

Sharing Place

Ramadan in Eyüp

After iftar one night in August 2013, I sat on the balcony of a friend's home with another guest, a man named Nedim Bey.¹ We had spent the earlier part of the evening talking about the district's history, one he knew well from his youth in the neighborhood and his close involvement in its politics. We looked out in the direction of Eyüp's central square; even though our view of the domes and minarets of the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan was obscured by the four-story concrete apartment buildings that filled most of the district's center, its loudspeakers were audible in the humid evening. Our conversation returned to the nature of Ramadan in Eyüp, a month characterized by large crowds, television programs, restaurants overflowing with people, public performances, and, above all, an intensified religious atmosphere.

That year, one of the most visible markers of the month's arrival was the temporary structure erected in Eyüp's central square, immediately in front of the mosque. Fashioned of fiberglass, paint, and fabric, this structure was designed to look like the arcades (*revaklar*) that once surrounded the Kaaba in Mecca.² During the day, it provided a welcome respite from the heat, a place to read and reflect, and it was used as a venue for performances and lectures. At night, it became an area for prayer, providing extra space for the large number of visitors who visited the mosque during Ramadan. Nedim Bey, however, criticized both the arcades and the other public events that took place in Eyüp: "You're bringing a cheap imitation [*çakma*] Kaaba. . . . If you're going to do something, be honorable and respectable [*şerefli ve namuslu*] about it. If you're going to have a recitation of the Qur'an, follow it with an explanation in clear Turkish so that everybody can understand. If nothing else, let those who come derive a little bit of enlightenment [*hiç olmazsa gelenler feyiz alsınlar*]."

The arcades had been built by the Eyüp Municipality. Depending on one's perspective, the municipality's highly visible role in organizing Ramadan-themed events served as either evidence of the municipality's success or, as Nedim Bey argued, as a clear marker of its failure. But Nedim Bey's negative evaluation was not just a question of local politics. His characterization of the "cheap imitation Kaaba" was implicitly positioned in relation to the real Kaaba in Mecca. He drew a distinction between external markers of religion like the arcades or a public recitation of the Qur'an and an internal world of understanding and "enlightenment." In short, his critique was one part of a much broader question this chapter examines: What should be the place of Islam in public life?

In response to that question, this chapter explores how individuals and institutions made Eyüp a place for Ramadan in 2012 and 2013. For some, the phrase "a place for Ramadan" might seem counterintuitive. Ramadan, after all, is usually defined as a *time*, a month of fasting. However, I argue that focusing exclusively on the temporal dimensions of Ramadan—its daily fast, its heightened acts of religious observance, its month-long duration—sheds light on only one dimension of the month's meanings.³ Just as the observance of Ramadan requires a set of temporal markers, so too its observance demands a set of practices that ground forms of being Muslim in the world. Extending Birgit Meyer's formulation, making Eyüp a place of Ramadan requires various material formations that create common subjects, communities, and temporalities.⁴

The arcades erected by the Eyüp Municipality in 2013 were one example of these acts of place making. They helped to transform Eyüp's central square in a way that brought a new form of order and made possible a novel set of social practices. In the process, the municipality sought not just to transform the district but also to shape the people who moved within it. Given its relative power and authority over public spaces, the municipality had an especially important role in this process, but it was not the only actor at work. Restaurant owners served meals for those who could afford them, religious organizations distributed fliers and free books to passersby, and media personalities offered their own perspectives on Ramadan's importance. Meanwhile, visitors and residents alike moved through Eyüp, engaging in their own acts of place making that were sometimes congruent with the municipality's efforts, sometimes in tension with them, and sometimes ignored those efforts entirely.

This chapter also highlights the importance of material things, objects, and practices in mediating the relationships that define Ramadan. During this month, material objects and practices—ranging from the arcades built by the municipality to the food shared by people at the breaking of the fast—become "sensational forms" through which Ramadan is experienced collectively.⁵ However, because these material objects and practices are available to be shared, they also become

sites of contestation and debate. Ramadan thus becomes a month in which those shared objects and practices can also spark deep divisions between people and places.

To develop this argument, this chapter narrates a series of encounters that took place during Ramadan in 2012 and 2013.⁶ The narrative is deliberately nonchronological to draw attention both to continuities (including debates about public spectacle and consumption) and to shifts (such as the municipality's decision to organize more elaborate celebrations in 2013 than in 2012). This helps to expose not only the temporalities internal to Ramadan but also those that link Ramadan to a much broader world. These are the temporalities of municipal elections, urban protests, political transformation, and lived experience, to name only a few.

THE MUNICIPAL POLITICS OF RAMADAN, JULY 2013

On a normal day during my fieldwork, I would trace a familiar route: arriving in Eyüp by ferry or bus, I would begin at the pier or the bus stop adjacent to the shore road. Working my way toward the dome of the mosque, I would pass through the narrow streets of Eyüp's center, past the walled-off cemeteries and the restored Ottoman-era tombs, before entering the main square in front of the mosque itself. If the weather was pleasant, there would usually be small groups of people gathered around the splashing fountain, taking photographs or feeding pigeons. On sunny days, the square, paved in white marble, would shine brightly.

The upper section of the square was roughly rectangular in shape. During the week it was often vacant, with visitors and residents perhaps sitting on the benches around its perimeter. On Fridays and weekends, however, this section of the square was transformed into an overflow prayer space for the large number of people who came for communal prayers. Before prayer times municipal crews would wash the marble pavement, set up portable wooden fences, and spread out rugs for prayer. Their work was facilitated by small architectural details built into the square itself: the paving stones were aligned with the direction of prayer, and a small brass line at the end of the section marked the position of the imam conducting prayers inside the mosque.

