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Globalization and Rituals: Does Ramadan Turn Into Christmas?

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the dynamics of consumer culture and globalization interact with Islamic beliefs, rituals and behaviors, and revive and modify local rituals in order to fit with modern consumption-driven lifestyles. Specifically, we focus on urban Turkey and discuss how Ramadan rituals are being reinvented, modified and reinterpreted at the marketplace. We argue that the commercialization of Ramadan is neither an instance of cultural imperialism nor an instance of postmodern disorder. Rather, commercial logic and consumerist ideology hybridize Western and non-Western traditions and practices, creating new expressions of existing rituals.

INTRODUCTION

Across the Muslim world, there are numerous signs that Ramadan, a time of fasting, prayer and reflection, is transforming from a religious month to a cultural and commercial holiday. The spirit of capitalism is felt in practices ranging from the marketing of specialty items (e.g., fasting calendars, lanterns) emblazoned with company logos to the Ramadan feasts promoted by restaurants and hotels, the Ramadan greeting cards, the Ramadan sweepstakes, and the Ramadan themed shopping malls and supermarkets. During the holy month in 2005, to the surprise of many, a shopping mall in Dubai even featured “a Ramadan display with an uncanny resemblance to a nativity scene, complete with moving camels, a village elder reading stories and a desert scene” (Fattah 2005). It appears that Ramadan has taken on the commercial trappings of Christmas and Hanukah and is transforming from a religious ritual to a holiday marked by consumption. Intrigued by these developments, our paper explores how the dynamics of consumer culture and globalization interact with Islamic beliefs, rituals and behaviors and reshape them to fit with modern consumption-driven lifestyles. Specifically, we focus on urban Turkey and discuss how Ramadan rituals are modified, reinterpreted, and reinvented in the marketplace. We begin our paper by offering a brief review of the literature on holiday rituals and their transformation under the logic of capitalism and consumerism. Next, we present the findings of an ethnographic study conducted in the fall 2005 in the cities of Ankara and Istanbul in Turkey and outline the market and consumption related actors, activities, and experiences observed in the enactment of the Ramadan ritual. We conclude by discussing the implications of commercialization of rituals for consumers as well as consumer researchers.

RITUALS AND THE CONSUMER CULTURE

Following the interest in rituals as incidences of symbolic consumption (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Rook 1985) several studies investigating numerous consumption rituals appeared in the marketing literature (see Otnes and Lowrey 2004 for a recent anthology). Much of this work deals with the nature and implications of consumption during ritual occasions such as Christmas (Belk 1989; Sherry and McGrath 1989), Thanksgiving (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991), birthday parties (Otnes and McGrath 1994), and wedding (Lowrey and Otnes 1994). In contrast to Rook’s view of rituals as “extremely resistant to innovation or deviation” (1985, p.253), many studies demonstrate that rituals, ritual artifacts and ritual meanings are

subject to dynamic changes (Goodwin, Smith and Spiggle 1990; Otnes, Kim and Lowrey 1992), that rituals are influenced by and influence social and cultural contexts (Belk 1989; Otnes and Scott 1996), and that new rituals can arise as a result of rapid social changes (Kreinath et al 2004).

Studies of consumption rituals observed in non-Western contexts provide more insights into understanding the dynamism of rituals and the relation between rituals and structural developments, such as the effects of modernity and globalization. For instance, in their study of the Chinese religious rituals practiced in Singapore, Kiong and Kong (2000) show that because conditions of modern living—smaller dwellings with new spatial arrangements—altered the conceptions of sacred space, related rituals had to be redefined and even replaced by invented rituals. Similarly, work on henna night (Ustuner, Ger and Holt 2000) and dowry (Sandikci and Ilhan 2004) rituals in Turkey reveal that both rituals went through a period of demise, mainly as a result of changing lifestyles and roles of women, but then were reinterpreted and recontextualized in accordance with the conditions of modern living.

Another set of studies focus on the effects of globalization and discuss how Western-originated rituals get adapted in non-Western contexts. Prominent in this research stream is the work on Christmas and its global spread. As these studies document, Christmas is celebrated in non-Christian countries as diverse as Japan, India, Trinidad, and China (Bodenhorn 1993; Miller 1993; Moeran and Skov 1993; Kimura and Belk 2005). Yet these are creolized or hybridized adaptations, which help incorporate Christmas into local culture. Similarly, Creighton’s (1993) work, which offers an exegesis of Valentine’s Day in Japan, reveals how foreign rituals are not just adopted but domesticated.

