

Nostalgia Spaces of Consumption and Heterotopia: Ramadan Festivities in Istanbul

By Defne Karaosmanoglu

Abstract

Contemporary city cultures are often defined in relation to the processes of late-capitalism and commodification. Today, in various parts of the world, the previously dominant industrial cities have been replaced by cities of consumption (Urry 1995: 123). Cities are treated as sites for representation, masquerade and sociability (Featherstone and Lash 1999: 3). National and religious celebrations and culinary festivals are parts of the dynamism of city life where nostalgia becomes a marketing strategy. This article looks at the nostalgia industry in the contemporary city of Istanbul in connection to the Ramadan festivities and *iftar* tables as everyday spaces of spectacle and consumption. It examines the ways in which the Ramadan space is articulated in everyday practices not only as a site of spectacle formed by both global and local discourses, but also as a form of sociability that brings people together.

Keywords: Ramadan festivities, nostalgia spaces, Istanbul, spaces of consumption, spaces of sociability

Introduction

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. (Debord 2004: 83)

The period of Ramadan in Istanbul creates a carnival atmosphere. Mosques are illuminated and nostalgic Ramadan space prevails while local celebrities perform in the festivities. The ritual of fasting during Ramadan is indeed a very popular activity in Turkey even among “the nonbelievers” (Gülalp 2003: 385). At sundown, the *iftar* meal (means “breaking the fast” in Arabic) is the main entertainment activity. *İftar* which used to be a homebound and familycentred activity, has been carried to the restaurants and guidebookrated hotels in Istanbul during the 1990s. The “past” has become a very important element at such tables. From fivestar hotels to decent restaurants, *iftar* tables are decorated with Turkish/Ottoman dishes. Menus are presented to bring back the “traditional” and “authentic” Ottoman tables. Fivestar hotels such as RitzCarlton, Hyatt Regency, Mövenpick, Conrad, Çırağan, Eresin Crown Hotel, The Marmara, and Swissotel introduce a mixture of traditional (known) and exotic (unknownforgotten) Ottoman dishes in their pricey restaurants (see Sarıtaş 2003; *Sabah* 2007a; 2007b).¹ Waiters wearing traditional folkloric costumes serve dishes in traditional Ottoman copper pans. In such spaces, from the presentation and décor to the serving style and the name of the dish, a nostalgia space of consumption is created (Zengin 2004).²

This is followed by other developments in the commercial sector of Istanbul in Ramadan. For example, supermarkets have started to sell reasonably priced *iftar* packages, which include many of the traditional components, including different kinds of cheese, olives, date, butter, *sucuk*,³ honey, rice, green lentils, and tea. Moreover, Burger King prepares an *iftar* menu called “the Sultan’s Menu”, which has a variety of *iftar* foods such as soup, pita with hummus, tomato, *sucuk*, chocolate palace *sarma* (dessert), date, and tea, while McDonald’s serves *tulumba* dessert (a Turkish/Ottoman dessert). Internet technology has also become a part of Ramadan. *Yemeksepeti.com* (foodbasket) takes online orders for *iftar* deliveries. Simply, Ramadan is now celebrated through a simple adaptation of local traditions to global technologies and discourses. Reference to the Ottomans is evident in these developments. For example, one of the supermarket *iftar* packages includes a label of Turkish coffee called the *Ottoman Kahve*⁴ (Ottoman coffee). Also, supermarkets organize events, which attempt to reveal the Ottoman past. Migros Beylikdüzü Shopping Center, which was decorated to look like old Istanbul, with Ottoman fountains, street vendors and *sema* performances⁵ in 2001, provides a perfect example (*Milliyet* 2001).

How can we understand such a boom in Istanbul’s consumer culture in the month of Ramadan? Can we understand it through the processes of commodifica-

tion alone? This article argues that notions such as “commodification of the past” and “latecapitalism” can only describe one part of the whole picture of Ramadan spaces in Istanbul. The other part of the picture has less to do with consumerism, but more to do with the formation of a temporalized space, which produces new discourses and new experiences of life.

In this article, first, I look at the extent to which “Islamists” play a role in the revitalization of the Ottoman past as a form of heritage. Policies of the Municipality of Istanbul under Islamist political parties are significant in the revival of the Ottoman past. Then I move to the commercial sector and explore the ways in which “the Islamist” and “the secularist” market, which are discursively constructed as separate in the mainstream media, in scholarly works (see NavaroYashin 2002) or as a part of public opinion, meet during the month of Ramadan. Even though constructing a separation between “the Islamist” and “the secularist” market seems to be problematic, I occasionally use the terms for strategic reasons to show that there is another reality, which defies the idea of a clear separation. In that regard, focusing mainly on media representations, I look at the extent to which Ramadan celebrations produce spaces of kitsch and spectacle regardless of the “Islamist” and the “secularist” political constructions. An approach that looks at the festivities from a commercialized and latecapitalist point of view is followed by another one, which is based on the politics of “heterotopia”. Here I perceive those commercial spaces as alternative spaces, which produce a utopian future for diversity, tolerance, and friendship. In the end, I explore the relationship between commodification and history, spaces of consumption and lived spaces of time and nostalgia.