In early July 2013, a few days before the beginning of Ramadan, I found a very different square. A jumble of fiberglass columns stood in the square, half-assembled and occupying the space where overflow prayer usually happened. As I stood there taking photographs to document the construction, an older man on his way to visit the mosque asked me, "Do you know what these are going to be?" I shrugged my shoulders and responded by quoting a small sign that I had seen taped to one of the columns. "Some arcades are going to be built," I said, "like the ones they have in Mecca." Without looking at the columns again, the man bid me a good day and passed into the mosque itself.



FIGURE 19. The completed arcades beside the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan, July 2013.

A few days after the beginning of Ramadan, the large square had assumed the form it would have for the entire month. The new arcades filled the upper half of the square. Painted to resemble white marble, their columns were linked with arches textured to look like stone; at the center of each arch was a roundel inscribed with “Allah.” Fabric was draped over the entire structure, and municipal crews would later install misting fans from the columns. Carpets were placed under the arches, and cushions and small bookshelves were organized throughout the space.

The other major element defining the Ramadan festivities was the large stage built in the square’s lower section over what was normally a splashing fountain. The fountain had been turned off to allow the building of the stage. The stage was flanked by two video screens that could be used to broadcast either feeds from inside the mosque itself or the live television shows that were installed on two raised platforms in the square. At the top of the stage, a panel displayed the municipality’s Ramadan slogan again: “In Eyüp Ramadan Has a Special Beauty.” At the very center of the panel was the municipality’s logo. In case visitors to the square had not already noticed the municipality’s role in sponsoring these events, two vertical panels to either side of the stage also carried the municipality’s name.

Istanbul’s district municipalities (*ilçe belediyeleri*) play a key role in making Ramadan visible. They do so strategically, both to advertise themselves and to generate rents. Crucially, however, the thirty-seven district municipalities make Ramadan visible in different ways. Municipalities controlled by the CHP (Cumhuriyet



FIGURE 20. Platform built for live television broadcasts next to the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan, July 2013.

Halk Partisi, or Republican People's Party), a party traditionally associated with a public commitment to "secular" celebrations, tend to mark the arrival of Ramadan in relatively small ways. Posted signs may welcome the month, but districts like Beşiktaş and Kadıköy do not usually sponsor large Ramadan events. In contrast, municipalities controlled by the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or Justice and Development Party), as Eyüp was in 2012 and 2013, almost always organize highly visible events for a broad public. Consequently, Istanbul's district-level political geography plays an important part in generating an uneven geography of observance.

At the same time, not all AKP-controlled municipalities celebrate Ramadan in the same way. Municipalities' capacity to stage expensive Ramadan events is constrained by the financial resources available to the municipality, the wealth of the private business interests affiliated with the municipality, the uneven flows of visitors to different Istanbul districts, and the potential rents that can be generated from Ramadan events. Finally, even though municipality-level politics impacts how and why these Ramadan events emerge, there are other ways that visitors to and residents of Eyüp make sense of the geographies of Ramadan.

These Ramadan festivities were noteworthy for several reasons, including their size and the visibility of the municipality's name, but I was especially curious about the fact that the events in 2013 far outstripped those of 2012. In 2012 the municipality had not transformed the square in any permanent way for Ramadan: there was

no stage with nightly performances, no platforms for live TV broadcasts, and no arcades modeled on the Kaaba in Mecca. To learn why, I spoke with Kenan Bey, an employee at the local municipality.

It was quiet in the municipality building when I visited in 2013. A lot of the contractors and other businesses take most of the month off, Kenan Bey explained, so the staff was mostly engaged with small tasks here and there. I asked him about the square, and he began by placing the square's transformation in context. "It's an investment [*yatırım*] for the election next year," he noted. "But as you know, the municipality did other things last year [as well]; they did the neighborhood [*mahalle*] iftars and the Haliç Activity Area, but they didn't do anything special for the square."

The rhythm of municipal elections thus marked one temporal background against which Ramadan was observed. These elections generally take place in March every five years.⁷ In March 2009, a relatively unknown figure named Ismail Kavuncu had been nominated by the AKP in Eyüp.⁸ Kavuncu's 2009 victory may have been the result of his own political savvy, but my conversations suggested that he also benefited from the AKP's strength in the municipality.

I encountered divided opinions about Kavuncu during my fieldwork between 2011 and 2013. Some praised his industriousness and relative modesty after the fifteen-year tenure of his predecessor, Ahmet Genç. Others criticized his lack of connection to Eyüp and the changes that took place between Genç's mayorship and his. He was also dismissed as a *cemaatçi*, a term used derisively to describe people associated with the Gülen movement.⁹

Although I had no almost direct contact with people closely involved in the Gülen movement, many of my interlocutors suggested that the movement had been well established in Eyüp even before 2009.¹⁰ However, Mayor Kavuncu's election had helped to make the movement's presence more obvious. Several properties previously used by the municipality for municipal purposes were transformed into restaurants and cafés. There were also rumors that the Eyüp Municipality's building would be transformed into a hotel under the ownership of a prominent figure associated with Gülen.

Ramadan in 2013 played out in relation to two distinct but interrelated temporal trajectories. First, and as Kenan Bey highlighted, there was the temporality of municipal elections. Whereas the Ramadan events of 2012 were relatively modest, Ramadan programming in 2013 was explicitly used by Mayor Kavuncu to advertise himself and the party in advance of the March 2014 elections. The second trajectory that became visible only in hindsight involved the Gülen movement itself. In December 2013 the indictment of several high-ranking government officials on corruption charges sparked one of the first open struggles between the Gülen movement and others within the AKP.¹¹ Not surprisingly given Kavuncu's association with the Gülen movement, central party leadership did not nominate him to run for a second term in March 2014.