Overall, research suggests that modernity, capitalism and globalization influence rituals in two major ways. On the one hand, one can observe revitalization of certain local rituals, resulting in reinterpretation of a disappearing or already lost rite through the lens of the contemporary consumerist lifestyle (e.g., henna night in Turkey). On the other hand, some rituals travel to cultures that did not historically observe them. In such instances, the ritual often gets reinterpreted in the imported context and is experienced through a combination of ‘original’ and ‘new’ artifacts, scripts and performances (e.g., Christmas in Japan). Whether proof of Western cultural imperialism and global homogenization or instances of hybridization and local appropriation, both the spread of Western rituals in non-Western countries and the revitalization of local rituals in new forms in diverse parts of the world are eminent. Furthermore, what is also eminent is that these processes are aided by multinational as well as local companies and media, who gain significant financial benefits from such adopted or reinvented rituals.

Indeed, commercialization surfaces as a key vector underlying the experience of rituals, be it Christmas or Ramadan, and the synergy between celebration and commerce continues to grow strong. Commercial logic and consumerist ideology hybridize Western and non-Western rituals, creating new forms of traditions. We argue that Ramadan in Turkey, and in many other Muslim countries, have become a mix of local and global, old and contemporary, religious and secular artifacts, performances, and meanings.

THE STUDY

Each year, during the ninth month of the lunar calendar, Muslims perform their religious obligation of Ramadan fasting. For a whole month, from sunrise to sunset, adult Muslims whose health permits abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity. Many modern Muslims consider Ramadan “the most important of the ritual duties” and “even if a person does not comply with the requirements of five prayers a day, observance of the fast is still likely” (Rippin, 1993, p. 133). Ramadan is regarded as a time for reflection and spiritual discipline, for expressing gratitude for God’s guidance and forgiveness of past sins, for acknowledgment of human dependence on God, as well as remembering and responding to the needs of the poor and hungry (Esposito, 1991). The month of Ramadan traditionally includes post-sunset feasts (*iftar*) and celebrations that are usually rather private and family centered (Jomier, 1991, cited in Keenan and Yeni, 2003) and followed by special night prayers. Nightly dinners are commonly provided for the needy, but here too, the focus tends to be on parents, children, friends and community alms-giving.

However, in recent years performance of Ramadan rituals in Turkey began to take place more in the public space and in a visibly consumption-oriented manner. For instance, five-star hotels offer lavish Ramadan feasts, Ramadan festivals take place in high-traffic historical sites, and shopping malls transform into Ramadan themed environments offering a variety of shopping and entertainment experiences. Underlying such changes are both state agencies and private companies who cooperate with each other to revive the interest in public celebrations of Ramadan and attract visitors. Indeed, more and more, Ramadan looks like other Western-originated holiday rituals such as the New Year’s, St. Valentine’s Day, and Mother’s and Father’s days that are already celebrated in Turkey but almost exclusively as holidays of consumption.

In this study we focus on three contexts that Ramadan celebrations take place. First, we look at Ramadan festivals organized by the Istanbul municipality. Each year, the municipality organizes three major festivals at three different sites: in the square next to the Blue Mosque, which is a major tourist area in Istanbul; in *Feshane*, a historical building converted to a convention center in the late 1980s; and, *Talimhane*, a recently renovated historical street next to Taksim square, which is both a commercial and tourist area. The second context that we explore is shopping malls, specifically, Bilkent Shopping Centre and Migros Shopping Mall in Ankara. Bilkent Centre is located in an upper class neighborhood whereas Migros Mall is located in a lower class district. Both places can be accessed by public transportation. Finally, we focus on up-scale hotels and restaurants in Istanbul and Ankara that offer *iftar* meals. These feasts were initially offered only by the five star hotels and up-scale restaurants. Observing their success, nowadays, several establishments provide *iftar* meals to a variety of market segments at a variety of prices.

We collected data in the fall 2005, before, during and after the month of Ramadan. The primary data collection method employed was an ethnographic participant observation of the different contexts. Observations were made in Istanbul and Ankara, in several shopping malls, Ramadan festival sites, streets, hotels and restaurants. Informal interviews with retailers participating to the different festivals as well as with the shopkeepers in the malls were conducted. Moreover, a collection of secondary data sources, comprising of advertisements, magazines, newspapers and Internet websites, informs our analysis. Once the data collection was over, the authors independently went through the field notes, photographs and the visual archive in order to identify conceptual categories and themes. Next, the categories and themes identified

were discussed among the authors and any disagreements were resolved.