The Islamist Versus the Secularist Market?: Or an Alternative Approach to Polarization

The history of modern Turkey is not that of a conflict between republicanism and Sultanism, nor is it a history of the strife framed by Islam and secularism. It is a complex, manytiered encounter between “traditional” forces and modernity that have interpenetrated and been transformed over time due to their propinquity. It is also a story of the constitution of new spaces where these forces have met and changed. (Mardin 2005: 160)

According to Taner Akçam, in contemporary Turkey, religion has ceased to be an overall unifying identity and a fundamental border between collective groups such as Muslims and nonMuslims. Instead “religion has become a political identity of a subgroup within society”. Therefore the unifying character of religion in the early Republican period has broken down (Akçam 2004: 120). Religion is being pushed to the culturalcivil sphere, where “political Islam” emerges. In other words, distancing from religion is “a determinant in the redrawing of the borders among the various ethnic groups”. The Alevis, the secularists, and the Islamists separate themselves by claiming to possess different characteristics of Islam and embrac-

ing their own unique particularities (Akçam 2004: 122, 123). As Akçam argues, AKP's (Justice and Development Party) success in the general elections of 2002 lies in the fact that it emerges by "setting religion in its proper place in the civil/social order" (Akçam 2004: 120). Debates over presidential elections and AKP's success in 2007's general elections caused suspicions and fears among secularists on AKP's sincerity about the preservation of secularism in Turkey. Polarization of Islamists and Republican secularists has become visible with the secularist demonstrations against AKP in major cities of Turkey in May, 2007.⁶

However, as opposed to those demonstrations that are based on a violent perception of polarization, there happens to be a different reality, which is brought by Şerif Mardin and his notion of "Turkish exceptionalism" (Mardin 2005). According to Mardin, rather than claiming the revitalization of religion in modern times (separating religion and modernity for that matter), we have to develop a dialectical approach where opposites recover in a historical setting. Therefore, we can talk about "a peculiar mix of state and religious discourse in the Ottoman Empire" which promoted "a modern Turkish Islamic 'exceptionalism' with distant Ottoman roots" (Mardin 2005: 146). Here, the specifics of Turkish history lie in the characteristics of Ottomans and Turkish Republic which have worked to create "a special setting for Islam, a setting where secularism and Islam interpenetrate..." (Mardin 2005: 148). In this case, we may understand Turkish exceptionalism through the interpenetration of "Islamist" and "secularist" discourses. This study intends to show how and why we should move from the idea of polarization (of "Islamist" and "secularist") to the idea of Turkish exceptionalism.

May 29, the day of the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, is not an official holiday, but it is officially recognized as a day of historical significance. Each year military representatives, the Municipality of Istanbul and the Governor's Office organize a small official ceremony, which is about visiting the tomb of the conqueror Sultan Mehmet. Even though the Islamist circles have celebrated the day with large demonstrations and parades, these ceremonies did not attract any media attention until 1994 (Çınar 2001: 366). The Ottoman past has been embraced and managed by the government policies following the victory of an Islamist party, the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) in the 1994 Istanbul Municipal elections.⁷ The Welfare Party has acted as the true guardian of the Ottoman/Islamic political heritage and Istanbul has been promoted as a global Islamic city. Istanbul's conquest is celebrated as a promising event that led to the formation of a global city with an Islamic image.

In 1994, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from the Welfare Party was the winner of the local elections for the Presidency of the Municipality of Metropolitan Istanbul. Since then celebrations have been organized by the Municipality itself and been widely noticed. Even though the Turkish State has not played a major role in these organizations (since the day is not recognized as an official holiday), the ceremonies target "a national public audience", rather than the "Islamic communal audi-

ence” (Çınar 2001: 366-384).⁸ The ceremonies reflect an alternative history, which not only glorifies the Ottoman past, but also makes the event a part of Islamic history. According to Alev Çınar, “these Islamist performances of history serve to construct an alternative national identity which is Ottoman and Islamic” and centred in Istanbul, as opposed to the secular Republican identity centred in Ankara. In these performances, Ottoman history is incorporated into national memory, and Istanbul is depicted as an “OttomanIslamic” city (Çınar 2001: 365, 366).

The Ottoman past is also reflected in the Ramadan celebrations. Especially since 1995, the Municipality of Istanbul under the Islamist parties (Welfare Party, Virtue Party, and since 2004, Justice and Development Party) has paid special attention to Ramadan celebrations. The Municipality organizes *iftar* tents, conferences, exhibitions, plays, and concerts in different parts of the city. Moreover, Ottomanstyle Ramadan festivals, which attempt to emphasize the Islamic identity of the Ottoman Empire, have been organized.

To see how the Ottoman past is embraced and managed by different groups, not only the policies of political parties, but also the capitalist consumer market should be examined. Yael NavaroYashin’s argument, problematic as it seems, is also based on a clear separation of “Islamist” and “secularist” market. She looks at the ways in which together with secularists, Islamists in Turkey have become active in the making and shaping of the consumer market. With the emergence of a new Islamist middle class, an Islamic consumer market has developed.⁹ Both secularists and Islamists have found ways to exhibit their conflicts in the cultural realm. Commodification, in this case, becomes a common ground, rather than a domain that divides the secularists and the Islamists (NavaroYashin 2002: 222). According to NavaroYashin, the Islamist market is very much influenced and determined by a kind of nostalgia that is fixed on the Ottoman past. For instance, it is the Ottoman past that inspires *Tekbir*, the biggest Muslim apparel company in Turkey. *Tekbir* sells Islamic clothing such as veils, overcoats, and headscarves, some of which are adopted from the fashions popular during Ottoman times. In this respect, Ottomanness is used to form the “authentically Islamic”. Therefore, *Tekbir* is a good example of the ways in which the Ottoman past is uncovered and embraced as part of the Islamist market (NavaroYashin 2002: 237). Products are presented under the titles such as “Inspirations from the Ottoman past.” As NavaroYashin argues, “the claim to be representative of a ‘past Ottoman and Islamic reality’ was what gave the *Tekbir* fashion show its legitimacy and force” (NavaroYashin 2002: 244).