Kenan Bey continued, “A couple of television programs talked about doing something [in 2012], but that didn’t happen either, that’s just the way it was. . . . There were a number of people who complained . . . last year, so we put together this project, and this is what happened this year.” Kenan Bey did not explain what the “complaints” were, but, having spent a great deal of time in Eyüp the previous Ramadan, I knew that they may have been about one of two linked issues: The first involved the general lack of public events in the square. Ahmet Genç, Eyüp’s mayor from 1994 to 2009, had made public celebrations during Ramadan a central part of the municipality’s work; in contrast, Ismail Kavuncu’s Ramadan celebrations seemed rather modest in scope. The second issue may have been related to the large number of people who took to organizing picnics in the square to break their fast. Indeed, many who complimented the municipality’s efforts in 2013 often compared the square to 2012, when it had been filled with this practice of picnic iftar.

Although the municipality’s transformation of the square in 2013 was different from the previous year, there were other municipality projects that remained the same. One of the most visible of these projects was the row of “Ottoman houses” (*Osmanlı evleri*) erected on Feshane Boulevard, a short walk from the center of Eyüp and parallel to the four-lane shore road that connected Eyüp to Istanbul’s central districts. Built of simple plywood and lumber and painted in a variety of pastel colors, some of these houses also included the overhanging *cumba* balcony that is widely used as a marker of the “traditional” Turkish house.¹²

A few days before the beginning of Ramadan in 2013, nylon scrimms advertised either the Eyüp Municipality and its Ramadan slogan or the company ESBAŞ, or Eyüp Belediyesi Anonim Şirketi (Eyüp Municipality Corporation). Established in 1992 as a public-private partnership in the midst of the privatization of a range of public services, the company had come to play a key role in the delivery of municipal services and the generation of significant economic benefits for the private individuals who worked with these partnerships.¹³ This collaboration benefits the municipality because it reduces the financial burden of paying for services like street cleaning and trash pickup and generates profits through the use of various venues owned by the municipality. It benefits the corporation’s private partners by allowing them to capitalize on “public” properties without transferring the ownership of those properties.

These Ramadan “houses” were one example of that mutually beneficial relationship. The houses were built directly on one of the pedestrianized boulevards of Eyüp. Restaurant owners and small entrepreneurs from outside Eyüp were willing to pay several thousand liras to rent the temporary structures for the month with the expectation that they would be able to turn a profit by selling meals, souvenirs, photographs, candy, and other sundries to the dense Ramadan crowds. The municipality was also able to generate money from a space that—without the houses—would have simply been a pedestrian boulevard.

ENCOUNTERING THE ARCADES: AMBIENCE,
OPENNESS, ORGANIZATION

Appreciating the Arcades, July–August 2013

Even though the arcades and the stage were prominently marked with the Eyüp Municipality's logo in 2013, individuals' responses to the arcades did not necessarily center the role of the municipality. Positive evaluations of the Ramadan events were rarely phrased in terms of explicit support for the local municipality. Instead, they highlighted qualities like the square's ambience, value as a domestic space, openness, and order. The relative invisibility of the municipality, even as its logo was prominently displayed nearly everywhere in the square, points to the complex way that "political" activities fade into the background of the broader city, both to the benefit of the municipality and to its detriment. Reactions to the arcades also highlighted the different audiences for these arcades, with a repeated distinction being drawn between those from Eyüp and those who came from "outside."

I came to appreciate the benefits the complex provided. I would remove my shoes at the edge of the carpets and sit with my back against one of the fiberglass columns. If there was a lecture, I would half listen as I closed my eyes and rested in the shared space, tired from fasting during the heat of the long summer days. As I spent time under the arcades during Ramadan, I realized that the value of the complex was in part derived from the way that it provided a place of comfort, one cooled by misters mounted to the arches, shaded by a fabric roof, and well provisioned with cushions and low desks for reading the Qur'an or simply reclining in the middle of the square. Its audience during the middle of the day tended to skew older, mostly men and women who seemed to be retirees. Mothers would sometimes shepherd their children to the lectures and performances during the day. One day I spoke with an older Eyüp resident as we sat next to each other under the awnings. "For the people of Eyüp it's OK," he said, shrugging as he spoke, "but for those who come from outside, it's a wonderful ambience [*güzel bir ambiyans*]."

On another afternoon I spoke with one mother about the square's events. She also lived near the center of Eyüp, and her children were frequent participants in the English classes that I taught nearby. She liked the complex and the events, she explained, because they provided an outlet during the day for her children's energy, particularly because she was fasting and they weren't. By carpeting the square, installing misters and an awning, and organizing lectures during the day, the Eyüp Municipality had succeeded in transforming the square into a different kind of public space, one that felt more domestic and associated with the interior spaces of the home.

In addition to providing a pleasing ambience and a semidomestic space for some families, the square was also distinguished by what some described as its "openness." Even though the municipality-sponsored programming was largely



FIGURE 21. The arcades on a typical Ramadan day, July 2013.

oriented toward ostensibly religious activities, such as recitations of the Qurʾan, lectures about Islamic ethics, and plays about the early history of Islam, one acquaintance explained that the public forms of Islam in Eyüp were different from those in other religious districts in the city. When we crossed paths in the square, Selim Bey was helping to coordinate the activities sponsored by the municipality. Behind us on stage, a group of men were performing *ilahis* (religious hymns) in front of a small audience scattered among the plastic seats that faced the stage. Selim Bey worked for the Eyüp Municipality, and our conversation picked up with a comment he had made a few days previously, when we had interviewed each other about our respective experiences in and observations about Eyüp.