RAMADAN FESTIVALS

Since the takeover of the governance of Istanbul by the Islamist Party after the 1992 local elections, the municipality has been organizing Ramadan festivals. Although there are some variations across the festivals conducted at different locations, what these festivals commonly involve are a wide selection of food and ample opportunities for shopping and entertainment. The municipality promotes the festivals as an attempt to revitalize the spirit of “old” Ramadans and constructing a space that brings together people from all social classes and creates a sense of community (Istanbul Bulteni, 2005). As no entrance fee is charged, indeed people with limited income can visit the festival areas; however, in order to partake in the joy of the festivals one needs to spend money, i.e., on food and entertainment activities.

The biggest and oldest of these festivals is the one held at the square next to the Blue Mosque. During October 2005, for a whole month, the area was transformed into a big market place, packed with more than hundred stands selling food and beverages as well as all kinds of paraphernalia. In each day of the Ramadan month, thousands of visitors crammed the square before the sunset and waited until the time that daily fasting would be over. After the meals were eaten shopping and enjoyment of various cultural activities began. The activities included religious panels addressing different aspects of Ramadan and Islam as well as artistic performances. The performances mostly included traditional art forms, such as *karagöz* (traditional shadow show) and *meddah* (an earlier form of stand-up shows), which have been very popular during the time of the Ottoman Empire but were long forgotten in the modern era. On the other hand, for those who were interested in shopping, the stands offered a wide range of selections from religious objects, such as Qurans and spiritual books, to electronic appliances and Chinese-made decorative ornaments. Moreover, several local and global companies promoted their products by distributing samples and other promotional materials. As in other festival areas, the stands were built in the style of the traditional Ottoman houses and the vendors were dressed in traditional Ottoman attires. Replicating the Ottoman house transformed the stalls into stores that tell stories, places that create a memorable consumer experience (Kozinets, et al., 2002).

Similar activities and goods were visible at the festival conducted at *Feshane*. Past the entrance gate to the building, one was confronted with the food court named as the “Ottoman Street.” Here as well, all the food stalls were in the form of miniature replicas of traditional Ottoman houses. After the *iftar* meal, visitors enjoyed their coffees and teas in a traditional coffeehouse located near to the food court. Next to the coffeehouse was a small theater where plays and concerts were performed. However, this entertainment was available only to those who paid the \$10 cover charge. The main building, on the other hand, was almost like a trade show; several companies were busy promoting their products and services to the wandering visitors. For example, banks promoted credit cards while mobile phone companies advertised their new fares. Not only information but also certain goods were distributed freely. Unilever Company, for example, distributed bowls of its newly launched instant soup and cups of Lipton brand flavored teas. There were also several brands of cars and motorcycles on exhibit. Many people waited in line to be photographed standing next to their dream car or motorcycle, while others posed with *Celik*, a cute robot functioning as the symbol of a local appliance manufacturer. At both festival places, a very popular activity was being photographed as an

Ottoman sultan. For \$10, one could be easily transformed to a sultan or his wife, complete with the period attire and look, and immortalize this instance with a color photograph. Couples as well as families rushed into, creating long queues every night. Candy and beverage stalls spread all over the festival areas were very popular as well.

While the Blue Mosque and *Feshane* festivals had a more mass appeal, the *Talimhane* festival claimed to offer a more “authentic” and exclusive Ramadan experience. The stalls placed alongside the street were again in the form of replications of the traditional Ottoman houses. However, instead of selling food and cheap paraphernalia, these stalls hosted craftsmen who were invited from all over Turkey by the municipality in order to promote and sell their art to the tourists as well as the upper-middle class residents of Istanbul. Along with handicraft replications of Ottoman art and jewelry the decorations used in the area attempted to create a more “authentic” revival of the past. Several real-life size black and white photographs portraying scenes from everyday life in the Ottoman period were placed next to the stalls. For example, visitors drinking Turkish coffee and smoking hookahs were sitting in front of a photograph of a traditional coffeehouse, while at the background of the visitors resting on an Ottoman style couch was a photograph of a living room of an Ottoman house. Moreover, actors dressed in Ottoman style dresses were strolling along the street, posing frequently with visitors to be photographed. Overall, for a month *Talimhane* was transformed to a nostalgic Ottoman neighborhood complete with the images of the Ottoman house, the grocery store, the coffeehouse, the spice store, and the whirling dervishes.

