telephone, I had the privilege of visiting him in Jerusalem to study his archives and clarify matters that were not documented in the archives in Helsinki or Turku. These matters were mostly connected to the first “mass conversion”—as it is often referred to—in the Jewish Community of Helsinki. After talking to Rabbi Schwarz, I also corresponded with two of the three members of the *bet din*¹⁷ that was present at the conversions of 1977 organized by Rabbi Mordechai Lanxner: Rabbi Mordechai Zeits and Rabbi Joseph Howard. Throughout my research, I found Meliza Amity’s genealogical database¹⁸ (Meliza’s Genealogy) particularly useful for my research.¹⁹ The database provided me with information collected by Meliza Amity herself through her personal contacts and relationships with the (former) members of the communities. Such information would have been especially hard to acquire without Amity’s database.

Throughout the process, I was aware that most of the documents I assessed were written for solely administrative purposes, that is, with the aim of documenting the internal and external processes of the congregations. Nevertheless, in certain instances, I had to consider that the underlying cultural framework and the power relations within the communities may have influenced the character as well as the content of the archival holdings and may have affected their accuracy. Throughout the study, I aimed to view my sources critically and study them in their complexity.

2.2.4 New ethnographic material

Survey

As preparation for the semi-structured interviews, which form the main material of the current study, I conducted a survey in the two Jewish communities to investigate the links between Jewish religious participation and attitudes toward Jewish practices among the membership. The survey was distributed between February and August of 2018 via the channels of the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku, in Finnish, Swedish, and English. The response rate of the survey was approximately 10 percent of community members aged eighteen or

¹⁷ A rabbinical court of three.

¹⁸ Meliza Amity’s genealogical database is an online database and family tree of Finnish Jewish families. The database also includes individuals who may not have Finnish Jewish ancestry but are or have been members of the Finnish Jewish communities.

¹⁹ I would like to express my gratitude to Rabbi Uri Schwarz, Rabbi Mordechai Zeits, and Rabbi Joseph Howard for their kindness and help during my research process and to Meliza Amity for providing me access to her valuable online database.

above. The survey (see *Survey* in the Appendix) was cross-sectional in design.²⁰ It tied onto the main typologies and considerations in previous research on contemporary Jewish identity and religious practices in Europe (including works of Kooyman and Almagor 1996; van Solinge and de Vries 2000; Becher et al. 2002; Cohen 2002; Lundgren 2002; Korazim, Katz, and Bruter 2002; Dencik 2003; Waterman 2003; Kovács 2004; Graham 2016). Mainly, it pertained to the survey Svante Lundgren distributed almost two decades ago (Lundgren 2002), as the questions posed in that survey (see *Survey*) were specifically targeted at the Nordic context. The majority of the respondents did not identify as Orthodox or keep kosher strictly. Only less than one fourth of them stated that they visit the synagogue on every Shabbat and during all other holidays. Most of them did not oppose the idea of intermarriages and were of the opinion that in case of an intermarriage, the non-Jewish spouse should be welcomed to the Jewish community. The majority of the respondents concluded that being Jewish is important for them. In addition, most respondents found “Jewish atmosphere at home” (such as Jewish food and customs), and Jewish culture (e.g., literature, music and arts) important aspects of their personal feelings of being Jewish. Due to the survey’s small participation, the results were used only as a basis for structuring the interviews and have not been analyzed in depth. The themes arising from the survey were connected to e.g., the regularity of synagogue visits, the observance of kosher dietary restrictions, and marital choices.

Interviews

In 2019–2020, semi-structured in-depth interviews (n=101) were collected from members of the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku. One informant withdrew her consent to take part in the study after the interview. At the beginning of the data collection process, the research team introduced the project to the participants of *Limmud Helsinki*²¹ 2019, where brief pamphlets about the project and contact details were also distributed.

Followed by this introduction, several participants of *Limmud* approached our project team directly to volunteer as informants. Others were contacted by the team members either via phone or email and sometimes in person. Both I and one of my colleagues on the research team, Dóra Pataricza, are members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki. Hence, occasionally at community events we were in contact with individuals and asked them to be informants for our project. Some informants expressed their interest to be interviewed when filling out my survey. Altogether, I conducted sixty-one interviews with sixty-three persons:

²⁰ In creating the survey, I received guidance from my supervisors, Docent Ruth Illman and ThD Pekka Lindqvist. Also, I would especially like to mention Professor Marcus Moberg, whose help was invaluable.

²¹ Limmud (or Limud) is an educational event that is not affiliated with any strand of Judaism. Since the 1970s, the concept has become popular in several countries, where events are organized with international lecturers on several topics that relate to Judaism and Jewry, ranging from religious and historical topics to politics, popular culture, and leisure activities. Limmud Helsinki is held yearly, during the first weekend of February. For more information: <https://www.limud.fi/> (accessed January 13, 2021)

seventeen alone and forty-four with one of my colleagues. On average, the interviews lasted for 1.5–2 hours. Occasionally, one informant was interviewed more than once, due to several reasons. In certain cases, the initial interview stretched over more than two hours, but the informants had such vast knowledge about local *minhagim* that we found it necessary to schedule follow-up interviews to complete the narrative. In other cases, the informants contacted us after the first interview and wanted to provide us with more information that they remembered only after our conversations and wanted to share on the record as well. Depending on the preferences of the informants, a significant number of interviews were conducted on the premises of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, in the office of Åbo Akademi University Foundation (*Stiftelsen för Åbo Akademi*), in informants' homes, and occasionally in public spaces, such as cafés.

The main reason for conducting interviews during fieldwork is to study and understand the notions, beliefs, and actions of people (Holy and Stuchlik 1983, 36). Of course, in an interview situation, individuals tend to reveal what they are conscious of (Cohen and Rapport 1995, 11-12), or in this specific case, traditions that they are aware of. Thus, conducting interviews is a suitable method for learning about and understanding their views on various subjects.

To acquire information on the practices of our informants, the interviews were thematically structured and touched upon questions connected to the four case studies of the *Minhag Finland* project. The informants were asked about e.g., family origin, upbringing, dietary habits, family and personal life, local customs in the synagogue and the home (see *Interview outline* in the Appendix), as well as perceptions of Judaism and the self. In some interviews, topics such as food and dietary restrictions gained more importance, while in others, topics such as family life became the center of attention. This depended on the informants, their backgrounds, and their willingness to provide us with personal information.

2.2.5 Informants and self-positioning

Informants of the *Minhag Finland* project

The requirement for participating in the research was that the informant was a member of one of the Finnish Jewish congregations and over eighteen years of age. Throughout the collection of the data, we strove to gather a diverse set of narratives from informants who identified as male and as female. There was no informant who identified with a gender outside the binary— or at least they did not articulate it to us during the interviews. During the collection of the data, the project team noticed that there are markedly few men between eighteen and thirty years of age registered in the congregations. Thus, they are underrepresented in our sample.

As a research team, we had to consider our potential informants' wishes when preparing for the interviews: some persons particularly hoped to be interviewed by me, as I was familiar to them from before, whereas some male informants wished to be interviewed by a male researcher for reasons connected to religious observance. In these cases, the informants' wishes were respected.

Selection of relevant informants for the present study

From all the interviews conducted within the Minhag Finland project, I decided to actively use twenty-eight interviews for Articles II and III, and ten for Article IV. These interviews were conducted with informants who lived in either mixed marriages or conversionary in-marriages. As the analytical phase of this study started before the collection of the interview material in the Minhag Finland project was complete, not all relevant informants were selected into this study.

The criteria for selecting the relevant interviews were based on the scope of my articles and were partially influenced by the analytical process (see section 2.2.6). Article II studies the experiences of intermarried women who are members of the Finnish Jewish communities. Thus, my selection criterion was women who were married to persons who do not or have not always identified as Jewish. Similarly, when working with Article III, on intermarried men's experiences, my criterion was that their spouses do not or have not always identified as Jewish. In the case of Article IV, I chose informants who converted to Judaism at the same time or after they became involved with their spouses, who identified as Jewish. A selection criterion for all informants was that the relationship between the spouses had to be legally officiated, either in the civil or in the religious sense. My youngest informant was born in the 1980s, the oldest in the 1930s. All thirty-eight informants whose interviews I used as a core of my study lived (or had lived) in heterosexual relationships. In one case, two informants were interviewed together.

In addition to these core interviews, I have complemented my understanding of the research themes with information derived from additional interviews from the Minhag Finland sample. I found this necessary to gain and to be able to provide a deeper contextual understanding in this work.

Self-positioning

When trying to describe a culture through an ethnographic process, the researcher's subjective involvement with the subject necessarily affects the analysis and understanding.

My broader research team included both members and non-members of the Jewish community in Finland. Not being a member, however, did not necessarily mean complete outsider status for my colleagues, as they were familiar to many members of the congregations, either because of their previous research on the local communities or because of their fields of research in the broader scope of e.g., Jewish studies. This naturally affected the process of data collection and perhaps resulted in different dynamics and conversations in different interview situations. As many of the informants had personal connections to one or several of the researchers in the team, we actively sought to separate between our personal and professional roles and not interview persons that were close to us personally, unless necessary. The different interview dynamics, e.g., depending on who conducted the interview or if two researchers conducted an interview together, have shaped the material we collected.

I was present at the interviews primarily as a researcher, but it was a well-known fact for my informants that I am a member of the Jewish Community of

Helsinki, making my presence in the field “simultaneously professional and personal” (Coffey 1999). It was particularly important for me to ensure that all informants felt comfortable opening up to me in the interview situation. Often both I and they were well-aware that we would continue to meet outside the interview context as well. While I was not consciously exposing my emotional involvement during the interviews, many informants knew me personally. I was also familiar with some of their stories prior to conducting the interviews. At times, I neither wanted to nor could hide my involvement with the field. These were occasions in which the informant shared particularly sensitive or personal stories with me or with us. In these instances, I allowed myself to “be vulnerable,” as Ruth Behar puts it, and not try to cover my feelings entirely (1996, 16). In instances, when our informants opened up about certain difficulties in their life, I often expressed my support or compassion with them. As a result, even though my involvement with the local Jewish community was not always articulated, I believe it facilitated the open and sincere discussions I had with my informants. Behar also concludes that being a vulnerable observer goes hand in hand with being a vulnerable writer. In the current study, this vulnerability is perhaps most present in the conscious decision I made to withhold certain information, which would have contributed significantly to my arguments but could also have harmed my informants emotionally. I believe it was my ethical obligation to make this decision.

In some cases, informants may have had their own ideas and agendas in mind when discussing certain questions with the researcher (Bourdieu 1999, 608–609). I also noticed this when conducting my interviews. In certain cases, however, my insider position made them noticeably more cautious about what they said during the recorded interview.

It is important to keep in mind that the data is an outcome of the interview context, in which the researcher is an active participant not only in the analysis of the material, but also in its creation (Utriainen 2010, 121–122). My involvement with the field also meant that my personal experiences and relations with the individuals affected the course and the results of the research (Davies 2002, 4; Spickard 2009).

While I am currently a member of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, my roots are not in Finland but in another mainly Ashkenazi environment. This made the process of distancing myself from my informants easier, but at times, not entirely possible. I was not brought up in either of the local congregations, and I do not have family ties in either of them. Of course, I am socially connected to local Jewry, but my ties in Finland are rather recent. Thus, even while being a member of the Helsinki community, I was able to locate myself in a “semi-detached” (Coffey 1999) position.

Kim Knott offers a detailed description of insider-outsider perspectives in the study of religious communities, highlighting several different levels of involvement: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and complete observer. These run on the scale from full involvement, where objectivity is not the purpose of the study, to a stance of complete

detachment. These four different roles were first identified by sociologists Buford Junker and Raymond L. Gold in the 1950s (Knott 2005, 246–50). I would define my role in this research as a participant-as-observer, as I tried to keep an impartial stance to the field. Of course, achieving this impartial stance when attending services was notably easier than when engaging in the interview process. In the latter case, I often asked my colleagues on the research team to interview informants or co-interview informants to whom I felt particularly close. At times, I found it challenging to separate the professional from the personal. While conducting the interviews, my colleagues and I often noticed that even when we did not share informants' opinions or reflections on praxis, we found ourselves sympathizing with them and regarding their arguments as rather understandable.

When working on the analysis, I found myself balancing between the emic and the etic²² interpretation of certain topics in relation to religious practice or observance, and I often caught myself connecting the narratives of my informants with my own ideas of Jewish identity or religious observance. In these cases, of course, I put even more conscious effort into distancing myself from my informants and from the local communities themselves.

Conducting the interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow much freedom and flexibility, and thus have a good knowledge-producing potential (Brinkmann 2014, 286). This was particularly true in the case of the current research, as its purpose was to acquire as much information as possible on vernacular practices and the personal lives of the informants. In this respect, semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions and more detailed reflections on certain subjects that arose during the interviews.

All informants whose interviews I used for my research were interviewed within the frame of the Minhag Finland research project. Thus, there were multiple factors to be taken into consideration. One of these was the matter of language. The interviews were conducted in multiple languages, mainly in English, Finnish, and Swedish, or occasionally in mixed languages. The language preference of the informants was always respected. In some cases, the informants wished to be interviewed in their mother tongues, sometimes they wished to be interviewed in the language that they felt could best describe their Jewish life, and sometimes they wished to be interviewed in the language(s) in which we had previously engaged in conversations.

2.2.6 Analytical approaches

Section 2.2.3 gave a detailed account of the usage of the historical and archival data. The aim of the current section is to address the analytical approach that was used in processing the interview material.

²² Emic perspectives refer to field research implemented from within the group that is under study, whereas etic perspectives refer to implementing research from outside of the studied group.

The approach applied in analyzing the interview data draws on the method of thematic analysis (TA). According to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006),²³ TA can be described as a method for identifying and analyzing themes as relevant units of analysis in a certain set of data. In this context, a theme is “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 1998, 161). TA allows the researcher to answer a wide range of research questions due to its versatile applicability. These types include, but are not limited to, questions related to experiences, understandings, perceptions, and practices (Braun, Clarke and Terry 2015, 98).