“See,” he said, “this is what I was talking about. There are all sorts of people here, women with headscarves, without scarves, in short skirts, in pants; there are people of all shapes, sorts, and sizes. You don’t find this in Fatih, for example.”

“Why?” I asked. “Is it stricter [*tutucu*] there?”

“Yes, exactly,” he replied. “It’s not as mixed [*karişik*] as this.”

Selim was referencing a widely shared social geography of Istanbul, one in which the city was divided into zones depending on their religious character.¹⁴ Within that geography, districts like Taksim, Kadıköy, Nişantaşı, and Beşiktaş are usually described as more secular.¹⁵ In those districts there are relatively few public markers of Muslim religious practice; mosques are often hidden between

apartment buildings, the call to prayer is often less audible, and religiously marked forms of dress and bodily comportment are less prominent.¹⁶ For people seeking these markers of a public Muslim identity, these districts can sometimes be alienating. In contrast, districts like Eyüp, Fatih, and Üsküdar are often described as more religious in character. Whereas secular districts of Istanbul are defined by the relative invisibility of public Muslim practices, these districts derive their religious identity from the public forms of Muslim religious practice, including prominent mosques, highly audible calls to prayer, and certain practices of dress, grooming, and social encounter.

Selim Bey, however, complicated that binary geography of secular and religious by calling attention to the differences between Fatih and Eyüp. He singled out women's dress as a key marker of Eyüp's diversity, noting that in Eyüp women both did and did not wear headscarves; some wore dresses, he noted, while others wore pants. While it is possible for men to blend in as they move through different districts of the city, women's dress is frequently used as a marker of piety and functions as one metric to evaluate how religiously conservative a district might be. In "conservative" districts, most women wear headscarves and long coats. Those who do not still usually wear long pants and blouses that cover their arms. The reverse holds true for "liberal" districts: most women—during the summer, at least—will wear T-shirts, skirts, or shorts. In both cases, women whose dress does not match the character of the district will attract attention, ranging from sidelong sneers to public critique.

In Selim's eyes, Eyüp was special because both conservative and liberal forms of dress coexisted within its central square. The municipality sponsored religious programming, but of a type that was accessible and attractive to a broad public, a public that Selim identified primarily based on people's dress. In the process, he implicitly suggested that there was value in noting the differences not just between religious and secular districts but also between different kinds of religious districts. As Selim Bey looked out on the audience, he saw a diverse crowd that could exist anywhere in the city. I looked out on the audience with him and asked, "Do you think people are happy? Are they enjoying all these performances?"

"Oh yes," he said. "Everyone is really happy with this. There are *ney* performances, Qur'an recitation, and *sema*. It's important that we organize these sorts of things."¹⁷ The "sorts of things" associated with Ramadan included a range of events. Some, such as the recitation of the Qur'an, were events directly linked to a set of explicit religious proscriptions. Others, such as the *ney* performances and *sema*, were part of the broader cultural field within which Islam is practiced in Turkey today.¹⁸ There are often heated disagreements between different groups and individuals about how one's Muslim-ness should be practiced in public. In its choices about what speakers to invite, what performances to sponsor, and what publications to distribute, the Eyüp Municipality played one part in creating a public Islam. Selim Bey's praise of Eyüp's "openness," in contrast to the more

conservative (*tutucu*) character of a district like Fatih, was in part shaped by the institution for which he worked.

Selim Bey's positive evaluation of the square highlighted another opinion that many of my interlocutors echoed in 2013: the square's organization and order. During a separate conversation with Salih Bey, a shopkeeper on a small street near the central square, he told me that although he prayed regularly and was fasting in observance of Ramadan, he tended to avoid the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan in favor of the smaller neighborhood mosques in the area. When I asked why, he explained that space in Eyüp Sultan should be reserved for those who visited from a greater distance than he. I followed up by asking for his perspective on the activities in the square. He paused a moment before answering, "It's a good thing, because last year it was disorganized [*düzensiz*]. This year it's more organized [*daha düzenli*] . . . they've done a much better job. This is what people should see when they come to visit Eyüp."

Salih Bey's positive evaluation echoed many conversations I had with other residents during Ramadan in 2013. For example, on another afternoon I crossed paths with Ziya, a young man with whom I'd had several discussions about Islam, his own piety, and his opinion about what constituted appropriate public religious behavior. Knowing that he passed through the square frequently, I asked him about the square's changed appearance. He focused immediately on how this year the Ramadan complex prevented the square's use as a picnic area, as it had been in 2012. "It's good," he noted, "better than last year. Last year people came and spread out their meals [*sofra*]; it wasn't appropriate, something that shouldn't have happened [*uygun değildi, olmaması gereken bir şey*]."

Picnic İftar and a Disordered Square, July 2012

Although Ramadan is experienced as a month of heightened religious observance, it is also experienced against the memory of the Ramadans that have come before. In 2013, many people referred either directly or indirectly to the way that the square had been used in 2012. That year, the municipality did not build any structures in the square. Their only obvious concession to Ramadan was placing a series of portable fences around the perimeter of the overflow prayer space and adding a set of portable awnings in the space that could be opened to shade visitors.

At the beginning of the month, small groups of families began to bring their food and picnic supplies to the square to share their iftar immediately in front of the mosque. Starting in the late afternoon, people would arrive with plastic rugs, portable propane stoves, bottles of water and soda, and containers of food that they had prepared at home. When the call to prayer sounded from the minarets of Eyüp Sultan, people were able to break their fast at the very heart of the district's religious life. By the end of the month, the square had become crowded with small groups of people who filled most of its space.