Taken as a whole, the municipality, by creating these festive consumption spaces, makes Ramadan an attractive event to the retailers, residents and tourists. In the mean time, the municipality also profits as it rents the stalls for around \$10,000. Through the intersection of sacred (religion and history) and profane (shopping and leisure), public authorities and retailers, attempt to sacralize the ordinary commercial commodities (O’Guinn and Belk, 1989), most of which are commonly available. Similar to theme parks like Disneyland, a “dedifferentiation of consumption” is evident as different institutional spheres become increasingly interconnected with each other (Bryman, 1999, p.33). This tendency is also evident in the Ramadan festivals as we see a tendency for eating, shopping and leisure to become “inextricably interwoven” and very difficult to separate (Bryman, 1999). Through a selective portrayal of history (Goulding, 2000), the Ramadan festivals also resonate with the trend of the “commodification of history” (Barthel 1996), which involves consumption practices related to the past. This themed past however, is cleansed from all the negative effects that may break the marketable theme and thus, places present a simulation of the Ottomans’ glory.

SHOPPING MALLS

Shopping malls become another site for the revival of the commodified version of the Ramadan ritual. The literature provides evidence that shopping malls have become venues for activities other than shopping and destinations in their own right (Bryman, 1999). Malls nowadays, provide a wide variety of services, such as restaurants, banking facilities, cinemas and leisure facilities for children, allowing individuals to participate in activities other than shopping (Sandikci and Holt, 1998). During the month of Ramadan, both of the shopping malls that we examined were turned into festive places themed with Ottoman symbols. Similar to the festivals organized by municipalities, the malls after *iftar* provided live music, shadow shows, and plays for the children.

The main entrance of the Migros Shopping Mall was decorated with some massive gold colored Tulips, which welcomed the

visitors with a reference to the old Ramadan days. The mixture of gold and tulips reminds the entrances of the luxurious Ottoman palaces with their renowned gardens and rich interiors, often described as paradises on earth. Located next to the main entrance were a miniature of the Blue Mosque in purple color and a miniature of an Ottoman neighborhood. The interior of the mall was further decorated with lively colored *fezzes*, which were initially used by the Ottoman soldiers and then were adopted as an everyday hat by the Ottoman men. Lively colored ribbons similar to the ribbons hold by the Ottoman army band were hanged between the *fezzes*. The corridors were decorated by purple lanterns, which connoted the lanterns used to light the streets in the Ottoman Empire. The decorations combined the pre-modern symbols of the most significant era of the Turkish history with modern and fashionable colors, such as turquoise blue, green, red and purple.

Apart from the decoration, the mall was transformed into a festival space after the post-sunset *iftar* feast. A traditional coffeehouse, with its stools and small tables, was set up on the third floor of the mall. In the same area, a small stage, where traditional performances (e.g. *karagöz* and *meddah*) and live music were performed, was built. Individuals could watch these activities from the upper floor as well, where the food court is located. Additionally, small stands were located all over the mall, which sold nostalgic candies and beverages (e.g., cotton candy, toffee apple, cotton halva).

Although the decorations in the Bilkent shopping mall were less spectacular, the atmosphere was similar. Here as well, a stage to host various performances was built. With Oriental lanterns and fabrics, Turkish carpets, a wooden carriage full of Ramadan candies, straws sprinkled down on the floor and waitresses dressed in Ottoman clothing, the place was reminiscent of the Ottoman past. The spirit of Ramadan also transformed the supermarkets located at the malls. Ramadan streets featuring different stands selling snacks eaten when breaking the fast, such as olives, dates and pitas, were built inside the supermarkets in both malls. The decorations at the Migros supermarket were an extension of the decorations used inside the shopping mall, colored *fezzes* and ribbons, gold tulip-like decorations and different kind of lanterns were placed all over the shop. In the supermarket at the Bilkent shopping mall, there was a Ramadan Street comprising of stands made to look like the facades of the Ottoman houses. A wide variety of snacks and products that were related with Ramadan were available for purchase.

