

## Constructing the Capital of Peace: Changing Branding Strategies for Istanbul's Eyüp Quarter

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This article analyzes how the Justice and Development Party (AKP)-led local municipality changed branding strategies for Istanbul's Eyüp quarter since its predecessor took office in 1994. Portraying itself as the savior of Eyüp's heritage and Eyüp as the symbol of a larger imagined Islamic-Ottoman community, the AKP legitimizes its political rule on various levels. The diachronic comparison of municipal city guidebooks illustrates how the

framing of Eyüp and its branding strategies changed with shifting political contexts. The recent strategy to attract diverse tourists as multipliers to consume and spread the AKP's identity narratives demonstrates the political nature of tourism branding.

**Keywords:** Urban Heritage Politics, City Branding, Eyüp, AKP, Neo-Ottomanism, City Guidebooks

### Introduction

On a sunny day in November 2016, I visited Pierre Loti Café on the cemetery hill in Istanbul's Eyüp quarter to enjoy the view across the Golden Horn to the Historic Peninsula's mosques. In the aerial tramway leading up, I encountered a friend. Seeing her in Eyüp surprised me, as many Istanbulites, who like her consider themselves secular, suspiciously regard the place as Islamist and conservative. However, she avoided the actual quarter and only enjoyed the hilltop's view.

People of various backgrounds from Istanbul, Turkey, and abroad visit Pierre Loti Café, and many of them never enter the adjacent quarter. Others come after visiting Eyüpsultan<sup>1</sup> Mosque and Shrine in Eyüp's center, which is crowded on religious holidays. Shops offer religious paraphernalia to visitors and so-called historical Ottoman cuisine.

Although various people experience Eyüp in rather different ways, many of these images have been shaped by the same Eyüp Municipality. Since the mid-1990s it has launched a broad range of activities to construct and promote an identity for Eyüp through interventions into the quarter's physical fabric, so-called cultural

events, and the propagation of narratives through publications (Hammond 98-144).

Studies on place branding identify investors, tourists, and residents as the main target groups of branding activities that aim mainly to attract capital and visitors in a global competition among cities (Braun et al. 18; Philo and Kearns 3). Studies examining place branding as a means whereby elites propagate narratives legitimizing power structures and aim to control social behavior often describe locals as targets. They discuss attempts to make residents identify with the constructed image, support branding activities directed at investors and tourists, and back urban development projects that serve elites' interests but may be diametrical to their own (Braun et al.; Broudehoux; Gotham; Philo and Kearns).

While these dynamics apply also to Eyüp's branding, this article shows that since the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP), the predecessor<sup>2</sup> of today's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), took office locally in 1994, these parties' activities to brand Eyüp have been closely linked to their narratives legitimizing their political power not only locally, but also nationally and regionally by portraying Eyüp as a symbol of a larger

imagined community's identity (Anderson). Tourists, for some time the main addressee, are attracted not merely for economic profit, but also to have them spread the AKP's identity narratives. This points to the political nature of tourism branding. This article further demonstrates how the Eyüp Municipality's branding strategies changed with shifting prospects for political and economic profit.

Research on the AKP's urban politics in Istanbul describes its attempts to transform the city's image into one of Ottoman glory and to attract global capital at the same time (Akcan; Öncü), primarily through mega-projects and the large-scale transformation of existing quarters. Mass evictions and demolitions led to protests. State institutions were granted major rights regarding renewal projects, resulting in widespread state-led gentrification since the mid-2000s, in parallel with gentrification processes through the settlement of higher status groups in historical areas (Akcan; İslam and Sakızlıoğlu). The gentrified areas' characteristics differ with the gentrifiers, developing areas such as Beyoğlu into nightlife hubs, while Üsküdar and Eyüp are transformed to fit religious Muslim middle and upper classes' lifestyles.

Research further shows how the AKP's and its predecessors' rhetoric and mobilization strategies transformed after they assumed power. The rhetoric changed from anti-establishment to pro-ruling elite (Tuğal); and they shifted from catering to the urban poor to addressing the growing Muslim middle and upper classes, promoting a lifestyle that combines consumerism with Islamic aspects (Çavdar). More generally, the AKP changed its rhetoric on the international level, based on shifting contexts, adopting certain categories for collaboration with the European Union (EU) (Girard and Scalbert Yücel) but others for Turkey's policy toward countries in predominantly Muslim and formerly Ottoman regions (Insel).