Ramadan seems to be an important period for the Islamist market. For instance, the religious publication fair has gained in popularity, with an increase in the books about Ramadan and Islam. An Islamist publisher, *Kitabevi*, publishes books on the old traditions of Ramadan. There is also an increase in religious books and

interactive educational CDs for children. As well, in Ramadan albums with religious music sell well (Eren 2004a).

However, it is not only the “Islamist” market that embraces the month of Ramadan, nor is it the sole possessor of the Ottoman heritage. The end of 1990s brought about a new era in the heritage industry both in the governmental and the commercial sector. The mainstream media and the popular culture have also joined the celebrations of the establishment of the Ottoman Empire and of the conquest of Istanbul. As opposed to what Çınar has claimed, I believe, the secularist construction of national history is no longer centered on the early Republican ideology, which rejects the empire and embraces Republicanism. Ottoman-ness and the sense of Istanbul as a city with many histories have become a part of the secularist national imagination. This would be a means to deconstruct the dichotomy of “secularists” versus “Islamists” and to move closer to a better understanding of Turkish exceptionalism.

It was not until 1999 that the mainstream media and the popular culture in general embraced the anniversary of the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. For the first time, in 1999, the Ottoman Empire’s 700th anniversary was celebrated in many areas, including the fashion industry (see *Sabah* 1999). Mainstream newspapers covered the celebrations at length and books and articles about the Ottoman Empire and culture were mushroomed at the time (see *Hürriyet* 1999). A growing interest in the emerging Ottoman culinary culture manifests itself as well. Divan Hotel organized an event called “the Ottoman Week” for the anniversary of the Ottomans. Tuğrul Şavkay, a food columnist of *Hürriyet* newspaper, argued that the celebrations were not that impressive, but nevertheless the private organizations did a good job by introducing the Ottoman culture and cuisine (Şavkay 1999a). Ali Esad Göksel, a food writer from *Sabah* newspaper, complained that the 700th anniversary ceremonies were not as marvellous as they deserved to be. For him, the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans on May 29 is significant not only for Turkey as its inheritor, but also for studies of cultural history in general (Göksel 2001). Popular culture in Turkey have created sites where historically constituted “Ottomanness” are manifested. The ways in which nostalgic reconstructions of “Ottomanness” are revealed in Istanbul’s Ramadans remains a crucial question.

Nostalgia as Spectacle and Kitsch: Nostalgia Spaces and the Ramadan Times

It has been widely claimed that contemporary times are marked by a kind of nostalgia that is infused by the commodification of culture. Roland Robertson argues that while previous versions of nostalgia arose more “naturally” from estrangement or alienation, contemporary nostalgia is for the most part capitalistic and intimately bound up with consumerism (Robertson 1990: 54, 55). As Svetlana

Boym also argues, today's nostalgia is strongly connected to consumer culture. For the nostalgia industry, time is money (Boym 2001: 38). It turns the past into a spectacle or an image that is desired and consumed as a commodity. For Fredric Jameson, there is an "appetite for the images of the past in the form of what might be called simulacra" (Jameson 1988: 104). Nostalgia appropriates "the past through stylistic connotations, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image" (Iwabuchi 2002: 549). Arjun Appadurai calls it "ersatz nostalgia" without lived experience. It creates "the simulacra of periods that constitute the flow of time, conceived as lost, absent, and distant". Commercial nostalgia teaches consumers to miss what they have never lost and fabricates the experience of loss (Appadurai 1996: 77, 78). In other words, it invents "the temporal logic of fantasy" (Boym 2001: 38). Therefore, nostalgia signals not only a return of the repressed, but also an aestheticization of the past. It turns history into a bunch of amusing and readily available activities or objects devoid of politics (Boym 2001: 51). According to Linda Hutcheon, it is the very "pastness" of the past that justifies the power of nostalgia (Hutcheon 1997: 3). Therefore, nostalgia is about the present as much as about the past: "Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near" (Hutcheon 1997: 7). Commercialized nostalgia temporalizes space and turns it into a spectacle by attributing exoticism and difference to the past. This kind of nostalgia can be understood with the notions of "parody" and "kitsch".¹⁰ Could we then argue that old Ramadans in Istanbul have grown out of commercial nostalgia, where the Ottoman history is aestheticized and is turned into a bunch of amusing activities?

Perhaps the most exotic way of recreating the Ottoman past in Istanbul comes in the month of Ramadan. During this period, Ottoman history is inscribed into public life with commoditized and exoticized Ramadan celebrations, and local Ramadan practices generate new habits of consumption and consumerism. Special Ramadan festivities attempt to bring back the Ottoman past in more than one way. While describing the spaces of Ramadan in Istanbul we have to theorize the complex relationship between temporal and spatial forms. The concept of a temporalized space could be useful here which refers to two simultaneous processes: past makes up a space, and at the same time space creates a particular form of history. The most popular Ramadan celebrations organized by the city municipality, which are held in two historical places of Istanbul, Feshane and Sultanahmet, are decorated in such a way that they attempt to bring back the old Ramadan traditions of the Ottoman past.