While this practice of sharing one's iftar in the square in 2012 made the center of Eyüp accessible to people who might not otherwise have been able to visit the expensive restaurants that surrounded the square, this practice of picnic iftar also presented a major challenge to one of the square's most important functions during Ramadan: its use as a supplemental prayer space when the mosque fills up, as usually happens on weekends and major religious holidays. Because prayer spaces are supposed to be kept clean and distinct from the "outside," the use of the square as a prayer space typically requires a cleaning crew and a gradual process of demarcating the prayer space from the neighborhood's urban fabric. That process was made vastly more difficult by people's *sofra* scattered throughout the square. Cleaning crews and municipal police often were forced to chivy families away from the prayer spaces as an impatient congregation tried to make their way to pray.

The tensions were not simply between the people who shared their iftar in the square and the municipality, the institution responsible for officially regulating the public square. Tensions also emerged between different groups of people about the appropriateness of this open-air iftar. One afternoon in August 2012, I had stopped in for a shave at the shop of Sefat Amca, a longtime resident of the district. Many of his customers were themselves people with long histories of connection to Eyüp. On this day, one of his customers came in complaining about the practice of iftar in the square during Ramadan. "It's as though people think that it's a blessing [*sevap*] to eat in front of the mosque; it's a sin [*günah*]! Pardon me, but they're sleeping like cows, the congregation can't even pray [*Affedersin, inek gibi uyuyorlar, cemaat namaz kılamıyor bile*]."

The customer's complaint drew on a much broader critique linked to discussions about religious knowledge, social class, and public norms. At the center of this critique was the distinction drawn between "blessings" and "sins." These blessings are conferred upon a person or upon those that they love by engaging in specific practices. These practices could include anything from reciting prayers, visiting shrines, and distributing food to—in this case—eating meals in front of the mosque. However, precisely because practices can take many forms, the distinction between "correct" and "incorrect" practices is crucial. Were one to seek blessings by engaging in religiously inappropriate practice, it would in fact be considered a sin. Hence the distinction between blessings and sin resonates with a complex debate about correct religious practice in contemporary Turkey, a debate shaped by claims to authority but also social class and urban norms. The customer's immediate segue into a comparison with "cows" points to precisely that overlap. People may often correlate a lack of religious knowledge—a lack that would lead people to confuse "blessings" and "sins"—with a lower socioeconomic status. This is an equation that many who are considered relatively "poor" work to challenge through their own pursuit of knowledge about Eyüp, Halid bin Zeyd, and Eyüp Sultan. Here, I seek to highlight the way that the critique of iftar in the

square blurs the distinction between a lack of religious knowledge and a class-based critique.

SHARING RAMADAN, UNEVENLY

Throughout the month of Ramadan, many of Istanbul's larger mosques hang strands of lights between their minarets that spell out various phrases. Known as *mahya*, these lights are one of the most visible forms of shared observance during the month. These phrases always make a claim, at once aspirational and normative, about what Ramadan is and how it (and, by extension, Islam) should be lived. Passing between Üsküdar and Eyüp as I did, I would often glance at the *mahya* hung from the mosques near the shore in Üsküdar and Eminönü. One night in 2012, I noticed the phrase "Ramadan Is Sharing" (*Ramazan Paylaşmaktr*).

Sharing emerges as a key theme during the month; people share in a variety of ways and in a variety of places. The square in front of the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan was one key site for this sharing. Sometimes, as in 2012, the sharing of activities like picnic iftar generated critique. Other times, as in 2013, the municipality helped to create a welcoming environment for people from outside Eyüp to come and share in the district's distinctiveness. But debates over the square's use and appearance during Ramadan did not simply turn on tensions over shared spaces and public norms; they also emerged around the contested boundary between practices associated with worship (*ibadet*) and those associated with entertainment (*eğlence*) and personal benefit (*menfaat*).

Although Ramadan is a month in which many people become more attentive to religious observance, it is also a month that creates tremendous economic value, as the municipality's "Ottoman houses" make clear. The municipality rents out temporary houses to entrepreneurs from outside Eyüp; restaurant and café owners in Eyüp spill out into the streets as they expand their capacity for guests; and even businesses not necessarily associated with food service will rent out their storefronts to Ramadan entrepreneurs. Some residents in Eyüp suggested to me that business owners can make as much during Ramadan as they do the rest of the year combined.

Criticizing Iftar, July 2012

Sharing Ramadan was thus not nearly as simple as being in the same square together. A week into Ramadan in 2012, after the crowds of the first weekend had subsided and Eyüp residents had returned to the rhythms of the workweek, I gathered with a small group of friends to share iftar. One of us, a doctor, began to tell a story about another iftar to which he'd been invited a few days previous, on the first Saturday of the month. "It was at one of the expensive restaurants adjacent to the square," he said, "and I went with a friend of mine." Although he didn't name the specific restaurant, all the "expensive restaurants" in the vicinity of the square shared a set of characteristics.

First, they were housed in either renovated wooden mansions or in the buildings constructed during the district's redevelopment in the 1990s. Second, although these restaurants were adjacent to the square, they were also clearly demarcated from it: their dining areas were behind walls or doors, or they were upstairs. Finally, these restaurants advertised their menus as being simultaneously traditional and sumptuous. As one promotional brochure advertised, "Welcome Ramadan, the Sultan of the Eleven Months, in Eyüp. . . . Alongside traditional tastes, variety after variety of iftar appetizers, soups, olive oil mezzes, varieties of sherbets, soft drinks, and unlimited tea, your iftar table turns into a banquet. Iftar tables, colored by the melodies of live Sufi music, gain another meaning within the historical fabric." They promised a kind of intimacy within the "historical," "traditional," and religious atmosphere of the district's center without the crowds of people who visited the district during Ramadan.