Themes identified by the researcher during analysis are often exclusively or primarily focused on either a semantic (overt), explicit level or a latent (covert), interpretative level (Braun and Clarke 2006; Braun, Clarke and Terry 2015, 98; Terry et al. 2017). Thematic analysis resembles qualitative content analysis, which is designed to analyze and interpret the meaning of certain data sets and to detect certain patterns in them (Boyatzis 1998; Schreier 2012). Content analysis, however, tends to give quantifiable results, whereas thematic analysis tends to create comprehensive narratives rather than singular phrases, which is typical for content analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Boyatzis 1998; Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas 2013).

Due to the extensive archival research that preceded the interview process, I was able to identify both explicit and implicit themes in the interviews. Therefore, I did not construct the themes exclusively on either the semantic or on the latent level, but by actively using the conscious and systematic combination of these. I found the great flexibility that TA allows for to be fruitful. (Braun and Clarke 2006; Braun, Clarke and Terry 2015). After identifying certain central themes that arose in my material, I restructured the content into a more presentable and generalizable format. My combination of semantic and latent coding resulted in a modified version of thematic analysis, optimized for this specific data set and the research questions guiding the analysis.

I found it important to go beyond the semantic levels of interpretation in my analysis because my goal was not only to describe the experiences of the informants, but also to locate and interpret them in connection to congregational regulations and legislative changes. These factors were sometimes explicitly, but more often implicitly, embedded in the interviews, and thus organizing the material along both semantic and latent codes facilitated the uncovering of such factors.

In this respect, the first step of my analytic strategy was to select the interviews from the Minhag Finland sample that I found relevant for my study (as detailed in Section 2.2.5 in *Selection of relevant informants for the present study*). After that, I examined the content of the interviews and identified

²³ There are two main schools of TA, depending on whether the researcher is working within the qualitative paradigm, with a more theoretically independent and flexible approach via organic coding processes, or whether the researcher is concerned with establishing coding reliability. For further reading, see Terry et al. 2017, 20.

common topics that occurred in many of the narratives. As I conducted most of the interviews used for this study and also transcribed a significant number of them, I was already thoroughly familiar with the majority of them. In cases where I was not the researcher responsible for collecting the data, I read and reread the transcripts several times.

My next step was to manually code the material by creating both latent and semantic codes. The outline of the qualitative interviews was influenced by the vernacular religion approach. Thus, I decided to implement a “top-down” or deductive approach (Braun, Clarke and Terry 2015, 97), so that my analysis was primarily guided by this theoretical framework. The semantic codes included explicit phrases such as “mixed marriage” or “conversionary in-marriage,” whereas when creating the codes I defined as latent, I tried to identify more implicit contents, which I coded as “Jewish education is important for continuity” or “not knowing how to celebrate the holidays.” These codes were not direct phrases from the data extract, but phrases that I attributed to the information I located in the data extracts, and my interpretation of this information. In the following stage, I moved on to creating the themes in the data. I consciously tried to cluster both overt and covert codes together, as I was aware that certain phrases, such as the above-mentioned “mixed marriage,” were understood differently by my informants depending on their own ideologies concerning e.g., what constitutes Jewishness. The main themes that arose from the material were *emotional connections to Jewish traditions, approaches of observing Jewish traditions, experiences of inclusion and exclusion and experiences of being and doing Jewish in Finland*. However, I found that these themes required further organization. Therefore, I structured the material in the format that I found the most suitable and easily presentable.

For Articles II and III, this meant organizing the themes into four main domains (see section 3.2). The four main domains—*Jewish holidays and traditions, kashrut*,²⁴ *Jewish education of (future) offspring, brit milah*—included discussions connecting all the major, interweaving themes (as stated in the paragraph above) that appeared in the material.

In case of Article IV, I decided to create a categorization that I modelled on Sylvia Barack Fishman’s *Choosing Jewish: Conversations about Conversions* (2006). Fishman divided her informants into three categories: *activist, accommodating, and ambivalent converts* (Fishman 2006, 17–37). As a result of my analysis, I decided to modify her categorization slightly and introduce my own category of *cultural converts* into the analysis of the Finnish data. Even if the size of my sample was nowhere close to Fishman’s, who drew on 103 interviews in her analysis, I found that my organization of the material modelled on her categorization would suit the analysis and the structure of the study well.

²⁴ Kosher dietary laws and restrictions.

2.2.7 Methodological and analytical limitations

Although I strove to make this dissertation as complete as possible, it naturally has its limitations. One is that the majority of the archival materials used in this study are primarily related to the Jewish Community of Helsinki, although they are naturally also relevant to the Jewish Community of Turku to a certain extent. One of the reasons for this disparity is that the Jewish Community of Helsinki is more than ten times bigger in size, and thus has significantly more documentation of past decades. This is probably the reason I failed to find equivalent documentation of the Jewish Community of Turku. According to the information and data I acquired, the Jewish Community of Helsinki and its policies affected the Jewish Community of Turku; e.g., congregants-to-be from Turku would take part in the conversions organized in Helsinki.

Furthermore, I found that interviewing both spouses in an intermarriage, and possibly their children, would be beneficial in future research. This, however, requires serious ethical considerations as it is very likely that the combined narratives of the spouses would make them easily identifiable. There are certain individuals in the current sample who are related to each other, sometimes through conversionary in-marriages. Yet, I decided not to address their connections for this exact reason. Nevertheless, in these cases I felt that the narratives complemented each other, and my understanding of their family construction, practices, and self-perceptions became deeper.

Due to the scope of the Minhag Finland project, only officially registered members of the two local Jewish congregations were interviewed for this research. I believe that conducting a study with informants who are not members of the currently existing Jewish communities but permanently reside in Finland and identify as Jewish is necessary in future research.

Lastly, I am aware that the flexibility of Thematic Analysis can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Nowell et al. 2017). However, these can be avoided by working through the entire data systematically (Braun and Clarke 2006), which is what I strove for when analyzing the interviews.

2.3 Data management and ethical considerations

2.3.1 Archival material

The archival material of the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku is deposited in the National Archives of Finland in Helsinki and Turku.

The material includes confidential information (Population Information Act, 661/2009, 28§), and permission from the Jewish communities is required to access it. At the beginning of the research process, I contacted the leadership of the two Jewish communities and asked for permission to study their archives, which was granted for six months at a time. Collecting the material from the National Archives was mainly carried out during the years 2017 and 2018. Occasionally, however, when the interview data benefitted from complementary

information, I revisited the archives. From January 2018 to June 2019, Simo Muir, Dóra Pataricza, and I organized, indexed, and catalogued the on-site archives of the Jewish Community of Helsinki and digitized a significant amount of its oldest documents. This project also contributed to the data collection of the Minhag Finland project. As a result of this effort, approximately seventeen linear meters of documents were put in unified order and stored in the on-site archive of the Jewish Community of Helsinki in acid-proof file holders. Approximately 1.5 linear meters of the seventeen linear meters of documents (including the oldest available documents on-site) were digitized and saved on a hard drive and a safety copy, which were handed over to the Jewish Community of Helsinki, which is responsible for the safe storage of the data.

The material I assessed in the archives of the Jewish Community of Stockholm is stored in the National Archives of Sweden. Studying the material required permission from the Jewish Community of Stockholm, as well as from the National Archives of Sweden. According to the Swedish law on ethics in research concerning humans (Lag 2003:460 *om etikprövning av forskning som avser människor*), any research that involves the study of sensitive personal information must be approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Swe. *Etikprövningsmyndigheten*). As the primary scope of my research was not Swedish Jewry, nor was my intention to publish sensitive information on individuals appearing in the material, I was granted permission to research the documents by both issuers.

2.3.2 Ethnographic material

The recorded interviews were transcribed partially by members of the project team and partially by contracted transcribers. During the project, the research team keeps copies of the interviews and their transcripts on the secure web server of Åbo Akademi University. At the end of the project, local copies are to be destroyed, and the material and the consent forms signed by the participants will be archived by the Finnish Literature Society (Fin. *Suomen Kirjallisuuden Seura*), SKS.²⁵

2.3.3 Ethical considerations

The data is particularly sensitive due to the small size of Finnish Jewry, the involvement of living informants in this research, and the data's nature and contents—such as information on the interviewees' ethnicity, religious affiliation, and ideological or political views. Participation in the research was voluntary and the informed consent of the informants was obtained at the start. They were informed in detail both in writing and orally about the objectives guiding the research and about their rights to integrity. No personal registers

²⁵ As the privacy notice of the SKS website states (PN), their processing of personal data is in accordance with sections 10 and 24 of the Personal Data Act (PDA) and articles 12 and 13 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

were kept during the process. Informants had the right to withdraw their consent from the research project at any time.

I find it important to highlight that, as a member of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, I paid particular attention not to disclose the identity of my informants. However, they not infrequently approached me to ask whether I had interviewed their friends or family members and to provide me with contact information for that purpose. Often, informants openly discussed their participation with others, revealing that they had been interviewed by the team, and many of them also told me certain stories and information “off the record” —as they often phrased it. I was also aware that the common practice of using pseudonyms and altering some details in the narratives would not be sufficient to prevent my informants from being unambiguously identified, especially when taking into consideration the small number of Jews living in Finland. One of my primary reasons for avoiding Hebrew names as aliases was to avoid the slightest possibility of revealing the Jewish names of the informants, and thus making them identifiable. Instead, I use e.g., Yiddish pseudonyms for male informants, pointing to the importance of Yiddish in the early history of the communities. In addition to the use of pseudonyms and the alteration of details, I often decided to omit certain information from my publications to protect my informants’ privacy and the studied group’s integrity.

3 Analysis and results

The current chapter presents the major findings of the study and is divided into four main sections.

The first one (3.1) primarily focuses on the content of the archival material and presents the key legislative changes of the early twentieth century. The section is divided into two subsections (3.1.1 and 3.1.2), the first one focusing on the first half of the twentieth century, whereas the second one focuses on the second half of the century up to the present.

The second and the third sections of the chapter (3.2 and 3.3) present the analysis of the ethnographic material with reflections on the legislative changes that, as the results presented in these sections point out, had overarching effects on the lives of the congregations and their members. The quotes I use in the text are meant to serve as examples within my analytic narrative and to illustrate the key elements of my informants' stories. Finally, in section 3.4 I present my conclusions for the overall study.

3.1 Finnish Jewish intermarriage from 1917 until the present

3.1.1 The first half of the twentieth century

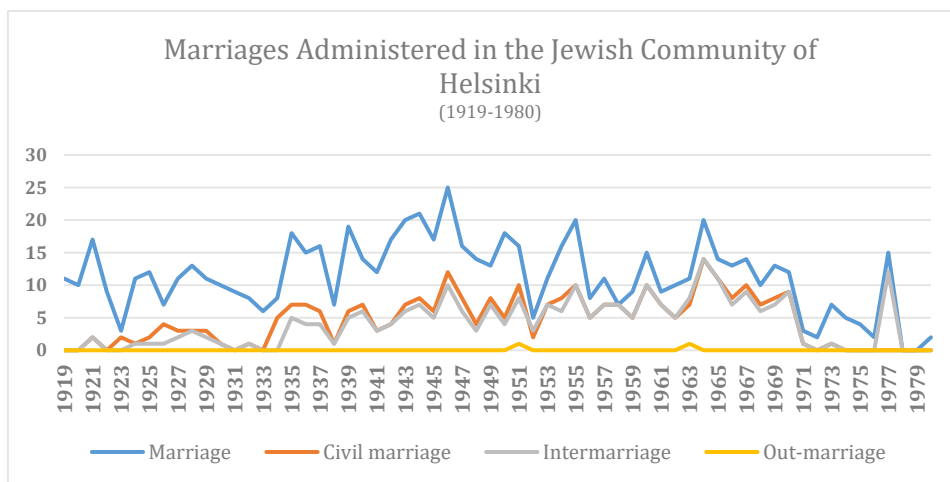
As highlighted in Article I, the means of both officiating intermarriages and perceiving intermarriages in the Finnish Jewish communities have changed significantly over the past century. The first steps of this change were connected to the sociopolitical transition that Finland went through as a result of its independence, which brought civil rights to Jewish citizens and allowed for various legislative changes.

The Russian Revolution of March 1917 created possibilities for the implementation of long-awaited legislative reforms in Finland. A committee was set up to deal with issues regarding the freedom of religion. The committee's aim was to provide full freedom of religious practice and equality of religious communities, with the separation of church and state in mind (Reijonen 1980; Kaila 1923). The revolution made it possible to reform marriage laws and introduce the institution of civil marriage.

The Finnish Civil Marriage Act (CMA) was prepared in the early twentieth century, accepted by the Finnish Parliament in 1911 (Pylkkänen 2012, 53), and came into power in the beginning of 1918.²⁶ The acceptance of the CMA occurred relatively late in Finland compared to other European or Nordic countries: the act on civil marriages was implemented in Norway in 1845, in Denmark in 1851, and in Sweden in 1908 (Pylkkänen 2012, 53). The CMA permits governmental officials (e.g., a judge, the president of a district court, the chairman of the

²⁶ I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Jyrki Knuutila for helping me out with my questions concerning the legislative changes in the marriage acts.

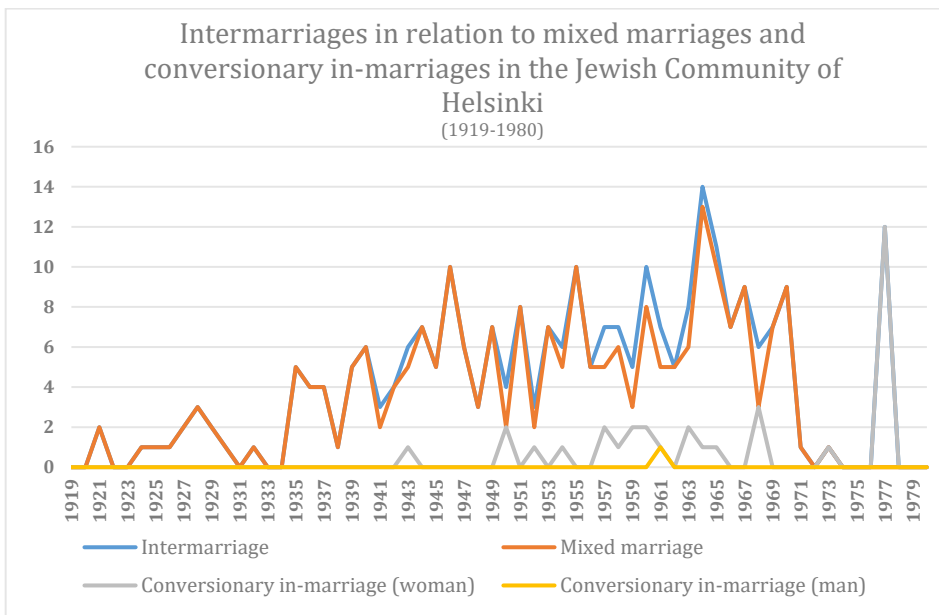
magistrate, etc.) to officiate a marriage. This was a crucial step in the history of intermarriages in the Finnish congregations, as Jews who wished to marry non-Jews were no longer required to convert to Christianity and were allowed to be wed in a civil marriage ceremony, as opposed to e.g., an Evangelical Lutheran marriage ceremony.