Contemporary popular culture and media creates a commercial space using "one" version of the Ottoman past and culture. This temporalized (or historicized) space could be perceived as an amusement park where people can have a little nostalgic fun and be reminded of their traditions:

As oldtimers would know, the shouting of 'bozzza, boooza'¹¹ was heard in Ramadan nights as well as *kestanecis*, *şerbetçis*, *macuncus*¹²... *Ortaoyuns*, *kantos*, *KaragözHacivat* shows were fetes for the people. Do not say 'what happened to

those old Ramadans!!' Now this traditional festival is revived in Istanbul's Feshane Cultural Centre. (Öz 2000)

The festivities started in 1999 in the glamorous building of Feshane, which was built in 1826 as a military clothing factory by Sultan Mahmut II. It was renovated to be used as an entertainment centre for Ramadan celebrations. It has become a scene where the old Ramadan days are recreated as theatrical scenery. For example, a historical boat called "the Sultan's boat", which was used by Sultan Abdülaziz at the time, is used now to bring back the past. "The Sultan's boat" tours in Haliç by the rowers in Ottoman costumes with a nostalgic Ottoman music playing in the background (Batur 2004). *Karagöz and Hacivat* (a kind of puppet show), *ortaoyunu* (a theatrical play based on improvisation) and traditional dancing performances are presented. Magicians, acrobats, *meddahs* (storytellers of the Ottoman Palace), and fireeaters are all parts of the entertainment (see Doğan 2003; Kurtaran 2007; Düdek 2007).

Sultanahmet has produced another space, a temporalized space, where Ramadan activities have been held since 1995. Sultanahmet is a part of old Istanbul where Topkapı Palace,¹³ Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, and other historical sites are located. In the month of Ramadan, Sultanahmet turns into a spectacular space where global and local, traditional and modern meet. Traditional puppet shows of *Karagöz and Hacivat*, as well as *Nasrettin Hoca* performances, and *fasıl* (a kind of traditional music) are parts of the entertainment. In the descriptions of Sultanahmet the notion of "the traditional" comes up very often. Sultanahmet becomes a space where "traditions are remembered" in most "authentic" ways. For example, to relive the old times, rather than brandname candies, traditional sweets like *elma şeker* (apple candy), *Ottoman macun*, and *pamuk helva* (cottoncandy) are sold in Sultanahmet festivities. People listen to *fasıl* and drink tea (see Yıldız 2004).

Ottoman kitsch is everywhere in the Sultanahmet festivities and a melange of past and future is most evident. A mythical past is mingled with a fairytale like atmosphere. *Alman Çeşmesi* (German Fountain) leaks honey and sherbet in place of water during Ramadan. Sultanahmet was represented with the smell of a blend of Western and local aromas of *kokoreç*¹⁴, popcorn, pickle juice, and *macun* (paste) (Zengin 2003). Ironically, there are images of the future and the past of the city, from fastfood and technological entertainments to "traditional" Ottoman *macuns* and old *Karagöz and Hacivat* performances. For example, American "mechanical bulls" are in very high demand, strangely (Yıldız 2004). Salih Zengin, a journalist, writes that rodeo involving mechanical bulls is a humiliating activity for "us", since it is a "silly" imitation of the American Western films (Zengin 2003).

The mainstream media (including the ones defined as Islamist or secularist) praise but, at the same time, criticize the celebrations. Some writers have developed a cynical approach to Sultanahmet's activities. In an article in the *Zaman*

newspaper, Salih Zengin describes the festivities as exaggerated and commercialized events of the past with no genuine Ottoman cuisine: “*Kokoreç* and *sucuk* stands make you feel Ramadan with their smells, but the more you eat the more you move away from the Ottoman cuisine, because there is no Ottoman cuisine there” (Zengin 2003).

Instead, it is the Southeastern cuisine that is sold at the palace door. According to Zengin, *sultan gözleme*¹⁵, *Ottoman sahlep*¹⁶, *Ottoman pickles*, *çiğköfte*¹⁷ as well as *Ottoman jeweler* and *sultan trinkets* are for the Turkish people who crave for nostalgia. Photographers provide Ottoman costumes for the customers who want their photographs taken in folkloric dress. The sign on its door says, “Photographs with Ottoman costumes are taken.” Salih Zengin shows his condemnation for those “ridiculous” scenes of Ramadan. He says that during Ramadan we are bound to watch how others embarrass and ridicule themselves with such imitations. Zengin also talks about a special Ottoman *macun* and a machine called *Rambo*, which is used to test the strength of men who eat the *macun*. For Zengin, this is typical of the Turkish men who want to show their machismo, and he comments on just how pathetic such displays are (Zengin 2003).¹⁸ Ironically, the Ottoman *hindişerbeti* (a kind of sherbet) is sold in one stand under the name of “energy drink–Ottoman doping”. This traditional sherbet is presented ironically as an “energy drink”, which makes it “global” as much as “local”. This attracts both the natives and the tourists. In this manner, the local past is recreated and shaped by a global discourse.

These festivities are like a depthless parody where Ottoman nostalgia becomes a fictional past of costume dramas and games. New Ramadan festivals recreate scenes of exaggerated Orientalist kitsch style. They are often thought as commercial activities which are directly connected to the market. They can easily be understood in terms of the commodification of the past with their exoticized imitations of *macuncus*, *şerbetçis*, and waiters with folkloric dresses. In this way, nostalgia exaggerates discontinuities with the past by emphasizing “the exotic”. Moreover, Ramadan festivities have created new trends and habits for the entertainment sector (Eren 2004b).

Sultanahmet and Feshane can be considered within the framework of theme parks, which “perpetuates the fetish of commodity culture”. They offer “a fantasy journey into a world of spatial [and temporal] forms” (Harvey 2000: 167). In this respect, contemporary nostalgia for the Ottoman culture can be perceived as fully commercial. All the artifacts of the Ottoman past are made available and the consumer enjoys both modern convenience and old pleasures of Ottoman history within a theatrical scenery.

However, is it sufficient to conceptualize the Ramadan celebrations in relation to the processes of commodification alone? What other discourses, concepts, and perspectives can describe the Ramadan spaces? What kind of a living space is

created other than a commercial one? Does commodification stimulate political indifference? Does it really kill “history” by materializing it?