Although Eyüp occupies a central place in both the AKP's and its predecessors' narratives and in Istanbul's topography, only few scholars have studied its developments since the RP took office in 1994 (Hammond; Ulubaş). Transformations in the presentation of Eyüp by the AKP and its predecessors could, however, due to its symbolic value, shed light on general transformations in the AKP's narratives.

Based on an analysis of city guidebooks on Eyüp published by the Eyüp Municipality between 1996 and 2016, this

article examines the historical changes within the Eyüp Municipality's narratives and branding strategies for Eyüp since 1994 in relation to wider political developments. Tracing these changes, in contrast to the Eyüp Municipality's essentialist rhetoric, the article points to the constructedness and volatility of a place's identity (Massey). The article further argues that by aiming to attract diverse groups to consume a particular narrative about Eyüp, which is presented as a symbol of a larger imagined community, branding Eyüp plays an important role in the AKP's identity politics on different scales.

### Changing Narratives about Eyüp and Political Rule

In the past, Ottoman narratives established a symbolic connection between Eyüp and political rule by claiming that the grave of the Prophet's Companion Ebu Eyyub had been rediscovered during the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Ebu Eyyub had died around 669, when the early Muslims unsuccessfully attempted to conquer Constantinople. Shortly after its Ottoman conquest, Sultan Mehmet II built a shrine for Ebu Eyyub outside Constantinople's city walls and near the Golden Horn (Coşkun 47-77, 121-128). The cult around Ebu Eyyub as a "patron saint of the new Ottoman capital"

(Necipoğlu 2523) after the conquest can be seen as part of an imperial policy to establish Islamic legitimation for Ottoman rule over Constantinople. (Necipoğlu 23-26) At least from the 17th century onward, throne ascension ceremonies for sultans took place at the shrine, which had developed into a pilgrimage site. The surrounding quarter was the center of one of the four administrative districts of Constantinople (Coşkun 142-197). The image of Eyüp's Islamic character was further stressed, in contrast to its neighboring quarters of Fener and Balat, inhabited until the mid-20th century pogroms by Greeks and Jews.

With the foundation of the secular Republic of Turkey in 1923, Eyüp ceased to be connected to such official narratives. The shrine was closed in 1925, along with most shrines in Turkey. With increasing industrialization along the Golden Horn from the 1950s on, Eyüp came to be imagined as a poor and polluted workers' suburb, crowded with informal settlements (Hammond 111). In the meantime, symbolic value continued to be attributed to Eyüpsultan Shrine. Some politicians referred to it to display their agendas' connectedness to the Ottomans and Islam. In this context, the shrine was one of the few

to be reopened by the new Democrat Party government in 1950 (Coşkun 13).

### AKP and Eyüp

The AKP and its predecessors, in office in Eyüp and Greater Istanbul since 1994 and nationally since 2002, have repeatedly displayed a connection to Eyüpsultan Shrine. After winning the constitutional referendum in 2017, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan prayed there. This was interpreted as imitating Ottoman enthronement ceremonies, and thus as Erdoğan positioning himself as the inheritor of the Ottoman sultans' position (Acarer).

Using the rhetoric of Ottoman and Islamic revival, the AKP and its predecessors position themselves in contrast to the secular republic's elites, whom they blame for Westernizing Turkey and breaking with its heritage. They claim to represent the religious and conservative groups who felt suppressed by measures taken in the name of modernization and secularization after the republic's founding. They portray the RP's 1994 election victory as paralleling Constantinople's Ottoman conquest in 1453. As the former Ottoman capital, Istanbul is central to Ottoman revivalist narratives (Çınar; Öncü). Due to the claimed connection of Ebu Eyyub to the Prophet and to the Ottoman conquest,

Eyüp is of central importance within Istanbul.