Graph 1. Marriages Administered in the Jewish Community of Helsinki (1919-1980)

Based on the entries in the marriage registry book of the Jewish Community of Helsinki (NA Vih), the first two mixed marriages (marriages in one spouse was a member of the congregation) were administered in the Community in 1921. The registry book appeared to be efficiently kept until the 1970s, when the entries became less thoroughly administered, most probably due to the introduction of the computer-based registry system. As *Graph 1* shows, both the civil marriage rates (*Civil marriage*) and the intermarriage rates (*Intermarriage*) started to rise significantly in the 1930s, and in the 1950s, intermarriages comprised almost half of all officiated marriages (*Marriage*) nearly every year. Civil marriages also include endogamous marriages of Jewish couples, who for various reasons opted for a civil service. I decided to introduce this category on its own, primarily to underline that the growing number of civil marriages may be connected to the previously mentioned secularizing tendencies in the communities. Most of the non-Jewish spouses were members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is not surprising considering that the majority of the country's population belonged to this church (NA Vih; Ak 1946–1980). I located only two conversionary out-marriages (*Out-marriage*) in the register book. In both cases, Jewish men married non-Jewish women and apparently converted to their wives' religion.²⁷

²⁷ In cases where individuals did not seem to hold membership in a Jewish community, or when they were members of other religious congregations, I considered them non-Jewish.



Graph 2. Intermarriages in relation to mixed marriages and conversionary in-marriages in the Jewish Community of Helsinki (1919-1980)

In most cases, both spouses kept their respective community memberships, which means that these marriages were mixed marriages. In thirty-six cases, however, non-Jewish women converted to Judaism—*Conversionary in-marriage (woman)*. In twelve of these cases, the religious marriage took place after an already officiated civil marriage. Some of these conversions, as well as the Jewish marriages of these couples that consequently followed the conversions, were officiated abroad. There are several records associated with Rabbi Emil Kronheim of Stockholm.²⁸ According to the available sources, there was only one man who probably²⁹ converted to Judaism in this period – *Conversionary in-marriage (man)*.³⁰ The vast majority of the members of the congregation who were Jewish by halakhah and engaged in intermarriage(s) were men. As demonstrated by the two graphs, there was a high number of conversionary in-marriages in the Community in 1977: out of fifteen marriages, twelve were conversionary in-marriages. This was due to the conversion Rabbi Mordechai Lanxner organized (as elaborated in Article IV and below). After studying the documents of the Finnish Jewish Archives, I found documentation of seven marriage that appeared to be conversionary in-marriages in 1977 (Ak 1977), but

²⁸ The rabbi of the Jewish Community of Stockholm (then Mosaic Community of Stockholm, Swe. Mosaiska församlingen i Stockholm) between 1926-1963. (SE/RA/6118)

²⁹ According to the congregational membership book (HrJFH), the person became a member of the Jewish Community of Helsinki as an adult. I concluded that he most probably converted to Judaism as an adult, as according to the sources neither of his parents were members of any Jewish community in Finland and he appeared to be of Finnish ancestry.

³⁰ When referring to these conversions, I solely refer to adulthood conversions. I did not consider any childhood conversions when constructing these graphs.

as they were not indicated in the registry book, I decided to omit them from the graph to keep it consistent. Based on data acquired from the informants of the Minhag Finland project, there were probably additional records of marriages (and conversions) that took place abroad, but were documented poorly. In my analysis, I attempted to compare the marriage registry book of the Jewish Community of Helsinki with that of the Jewish Community of Turku (MA IAa 1-2). The recordkeeping of the two registry books and of the other forms of documentation, such as extracts from population registry entries or notifications (MA), were inaccurate and inconsistent. However, an unclear document³¹ among the population registry documents of the Turku community proves that the first mixed marriage registered in the community took place in or earlier than 1920 (MA ICa).

Archival documents of the Jewish Community of Helsinki show that most of the endogamous marriages officiated in the Jewish Community of Helsinki were with other members of the same community, occasionally with members of the Jewish Community of Turku or the Jewish Community of Vyborg, and rarely with Jewish individuals who were not from any of these communities, but from other countries (NA Vih). The same source reveals that in addition to the growth of intermarriages within the community, civil marriages between congregants also became more frequent in the 1920s. Regardless of the inconsistent recordkeeping apparent in the documentation, there is a visible pattern of growth in both endogamous and non-endogamous civil marriages.

Orthodox Jews who adhere to stricter observance of Jewish law do not support the idea of intermarriages unless the non-Jewish spouse converts to Judaism (Hartman and Hartman 2010, 47; Sarna 2015). The growing number of intermarriages (and more specifically mixed marriages), therefore, was a clear sign of secularization in the congregations in general and in the Jewish Community of Helsinki in particular. This observation is in line with previous research about Finnish Jewry (see e.g., Ekholm 2013; Muir 2004; Muir 2019; Muir and Tuori 2019; Weintraub 2017). Interestingly, the theme of secularization was even picked up in Yiddish plays of the time, along with the stereotypes against Jews in society, and—as Laura Ekholm asserts—the *nouveaux riches* of the community (Ekholm 2013, 103; Muir 2011, 144–149; Muir 2019).

Archival sources and earlier studies point out that in the first half of the twentieth century, the leadership of the local Jewish communities failed to regard intermarriages as an option to enlarge the demographic base of their communities. In 1924, the board of the Helsinki congregation laid down the requirements for the appropriate rabbi candidate: an academically proficient

³¹ The document refers to terminating a marriage (“afslutat äktenskap”), but the phrasing of the document refers to a joyful event, which is described as an honor (“har den äran”), and the woman on the document is referred to as “miss” (“fröken”) which would be odd in the case of recording the termination of a marriage. The document was signed by Waldemar Löfman, the mayor of Turku at the time. Here, I would like to thank to Ruth Illman for sharing her thoughts on this particular document with me.

Orthodox Jewish rabbi (NA Bmm 22.4.1924). In accordance with those requirements, in 1931 the Polish Dr. Simon Federbusch became the rabbi of the community, a position he held until 1940 (Muir 2004, 34; Muir and Tuori 2019, 20–21).

As Article I describes in detail, due to the growing number of intermarriages, Federbusch issued a rabbinical statute, or *taqqanah* (Torvinen 1989, 127; Muir 2004, 5), that denied intermarried Jewish men the right to do *aliyah*,³² which is considered to be a great honor in Jewish communities. Denying this right to certain members resulted not only in numerous discussions and arguments within the Jewish Community of Helsinki, but also in extensive correspondence on the matter with various rabbinical authorities in the Nordic countries and in the State of Israel. The arguments and the correspondence lasted up until the 1970s, when the *taqqanah* and its restrictions were abolished and the Jewish Community of Helsinki decided to allow all adult male members to rise to the Torah (*Hakehila* 2/1999, 30). Congregational members of the two currently existing communities who remember this period frequently talked about it and its consequences, sometimes in the interviews, and sometimes in our private discussions. These reflections often entailed memories about the negative and discriminatory ways in which intermarried persons were viewed within both their communities and their families. The practice of declaring children who married out “dead” was mentioned in earlier studies of Finnish Jewish life (e.g., Smolar 2003, 57) and has also been addressed by some informants for this dissertation, in Article III in particular. The practice was also brought up by various informants of the Minhag Finland project. The social rejection these persons experienced often resulted in them withdrawing their membership from the congregation. Most of the persons who resigned were women (JCH HrJFH; Ak; NA Bmm; NA Hpl; NA Kii; YLE), which may also be the reason why most of the intermarriages administered in the marriage registry book of the Jewish Community of Helsinki were intermarriages between Jewish men, and non-Jewish women.

In 1933, the Board of the Jewish Community of Helsinki went as far as concluding that a person who withdraws their membership from the community and enters the civil registry essentially “withdraws from Judaism” (Swe. *utträde ur judendomen*) (NA Bmm 25.12.1933).³³ This implies that some congregants, at least at this point, regarded Jewish identity as equivalent to being a member of the community— regardless of whether the individuals in

³² Rising to the Torah in order to read it during a synagogue service.

³³ During the same board meeting, several other sanctions were also put in place, e.g., a person who left the community would also lose their place in the synagogue; the community would not circumcise children whose parents had left the congregation; those who left would not be allowed to have a marriage ceremony under Jewish law and would be excluded from all Jewish associations. A person who was not enrolled in the community at the time of their death would even run the risk of being buried outside the Jewish cemetery, even if they considered themselves Jewish. If a person who had previously withdrawn their membership wanted to join the congregation again, they were obliged to pay the taxes for all the years they had been absent (NA Bmm 2.1.1934).

question considered themselves Jewish or not when they left the congregation.

Intermarriages and members leaving the congregation due to experiences of rejection affected the Jewish Community of Helsinki significantly. Another change in legislation that was connected to intermarriages, described in detail in Article I but mentioned in all the other articles as well, was the ruling of the Freedom of Religion Act (UVL267/122). The FRA granted the right to practice religion in private and public, which was a significant step toward freedom of religion. According to paragraph 23 of the act, however, religious communities were obliged to keep a registry of their members and their members' children, unless the children officially belonged to other religious congregations (UVL267/122). The act traced affiliation of children whose parents belonged to different religious communities—or did not belong to any at all—patrilineally. This conflicted with the halakhah followed by the local communities, and thus caused significant problems in the communities in general and the Jewish Community of Helsinki in particular. This regulation remained in force until 1969, when the Finnish law of freedom of religion was changed³⁴ (LUM767/1969).³⁵

The FRA of 1922 affected the Jewish communities significantly. The question of registering halakhically non-Jewish children of mixed marriages and the issue of mixed marriages themselves were frequent subjects of discussion during the community board meetings of the time. The board of the Helsinki congregation repeatedly consulted the rabbis of Denmark and Sweden but also the Chief Rabbinate of Israel to seek advice in these matters (Bmm NA 17.06.1942; NA Kii; JCH 1960–1964, 1965–69; NA 1950–54, 1955–59; Czimbalmos 2018).

3.1.2 The second half of the twentieth century and the present

As the earlier graphs (Graph 2. in particular) display, by the 1950s the number of mixed marriages became high enough in the Jewish Community of Helsinki³⁶ for the board to address the registration issue again. The community was in regular contact with other Nordic Jewish communities regarding a variety of matters throughout the century (NA Kii; JCH 1960–1964, 1965–69; NA 1950–54, 1955–59; SE RA). In this case, they asked Rabbi Berlinger³⁷ to lay out the principles of conversion to Judaism (NA Bmm 20.4.1950) and sought advice from

³⁴ Unfortunately, I failed to find the reason for introducing this particular change in the Freedom of Religion Act. However, I cannot exclude the possibility that the administrative difficulty faced by the Jewish congregations was a reason for the change.

³⁵ The law was revised again in 2003 and now states that until the child turns twelve years old, the parents decide on the child's religious affiliation together. After this, joining a religious community must be the mutual decision of the child and the parents (UVL2003/453).

³⁶ The situation was most likely similar in the Jewish Community of Turku. However, I did not find sufficient information on their statistics.

³⁷ Elieser Berlinger was the rabbi of the Mosaic Community of Malmö (Swe. Mosaiska Församlingen i Malmö) at the time. He worked as a rabbi of the Jewish Community of Helsinki between 1946–1951.

other rabbinical entities concerning the case of halakhically non-Jewish children (NA Bmm 20.2.1951).

As a result of the correspondence, the community decided to register children in the membership books but to specifically mark the cases in which children were not halakhically Jewish (NA Bmm 15.4.1951). Multiple minutes from board meetings of this period verify that several individuals decided to leave the congregation during these years (e.g., NA Bmm 25.12.1933, 29.12.1952). This may have been a result of the community's taxation policy, but could very well have been connected to other matters, e.g., the conflicts that arose as results of intermarriages. Often the minutes do not specify reasons for leaving the congregation. In the following years, several entries were made in the membership book that indicated the religious status of the children as "not Jewish" (Swe. *icke jude/icke judinna*) (JCH HrJFH). In most of these instances, the board decided on the matters individually (NA Bmm 12.10.1953; 2.11.1953). Halakhically non-Jewish male children were circumcised, which was considered necessary to prepare them for future conversion to Judaism (NA Bmm 15.3.1954). Rabbi Kurt Wilhelm of Stockholm, who advised the Jewish Community of Helsinki to comply with Finnish law, believed it was impossible to impose halakhah on every member of a congregation. He advised the Helsinki congregation to be tolerant as they could not afford to lose a single Jew (NA Kii). Soon enough, the congregations developed a protocol that allowed for childhood conversions without the mother's conversion (Na Bmm 3.5.1954).

The protocol in question affected the members' perceptions of Jewishness. It is hard to know with certainty what came first: the change of attitude among the congregants toward intermarriages or the halakhic resolution toward the issue of patrilineal descent. In any case, the result was that the community gradually became more welcoming toward intermarried members and their spouses and even became eager to facilitate the conversions of the (future) spouses. In 1972, the board of the Helsinki congregation concluded that parents must agree in a written agreement about the Jewish upbringing of the children of intermarriages (NA Bmm 29.8.1972). The minutes and the protocol refer to intermarriages where the mother of the child is not Jewish according to halakhah. In 1973, the protocol of 1954 was reaffirmed by the Helsinki congregation (NA Bmm 3.4.1973). This is a particularly interesting development, considering that by 1973, the FRA had changed: from 1970, the child was to follow their mother's religious affiliation, unless otherwise decided by the parents in a written statement (LUM767/1969). The congregation therefore was no longer legally required to register halakhically non-Jewish children in the membership books. Most probably, due to the high number of individuals affected, the practice was so embedded in the everyday life of the congregation that its leadership opted not to change it. In addition, the reaffirmation of the protocol offered a tool for the congregations to secure the involvement of intermarried Jewish men and their children in the community, which may not have been possible if the mothers of the children were obliged to convert to Judaism together with their children. The system has

remained in practice ever since. The interplay between the “official,” “folk,” and “individual” (Bowman 2004, 6) was therefore already present on all levels of congregational practices: “official” religion as the halakhah, “folk” religion in the form of the commonly accepted considerations and procedures and “individual” religion in the personal interpretations certain congregants supported regarding what constitutes Jewishness. As Article I and many informants of the Minhag Finland project pointed out, the general perception of congregants attributed (and still attributes) high importance to patrilineal ancestry.