Utopias of the Scene: Ramadan as a New Spatial Form

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images (Debord 2004: 83).

Shifting our perceptions from commodification to sociability, kitsch styles to new ways of spatial plays where social relations are expressed, Ramadan can be considered as an alternative space. It is a time/space, which creates new ways of experiencing everyday lives in the city. Bringing a new perspective, I explore Ramadan as a heterotopic site and a utopic space.

The notion of commercial nostalgia explains only one side of the Ramadan space. First of all, it quickly eliminates the power of agency. It puts the consumers in a passive position in which they appear to be manipulated by the capitalist system. Secondly, commercial nostalgia, which only focuses on commodity culture, fails to see the fact that in actually existing spatial forms everyday lives are reconstructed and new experiences and discourses emerge. Finally, the question of whether commodification kills history is answered too quickly by commercial nostalgia (Harvey 2000: 168).¹⁹ In other words, the concept of commercial nostalgia cannot provide an alternative ground for understanding the relationship between commodification and history. Andreas Huyssen disagrees with the argument²⁰ that commodification equals forgetting, that is, that the marketing of memory generates amnesia. For Huyssen, we have to look at the marketing of memory from a different perspective:

Something else must be at stake, something that produces the desire for the past in the first place and that makes us respond so favorably to the memory markets: that something, I would suggest, is a slow but palpable transformation of temporality in our lives, centrally brought on by the complex intersections of technological change, mass media, and new patterns of consumption, work, and global mobility. (Huyssen 2000: 21)

Consequently, capital and the processes of commodification do not necessarily kill history. On the contrary, in some sense they strengthen remembering and demand more of history, more of historical detail. Perhaps here we should focus on another process, which seems to go “with”, not “against” commodification. In what follows, I will revisit the spaces that are commercialized and aestheticized (and which perpetuate “the fetish of commodity culture”) in relation to notions of “heterotopia” and “utopics”. Such notions effectively combine “the spatial” and “the temporal” to form a progressive politics of time and space.

Louis Marin (1984/1990) coins a term, “utopics”, to define broad social practices where utopian ideals of a society are expressed spatially. It is a “spatial play” which is seen in the examples of prison design, civic building, modernist architecture, town planning and so on. All sites of social engineering such as prisons, hos-

pitals, schools, libraries, and museums reflect utopic expressions of social ordering through new forms of spatial arrangements (cited in Hetherington 2001:51). Those sites are defined as new sites or newly interpreted sites, which offer alternative and different ways of experiencing life, and new ways of doing things (Hetherington 2001: 51; Harvey 2000: 184, 185). To describe the ways in which sites and spaces are produced, Hetherington uses the term, “the utopic engineering of social space” (Hetherington 2001: 51).

Here Michel Foucault’s differentiation of utopias and heterotopias is a useful one. He defines utopias as unreal spaces, and heterotopias as real spaces in a similar way as Marin describes “utopics”.²¹ Heterotopic sites produce different experiences of life (Foucault 1986: 25, 26). They include the cemetery, prison, mental hospitals as well as the factory, shopping mall and Disneyland (Harvey 2000: 185). Heterotopias are temporal sites. Some are linked to the accumulation of time, such as the museum and the library. And others are linked to the flows of time, such as the festival (Foucault 1986: 26).

For Foucault, fairgrounds are temporal heterotopias that take place once or twice a year with stands, displays, wrestlers, fortunetellers and so on. Furthermore, heterotopias offer alternative and new orderings of science, politics or art (Hetherington 2001: 52). They disrupt the homogeneity to which society typically remains attached. More importantly, they produce new discourses. In other words, as Hetherington claims, in “heterotopic spaces” discourse is made up:

[I]n order to understand how discourses emerge and become effective we have to pay attention to the spaces in which the utterances, of which discourses are constituted, are made. The model that I have suggested here is that new discourses emerge in places that are Other; heterotopic, sites that suggest a novel or different mode of social ordering that contrasts with the established sense of order within a particular social field. That mode of social ordering is articulated discursively. (Hetherington 2001: 71)

Ramadan festivities, which happen once a year, can be considered as temporal heterotopias. They are linked to the flowing time “in the mode of the festival”. Public life functions differently and a new form of social ordering is constructed in such spaces. Most importantly, daily time is reorganized according to *sahur* (starting the fast) and *iftar* (breaking the fast). Ramadan therefore reorder everyday activities through a new discourse of time.

Moreover, Ramadan becomes a cultural celebration where universal qualities of peace, friendship, family, tolerance, and love are presented as if they were expressed by all kinds of people regardless of their age, class, religion, or ethnic backgrounds. Bringing new discourses, Ramadan times and spaces disrupt the constructed polarization of Islamism and secularism and enable us to think otherwise. As Şerif Mardin (2005) argued, we have to think of a dialectical approach for this peculiar modern Turkish Islamic case where opposites come together. In this regard, Ramadan and Ottomanness create a new spatial form where polarization of Islamist and secularist are challenged. The mainstream media embrace the

Ramadan period as a utopic space and an alternative social form, which is experienced by a diversity of people, produces a common ground for the “Islamist” and “secularist”. The spaces of nostalgia in Istanbul are temporalized spaces that gather a diversity of people who would not come together otherwise. I believe such spaces do more than reproduce the capitalist consumer culture. Instead they provide an alternative way of dealing with history, nostalgia, and politics.