Overall, both malls attempted to create a simulation of the pre-modern agora or bazaar. The prehistoric market was essentially social, characterized by crowds, close physical context, and highly personal interchange, which provided for an exciting, festive environment (Gumpert and Drucker, 1992). Malls nowadays attempt to replicate the feeling of market through design and atmospherics, re-creating a simulated controlled “urban” environment (Gottdiener, 2001). Likewise, shopping malls, through the commodification of social experience, seek to re-construct the spirit of the publicly-celebrated Ramadan experience, an experience that has lost its public appeal during the making of the modern republic. The Ottoman theming allows consumers to experience the collective but forgotten past through fantasy, similar to Disney’s Main Street, which allows consumers to experience a suburban town in America (Holak and Havlena, 1991). But although nostalgia draws from the past, it is clearly a product of the present. As Panelas (1979) argues nostalgia is always evoked in the context of current modern fears and anxieties. Shopping malls resolve the modern societies’ anxieties through providing security in all their entrances, offering a controlled environment cleansed from the unexpected events (pick-pocketing, street fights etc.) that contaminate the municipality festivals.

HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS

From fast-food chains like McDonalds to luxurious five star hotels, restaurants offer different menus in a variety of price ranges. The most conspicuous consumption of *iftar* feasts occurs in five star hotel and restaurants, which through advertising try to create an alternative “elite spirit” of Ramadan. The market offers to its’ elite Muslim followers the ability to experience the sacredness of the month at an exclusive environment. However, rather than being available to anyone wishing to attend (Procter, 2004), luxurious hotels and restaurants re-produce differences in class positions, as *iftar* dinners cost \$30 or more per person.

Similar to the other contexts, hotels and restaurants promote the revival of the ritual by emphasizing the Ottoman references. For example, the advertisement for Polat Renaissance Hotel portrays the Blue Mosque in the days of the Ottoman Empire. The picture shows Ottoman merchants gathered around the garden of the mosque dressed in the attires of that epoch. The ad attempts to draw an analogy between the mosque and the hotel by alluding to the fact that religious centers were also commercial centers in the pre-modern times (Ibrahim, 1982). Similar to the religious centers of the Ottoman epoch, the hotel creates a sacred centre in their commercial space. The hotel claims an “authentic” revival of the past and welcomes its visitors to the most “authentic” experience of Ramadan. Another five star hotel in Istanbul, Ceylan Intercontinental, associates its brand name with the word *iftar*. Just after sunset when the fasting is over, televisions channels declare the end of the fast by the announcement “Now, it is the time for *Iftar*”. Alluding to the announcement, the Ceylan Intercontinental advertisement reads “Time for Ceylan in Ramadan”. The ad also features the characteristic signature of the Ottoman Sultan in the form of a music note, which further emphasizes the courtly quality of *iftar* at Ceylan Intercontinental.

The Ramadan feast at the five-star hotels and up-scale restaurants included a plethora of dishes, starters, main dishes and sweets, which reflect the abundance of choices presented to the modern consumer. Consumers enjoyed their *iftar* either in set menus or in American style buffets. The choice of a menu dining was not limited to a single fixed menu. Rather, hotels and restaurants offered at least four different menus in order to respond to their customers’ tastes. Moreover, individuals could create their own customized menus. The food offered was a combination of the rich cuisine of the Ottoman Empire and a variety of options among Turkish and World cuisines (e.g. Mexican, Italian and Greek cuisine). The consumer was not limited to the local tastes of his/hers country; rather, food acquired a global taste. Not only the choices of the food, but also the presentation of the food created an elite feast. The food is often served in copper cutleries, which used to be the tableware at the Ottoman Empire. Live traditional Turkish music also was performed throughout the feast. In some of the restaurants, even *Whirling Dervish* performances were carried out. Some restaurants revived traditions that were long forgotten, such as “*Di? Kirasi*”. During the Ottoman times, when a family invited visitors for the *iftar* feast, the hosts also gave small gifts to their guests. Modernizing this ritual, an upscale restaurant, *Asitane* offered gifts like silver cigarette cases and amber rosaries to its patrons.

The nostalgia created in these contexts are based on an elite longing for the past, a longing for the lives of the Sultans and the life at the Ottoman palaces, rather than a longing for a collective past (Holak and Havlena, 1991). Ottoman Sultans enjoyed all aspects of the imperial glory such as the art, leisure and richness of the cuisine, without having to wait for the sacred month of Ramadan (Sakaoglu and Akpınar, 1999). Through their sophisticated decorations, selection of dishes and entertainment activities, the up-scale restaurants

and five-star hotels attempted to create a simulation of a Ramadan celebration at the Ottoman palace. Thus, although Ottoman theming was present in all three contexts that we discussed and similar cultural motifs were used to invoke the Ottoman past, their differential use enabled companies to differentiate the offerings in order to appeal to different consumer markets (Gottdiener, 2001).