In the same year, the Hungarian Mordechai Lanxner became the rabbi of the Helsinki congregation. During his term, synagogue services suffered from a lack of participants. The congregation often had difficulty establishing a *minyan*,³⁸ and the intermarriage rates still caused frequent debates in the community (Muir 2004; Muir and Tuori 2019). This perhaps was one of the main reasons that Lanxner organized a *bet din* in 1977, for which he invited Rabbi Mordechai Zeits and Rabbi Joseph Howard from the Corporation of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Shearit Israel in Montreal, Canada. This resulted in fifteen to eighteen conversions, mostly of wives and children of congregants, in 1977, as described in both Articles I and IV. Lanxner’s successor, Rabbi Schwarz, referred to the conversions that took place in the spring of 1977 as the “conversions that saved the community.” He implied that had the women not converted to Judaism in 1977, many members of the congregations would not be Jewish by congregational halakhic standards. Schwarz himself also organized adulthood conversions in the community in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and without a doubt, these conversions contributed to an increase in membership of both the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku. Despite the more open attitudes toward adulthood conversions, however, both the archival sources and the interviews indicate that it still took a while for converted individuals to be widely accepted or well received by the general congregational membership. Nevertheless, their rejection was not as harsh as in the first half of the twentieth century.

The examples of the current and the previous section show that the initial setup of defining a child’s religious affiliation based on their father’s, determined by the law of 1922, defined the field in which negotiations and re-evaluations of religious practices started as “official religion” (Bowman 2004, 6) dictated by the Orthodox halakhah. In the perception of the congregants however, their ability to observe Jewish law was threatened by Finnish legislation. The congregations had to define and redefine their boundaries while balancing between the triangle of the Orthodox halakhah, the Finnish legislation, and the persistence of their members, who had formed their own ideas of Judaism and Jewish practices. The interplay between these three led to a shift in general congregational attitudes. Several informants of the Minhag Finland project suggested—either implicitly or explicitly—that patrilineal ancestry, though not officially accepted in the congregations, is still an important marker of Jewishness in the communities. This, I argue, is a result of the FRA of 1922 and the custom of converting children

³⁸ A quorum of ten Jewish men required for public worship.

of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers without demanding the conversion of the mothers. Regardless of this non-requirement, after Lanxner's pioneering mass conversion, conversions and group conversions of both adults and children became regular in the Jewish Community of Helsinki. Individuals who were to join either the Helsinki or the Turku congregations often took part in them after fulfilling the prerequisites of the rabbi at the time.

As several informants of the Minhag Finland project pointed out, and as was noted in previous works as well (e.g., Weintraub 2017; Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2019; Illman 2019), today, local Finnish Jewish communities are far from homogenous. In the 1990s, an influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union affected the congregations (Weintraub 2017) and over the following two decades, a growing number of Israeli and other expats and immigrants joined the Jewish Community of Helsinki. Many of these individuals are in intermarriages. The exact number of intermarriages (either conversionary intermarriages or mixed marriages) remains unknown, due to the lack of available statistical information. It is, however, clear from the interview data that discussions around the various implications of intermarriages are still frequent in the congregations. This is showcased by e.g., the recent change in admission policies for halakhically Jewish non-circumcised male children, which will be mentioned later, in e.g., section 3.2.

Article IV specifically focuses on conversionary in-marriages in the congregation. As elaborated in detail in the article, and as mentioned earlier, current conversion policies and perceptions of *gerim*³⁹ are direct results of the rabbinical legislation that was initiated in the Jewish Community of Helsinki in the 1950s and then reaffirmed in 1973. In the article, I also point out that owing to the different rabbis who worked in the congregations and the demographic changes that took place over the decades, several individuals with different, not necessarily Orthodox Jewish backgrounds were able to join the communities, often after conversions that were officiated by both Orthodox and non-Orthodox rabbinical courts.

In this section, I gave a detailed account of the history of Finnish Jewish intermarriages from 1917 to the present. In addition to pointing out the legislative changes in Finland after its independence in 1917, such as the CMA and FRA, I highlighted the effects they had on the congregations. These effects included the rising number of intermarriages, which gave rise to several problems in the Jewish Community of Helsinki in particular. One of these issues was the *taqqanah* of Rabbi Simon Federbusch that denied intermarried male congregants the right to do *aliyah* to the Torah. A second issue is how halakhically non-Jewish children of intermarriages were recorded in the membership books of the congregations. The flexible approaches toward intermarriages and conversions that arose from the controversial legal situation in the local Jewish communities often allowed for a renegotiation of boundaries and for applying creative solutions that contributed to the

³⁹ Converts.

preservation of Finnish Jewry and to ensuring Jewish continuity. This will be discussed in greater detail in the upcoming sections.

3.2 Domains of vernacular Judaism

As I already pointed out in section 2.2.6, the main themes that arose from the ethnographic material were *emotional connections to Jewish traditions, approaches of observing Jewish traditions, experiences of inclusion and exclusion and experiences of being and doing Jewish in Finland*.

However, I found that these themes required further organization. I decided to organize the analyzed material into the format that I found the most suitable and easily presentable. The analysis therefore is presented in sections 3.2 in four main domains (see below), and in and section 3.3 along a categorization similar to that of Sylvia Barack Fishman's (2006) of Jewish converts.

3.2.1 The four versus three domains

Vernacular practices ought to be studied in context, with sensitivity to local and social hierarchies (Fingerroos, Hämäläinen and Savolainen 2020, 5–6; Illman and Czibalmos 2020). In the current case, the context is defined not only by the officially Orthodox Jewish setting, but also by the minority status of the congregations and their congregants and the effects Finnish legislation.

However, one should not disregard the gender-traditional nature of Orthodox Judaism as a crucial contextual attribute. In gender-traditional religions, doctrinal traditions are often dominated by men (Woodhead 2007a, 2007b). Jewish men—who traditionally have more liturgical obligations and rights—appear to have been in a more powerful position in their communities, as Finnish laws were on their side. Intermarried Jewish women, in theory, had the right to agree to enroll their halakhically Jewish children in Jewish communities, but as several examples in the membership registry books show, they often did not want to or failed to do so (JCH HrJFH, Ak). In most cases, the reasons behind their choices remain unknown as they were not documented. Several sources suggest (e.g., YLE, Banik and Ekholm 2019) that women who married out were not welcome within the congregations anymore. This was confirmed by many informants as well. The possibility that their husbands did not agree on certain matters, such as the compulsory circumcision of their common children, cannot be excluded either. This is not to say that intermarried men were entirely positively affected by the legislative changes. The historical documents—presented in Article I, and in the previous chapter—support the conclusion that intermarried men were denied the right to perform their liturgical obligations in the Jewish Community of Helsinki and also suffered a loss of power within their communities. Their obligations, however, were mainly connected to practices that were key to maintaining an active (non-egalitarian) Orthodox Jewish congregation. In intermarried men's narratives of their vernacular Jewish lives, they became “agents of change” (Goldstein 2015, 136) in their communities. This

resulted in the establishment of a system that contributed to them regaining power within the communities.

When informants discussed practices connected to religious traditions, they often talked about influences from the surrounding Finnish society as factors that affected their practices significantly. Perhaps this shaped the main themes that occurred in their narratives. In practice, as Rachel Bernstein and Sylvia Barack Fishman suggest, Jewish observance requires commitments, which are often balanced with everyday responsibilities (Bernstein and Fishman 2015). One female informant explicitly addressed this issue when talking about the difficulties of purchasing kosher meat, which she opted not to do:

... it's about logistics. I think a lot about it. I mean, if you have kids, you work ... I was just thinking of my life. [...] [Taking the] kids to school, kids to daycare ... me to work ... This, that, hobby, stuff ... I mean, it wouldn't be sustainable to have to go to one shop only to get what you need.

When looking at observance on a more abstract level, it is apparent that navigating between the needs of different persons and practices within a household—especially if those are connected to religious identifications—can result in problematic, uncomfortable situations (Mehta 2020). My informants were clearly affected by the Finnish context; some specifically talked about both it and everyday negotiations with their partners. The conflicts that may have occurred, however, gained little space in their narratives. This is not to imply that they did not exist. Female informants addressed the negotiations with their spouses and occasionally reflected on aspects they considered hard for their spouses to accept. Michal, for example, talked about the way her husband felt about the circumcision of their son, and later his *bar mitzvah*, as follows:

The circumcision [of our son] was very difficult for him. [...] And then, when our son did his *bar mitzvah*, it was very difficult for him, and I thought that he is not going to participate, but then he came after all, since our son was so important to him and he loved him so much, that he came after all. But he was very mad, because I kind of made a pact with G-d in a way, and he was a big atheist.

The women often expressed the desire to keep “equality”—in their words—between themselves and their husbands in mind and did not want Judaism to be overrepresented in their households.

After having identified the main themes of the interview material, I realized that they encompassed four key domains of vernacular Judaism in the case of women who married out (Article II). Out of these, three domains were also clearly present and touched upon by men (Article III). These domains were not necessarily explicitly stated by the informants in their current forms; however, they were discussed in relation to the four overarching themes I identified. These domains, which were connected to informants’ approaches of forming their Jewish lives and negotiating their practices as well as their Jewish identities, were present in the informants’ narratives in different ways.

In addition to Jewish holidays and traditions, kashrut, and Jewish education of (future) offspring—which both men and women talked about—women often specifically addressed the subject of brit milah when talking about Jewish traditions. These domains are obviously interconnected and in certain cases overlap so that it is not entirely possible to separate them from one another. However, I opted for this categorization as it was based on the narratives of my informants themselves. Naturally, the thread of the conversations and the way my informants presented their stories were partially defined by the design of the interview frame. This supported my intention to structure the material for better readability. The core informants often discussed everyday Jewish traditions (which also included some life-cycle events), circumcision, and kashrut as if they were different categories, although they are essentially part of the same (religious) system. In addition to the domains in which I structured the material, I found that matters connected to gender and gender-traditional practices were not articulated in the narratives per se, but were present in more latent ways in the interviews. Gender is always part of the dynamics in heterosexual “interfaith” families—as argued by Mehta—even though the role of gender differs from family to family, resulting in different family configurations (Mehta 2020, 7–8), as in the cases I describe.

3.2.2 Jewish holidays and traditions

As described in detail mainly in Article II, I found that among my informants, the domain of Jewish holidays and traditions most readily facilitated creative solutions in terms of religious or cultural practices. This is no surprise, considering the diversity of the local communities, represented particularly by the female informants. While most of my informants had Cantonist ancestry, some of them were raised in different traditions, outside of Finland, or in different environments.

Jewish holidays and traditions appeared to be the broadest domain of my informants’ practices, especially in the case of female informants. I found women to be significantly more flexible and creative with their traditions than their male counterparts. Several reasons for this can be assumed. Firstly, many women who were creative in their practices were brought up in mixed marriages themselves, and they may not have been familiar with the means of practicing certain traditions in the traditionally accepted Orthodox way. In the narratives of my female informants, practices were tied to competences and knowledge. Thus, if one does not feel competent enough, one may opt for creative solutions or omit practices altogether. As one informant, Yehudit, addressed:

I think [having our own traditions] is something that we would like to have more, but it’s like we don’t have all the know-how either, or when we should do what basically. We talk a lot about that we would love to have our own interpretation of *Shabbes*, like that we have people over for food many times a week anyway. It would be nice to make it somehow above the ordinary.

Women have significantly fewer liturgical and religious obligations than men—according to non-egalitarian Orthodox Jewish traditions—and thus, one of the links through which women could connect to Judaism was their homes and private practice. Men, on the other hand, have several possibilities to perform Judaism within the premises of their congregations. Even if they do not live an Orthodox Jewish life—as none of my informants claimed to do—they can take active roles in the services. They are counted in the *minyán* and can go up to the Torah to do *aliyah*, etc. Thus, the need for creative solutions might not be as acute for them as for the intermarried women.

Another reason I associate with this difference is the traditional division of domestic labor in most Jewish households, described in earlier research on intermarried couples (e.g., McGinity 2009, 2014; Thompson 2013). The age difference between the male and female informants may also have affected some of their approaches, especially those connected to the gender-traditional division of household labor. The youngest female informants were born in the 1980s, the youngest male informants in the late 1960s. As indicated in Section 2.2.5 however, intermarried men under the age of 30 were underrepresented in the sample. Generally, older informants appeared to be more traditional when dividing household labor. Thus, the lack of a certain cohort of men may have affected the results slightly.

Neither the male nor the female informants rejected Judaism altogether when marrying out, nor did they take on entirely new practices. Their practices do not move on the “scale of official–unofficial” (Bowman and Valk 2012, 7). Women appeared to have “creatively straddled” (Kupari and Vuola, 2020, 8) traditions that were either preferred or unappreciated by them. Most of them—the older informants in particular—refrained from practicing non-Jewish traditions in their homes, but often decided to attend family events with their extended non-Jewish families. Many of them attributed deep emotions to Judaism and Jewish practice, partially connected to their childhood, and thus wanted to keep their connections to these. Basya, one of the youngest female informants, contrasted her emotions to her rationality when trying to explain the changes in her connections to Jewish practices immediately before and after the marriage to her husband:

I think in a way I almost tricked him [my husband] a little bit, because when I met him, I just happened not to be very interested in these things. So, he thought he was getting one thing, but then when we got married, suddenly [I started to have] all of these absolutely absurd [Jewishly related] demands, that are very hard to justify if you don't even have a personal faith.