Especially in the media, Ramadan and *iftar* become a common ground for a diversity of people, which do not discriminate according to religion, age, class, and ethnicity in any sense. In other words, the month of Ramadan produces a multicultural and a multireligious space. For example, the Turkish representatives and the members of three main religions come together for Ramadan celebrations. This was organized in 2001 by the Journalism and Writers Foundation. The *Fener* Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Turkish Armenian Patriarch, the Catholic Community Representative, the Vatican Representative, and the President of the Rabbis all joined the *iftar* table, which was called *Halil İbrahim Sofrası* (“Table of Abraham”). Not surprisingly, Abraham, who is a significant figure recognized by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is chosen to refer to the commonness of those religions. And, it was felt that such a vision of union should give hope to the world (*Yeni Şafak* 2001a). The Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri*)²² announced at the time that this show or cooperation and support between people was worthy of praise since it reflected a harmonious multireligious society (*Yeni Şafak* 2001c).

Therefore, rather than an Islamic event, Ramadan becomes a “cultural”, “historical” and “spiritual” one. For example, in the mainstream media, instead of the idea of a religious faith, “cultural” and “historical” aspects of the month of Ramadan are emphasized. *İstanbul Life* (a popular magazine for the middle classes) indicates in its special Ramadan pages that its readers “do not have to be ‘too Muslim’ to be interested in this edition, since *iftariyelik*²³ is a food tasting journey which includes all religions” (Soydemir 2004). On the other hand, the newspapers of Islamist intellectuals and liberal believers of democracy (as they call themselves), *Yeni Şafak* and *Zaman*, highlight the spiritual as much as the cultural or the traditional sides of Ramadan. For example, *iftar* is defined as a holy meal, which “shuns hate and greed, and gives peace” (Zeytin 2004). As well, modern ways of living are seen as a threat to the sacredness of *iftar* meals. Eating alone is portrayed in the media as an undesired activity that neglects the spirituality of breaking the fast with the loved ones. Therefore, it is the sense of community that gives peace, comfort and serenity to *iftar* tables. The newspapers describe *iftar* through friendship and fraternity. *İftar* tables are portrayed as sacred, and fasting is claimed to strengthen social bonds: “What is filled is not so much the stomach, but the heart and the soul” (Eren 2004b).

As well, the interviews with Turkish celebrities reflect the emergence of a new progressive spatial form. A famous name in Turkish music, Ahmet Özhan, spoke

about the social and individual aspects of friendship, love and brotherhood referring to the old Ramadan days (*Yeni Şafak* 2004a). Alişan, a young musician, Kenan Işık, an actor, Hülya Koçığit, an actress, and Cem Karaca, a musician, also expressed their excitement and joy for the holy month of Ramadan (*Yeni Şafak* 2004c; 2002c). But is especially Cem Karaca, whose mother is a Christian and whose father is a Muslim, who occupies an inbetween space where Ramadan is defined through tolerance and holiness. As Cem Karaca claimed, even though his mother was not a Muslim, she had prepared the *iftar* table and encountered Ramadan with the same sacredness as his father (*Yeni Şafak* 2002b).

Furthermore, in Ramadan time is reflected on space, in which case Istanbul in general and its neighborhoods in particular become spaces of “progress” and “difference”. Istanbul is portrayed as a highly cultural and historical place to be in the month of Ramadan. Due to its cultural heritage it is supposed to provide a special space and is regarded as one of the most sensational places where Ramadan is experienced (see Göksel 2000).²⁴ Moreover, Istanbul is treasured for its multireligious character and its mysterious past (see Tüzün 2005).²⁵ It is a space of diversity and tolerance. By referring to the Christian, Muslim and Jewish histories, Istanbul is cherished with pride:

This year New Year’s Eve is again in the month of Ramadan. We will enter the year 2000 at the end of a Ramadan day. This is a very interesting coincidence! Istanbul is one of the most interesting places to be in the New Year’s Eve... And try to understand the divine coincidence of those people meeting in this world city of thousands of years. Different and meaningful New Year’s celebrations of the year 2000 can only happen in this city. I don’t know about the others but in the New Year’s Eve I will be in Istanbul. (Şavkay 1999b)

A “multireligious heterotopia” is created in Ramadan times by following the “Ottoman tolerance” of the past when nonMuslims were invited to *iftar* tables (see *Yeni Şafak* 2003b). In this case, the neighbourhood of Darülaceze is perceived as a spatial model, which has “preserved the notion of friendship for 107 years”. Ramadan is once again characterized by togetherness, tolerance, peace, and friendship among Muslim, Christian, and Jewish citizens. This should be an example to the world reports one particular news story in *Yeni Şafak*. A Muslim, an Armenian, and a Christian are all quoted as they express their feelings about the cultural month, and all are portrayed as happy in Ramadan (*Yeni Şafak* 2003c; 2002a). In another news story in *Yeni Şafak*, Grand Bazaar is portrayed as another space where all kinds of people from Muslims to nonMuslims sit at the same table waiting for the prayer for *iftar*. The artisans of the bazaar celebrate Ramadan regardless of their religion and ethnic background. The story reports that people preserve the culture of tolerance, understanding, and fellowship in Grand Bazaar. A Jewish and a Syriac artisan who do not complain about any sort of discrimination are extremely pleased during Ramadan because, as they claim, tolerance and friendship have still been a virtue of Istanbul while the world has lost much of those qualities (Kucur 2004).

Sultanahmet is, in a sense, a heterotopic site where religion, culture and history are mingled in complex ways. It can be considered as a progressive temporalized space. As David Harvey argues, spatial form controls temporality, history, and the possibility of social change (Harvey 2000: 160). Sultanahmet is a space that is created and engineered by the state policies of the city municipality. It is a new site, which offers alternative expressions of social ordering, different ways of experiencing life and new ways of doing things. It brings the past in a new form. A new discourse on time and Ottomanness emerges in Sultanahmet. The mingling of global and local, past and future, East and West, new and old constitutes a discourse and a lived experience of history. These are all combined in a theatrical ambiance where past is revealed in the “utopias of the social form”.