The doctor continued by describing the sheer quantity of food that was served to break their fast. "The portions were enormous," he said. "There wasn't any way that we were going to be able to finish it. I could only eat half, my friend could only eat half, and we had to take the rest and push it to the side. Can you imagine this? It's a sin [*günah*]." From there our conversations spiraled into a discussion of the tension between being modest and publicly displaying one's wealth. They could put half the food on the plate, the doctor added, and charge less money, and everybody would be better off. Debates about public displays of wealth are neither unique to Istanbul nor specific to the contemporary moment. Over the past two decades, however, these debates about public consumption have intersected with new debates about religious practice in public. Critiques of lavish iftar have been at the center of these debates.¹⁹

Ramadan Is Not What It Used to Be, July 2012

On another afternoon during Ramadan I ran into an acquaintance named Cavit Bey. Knowing that I was interested in meeting more people in the district, he took me to visit a small barbershop a short walk from the central square run by two men, Ömer Amca and İzzet Amca. Although I was fasting, Cavit Bey wasn't. As we walked into the small shop, he asked, "Ömer Amca, can you give me a shave without breaking your fast?" He asked not out of ignorance but out of politeness. People's observance of Ramadan, like their observance of Islam, can take many forms in Istanbul. While negotiating those everyday differences can be tense, Cavit Bey's polite question offered an alternative and far less tense negotiation.²⁰ Ömer Amca motioned him into the chair and, as Ömer Amca lathered up Cavit's face, they began to talk about Ramadan and how Ramadan used to be.

Ömer Amca began to tell a story about when he was younger and working as a barber in Balat, the neighborhood just inside the city walls that used to be one of the centers of Istanbul Greek Christian and Jewish life. Now in his seventies, Ömer Amca remembered a different Balat in a very different Istanbul. Even though his neighbors back then weren't Muslim, he explained, during Ramadan "not a single



FIGURE 22. Banner advertising iftar and sahur at a restored Ottoman-era mansion in central Eyüp, July 2013. The prices were substantially higher than those at places advertised to the general public.

person would smoke beside [him], drink anything, go after any soft drinks. They all respected that we were fasting. But now,” he continued, “the other day, I was here and some group of people came in from out of town, their license plates said they were from Samsun. They set up in front of the barbershop and were just eating and drinking and carrying on.” He added, in a phrase I came to hear repeated throughout Ramadan: “Ramadan is a month of worship [*ibadet ayı*], not a month of entertainment [*eğlence ayı değil*]. In this poor country, why is there a need for this much entertainment?” As he was being shaved, Cavit summed up the conversation: “Ramadan used to be more unpretentious [*daha sade idi*].”

Not Worship but Personal Benefit, July 2013

Even though the municipality brought a new level of order and organization to the square in 2013, a conversation with Kadir Bey in the same year highlighted the continued tension surrounding the square’s orientation toward business. Like Salih Bey, Kadir Bey was another longtime resident of Eyüp and owned a small shop a little way from the central square. He also prayed regularly and was fasting for Ramadan. Yet when we talked about the uses of the square and the changes between 2012 and 2013, he was dismissive of the municipality’s efforts. “The square isn’t being used for worship [*ibadet*],” he said. “It’s become an open restaurant, not the sort of thing you should find in a house of worship [*ibadethane*].”



FIGURE 23. “Ramadan is not a month of enjoyment but of worship.” Banner hung from local Felicity Party office, August 2013.

I murmured my agreement and repeated one of the phrases that I had frequently heard as a critique of Ramadan’s public spectacles in Istanbul: “Ramadan’s not a month of enjoyment,” I said, “it’s a month of worship” (*eğlence ayı değil, ibadet ayıdır*). Kadir Bey nodded his agreement and added a second point: “Wherever there’s personal benefit [*menfaatin olduğu yerde*], Allah’s approval is absent [*Allah’ın rızası olmaz*].” At stake in Kadir Bey’s critique of the square was the relationship between success in this world and true success in the afterlife. *İbadet* is an act that reminds Muslims of their smallness before God. When people seek personal benefit (*menfaat*) in this world, they neglect what should be the true goal, which is “Allah’s approval.” Insofar as the square became a place of profit, that profit seeking replaced the practice of worship. The municipality occupied a complicated position within this debate. On the one hand—and as Said Bey, Ziya, and many others noted approvingly—the municipality had brought a needed level of organization and coordination to the square in 2013. The square was, for them, a more comfortable and well-managed place than it had been in 2012. But on the other hand, the municipality was both financially and symbolically invested in attracting business to Eyüp during Ramadan and benefiting from business activity during the month.

The debates over Ramadan in 2013 were also set against the background of Istanbul's changing urban norms and forms. These changes shaped the trajectory of my fieldwork between 2011 and 2013 and provided a key point of reference for conversations about appropriate urban behavior, profit, and the use of public space. Especially in the aftermath of the 2002 electoral victory of the AKP, Istanbul had been transformed in far-reaching ways. These involved both spatial transformations like new malls, housing developments, and the expropriation and redevelopment of specific districts of the city,²¹ and social transformations that provided new opportunities and challenges in the rapidly changing city.²² My conversations in 2013 tapped into a set of broadly circulating vocabularies about these shifts. These conversations were further sharpened by the temporal and spatial proximity of the Gezi Park Protests, which ended only weeks before the beginning of Ramadan.²³ Although Eyüp's religious atmosphere was in many ways distinct from the events in Taksim Square, the protests served as both an implicit and explicit point of reference in some of my conversations.