Some of these emotional connections were perhaps among the driving forces that urged the women to come up with remarkably creative, often ambiguous, but powerful practices. According to Primiano, the presence of creative, ambiguous, and powerful approaches aligns well with the defining features of vernacular religion (Primiano 2012). This phenomenon was already addressed in previous research by Orit Avishai (2008), who suggests that “observance is best explained by the notion of religious conduct as a mode of being, a

performance of religious identity their Jewish identities” (Avishai 2008, 410). As explicitly stated by an earlier quoted informant, Michal: “our traditions are so strong, and they somehow build this [Jewish] identity.”

One particularly frequent topic in the women’s narratives was life-cycle events, which often seemed to have urged them to “do Judaism” in ways they perceived—either explicitly or implicitly—as irrational or nostalgic. This sense of irrationality and feeling of nostalgia point to their emotions connected to Judaism and Jewish practices and may very well be interpreted as the above indicated “driving forces” behind their ambiguous, creative, and powerful practices. Doing Jewish at wedding ceremonies was often mentioned by them: having the *chuppah*⁴⁰ and breaking the glass seemed to be of special importance. Only one informant, Talia, analyzed the meaning of this tradition in depth and found interpretations of the practice that both she and her husband felt were relatable.⁴¹

... you know, this kind of idea of *tikkun olam*⁴², that you can devote yourself to fixing what’s broken... for us, that felt like an interpretation that made a lot of sense.

Others wanted their weddings to only resemble a Jewish ceremony: they kept the glass-breaking element as it was, stomping on it, or modified it slightly, but did not think about the background or the meaning of this tradition. Some women decided to have only a civil ceremony. One informant wanted to have the reception, but not the ceremony itself, in her congregation, to be able to invite guests who require kosher dining.

Women who had not lived in Finland all their lives often stated that the changes brought into their lives as they relocated to Finland urged them to adjust some of their practices—especially when their status shifted from the majority to a minority position. These adjustments also resulted in creativity as their usual ways of practicing were impossible in Finland, either because of the general infrastructure or because of their minority status.

McGinity pointed out in her study (2014) that religious and cultural heritage increases intermarried Jewish men’s ability to raise Jewish children, equally affectively as intermarried Jewish women. In the current study, male informants, in contrast to female informants performed Jewish traditions with a much more, —in their words— “traditional” approach and connected to their cultural heritage in a less flexible way than their female counterparts. One male informant, Froim, asserted the following when talking about celebrating Pesach and Rosh Hashana:

... we celebrate it in the very traditional way that we celebrated it already when we were small children at our grandparents’ home.

⁴⁰ A four-legged canopy, under which a Jewish couple stands during their wedding ceremony.

⁴¹ The glass-breaking at the wedding ceremony is mostly associated with remembering the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

⁴² A concept defined by acts of kindness performed to perfect or repair the world in the Jewish tradition.

This seems to have strengthened the men’s sense of “being Jewish.” As opposed to many women, none of them talked about a perceived lack of knowledge regarding Jewish practices. Only minor adjustments were usually mentioned, such as shortening the Pesach seder or “transforming the Christmas calendar into a Hanukkah calendar” — as an informant recalled. Most men represented in the study grew up in Finland, but the ones who did not also addressed the matter of becoming a minority and thus feeling a growing need to do Jewish, as Liebel said:

... [in Israel] you don’t need to think about Judaism. It’s a part of life. You don’t need to know what day [holiday] is today or what[ever]. Everything is in the air and around you and is surrounding you, and then, only when you leave Israel, you understand, [that] you need to try.

These men spoke about conscious efforts and their feelings of responsibility to observe certain holidays, which they considered as essential to maintain their connections to Jewishness and Jewish identity. This required a greater effort in Finland than it had when they lived in an environment surrounded by mainly Jews. Yet, they referred positively to the possibility of forming personal traditions. Again, Liebel explicitly described the creative approaches he had developed: for instance, he transformed the *Pesach* seder so that his family discussed themes that are relevant from a contemporary perspective instead of reading the *Haggadah*⁴³ and conducting the seder in the traditional way. His choices were not motivated by a lack of knowledge but were conscious reflections on his part within the frame of Jewish holidays. He also underlined the role of his non-Jewish wife, whom his children “consider to be more Jewish” than he is, due to her familiarity with Jewish practices, holidays, and traditions in general.

The other shift that made informants reevaluate their traditions was connected to their children. Many became more engaged in doing Jewish when their children were enrolled in Jewish educational institutions or were coming to their *bonei mitzvot* ages.⁴⁴ A male informant said that he would have felt “hypocritical” not to observe at least certain holidays or commandments when his children were approaching their coming-of-age ceremonies. In a longitudinal study of Jewish families, Alex Pomson and Randal F. Schnoor (2018) point out that certain family celebrations seem to change and become less prominent in Jewish families when the children reach a certain age or grow up (2018, 93–110). This reverse shift of omitting certain practices or ceasing to celebrate certain holidays after children have passed through the Jewish school system or moved away from home was also present in the narratives of my informants.

⁴³The Haggadah is the text that sets the order of the Passover (Pesach) seder. Reading the Haggadah at the seder table is a fulfillment of the commandment “tell your child” connected to the holiday. The story in the Haggadah reiterates the exodus from Egypt.

⁴⁴ The coming-of-age ceremonies of Jewish children. Bar mitzvah refers to the coming-of-age ritual for boys at the age of thirteen, and *bat mitzvah* to the coming-of-age ceremony of girls at the age of twelve in Orthodox Jewish communities.

One strikingly big difference between the male and the female informants within the domain of Jewish holidays was the gendered nature of Jewish conversions: many of the male informants had wives who had converted to Judaism. Among the many other effects that this may have had on their families, it may also have contributed to the lack of creativity in the families of these Jewish-born men regarding Jewish holidays and practices. Men whose wives converted to Judaism very often said that after their conversions, their wives became stricter about what to do and how to do it during the holidays.

... let's say, that she [Dovid's wife] keeps them [the commandments related to Shabbat] and we cheat a bit. But theoretically, we keep *Shabbat* together on Friday [evening] and on Saturday of course. My wife often goes to the synagogue on Saturday, but we [Dovid and his child] don't go as often as she does.

The wives often put serious efforts into their studies and also decided to take up their husband's family traditions. I will elaborate further on conversionary in-marriages later in the analysis, drawing on Article IV, which explored these matters in depth.

3.2.3 Kashrut

Food and kashrut stand out as a domain of negotiations that is truly present in the everyday lives of (Finnish) Jewry. Jewish food choices are often flexible, temporary, situationally variable, and serve as intentional expressions of one's identity. The memories connected to food are often charged with emotions (Brumberg-Kraus 2018, 4–7). The emotional connection to certain dishes was often expressed by my informants, sometimes more explicitly, sometimes by recalling fond childhood memories.

Kosher meat is not only expensive and hard to find in Finland, but also mostly comes as frozen, and, hence, is of poor quality.⁴⁵ The number of products that are certified and have a *heksher*⁴⁶ on them is also limited. However, products that can be considered kosher—without a *heksher*—are available in most of the basic stores. Today there are also suppliers that provide kosher products online. In 2020, one of the biggest supermarket chains started to sell certain kosher products (including meat). Still, the availability of these products is significantly more limited than in countries where there is a bigger Jewish minority (Pataricza 2019).

Most informants addressed the issue of the limited availability of kosher products. However, it is also evident in their narratives that most of them did not express a real demand for kosher groceries, or even attempt to keep kosher to any extent. As Deborah said:

I have been thinking that I should have more of those [Jewish] traditions. But then somehow, they were kind of left in the background. But for instance [to

⁴⁵ Kosher slaughter is illegal in Finland since 1996 (ESL 1996/247).

⁴⁶ A rabbinical product certification that is placed on items that qualify to conform the requirements of the Jewish law.

keep] more kosher, maybe not kosher, but that there is no pork. And then I was wondering why we have pork at home.

Some informants mentioned that they only purchase kosher meat for holidays, and some opted for the more widely available halal products. The majority of the male and female informants alike were flexible with kosher dietary restrictions. This is a general tendency among Finnish Jewry, as previous research has already highlighted (Pataricza 2019). Nevertheless, male informants were also more traditional in this regard, and reported buying kosher meat at least for the bigger Jewish holidays, such as the High Holidays or Pesach. Most of them seemed aware of the kashrut laws at least to a certain extent. As in the previous domain, however, many of the men reflected on the influence of their spouses' conversion when forming their dietary practices and suggested that they shifted to keeping kosher or keeping stricter kosher after the conversion of their spouses. They noticed a similar tendency when their children were born.

Female informants, on the other hand, did not talk about such measures. Older women seemed to be stricter, or at least more traditional, as I describe in detail in Article II. Most informants talked about pork as a mark of a dietary boundary, something that they would never even consider eating, which strengthened their self-perception as Jews. Even when they did not consume pork, however, most of them did not refrain from other notably *treif*⁴⁷ foods, such as shellfish, which are especially popular among Swedish-speaking Finns. Individuals who were not only Jewish, but also native Swedish speakers often talked about consuming crab, shrimp, or oysters, which are not considered to be kosher by any Jewish standard. The informants were aware of this:

We celebrate Hanukkah, and then we always have the same foods. ... I can say that that's maybe our family's thing, unfortunately, it [the family's own tradition] doesn't even fulfill the *kosher* criteria. But for us, it's like our Jewish tradition. So, we begin with oysters.

Just like there are a variety of levels of doing Jewish, there are a variety of levels of "eating Jewish" as well. There is no one way of keeping kosher, and not keeping kosher does not necessarily mean that one disregards one's Jewish identity and ancestry altogether. Engaging in consuming *selective treif* (Brumberg-Kraus 2018, 123) meals and ingredients was an approach favored by many. Certain recipes and dishes eaten during the holidays—whether made of kosher ingredients or not—were of special importance to both male and female informants, as they often brought up childhood memories and thus held emotional importance (see Articles II and III). They were not only important links to their family's traditions but often also linked them to or detached them from their Finnish Jewish communities. The narrative of detachment was stressed in interviews where the informants noted that the food they connect to certain holidays or events are not available in Finland (anymore). Opting for vegetarian or vegan dishes when eating out was also mentioned as a "solution" to the problem of finding kosher options. Often, the primary reasons were ethical

⁴⁷ Unkosher.

considerations connected to animal welfare and environmentalism, but not necessarily to religious convictions.

3.2.4 Jewish education of (future) offspring

Jewish identity is often said to be strengthened by receiving formal Jewish education (Cohen 1974; Cohen 1995). Many informants both in Article II and III shared this opinion and often stated that without attending Jewish school, for instance, their children “are not Jewish children.”

Almost all of them found it especially important to enroll their children in the only existing Jewish daycare, Jewish kindergarten, or Jewish school in Helsinki. The Jewish Community of Turku, which is smaller in size and has a demographic base primarily constituted by elderly congregants, does not run any formal educational institutions. Thus, congregants from Turku often reflected only on the lack of institutions in their city. In the case of the Helsinki, the Jewish daycare is run by Chabad Lubavitch, and the kindergarten and the school are run by the Jewish Community of Helsinki. Articles II and III address the fact that the Jewish Community of Helsinki did not allow uncircumcised male children to be registered in the congregation or in its educational institutions up until March 2018 (Hakehila 1/2018, 58). The requirement of circumcision for converting to Judaism⁴⁸ or for joining to the Jewish Community of Helsinki as a child was already stated in the protocol the congregation issued in 1973 (NA Bmm 3.4.1973). The protocol limited the number of children who were able to access formal Jewish education. *Minhag Finland* informants often referred to the problematic nature of this ruling, not only from the perspective of halakhically uncircumcised Jewish children (and adults), but also from the perspective of inequality between male and female siblings, where male children will inevitably be excluded from the school and from certain activities within the congregation.

In the interview material, Jewish education was primarily seen as a means to ensure Jewish continuity among the children of intermarried couples but also as an opportunity to expand parents’ own knowledge about Jewish holidays and traditions. They—mainly women—were frequently impressed by how their children learned different rituals and blessings. Abigail, for instance, called her children “praying robots,” as they knew how to recite certain prayers better than she herself did.

Enrolling children to Jewish institutions, or having children in general, often generated a shift in informants’ own approaches and made them introduce stricter measures of observance, as mentioned earlier. Becoming a father was said to create a need to ensure Jewish continuity and to strengthen their Jewish identity, or to awaken it, as McGinity (2014) found in her study as well. This was often connected to the “obligatory” conversion of their children, since most were not considered Jewish due to their mother’s status, if their mother’s conversion took place after their birth. As a result of the commitment to provide their children with a formal Jewish education and to raise them Jewish in general,

⁴⁸ For further reading on the religious requirements of conversion to Judaism, see Finkelstein 2003.

intermarried couples were “predisposed to Jewish engagement” (Krasner 2015, 102). Talking about the few Jewish family members she has in Finland, Naomi states:

It was important for me to have the children come to this school [the Jewish school], and through that, then, it's been easier to sort of observe certain holidays and celebrate them.

Multiple informants said that when their children were small, their lives were centered around Jewish cultural (and religious) traditions and their cycles. Most men and women alike believed that in a country where Jews constitute such a small minority, children would not feel any connection to their Jewish roots unless they were enrolled in the Jewish school.

There were examples of both males and females who could not enroll their children into the school or could not have done so had they had children—either because they were halakhically not Jewish (in the case of children of male informants) or because they were not circumcised (in the case of children of female informants). All of them, however, thought that Judaism was meaningful for their children, and they believed that their children have a sense of Jewish identity which was of particular importance to them.

Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish.⁴⁹ The Swedish-speaking population comprises approximately 5 percent, whereas the size of the native Finnish speakers is approximately 87 percent (InfoFinland). The Jewish minority of Finland has traditionally been Swedish speaking. Thus, it is not surprising that a crucial aspect of the negotiations connected to Jewish schooling was articulated as a “double minority status” as phrased and experienced by some informants. This was particularly addressed by female core informants of this study (as addressed in Article II in depth). Being Jewish and being a Swedish-speaking Finn were both important aspects of their lives. The Jewish school is a Finnish-language institution, and hence, for some of them it was not easy to decide to enroll children into the school, especially if their spouse was also a Swedish speaker. For this reason, one informant specifically decided not to enroll her children in the Jewish school, which she would have otherwise considered. A male informant, Aizik, also addressed this matter briefly: his wife was a Swedish speaker who converted to Judaism and agreed to enroll their common children in the Jewish school but said this was “exceptionally hard” for her. Yet, perhaps partially because of her conversion, Jewish education may also have held a special importance for her.