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the literatures on rituals and globalization by studying how rituals are modified, reinterpreted, and reinvented in the marketplace. We discuss how the interaction of the global and local revive and transform the practices and the meanings of Ramadan ritual. In their study of Christmas celebrations in Japan, Kimura and Belk argue that Western holidays like Christmas, Valentine’s Day, and Halloween, which have complex cultural ideologies behind them, “threaten to displace traditional local holidays” (2005, p.325). However, we argue that in some cases, rather than displacing, they might revive and modify existing local rituals. Our findings indicate that the commercialization of Ramadan is neither an instance of cultural imperialism where Western life forms erase local life forms under the disguise of globalization (i.e., McDonaldization, Ritzer, 1995), nor an instance of postmodern disorder, characterized by liberating experiences and themes erasing the limits of the modern project (i.e., Disneyization, Bryman, 1999). Ramadan is rather like “traffic in things” (Jackson, 1988) and a process of glocommodification (Ram, 2004). Jackson (1998) argues that commoditization is like traffic, in which various agents encourage the revival and transformation of meanings and responses. Similarly, Ram (2004, p. 27) discusses global commodification as a dual process that “combines structural uniformity with symbolic diversity”.

At the symbolic level, there are distinctive characteristics that differentiate the ritual of Ramadan from other holidays and create a unique experience for the Muslim followers. Different forms of post-sunset *iftar* feasts and celebrations together with the use of the symbols of the Ottoman Ramadan festivals encourage a local heterogeneity. On the other hand, contemporary rituals are still edited in accordance with the needs of the profit-oriented industries (Schmidt, 1991), and thus reproduce the deep-seated social relationships involved in their production and consumption (Ram, 2004). The global consumerist ideology facilitates and strengthens the consumption of “sacralized” commodities in the form of products, services, places, and experiences, and offer consumers a new occasion for shopping and leisure. Ramadan turns into a “glocommodified” (Ram, 2004, p. 27) ritual, combining a variety of symbols connoting religious values and beliefs as well as markers of global consumption ethos. Theming, which underlies all three contexts we discussed, operate as a major instrument of commodification.

Although this glocommodified ritual encompasses many features that appear to fit postmodern theories, many modern foundations shape the ritual. Unlike, Beardshow and Bryman (1999), who argue that themed environments include many of the reassuring securities of modernity such as physical safety, comfort and hygiene, we argue that more powerful actors such the nation state and the existing social hierarchies reproduce modern foundations. Our results indicate that local municipalities and the market have forged close ties for the revival of the religious ritual. Municipalities transform religious and historical places into temporary commercial markets. While the local government profits from organizing the sites, retailers profit by finding another channel to market their products. However, what underlies this cooperation is not only the profit motive, but also the state’s political ambitions.

The Islamist party, which controls the governance of major cities as well as the country, emphasizes both the religious and Ottoman values for the contemporary Turkish identity and takes advantage of any incidence that can be converted into some form of cultural and religious propaganda. As Kopytoff (1986) argues the commoditization of holidays is significantly related to “the cultural and ideological premises that suffuses its working”. Thus, in contrast to postmodernist theories, rather than an erosion of the state’s ability to forge national and in this case religious identities (Firat and Dholakia, 2003), the nation state becomes a primarily agent in the revival of the ritual.

A second feature that contradicts the liberating experiences of post-modernity is the reproduction of social structures, which creates a deprived experience of the ritual for many individuals. In contrast to the conceptualization of festival celebrations as being available to anyone who wishes to attend (Procter, 2004), Ramadan festivals reproduce social inequalities. For example, the luxurious feasts in five-star hotels and restaurants and certain forms of entertainment in the municipality festivals, which require payment of a cover fee, limit accessibility. Rather than acting as a ritual that emphasizes ultimate unity and equality of all believers before God (Esposito, 1991; Creighton, 1993), Ramadan festivals reinforce accepted social hierarchies.

Overall, this study offers an initial attempt to explore the forms of revival and modification of local rituals in the marketplace. As this study was primarily composed of an analysis of representation, more insights can be gained through conducting in-depth interviews with the agents that have the power to edit rituals, as well as the individuals, who consume these rituals. Questions of how rituals influence each other and how consumers make sense of the local and the global, the past and the contemporary, offer a range of opportunities for further research.

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