CONTESTED MARKERS OF WORSHIP, JULY 2013

One afternoon in 2013, as I was sitting in the square taking advantage of the misters during the July heat, I saw Sema Hanım exiting from the mosque. Now retired, she was a well-known resident of the district, and she exchanged greetings with many of the shopkeepers as we walked back to her home. As a longtime resident of Eyüp, she was very attuned to its changes over time and the ways that these changes had emerged in relation to a set of changing everyday practices. She told me a story of a recent time that she had gone to pray in the mosque. While she was praying, another woman approached her and told her that her arms were not covered enough and that her prayers would not be accepted. Sema Hanım pointed to the joint of her hand and her wrist to show me how far her sleeves had extended. The other woman insisted, Sema Hanım continued, until she agreed to add two half sleeves that would fully cover the backs of her palms. "Our people are getting too fundamentalist" (*halkımız yobazlaşıyor*), she complained. She described her own practice of worship as something that was not marked by a set of external signals but as something that emerged from an internal commitment: "I try to worship in a way that comes from inside me" (*içimden geldiği gibi ibadet etmeye çalışıyorum*).

She transitioned to a discussion of how people today had ceased to treat each other with the respect that they once did. "Our people have become arrogant" (*halkımız küstahlaştı*). When I asked her why, she said that she didn't know the reason, but she shared a story that illustrated her point. She had been in the square, she said, and had seen a group of people sitting on one of the benches, where they were eating sunflower seeds and throwing the shells on the ground. When I scolded them, she added, they looked at me like I was crazy. In her telling, "becoming fundamentalist" and "becoming arrogant" were closely linked. The

former involved an obsessive attention to external markers of piety while the latter signaled a disregard for any sort of shared experience of the city.

That night Sema Hanım invited me for iftar, when we would be joined by several other people, including Filiz Hanım and Nedim Bey. Filiz Hanım was even more deeply rooted in Eyüp, as her grandfather had worked at one of the first Ottoman factories and her father was a local official. Our conversations were frequently inflected by her deep sense of Eyüp's lived history. Nedim Bey had been born in the district but moved away later; his joining us for iftar that night was thus also an opportunity to maintain a set of social relationships that had been spread out across the city. As we sat down to iftar that night, I asked them about their sense of the events taking place in the square of Eyüp Sultan. Both were critical. Filiz Hanım explained, "Eyüp's mystical atmosphere has been ruined [*ulvi atmosferi mahvolmuş*]." Both Filiz Hanım and Nedim Bey agreed that the problem with the municipality's events was that they had drawn so many people to the district that the act of contemplation—ostensibly at the center of one's individual responsibilities during Ramadan—had become impossible. The crowds, everyone agreed, hadn't always been like this. Eyüp wasn't this crowded ten years ago, Sema Hanım added, saying that it had only become so in the past decade.

Our conversation that night marked one example of the way that people make a place for Ramadan through stories that link them to multiple temporal and geographical references. Their collective critique compared Eyüp in 2013 to decades of lived experience in the district, family connections to the district's Ottoman past, and the more recent reference point of "ten years ago." Their critique also implicitly referenced the district's changing connection to the broader city: without the sponsorship of the municipality, Eyüp might never have become this crowded.

After we finished dinner, Nedim Bey expanded on this critique. As we sat on the balcony and looked out in the direction of the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan, he added the judgment with which I opened the chapter: "You're bringing a cheap imitation Kaaba [*çakma Kabe*]. . . . If nothing else, let those who come derive a little bit of enlightenment [*hiç olmazsa gelenler feyiz alsınlar*]." The arcades that stood immediately in front of the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan were modeled upon the arcades that surround the Kaaba in Mecca. Nedim Bey linked the "cheap imitation" municipality events with a recitation of the Qur'an that was unintelligible to most listeners. In critiquing the recitation of the Qur'an without an accompanying Turkish translation, Nedim Bey was not arguing against a form of Islam in public; rather, he was critiquing a recitation of the Qur'an that substituted for understanding it. By calling for an explanation in Turkish, Nedim Bey imagined a situation in which visitors might at least be able to derive a benefit from their visit in the form of "enlightenment."

As he continued, his critique broadened out from the square to the district's transformation. Because Eyüp had become such a destination for visitors during Ramadan, traffic and parking had become significant problems for residents. "As

it is now,” he continued, “visitors come to the neighborhood, then park in the first open space they can find and then leave their car. People can’t get into and out of their houses. It’s a shame, an embarrassment; there’s no value in their pilgrimage [*ziyaret*] because they’re infringing on someone else’s rights [*hakkını yiyorlar*].”

Nedim Bey’s discussion pivoted on one of the tensions at the center of this chapter’s argument: how should individual beliefs, practices, and understandings of Islam be negotiated in relation to the shared space of the city? Recall Ömer Amca’s critique of the people who drove to Eyüp from outside the district, parked in front of his barbershop, and set about eating and drinking without considering where they had parked. To satisfy one’s individual needs—even if, like pilgrimage, they are ostensibly “religious” in nature—in a way that negatively impacts others violated something fundamental about social relationships in Eyüp. During my two years of fieldwork, this critique of others “infringing on one’s rights” was repeated by many different individuals as a judgment on the transformations that they saw in Eyüp. Crucially, rights can function both as something absolute (derived from God) and something relational (always contingent upon the social contexts within which one is embedded).

CONNECTED BY A DREAM, JULY 2012

In a month characterized by exceptional attention to one’s religious obligations, the nightly ritual of *iftar* is one of the most intense moments of connection, a moment when you become acutely conscious not only of your own experience of drink and food after a complete day of fasting but also of the fact that this intimate act is shared by people all around you. It is at once personal and expansive, a moment in time that links you to a broader geography of belief. To this point, this chapter has focused on some of the public debates over how Ramadan should be observed within the city. These debates hinge on competing understandings of what a well-ordered public looks like, the ways that people should and should not profit from the religious activity of Ramadan, and the appropriateness of consumption. I turn now to a different Ramadan encounter to highlight one way that this place can be shared without participating in those debates at all.