3.2.5 Brit milah

Brit milah, the circumcision of Jewish boys and men, is often regarded as one of the most evident acts of Jewish belonging worldwide. Theologically, it is considered to be the sign of the covenant between the Jews and God, yet even secular Jews often opt for it.

⁴⁹ See: Language Act (Språklag) 6.6.2003/423 §5.1.

This was the only domain that presented itself in the discussions with female informants but was almost entirely missing—with one exception—from the interviews with male informants. According to Naomi Schaefer Riley, birth ceremonies often cause major disagreements among intermarried couples (Riley 2013, 87). Interestingly, very few of my informants suggested that circumcision would have caused major disagreements with their spouses, even though it is not a commonly practiced tradition in Finland outside the Jewish and Muslim communities. Female informants who did not have (male) children (yet), speculated that their husbands would perhaps find the tradition problematic, and did not feel particularly positive about it themselves. Most of the women and one male informant spoke about their reluctance toward the practice. Women often referred to the practice as unnecessary, as their children will be Jewish according to halakhah anyway, due to their birth status. The single male informant, Zisse, who reflected on the matter in depth connected the practice to the early-childhood trauma that might be experienced during the process and called the act of brit milah—in his words—“bullshit.”

I thought that such a small child—eight days old—and I thought that it is complete bullshit, and an excuse that all the community members say “he is so small that he doesn’t feel anything.” It is the other way around ... and I think it is a traumatic experience. ... And I decided that my sons can decide when they turn 18. And they couldn’t go to Gan [the Jewish kindergarten]. Now they could. It [the situation] progressed. But then, I was like the Jewish Luther!

Whether it is self-evident or not, brit milah raises multiple questions related to inclusion, exclusion, and Jewish identity,⁵⁰ some of which were reflected on by informants of Articles II and III.

Prior to March 2018, brit milah was non-negotiable if one wanted to enroll one’s male child in the congregation—and it is still non-negotiable for those children of male congregants whose mothers are not considered Jewish at the time of their births. Thus, non-Jewish children are still required to convert to Judaism at the latest before their bnei mitzvot if their parents want them to be enrolled in the Jewish school. Gendered roles and norms produce gendered patterns in belief and religious behavior, but religious teachings and traditions are also used to legitimize and undercut power relations between men and women (Kupari and Vuola 2020, 2). Female informants who gave birth to children that were considered Jewish by halakhah often stressed that the requirement to circumcise their children was “unfair.” Some of them particularly referred to the previously mentioned cases in which a Jewish daughter of a halakhically Jewish woman could be enrolled in the Jewish school, but the son of the same parents could not unless he went through the brit milah. Contemporary Jews in the US and in other Western countries, and to some extent in Israel, use the disparity in the treatment of newborn boys and girls as an argument against brit milah. They argue that the procedure is “so irredeemably androcentric that it can no longer be tolerated” (Cohen 2005, 214). Female informants who

⁵⁰ For further reading on the history of and questions related to brit milah, see Cohen 2005.

opposed the practice connected it to the inequality between male and female children, to ethical grounds, such as the child's right to make such a decision, and also to their own exclusion from the community. As Yehudit said:

Never say never, but currently I feel that I don't see any reason why I would do that [the circumcision], or would decide on that without any other reason. And that makes me feel very stressed to think about because it suddenly feels like it is a decision with a domino effect, and I think it is maybe all kinds of pressure. And pressure in a way pushes me away. Like the pressure that I have to be in a certain place in the synagogue. It feels as if it pushed me away from the community. ... Either you do this, or your kid is out, in a way. ... If they kind of don't let my kids in, there is no reason for me being a member anymore.

Shaye J. D. Cohen argues that, teleologically considered, "...the non-circumcision of women bespeaks their exclusion and subordination, the matrilineal principle bespeaks their inclusion and equality. The one is compensation for the other." (Cohen 2005, 141–142). This is not to indicate that any of my informants would have wanted to impose circumcision on their female offspring or on themselves; quite the contrary. They used the matrilineal principle as a key argument against circumcision—however, they did not necessarily agree with the principle itself. To a certain extent, their narratives spoke to the conflict between the communities officially following the Orthodox halakhah in terms of the matrilineal ancestry, yet not considering it normative when it refers to uncircumcised halakhically Jewish male children.

Those who did not see circumcision as problematic emphasized that they would ask (or had indeed asked) a medical doctor to perform the procedure, which they considered an absolute must. As opposed to female informants, who were more likely to oppose circumcision, male informants occasionally voiced the opinion that the practice is "self-evident" for Jews. The only male informant who argued against the process was aware of the requirements of the Jewish school and decided to ensure the Jewish education of his children in an alternative way: he organized their bnei mitzvot outside of Finland, in a community where brit milah was not a prerequisite. As Article III emphasizes, the lack of focus on brit milah among the male informants was probably due to the contextual attribute (Kupari Vuola 2020), the institutional regulations that were set up in the 1950s to facilitate the registration and the later giyur of male congregants' children. This implies that rabbinical authorities, or "official religion" (Bowman 2004, 6), can have strong impacts on vernacular practices and the narratives of individuals, but also points to the fact that religion in this context is also significantly shaped by "gender logics" (Avishai 2016, 264).

3.3 Conversionary in-marriages

Whereas Articles I, II, and III touch upon the matter of both adulthood and childhood conversions and their effects in the communities, Article IV specifically studies the experiences of informants who converted to Judaism after becoming romantically involved with their Jewish spouses.

None of the individuals whose narratives were studied in Article IV mentioned any pressure from their spouses to convert. They all maintained that the giyur was a result of their own decisions, sometimes connected to an earlier interest in Judaism. Conversion to Judaism may be a personal choice, but, as any other religious practice, it is also placed within a broader societal context, guided by other considerations and institutional frameworks and by gendered pressure. Regardless of whether it happens for social or spiritual reasons, conversion is an important way to maintain group and family cohesion (Rambo 1993; Rambo and Farhadian 2014; Waxman 2015; Hadari 2016), and a way to cross the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews (Hartman and Hartman 2001).

Both the male and the female informants of Articles II and III clearly stated that they do not identify as Orthodox Jews. This is also shown in their marital choices: had they identified as Orthodox Jews, they would most probably not have married someone who either did not identify as Jewish or may not have been accepted as Jewish according to Orthodox Jewish law. The conversion of the spouse would most probably be required in an Orthodox Jewish setting. Some of them talked about the (potential) conversion of their spouses as a boundary crossing, but only one person among the informants specifically brought up the matrilineal principle with his future wife and suggested conversion as a practical solution.

As Orthodox Jewish communities, the Helsinki and the Turku congregations are also bound by this ruling of the halakhah, and thus do not accept patrilineal ancestry, at least officially. Due to the effects of Finnish legislation on the Jewish communities after the Freedom of Religion Act of 1922 came to power, a complex situation arose in the congregations. As mentioned before, in 1970 the FRA was modified: in theory, halakhically non-Jewish children were not obliged to be registered in the congregations. Nevertheless, the practices that were set in the 1950s and were connected to childhood conversions were reaffirmed in the 1973 protocol. Firstly, the protocol did not require the mothers of the children to be converted to Judaism with their children—which is highly unusual in an Orthodox Jewish institutional set-up. Secondly, the confirmation of the protocol, despite the legislative change in favor of Jewish law, implies that the practice was so embedded in the everyday life of the congregation that its leadership did not opt for changing it.

With or without the legislative changes, however, the discussions around intermarriages did not stop. Consequently, Rabbi Mordechai Lanxner was urged to organize the first conversion group (as described in section 3.1). From this point, adulthood conversions became, and childhood conversions remained, an endemic vernacular practice among Finnish Jewry. Conversion courses and conversions organized in the Jewish Community of Helsinki have served not only the Helsinki congregation, but the Turku one as well. This process is an obvious interplay between the three components of vernacular religion: the institutionalized religion, the commonly accepted practice, and the personal interpretations (Bowman 2004) —not necessarily in this order.

Adulthood conversions were tightly connected to intermarriages for a long time, as most of the *gerim* in the communities were wives of male congregants (JCH HrJFH; NA Kii). In the past decade, this started to change in the communities or more precisely, in the Jewish Community of Helsinki, where conversion courses and conversions were and are organized. Today, according to the informants, the number of persons with no prior ties to Judaism who wish to convert is growing.

Conversions to Judaism are highly gendered phenomena. On the one hand, this is connected to the principle of matrilineal descent, which is accepted in Jewish congregations worldwide and across denominations,⁵¹ as opposed to patrilineal descent, which is not accepted by Orthodox Jewish communities. On the other hand, the matter is connected to other ritual obligations, e.g. the act of circumcision: men who convert to Judaism are required to be ritually circumcised—which is a commandment that is not required of women (Finkelstein 2003; Cohen 2005). It must be repeated that men have significantly more ritual obligations, including those of participating in the prayers, which means that they must acquire a certain amount of knowledge to be able to actively engage in religious services. This may be a factor that affects men's un/willingness to go through with the process. Men tend to convert to a generally more privileged position, which, however, requires their active engagement in the more official settings, such as during a service.

The informants of Articles II, III, and IV, as well as other informants of the Minhag Finland project, often alluded to a matter to which archival sources (e.g., JCH HrJFH; Ak) also point: the number of female converts has always been significantly higher in the two Finnish Jewish communities than the number of male converts. Issur, whose wife converted, agreed early on with his wife that their common children would receive a Jewish upbringing. First, their children were converted to Judaism, and later, the wife also decided to convert to create family unity:

I think my wife was not very keen [on religion], and hasn't been very religious as a Christian either, so she didn't become a very religious Jew either, but for the sake of the family, she decided to keep the traditions and was interested in Judaism.

The gendered nature of *giyur* in the local communities is an obvious finding of this study. Among the informants of Articles II and III, only one woman (in Article II) talked about the conversion of her husband, when six men (in Article III) talked about the conversion of their wives. Article IV investigates this phenomenon further and focuses on the different experiences and practices of ten individuals, three men and seven women, who decided to convert to Judaism after they became romantically involved with their Jewish partners.

Despite the high number of female converts, the congregations and their leadership were more reserved toward them than towards converted men. Converted women talked about not being accepted by other congregants, as they

⁵¹ With the exception of Karaite Judaism, which follows the principle of patrilineal descent.

did not perform certain domestic chores and could not convince certain members in powerful positions that the children born out of their (conversionary in-) marriages are raised as Jews.

Even after we were married, on the street they [the elderly men from the congregation] would say “Hello” to my husband, but not to me, and when they met him alone, they would say something like “How is your mistress?” It was not until I had our son’s circumcision and I made everything: *gehakte leber* [chopped liver], about everything! And then they were starting to talk to me, and they said that “The brit, brit milah was so good, that it’s good everywhere.” That’s how it [the exclusion] ended.

Women among the early converts (e.g., those who converted in the first “mass conversion” in 1977) talked about this at length. None of the male informants of Article IV described being rejected to any degree, neither within their congregations nor within the families of their spouses—even though at least one of them converted during a period when adulthood conversions were not yet common in the community. Rather, their narratives suggested the opposite, that is, experiences of inclusion. This is especially interesting considering that in the Orthodox Jewish perspective, men have considerably more religious obligations than women. The rejection that women experienced was most likely connected to the importance of matrilineal ancestry in Orthodox Judaism, as well as to the fact that conversions to Judaism are not unified. As mentioned in section 1.5.3, denominational differences and congregational requirements differ regarding conversions to Judaism. Even when one is considered to be Jewish in one’s own congregation, one’s status may not be Jewish in other communities where a higher level of religious observance, and a stricter conversion procedure, is required. This naturally affects the status of the children, e.g., in the case of a converted Jewish mother. This discrepancy, of course, also appeared in the interviews. One informant, Velvel, told the story of organizing his daughter’s wedding ceremony: the rabbi who was to officiate the wedding and was invited to come to Finland from abroad refused to perform the ceremony since “he did not accept Rabbi Lanxner’s conversion” of her daughter. Another informant, Beynish, specifically told his son that because he was the son of a woman convert, he might not be accepted as Jewish in certain communities or in the State of Israel.

Article I highlighted that various rabbis worked in or with the congregations during the twentieth century, and their approaches to local traditions affected the congregations on various levels (see e.g., Torvinen 1989; Muir and Tuori 2019). The results of this were seen in the early discussions of intermarried men’s rights to do *aliyah* when the question was repeatedly brought up with different rabbis both in Finland and abroad (see e.g., NA Bmm 18.11.1937; NA Kirj. 1930–9; NA Bmm 1930–4, 1935–9; NA Bmm 16.8.1954, 4.10.1954, 25.10.1954, 31.5.1955, 26.11.1956, 3.6.1957, 10.8.1958, NA Hpl 1968, 1969; *Hakehila* 2/1999, 30;). It also contributed to the differences in conversion processes in the Jewish Community of Helsinki that people went through throughout different periods, and resulted in experiences that are far from

uniform. Furthermore, certain individuals relocated to Finland after their conversion took place abroad.

As elaborated on earlier, conversion to Judaism is a complex and sensitive matter, and the discussions centered around it can shed light on contemporary perceptions of Jewishness and boundary maintenance. As a collective identity, by definition, Judaism cannot be determined solely by individuals and their actions. Judaism must entail a common notion of boundaries establishing the space that all who are Jews agree to share (Hartman 2007b, 5). This is, of course, true about other collective identities as well. As was already pointed out, collective identities, as well as identities in general, are relational (Weedon 2004; Moberg 2009; Moberg, Sjö and Lövheim 2020). Conversions echo the different aspects of Jewish identities; the extent to which Jewish identity is a religious affiliation as opposed to an ethnic identity or vice versa (Hadari 2016, 136). A *giyur* may theoretically be a religious act, but it is also very much a social act, as it is connected to questions of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, individuals are not required to adopt a set of beliefs as they convert. Rather, they are required to adopt a set of practices (RSP; Hadari 2016). Understanding the meaning of these practices and knowing how to perform them requires a significant amount of studying and engagement. These practices and the extent of studies are defined by the community that the person is hoping to join.