Sultanahmet resembles a fairground where “the traditional” is reconstructed and remembered with a diversity of entertainments. Celebrations resemble the old tales. Only in Ramadan do people find a chance to see traditional plays such as *Nasrettin Hoca*, *Karagöz and Hacivat*, and *meddahlık*, which could not usually compete with the modern ones like Pinocchio (Yıldız 2004). Utopia in this sense is not only a “spatial play”, but also a “temporal play”. It invents history and cultivates nostalgia for an intriguing past. From this perspective, Sultanahmet provides an alternative space, which brings “new” experiences from “the past” that are mingled with the “new” global (Western?) entertainments (like the rodeo).

Furthermore, Sultanahmet is a space of utopias, which express a too optimistic concept of “cultural diversity” for today’s Turkey. It reminds us of the old Ramadan times and spaces of the Ottomans which now are characterized by “difference” and “tolerance”. Newspapers embrace the space of Sultanahmet as “progressive” as well as commercial. In this space all kinds of people enjoy themselves freely with maximum tolerance. Through Sultanahmet, the utopian ideals of Turkish society are expressed spatially, where peace, understanding, and companionship are the desired characteristics. A picture of universal tolerance is drawn extensively. Veiled girls, punk tourists, men with *şalvar* (traditional trousers) and *takke* (an Islamic hat) are referred to as walking together peacefully. As it is reported in *Radikal* newspaper, “*dedeler* [old men] with *takke* do not even turn their heads to look at the naked bellies of the young girls” (Yıldız 2004). It is as if a “universal” *iftar* table reports one of the news stories in *Yeni Şafak* (2004b). It has been claimed that in Sultanahmet, worldviews, economic classes, and political differences do not count. NonMuslim tourists constitute an important part of this scene of tolerance. They respect the culture of Ramadan by waiting for the *iftar* time to eat together with the Muslims. More importantly, even though some natives eat before the *iftar* time, they are not condemned either: “Just like the *iftar* tables, this space of tolerance in Sultanahmet is Allah’s gift to Istanbul” (*Yeni Şafak* 2004b). Regardless of its political connotations, “Kurdishness” seems to be included in this picture of diversity and tolerance. It is claimed by one reporter in *Yeni Şafak* that a Kurdish entertainment was held in “lovers' tent” where Turkish

and Kurdish live music plays not only for the natives but also for the tourists (*Yeni Şafak* 2003a). In this respect, a discourse of universal spirituality that is free from the state politics and that embraces cosmopolitanism and diversity is created in the “heterotopic space” of Sultanahmet.

Finally, Ramadan in general and Sultanahmet in particular provide an alternative space where “other” politics and views are expressed. The utopian ideals that are pointed spatially are reflected through the means of cultural heritage, which was emphasized by the Eminönü Municipality Lütfi Kibiroğlu as well: “The only way to bring back people’s past would be through culture. Sultanahmet intends to introduce, and to pass our history and culture to the new generations” (*Yeni Şafak* 2001b). In this sense, culture, history and cultural heritage including for the most part “Ottomanness”, form the common ground where all kinds of people meet.

Conclusion: Utopia as a Projected Vision

The city invented potential pasts in order to find a possible new future. (Boym 2001: 162)

Ramadan is one of the ways which mirrors the interaction and conflict between national history, nostalgia and everyday lives. In other words, Ramadan festivities and *iftar* tables are central to the experience of the past and the future, the new and the old, the global and the local. In the month of Ramadan, restructuring the city according to history, heritage, and tradition is one concern, and turning it into a global metropolis is another. As well as a space of consumption and a site of spectacle, the Ramadan festival becomes a “heterotopic site” where a diversity of people from all ages, religions, classes, and ethnic backgrounds unite to celebrate a common event. As a result, Ramadan attempts to create a space where “Islamist” and “secularist” discourses intertwine and where a utopian future is inscribed through an imagined past. This new spatial and temporal form provides us with an understanding that would challenge simplistic polarization arguments and would take us to a more constructive idea of Turkish exceptionalism.

The Ramadan space provides a possible future created by a version of the Ottoman past. Therefore, utopic ideals of Turkish society are expressed through Ramadan. One must ask, however, how much of this Ramadan space is a projected vision. Do we suppose that this utopian vision portrays Turkey as a harmonious multireligious society, or that Ramadan creates a “community” which is characterized by tolerance, multiplicity and diversity? The Ramadan space in Istanbul could by no means be considered a sign of harmony which characterizes Turkish society in general. Needless to say, religion reveals antagonism between different groups in Turkey, and this inspires radical nationalistic acts. For example, Orthodox Christian ceremony – held each year in Haliç (Golden Horn) for the baptism of Jesus – has been protested again as recently as January 6, 2006 by members of a nationalistic group, *Türk Haliç Platformu* (Turkish Haliç Platform).

One of the protesters was dressed in Conqueror Mehmet's costume and others in Ottoman military costumes to reflect the conquest of Christian Istanbul by an Islamic and Turkish Empire (*Hürriyet* 2006). In this case, the Ottoman Empire reveals radical forms of nationalistic sentiments, which do not allow tolerance and harmony between different ethnic and religious groups. Consequently, this article argues that the Ramadan space forms a new social space and discourse which, perhaps being too optimistic, exaggerates religious and cultural tolerance in the city of Istanbul.