It was near the end of Ramadan in 2012, in the middle of July’s long days heavy with heat and humidity. I took the ferry from Üsküdar to Eminönü at about 6 p.m., so there was still quite some time before *iftar*. The bus platforms were crowded in Eminönü, people waiting three rows deep for a bus home after work or shopping. When I finally got on a bus for Eyüp and found a seat, the woman beside me fell asleep on my shoulder, both of us lost in the press of people trying to get home. I got off the bus at the ferry station in Eyüp and walked by the park where people—mostly men—were sitting on the park benches. It was the middle of the week, so the park wasn’t as crowded as it was on the weekends. When I made it to the municipality’s free *iftar*, located on a small street behind the mosque, I was

surprised to find it nearly full. I heard small arguments between people about saving empty seats for the friends and relatives; a cluster of municipal police stood to the side. I cut through the mosque, where people were asleep on the rugs or simply sitting in the shade of the courtyard, waiting for the last hour before the breaking of the fast.

I made my way into the central square and sat down on the curb in front of the ice cream shop. An older man sat to my left. Tanned and wearing a flat-brimmed cap, he was from somewhere else, somewhere not Istanbul; his Turkish was accented with the heavier consonants of Anatolia. He shared a plastic-wrapped piece of bread from his bag, one of the small rolls distributed by the Istanbul People's Bakery (İstanbul Halk Ekmekleri). The man sitting on my right offered an *ayran* for me to drink. I didn't have anything to offer and found myself ashamed by their generosity. I murmured the only thing I could, *Allah razı olsun, teşekkürler*. May God be pleased, thank you.

I began to speak with the second man. In his fifties, Nazım Bey was from the mountains between Ankara and Kastamonu, but he was born and raised in Zeytinburnu. He lived in Bahçelievler now, on the spreading margins of the city. "When did you first come here?" I asked him. He must have been twelve, he said, so it had been a long time. So why tonight? I asked.

"Last night," he answered, "I had a dream that told me to go to Eyüp Sultan and drink the water there to break my fast. When I woke up this morning, I thought about it a little; there was nobody else in the house, everybody else had gone back to the village to visit relatives, and it seemed like the right thing to do. And so I came here, and now we've met and are talking— that's about it." He showed me the bottle of water in his bag with which he would break the fast.

"If you buy it down the street," he added, "they're only seventy-five *kuruş*. They're selling the same size here in the square for two liras." He dumped out the entire bottle and then left for a moment to enter the mosque, where he refilled his bottle from the fountains in the courtyard. When the call to prayer came, we broke our fast there together: small bread rolls, *ayran*, water from the faucets in the mosque. All around us in the square, families had spread their meals out; there was a powerful sense of sharing in a collective act.

CONCLUSION

One of the most remarkable aspects of Ramadan is the profound shift in one's relationship to the world. The experience of fasting for the entire day and breaking one's fast at the same moment that thousands, even millions, of other people engage in the same act produces a powerful sense of belonging that spans place and time.

This chapter has shown some of the ways that marking Ramadan as a distinct temporal experience also involves making a particular kind of place for Ramadan,

one that is continually remade through relationships between people and the city in which they live. It told the stories of the two Ramadans that were at the center of my fieldwork in 2012 and 2013, periods in which different people and institutions articulated the importance of this time and place in shifting and sometimes contradictory ways. It showed how the construction of the arcades in 2013 was a material transformation that aimed to simultaneously control and channel how Eyüp's central square was used as a site for public worship. The arcades' construction and the debates that they generated were not simply about a set of religious concerns; they were also connected to the broader politics of the city, a politics that were in a state of rapid transformation in June and July 2013. But the arcades' appearance also tied into a more expansive set of debates about the entertainments of Ramadan and the often-blurred line between worship and entertainment, faith and public spectacle. Welcoming the month of Ramadan involved a set of temporal and geographical transformations that were inextricable from the ongoing rhythms and routines of the city, the country, and the world beyond.

At the beginning of Ramadan, signs in Istanbul's public places frequently declare, "Welcome, O month of Ramadan" (*Hoş geldin, ya şehr-i Ramazan*). "*Hoş geldin*," which is used to welcome guests who arrive from somewhere else, reminds us that the temporal and the geographical are linked, whether consciously or not, when we think about Ramadan. One of the ironies of the observance of Ramadan in Eyüp is precisely this tension between a religious obligation incumbent upon all practicing Muslims and the way that certain modes of religious consumption—in particular, the breaking of the fast—come to separate and divide groups of people. This in turn raises tensions between concepts of worship and entertainment, as well as of order, control, and public space.

"Who is Eyüp Sultan for during Ramadan?" I asked many people during Ramadan in 2012 and 2013. I came to realize that even though the Mosque of Eyüp Sultan is at the center of the district, many people who live in the district stay away from its crowds and spectacle. That thought came to mind during the last week of Ramadan in 2013, on a night when the district was even more crowded than usual. I shouldered my way through the press of people in the mosque's central courtyard and remembered what an acquaintance on the mosque's staff had said: this mosque "isn't enough for us" (*yetmiyor bize*).

Public Ramadan celebrations in districts like Eyüp serve as a key instrument of municipal politics. Their organization speaks to a particular configuration of politics and piety that has emerged over the past two decades. However, it would be a mistake to say that the politics of Ramadan are associated only with the ruling Justice and Development Party. Making a place for Ramadan—an act that brings people, objects, and buildings into multiple forms of alignment—asks us to consider something bigger: How different groups of people might come together to define a common place.