These practices and studies are connected to the Jewish law. They are embedded in and connected to religious obligations and to the commandments, which are accepted by the convert with the *giyur*. This is a controversy in itself, very well addressed by e.g., Mindel:

A Jew is of course a person who was born to a Jewish mother and lives a Jewish life. But – and of course – Judaism will remain and will never be lost. Rabbi Lanxner always told us “Once a Jew, always a Jew” – that you can’t get out of that. “Now that you convert to Judaism, you can never wash it away.” This was what was instilled in us. That you can’t be like “No, I am not, never...”. But it is said that even if there is a Jewish grandmother who has a daughter, and the Jewish grandma marries a non-Jew and the daughter also marries a non-Jew, and they get a daughter, and they say that their child must be taken to the congregation. And in that case, the thought arises, that since they haven’t lived any kind of Jewish life, how can they all of a sudden be Jews?

The interplay between “being Jewish” and “doing Jewish” can often be very complicated. One can be born to the ‘right ancestors’ and be Jewish unquestionably even without “doing Jewish” or knowing much about Judaism at all. But a person without Jewish ancestors is required to know *and* to perform—to the extent that their congregation-to-be requires, of course. In the Finnish context, individuals converted to Judaism in front of different rabbinical courts, not only within the denominational frames of Orthodox Judaism, but often outside of it, in non-Orthodox congregations. Some of them had to go through multiple conversions to be officially recognized in their current communities. Most, however, did not describe themselves as “religious” in any sense, at least not in the “Orthodox sense,” which is a particularly Finnish Jewish phenomenon.

Thus, instead of studying the theologies of conversion applicable to conversionary in-marriages, in Article IV I focused on the levels of devotion on a more practical level, and explored the Jewish practices of the informants, and the ways they perceive themselves as Jews and interpret Jewishness. This approach is in line with Davidman's description of conversion.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I based my categorization in Article IV on that of Fishman, adding to it the category of *cultural converts*, which seemed especially prominent in my own data. I considered most of my informants, six people, to fall into the category of *activist converts*. They had been interested in Judaism already before meeting their spouses and actively worked to establish a Jewish household and to observe Jewish law in a stricter way than their spouses would have hoped for. They engaged in studying vigorously and frequently became more observant than their spouses. One of them, Zelda, nurtured a long-held interest in Judaism, but the first local opportunity to proceed with it arose only when Rabbi Lanxner organized the first conversion course, followed by the first "mass conversion" of 1977. When she finally had the opportunity to learn more as her "husband did not teach [her] anything," she used all her free time to learn as much as she could:

I was walking with my child in the stroller in which I kept a piece of paper with the [Hebrew] alphabet and blessings. I also had them with me in my pocket on the street. I was reading them all the time. I was washing the dishes, I didn't have a dishwasher at the time, and I had a note on the cupboard, and I was reading it all the time. It did help that I was such a conscientious student!

The two *accommodating converts* found a common middle ground for establishing practices that they considered to be meaningful and suitable for their respective families. Kreindel talked about the flexibility she and her husband applied in their family, which was partially based on a common consensus, partially on intuition:

Sometimes we [Kreindel and her husband] have the feeling that we have to kind of explain these [the reason why they keep certain holidays] to people. Like why would we do some things, if we are not like the ultra-Orthodox, or the Orthodox people in the community? We are not "logical," we don't follow everything. But then [we do follow] some things...

As already mentioned, I found Fishman's last category of *ambivalent converts* missing in my sample. *Ambivalent converts*, as Fishman describes them, are often hostile toward organized religion, find themselves yearning for aspects of the (religious) culture they left behind when converting, and may also have doubts about their conversion (Fishman 2006, 37). I only interviewed individuals who were members of either the Helsinki or the Turku communities. Their membership is already a sign of them having some sort of connection to Judaism and perhaps not being particularly hostile toward organized religion either. The two individuals I could not fit either in the "activist" or in the "accommodating" category were informants who didn't mention or allude to the importance of "spirituality" or "belief" to any extent or who clearly stated that they do not

believe in God. Fischel said he always thought of religion as if it was “voodoo.” Toibe, for her part, talked about her feelings of Jewishness and Jewish identity in the following way:

I think a Jew is a person, whose mother is Jewish. But Judaism is very diverse, there are converted Jews; there are people who were born Jewish. But I think Judaism is not measured by one’s degree of Orthodoxy or religiosity, even though in a sense it is a part of Judaism. [...] For me, Judaism is a set of customs [Fin.: *tapakulttuuri*] and the “god-issues” influence it, let’s put it that way. They are difficult for me, probably because of my background. The kids asked me at some point “Mom, does God exist?” and I told them to ask their father [...] But I love the Jewish traditions [...] I can say that I am probably an atheist, but I am Jewish. But Jews can be atheists too.

Nevertheless, they felt very deep connections to Jewish culture in the “non-religious sense” and talked about their involvement with cultural organizations connected to the Jewish communities. Hence, I decided to describe them as “cultural converts.” It was clear from their narratives that they converted not only for personal reasons, but also to secure the unity of their families and to be able to provide a Jewish upbringing to their children—a dimension that provided a different and new purpose to their conversions.

The informants of Article IV also took a very serious approach to studying before their conversions and to their practices—although their attitudes may have changed since then and most probably will still change during their lives. In addition to the previously mentioned Zelda, another “activist convert,” Golda, had to go through several conversions to be accepted in her current community. Her husband thought of the process as unnecessary, and his family still does not regard Golda as Jewish, as they view Jewishness as an ethnic construct. Even these days, they ask her about whether she would like to visit the “Jesus places”—as they call them—in Jerusalem. Golda described how she attempted, with partial success, to introduce a more observant lifestyle in her family:

... all the things around us, I brought them in gradually. For instance, I waited years before he [her husband] accepted them. At first, it was so that we did not eat pork or anything like that. Now it is easy, but then for example we [first] changed it to only buying kosher meat, and our kitchen became kosher. And we are not *shomer shabbat*⁵² because that simply didn’t work out. But I would have wanted that. I turned the *plata*⁵³ on, and the water boiler [thermos] and all that, but he could just simply forget it, start cooking, put water to boil or fry something.

Tenenbaum and Davidman conclude that Jews who were born Jewish may feel attached to their ancestry as an assurance of their Jewishness but may not necessarily feel the need to engage in any specific ritual observance (Tenenbaum and Davidman 2007, 443). Jews who converted to Judaism often engage in more practices and stricter ones than their Jewish-born fellows. Earlier research has

⁵² A person who observes the commandments associated with shabbat.

⁵³ Electric hot plate with a timer, used to avoid turning electricity on or off during shabbat.

already suggested that individuals who convert to Judaism often engage in more intensive religious practices than individuals who were born Jewish (see, e.g., Fishman 2006; Tenenbaum and Davidman 2007; McGinity 2014). The narratives of the informants of Article IV and Article III also support these findings.

Converted informants, as well as Jewish-born informants whose spouses converted, often mentioned that the conversion resulted in the entire family taking on stricter levels of observance. The converts' approaches to learning about Jewish rituals and practices often put them in a position where they knew more about such practices than their (born-Jewish) spouses or their Jewish relatives. In addition to "being Jewish" and "doing Jewish," "knowing Jewish" (Illman and Czimbalmos, 2020) are the three focal points that tied their identification together.

3.4 Conclusions

The primary aim of this study was to explore vernacular practices of the Jewish Community of Helsinki and Turku and their members, through the lens of intermarriages. The study uses various historical and archival sources, as well as newly collected semi-structured qualitative interviews (n=101), which were collected as a shared effort of the members of the Minhag Finland project—which this study is a part of.

Private and public belief, rituals, and habits—as well as identities—are (re-) narrated depending on historical and contemporary contexts (Bowman and Valk 2012, 7–8). Taking this into consideration, I studied a vast amount of archival sources in the National Archives of Finland and Sweden, and in the on-site archives of the Jewish Community of Helsinki in order to gain a deeper understanding of the history of intermarriages and conversions in the local Jewish communities. The archival material used in this study comprised documentation from the early twentieth century, up until the 1970s. It consisted mainly of minutes from board meetings, marriage registries, birth registries of the Jewish Community of Helsinki and Turku, rabbinical correspondence with rabbis and institutions outside of Finland, Finnish population registry documents, and general correspondence between the Scandinavian Jewish communities, the Finnish authorities, and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. During the research process, I inquired further information on some of the data I derived from the archives from a former rabbi of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, Rabbi Uri (Ove) Schwarz and from two rabbis of the bet din that was present at the locally organized adulthood group conversion of 1977, organized by Rabbi Mordechai Lanxner.

As a preparation for the semi-structured interviews, which form the main material of the current study, I conducted a survey in the two Jewish communities to investigate the links between religious participation and attitudes towards religious practices among the membership. Due to the low participation rate, the results of the survey were mainly used as a basis for structuring the interviews and have not been analyzed in depth in this study. During the data collection process of the Minhag Finland project, 101 semi-

structured qualitative interviews were conducted by the Minhag Finland team, out of which I actively used twenty-eight interviews for Articles II and III and ten for Article IV. In addition to these core interviews, I have complemented my understanding of the research themes with information derived from additional interviews from the Minhag Finland sample.

The approach applied in analyzing the interview data drew on the method of thematic analysis (TA). TA was chosen as it allows the researcher to answer a wide range of research questions due to its versatile applicability, and the possibility to reflect on experiences, understandings, perceptions and practices (Braun, Clarke and Terry 2015, 98). As the outline of the qualitative interviews was influenced by the vernacular religion framework, a “top-down” or deductive analytical approach was implemented (Ibid., 97), and thus, the analysis was primarily guided by the theoretical framework of vernacular religion.

The combination of the different materials analyzed in this study allowed for an in-depth reflection on the vernacular practices of the two currently existing Finnish Jewish congregations and their members. The different kinds of materials complemented each other very well and allowed me to study intermarriage, conversion, and Jewish identity in the Finnish Jewish communities efficiently.

As Fingerroos, Hämäläinen and Savolainen conclude, factors such as age, class, education, spatial and temporal coincidences, position in social networks, and personal disposition influence how individuals form patterns of vernacular practices (Fingerroos, Hämäläinen and Savolainen 2020, 10). The combination of the materials analyzed in this study allowed for viewing these matters in their complexities and highlighted the different aspects that came into play when intermarried members of the Finnish Jewish communities formulated their vernacular practices.

As a result of the Civil Marriage Act (CMA), intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews in Finland was made possible through a civil marriage ceremony. As a result, the number of intermarriages increased in the local Jewish communities. After the Freedom of Religion Act came into power in 1922 (UVL267/122), a contradictory legal situation arose and prevailed in the Jewish congregations until 1970, when the FRA was reversed (LUM767/1969). The Finnish law of 1922 defined the religious belonging of children according to the father, as opposed to the halakhah, which traced it matrilineally. This controversy was the source of one of the main challenges in the local congregations, which were then forced to find a solution that aligned with both the legal frame imposed by the Finnish administration and with the halakhah they wished to follow. In the 1950s, the Jewish Community of Helsinki established a protocol (NA Bmm 12.10.1953; 2.11.1953; 15.3.1954; 3.5.1954; 2.9.1954) that became the accepted means of practice. In 1972, the board of the congregation concluded that parents must agree in writing about the Jewish upbringing of children in intermarriages (NA Bmm 29.8.1972) and in 1973, they reaffirmed the already existing protocol (NA Kii). The main aim of the protocol was to allow the children of intermarried Jewish men to be registered into the congregational membership books before

their conversion to Judaism to ensure their and their father's involvement in the congregations—without forcing the mothers to convert as well. The system has remained in practice ever since. The interplay between the “official,” “folk,” and “individual” (Bowman 2004, 6) religion, here defined as vernacular religion, is clearly present on all levels of the congregational practices, although it is not necessarily clear which component was the first to affect the other two. Whichever may be the exact case, the interaction between these three levels is an embodiment of the close connections between individual interpretations and contextual attributes that the framework of vernacular religion was designed to highlight (Primiano 1995, 2012; Bowman 2004; Kupari and Vuola 2020; Romashko 2020).

The arrangement did not only influence the congregational administration but also shifted the congregational debates on Jewish identity, even though the official stance still follows the Orthodox perception of who can be considered Jewish. The combination of the official terms with the practical solution that was enforced on the congregations is an expression of vernacular religion itself, as it connects the beliefs of the community with specific social and political conditions in which the practices of the Jewish communities exist in Finland.

In realm of the Finnish society, where the Jewish marriage market was and is small, the secularization of the Jewish communities has long been a subject of discussion. In this context, the practices of intermarried Jewish men and women exemplify how the three elements of vernacular religion take form within the framework of institutional religion. This study supports Primiano's observations that such processes include absorbing, learning, accepting, and changing the religious parameters of personal lives, families, and even community praxis. The examples also point to the power of creative contestations and the fluidity of religious practices along and against power relations (Primiano 2001, 2012).

The findings presented in the articles of this dissertation also support the conclusion that the gender differences among the informants are remarkable. Female informants (Article II) employ creativity and do Judaism (Avishai, 2008) to establish practices that they consider meaningful for their Jewishness and Jewish identity. Male informants, on the other hand (Article III), tend to draw on their cultural heritage and often refrain from creative practices. They construct homes in which the gender-traditional division of domestic household chores are very much present, and where their wives are of significant help in maintaining a Jewish household and ensuring Jewish continuity, which the men had strong desires for. A significantly greater percentage of male informants talked about the conversions of their wives than vice versa. This observation may be related to the fact that most of the adulthood converts in the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku are female (Article IV). This is a strong implication of the gendered nature of conversion in the local Jewish communities, which is present despite the practice of early childhood conversions of children from intermarriages. As confined in the protocol on childhood conversions, the non-Jewish mothers of children who convert to Judaism were not and are still not required to convert to Judaism themselves. The custom was probably not

developed to decrease gender imbalance between the conversions of men and women, but rather to allow Jewish men to regain power in their congregations. This is also underlined by the fact that as women have less liturgical obligations within a traditional Orthodox Jewish community, converted women essentially convert to less privileged positions. They, however, appear to be more observant than their spouses, although they often remain less accepted in their communities.