Defne Karaosmanoglu is an Assistant Professor in Communication at Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul. Her research interests include narratives of history; spaces of nostalgia in the city; globalization and changing discourses around food and cuisine. Her article "Eating the past: Multiple Spaces, Multiple Times: Performing Ottomanness in Istanbul" appeared in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2009, Volume 12 (4). She also published an article entitled "Surviving the global market: Turkish cuisine *under construction*" in *Food, Culture and Society Journal*, Fall 2007, volume 10 (3).

E-mails: defnekar@gmail.com; defne.karaosmanoglu@bahcesehir.edu.tr

Notes

- 1 While some serve traditional dishes like hünkar beğendi, tas kebapı, and lamb tandır, the others serve more exotic dishes such as şikempervir soup, pıruhi, pumpkin borani, mihrap böreği, and lamb palace kebab with quince.
- 2 It is most certainly the middle and higher classes who visit the five-star *iftar* places. This elitism has been the subject of criticism from the media (see Zengin 2004).
- 3 A meat product native to Turkey.
- 4 Instead of "Osmanlı", the English word "Ottoman" is used to make the product more appealing to the Turkish customers.
- 5 Religious performance of Melevîs and is performed by whirling dervishes.
- 6 Those demonstrations were against the controversial Presidential elections, which would result the presidency of Abdullah Gül (former Foreign Minister from AKP). With an email warning from the Turkish Armed Forces, however, AKP suggested early elections. General elections were held in June and were resulted with AKP's victory.
- 7 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from *Refah Partisi* (RP) stayed in power until 1998. After the closing down of RP, it was succeeded by FP (*Fazilet Partisi* Virtue Party). The Mayor of Municipality was Ali Müfit Görtuna until 2004 when Kadir Topbaş from another Islamist party, AKP (Justice and Development Party), became the new Mayor. Therefore, since 1994 the Mayors of Metropolitan Istanbul Municipality have been from the Islamist parties.
- 8 In this respect, the Islamist celebrations of Istanbul's conquest not only produce an Islamic identity in the public sphere, but they also serve to *nationalize Islamic discourse* (Çınar 2001: 387). According to Çınar, while they make full references to Islam, prophecy, and Mehmet II as a Muslim commander, they also constitute a national subject situated in the rhetoric of "us" and "our army" around an Islamic civilization (381). Therefore, an alternative national time is reproduced with Islamic-Ottoman heritage, but the ideal modern nationalist format stays the same as one nation=one time=one state (387).

- 9 The five-star Caprice Hotel was built in 1996 for the new Muslim demand for a summer resort. It has gender-segregated beaches and pools. No alcohol is served. As well, the neighbourhood of Eyüp has become popular for its religious shopkeepers, who sell prayer mats, turbans, robes, nonalcoholic perfumes, and rose water on the counters.
- 10 Louis Marin (1984) has introduced the notion of “degenerate utopias” to define utopia spaces that perpetuate “the fetish of commodity culture”. He gives the example of Disneyland which is “a supposedly happy, harmonious, and nonconflictual space” situated apart from the “real” world. It entertains, invents history, and cultivates nostalgia for some mythical past (24057; also cited in Harvey 2000: 166167).
- 11 *Boza* is a drink native to Turkey and to the Ottoman times. It is made out of malt.
- 12 Street sellers of *kestane* (chestnut), sherbet, and macun.
- 13 Ottoman sultans used to live there up until the end of the 19th century. They then moved to Dolmabahçe Palace on the shores of Bosphorus.
- 14 Roasted mutton intestines.
- 15 A kind of local (Anatolian style) pancake.
- 16 A beverage made from sahlep flour, which is very popular especially in the Middle East.
- 17 Traditional spicy raw meat.
- 18 Another article appeared in *Radikal* describes the Sultanahmet scene as simply an imitation without any real content. It says that the ambiance of Sultanahmet is “Ottoman” with regards to food and souvenir stands, but that the people who wear *fes* and Ottoman vests serve fast food at these stands instead of Ottoman food (*Radikal* 2004).
- 19 David Harvey (2000) has an argument that commodification and spectacles of commodity culture foment political indifference (168). However, he does not totally eliminate history and nostalgia from the scene. He gives the example of “new urbanism” which is basically the nostalgia for a small town America. It recuperates history, tradition, collective memory, and a sense of belonging and identity, therefore it does not lack “a critical utopian edge”. However, again for Harvey this is the materialization of utopian vision and is problematic since nostalgia for “a community” is not enough if we do not know what it means and how to achieve it (16970).
- 20 He calls it the Adornean argument since it originated with Adorno himself.
- 21 To explain heterotopias, Foucault provides two categories and five principles. The first category refers to sacred and forbidden places, which are based on purification and ritual, whereas the second category refers to places where people are placed by compulsory means, such as the prison and the mental hospital (1986: 2527).
- 22 The President at the time was Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz who made the announcement.
- 23 *İftariyelik*, which is the first meal to break the fast, is composed of butter, jam, cheese, *hurma*, *sucuk*, *pastırma*, and so on. This is a small meal which would not upset the stomach after a daylong fasting.
- 24 A writer of a mainstream newspaper, Ali Esad Göksel (2000) quotes his friend, a Turkish businessman, who lives in London: “Istanbul is the most sensational place in Ramadan” and “it is where you best experience Ramadan”. For him, as well, it is due to ‘our’ cultural heritage that Istanbul provides a special picture for Ramadan. For Göksel, historical breaks and forgetting can never erase the past totally. *Gulyabani’siz ramazan olmaz* (There cannot be any Ramadan without Gulyabani).
- 25 However, it was not until 2005 that the first step was made to advertise Istanbul’s Ramadan internationally. “Ramadan Istanbul Project” was proposed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to attract Muslims from other parts of the world, which includes special travel packages and city tours (Tüzün 2005).

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