The combined results of the four articles also show that in the Finnish Jewish context, Judaism is truly a “practice-based religion” (RSP). The practices through which the informants in these articles establish their Jewish identities, however, are often closely tied to Jewish culture rather than to Jewish religion, even though they all acknowledge, as Webber says, that “the concept of Jewish culture cannot exclude religion” (Webber 2014, 43). Informants’ and their communities’ approaches to Jewish practices are closely connected to the changing forms of religious lives, which were affected—if not generated—by socioreligious structures inside and outside the Jewish congregations. They “do Judaism” in various ways and often consciously avoid certain practices, either because they disagree with them, or because they feel they do not know how to perform them. They feel strongly about “being Jewish,” but the basis of their perceptions of their own Jewishness may vary. Regardless of how they choose to perform their Jewish identities and practices, the driving force of all the narratives is common: they wish to ensure Jewish continuity through their children. Today, the number of intermarriages, as well as the number of converts, is especially high in the two Jewish communities in Finland. The number of informants presented in this study may be small, but they nevertheless may serve as a representative illumination of and provide insight into how vernacular Judaism is formed and shaped by several different influences in the contemporary diaspora.

The membership base of the two Jewish communities is defined through Orthodox Jewish halakhah: through conversion, which is a religious means of boundary crossing (Hartman and Hartman 2010, 46), or through matrilineal ancestry. This, however, does not mean that the members, for their own part, perceive themselves as Jewish in the “religious sense,” or view Judaism and Jewishness as a binary construction defined by religious laws. Their expressions and experiences of vernacular Judaism are diverse and can take many different forms. Their approach to Jewish culture and religion, whether they engage in, neglect, or negotiate Jewish practices, are resources in the building of their and their communities’ Jewish identities. The boundaries along which they define themselves as Jews and build their practices are constructed by them: they define their own rules in their households and operate within the—often flexible—boundaries that the rabbinic authorities set up.

Jewish religious practices are centered around continuous processes of interpretation of texts and traditions in given historical and cultural circumstances: certain halakhic regulations are commonly accepted by a broader group of community members and then, practiced and interpreted

by the individuals themselves. This approach to religious practices is what Bowman describes as the interplay between the three key components of vernacular religion, “official,” “folk” and “individual” religion (Bowman 2004, 6). Vernacular religion, therefore, is not only highly relevant in the current case, but is also especially suitable for studying Jewish communities worldwide.

Intermarriages and conversions are at the very heart of Jewish concerns today—whether they are regarded as dangerous for Jewish continuity or not. As the results of this study indicate, intermarriages also facilitate the emergence and manifestation of not only vernacular practices, but also complex negotiations of vernacular practices and identities, whether they are religious, ethnic, social, or a combination of all of these dimensions. These manifestations and negotiations through the vernacular religion approach are still mainly unaddressed in contemporary scholarship, and thus, require further attention.

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Interview material

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 031219_MC_DP
 040619_MC
 040719_MC
 070319_MC_DP

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130619_MC_DP
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160120_MC_RI
160519_DP
161219_MC_DP
171219_MC
180219_MC_DP
180219a_MC
180219b_MC
210219_MC_DP
220219_MC_DP

220319_MC
250219_MC_DP
250219a_MC_PD
250419_MC_DP
260219_MC
260319_MC_DP
270219_SM
270919a_MC_DP
280319_MC_DP
290119_SM
290419_MC_DP
300819_MC_RI
310519_MC_DP

Interviews with Rabbi Uri Schwarz

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Appendix

Interview outline

1. Personal Information

- Name
- Year of birth, place of birth
- Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your background with your own words
- Please tell me about your parents' and your family's background.

2. Questions relating to religious practice on the personal level

- Please tell us about your and your family's (religious) traditions.
- Do you attend often Jewish services?
- Is your spouse Jewish?
- Do your children practice Judaism?

3. Liturgical matters

- What kind of memories do you have about the services in the synagogue from your childhood/youth years?
- How did you prepare for your *bar/bat mitzva*? Who helped you prepare for it and do you remember what texts did you study?
- Do you remember any (guest) rabbis, cantors, or active members of the community? Do you remember any visitors on special holidays?
- Do you remember traditions that have changed in the community? Do you remember discussions about changing the community's direction from orthodox to more liberal?
- Have you ever participated in other synagogues services as well? How would you compare their services/traditions to your own community's services/traditions?
- Has there been any changes in the services of holidays during your life?
- Has the situation and role of women changed during your life?

4. Activity in the community

- Have you been a member of any organizations of the community (e.g., *Bikur Cholim*, *Chevra Kadisha*, etc.)?

5. Jewish food traditions

- Do you have any specific memories from your childhood connected to food?
- What kind of dishes do you usually make on a regular day, and during holidays and why?

- Would you define your household as kosher?
- How do you consider keeping kosher in Finland?
- Has there been any occasion that you think had changed your habits?

6. Questions about Jewish identity, its boundaries, Jewish life in Finland

- How observant do you consider yourself?
- Please tell me, who do you consider to be a Jew...
- Please tell about what being Jewish means to you...
- How is it to be Jewish in Finland? Do you think Jews in Finland often face challenges?
- Has there been any occasion in your life that changed some of these feelings?
- Have you found a way of living a Jewish life that feels true and meaningful to yourself? Connected to tradition but still open to the world of today?
- Please tell me how you fit these things together in your everyday life.

Survey

In the first part of the survey, I am interested in your age, gender and in which Jewish community do you belong to.

Year of birth: ____

I am female: ____ / male: ____ / other: ____

I belong to the Jewish Community of _____ (city)

The next part of the survey includes questions about your relationship to Judaism.

- 1. Were you born as a Jew?**
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.

- 2. Are your parents Jewish?**
 - a. Yes, both of my parents are Jewish.
 - b. No, neither my parents are Jewish.
 - c. Only my mother is Jewish.
 - d. Only my father is Jewish.

- 3. Did either of your parents convert to Judaism?**
 - a. Yes, both of my parents converted to Judaism.
 - b. Yes, my mother converted to Judaism.
 - c. Yes, my father converted to Judaism.
 - d. No, neither of my parents converted to Judaism.

- 4. Which of the following alternatives do you identify with the best?**
 - a. I am a non-observant or a secular Jew.
 - b. I am a liberal or progressive or reform Jew.
 - c. I am a conservative Jew.
 - d. I am an orthodox Jew.
 - e. I am not sure.

- 5. There can be various senses of being "Jewish". Which one of the following statements describes you the best?**
 - a. Even though I have a Jewish background, I do not consider myself Jewish.
 - b. I am aware that I am Jewish, but I do not think about it frequently.
 - c. I consider myself rather Jewish, but other aspects of my life are also important.
 - d. I am very aware that I am Jewish, and that is very important to me.
 - e. None of these alternatives. Please describe in your own words (optional):

- 6. Do you feel more Jewish or Finnish (read your own nationality here, if you are not a Finnish citizen) or equally both?**
- a. I feel more Finnish (read your own nationality here, if you are not a Finnish citizen) than Jewish.
 - b. I feel equally Finnish (read your own nationality here, if you are not a Finnish citizen) and Jewish.
 - c. I feel more Jewish than Finnish (read your own nationality here, if you are not a Finnish citizen) is relevant to you.
 - d. Difficult to say, not sure.

7. How important is each of the following aspects for your personal feeling of being Jewish?

| | Very important | Important | Don't know | Not important | Not important at all |
|--|----------------|-----------|------------|---------------|----------------------|
| A feeling of being Jewish "in essence" (e.g. as an aspect of your personality, a way of thinking). | | | | | |
| A feeling of belonging with other Jews. | | | | | |
| A feeling of solidarity with the State of Israel. | | | | | |
| Religious activities, religious customs (e.g. praying, observing the <i>mitzvot</i>). | | | | | |
| Going to the synagogue, going to the events organized by the community. | | | | | |
| Jewish atmosphere at | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| home (e.g. food, customs). | | | | | |
| Jewish culture (e.g. ,music, literature, arts). | | | | | |

8. Do you participate in the activities of any non-religious Jewish organizations? (e.g. sports organizations, cultural activities etc.)? If yes, in what?

- a. Yes. Please specify:
- b. No.

Next, I am interested in your religious practices.

9. How often do you visit the synagogue?

- a. Every Shabbat and during all the holidays.
- b. Sometimes during Shabbat and during some of the holidays.
- c. Only during the holidays, such as Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashana or Pesach.
- d. Only if there is a special occasion (wedding, *bat mitzvah* etc.)
- e. I do not visit the synagogue.

10. What is your opinion regarding the following statements?

| | Agree | Agree to a certain extent | Don't know | Disagree to a certain extent | Disagree |
|--|-------|---------------------------|------------|------------------------------|----------|
| A Jewish woman can be a <i>mohelet</i> (a female circumciser). | | | | | |
| Jewish women should be counted in a <i>minyan</i> . | | | | | |
| A Jewish woman can be a rabbi. | | | | | |
| A Jewish woman can be called to the Torah. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| The service in the synagogue should be as traditional as possible. | | | | | |
| If a person's father is Jewish, the person is Jewish him/herself. | | | | | |
| The rabbi should offer blessings on same-sex marriages. | | | | | |
| The rabbi should offer blessings on intermarriages (such as Jewish and Christian). | | | | | |
| A Jew should marry a Jew. | | | | | |
| If I had a son/daughter who wanted to marry a non-Jew, I would do everything in my power to prevent it. | | | | | |
| Non-Jewish spouses should be welcomed to the community. | | | | | |
| Children of intermarried couples (such as Jewish-Christian) should be raised as Jews. | | | | | |
| Children of intermarried couples (such | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| as Jewish-Christian) should be educated about the religion of both parents. | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|

11. Do you keep *kosher*?

- a. Yes.
- b. Yes, but only at home.
- c. To some extent, but not strictly (e.g., I do not always buy *kosher* meat).
- d. Only on a basic level (e.g., I do not eat pork).
- e. No.

12. Do you observe *Yom Kippur*?

- a. Yes.
- b. Yes, but I do drink.
- c. To some extent, but not strictly (e.g., I do work).
- d. Only on a basic level (e.g., as far as my duties allow).
- e. No.

13. Do you have a *mezuzah* on your door-post?

- a. Yes, on every door-post.
- b. Yes, but only on the main entrance of my home.
- c. No.

14. Do you light the Shabbat candles?

- a. Yes, every Shabbat.
- b. Yes, most of the time.
- c. Occasionally (e.g., when there is a bigger holiday).
- d. Rarely.
- e. No.

15. Do you avoid working on Shabbat?

- a. Yes.
- b. Yes, most of the time.
- c. Occasionally.
- d. Rarely.
- e. No.

16. Do you celebrate Christmas?

- a. Yes.
- b. Yes, but only for cultural reasons and in a non-religious manner.
- c. To a certain extent (e.g., I have a Christmas tree).

- d. On a basic level (e.g., I can attend Christmas parties).
- e. No.

17. If you have a son/sons, is he/are they circumcised?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.
- c. I do not have a son, but if I had, I would have him circumcised.
- d. I do not have a son, but if I had, I would not have him circumcised.

18. Do you believe in God?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.
- c. I am not sure.

The following questions focus on Finnish Jewry.

19. Today there is much discussion about the future of Jewry in Finland. What is your view?

| | Agree | Agree to a certain extent | Don't know | Disagree to a certain extent | Disagree |
|--|-------|---------------------------|------------|------------------------------|----------|
| Through conscious investments in cultural and social activities, Jewry can survive in Finland. | | | | | |
| In the long run Jewry has a chance to survive only in Israel. | | | | | |
| Jews in Finland can survive as Jews only if they are orthodox. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Jews in Finland can survive as Jews only if they are open to renewals in the religious practice and community life. | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|

20. How would you describe the Jewish community in Finland? Mainly as a religious group or as a part of the Jewish people - “Am Yisrael”?

- a. Mainly as a religious group.
- b. Mainly as part of the Jewish people.
- c. Mostly as a religious group, but also as the part of Jewish people.
- d. Mostly as the part of Jewish people, but also as a religious group.
- e. Equally as a religious group and as part of the Jewish people.
- f. None of these alternatives. Please specify (optional):

Finally, I would like to know about your marital status and your partner.

21. What is your marital status and the religion of your partner/spouse?

- a. I am married to/in a registered partnership with a Jew.
- b. I am in a relationship with a Jew.
- c. I am married to/in a registered partnership with a non-Jew.
- d. I am in a relationship with a non-Jew.
- e. I am not in a relationship, but I am consciously looking for a Jewish partner.
- f. I am not in a relationship, and I am not consciously looking for a Jewish partner.
- g. I am not in a relationship, and I am consciously looking for a non-Jewish partner.

22. If your spouse is Jewish did he/she convert to Judaism?

- a. Yes, as an adult.
- b. Yes, as a child.
- c. My spouse was born Jewish.

23. If your spouse is Jewish does he/she belong to any Jewish community?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

24. If your spouse does not belong to any Jewish community, what religious community does he/she belong to?

a. Please specify: _____

b. My spouse does not belong to any religious community officially.

If you would be interested in taking part in an interview, please write your e-mail address/phone number here:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR REPLYING!

Original publications

“Laws, doctrines and practice: a study of intermarriages and the ways they challenged the Jewish Community of Helsinki from 1930 to 1970.” In *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 30 (1): 35–54. 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.30752/nj.77260>

“‘Everyone does Jewish in their own way’: Vernacular practices of intermarried Finnish Jewish women.” In *Approaching Religion*, 10 (2): 53–72. 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.91381>

“Yidishe Tates Forming Jewish Families: Experiences of Intermarried Finnish Jewish Men.” In *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 31 (2), 21-40. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.30752/nj.97558>. 2020.

“Rites of Passage: Conversionary in-Marriages in the Finnish Jewish Communities.” In *Journal of Religion in Europe*. 2021 (forthcoming).

Mercédesz Czibalmos

Intermarriage, Conversion, and Jewish Identity in Contemporary Finland: A study of vernacular religion in the Finnish Jewish communities

This article-based dissertation provides an overview of Finnish-Jewish intermarriages from 1917 until the present by analyzing archival materials together with newly collected semi-structured ethnographic interviews. The interviews were conducted with members of the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku who are partners in intermarriages, either as individuals who married out or as individuals who married in and converted to Judaism. The key theoretical underpinning of the study is *vernacular religion*, which is complemented by relevant international research on contemporary interreligious Jewish families.

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