Consequently, after taking office, the RP expended considerable energy to rehabilitate the quarter and to transform its image as a poor industrial suburb into one representing Islamic and Ottoman glory (Hammond 98-144). Referring to urban rehabilitation activities since 1994, the party presents its taking office as a turning point in the quarter's history and itself as the savior of Eyüp's imagined identity. Since the area's deindustrialization in the 1980s, its economy began to shift to the service sector (Yenen et al. 103-139). With the Golden Horn's cleaning, historical buildings' restoration, and infrastructural investments, Eyüp started to attract tourists, middle-class residents, and non-governmental institutions, based on Eyüp's religious and historical image. Rising real estate prices and new consumption offers targeting tourists and Muslim middle classes suggest that a process of gentrification is ongoing. Renewal projects and a planned metro station presumably accelerate the process.

### **From Attractive Residential Area to Capital of Inner Peace**

Inderpal Grewal and Rudy Koshar demonstrate how guidebooks are related to the construction of imagined authentic and

stable larger collectivities and of distinctions between the *Self* and the *Other*. With the composition of objects into landscapes representing these entities, guidebooks make it possible to experience these abstract ideas and seemingly prove them true. Instructions on how to approach and interpret sights as parts of a larger meaningful entity shape the guided person's expectations, experience, and understanding. By selecting and interpreting objects and by interpreting the reader's relationship with them and the entity they represent, guidebooks reinforce difference and power structures, while masking their own role by using objective language (Grewal 2, 85-101; Koshar). The guides published by the Eyüp Municipality offer only a particular interpretation of Eyüp, define the reader's relationship to the place, and provide strong advice on how to approach it. However, the compositions of the routes proposed in the guidebooks change over time, mobilize different frames of cultural and religious significance, and connect to different general identity narratives. This indicates changes in the AKP's strategies for identity politics in changing political circumstances.

In 1996, two years after the RP took power locally, the Eyüp Municipality Mayor's

Office published the first city guide about Eyüp. Dedicating it to Eyüp's residents, mayor Ahmet Genç states in the preface: "Eyüpsultan, where the Ottoman sultans were girded with the sword during their throne ascension ceremonies and which they found as a source of legitimation for their power, can with the determination of Eyüpsultan's people win back the same spiritual mission" (*Eyüp Sultan Rehberi* 1996 1-2). The booklet presents the quarter primarily as being significant for the Ottoman conquest and the Ottoman state and society. Based on Eyüpsultan Shrine, it is referred to as the Ottoman sultans' "source of legitimation".

An "encyclopedic" section (*Eyüp Sultan Rehberi* 1996 21-38) of the guide illustrates that Eyüp's identity is envisioned as being "Ottoman" – all structures listed were built during the Ottoman period. But "Ottoman" is mainly understood as Islamic, as most buildings presented are related to Islam. Mosques, lodges, and shrines make up the vast majority. The second to last category, "Other Structures", comprises two industrial buildings. In last place, after what is called "other" and thereby ranked as the least important, are two Armenian churches. Although their existence points to the presence of Armenian residents during the Ottoman period, the text pre-

ceding the list mentions non-Muslims only concerning the pre-Ottoman past, regarding the Byzantine settlement of Cosmidion at the site of today's Eyüp; concerning the Ottoman period, it regards only visitors from outside such as the French Orientalist writer Pierre Loti. Non-Muslim residents during the Ottoman period are never mentioned and thus not considered part of Eyüp's true identity.

Directed at current and possible future residents, the guide describes Eyüp as an attractive place to live with modern infrastructure and provides information about services such as health care and education (*Eyüp Sultan Rehberi 1996* 12-15, 39-47). The RP-led municipality's aim during this time was to promote an image of Eyüp associated with its glory during Ottoman times, as part of the party's Ottoman revivalist activism in the 1990s. In addition to portraying the new government as saving Eyüp's true identity, the guide introduces the RP's governance as resident-focused and based on scientific and modern principles. The guide is part of the RP's project to prove itself to its electoral base while trying to institutionalize its new political power locally and, with more difficulty, nationally.

Ten years later, the Eyüp Municipality's 2006 Strategic Plan, optimistic about economic opportunities, promotes mass tourism as a prime goal. It praises Pierre Loti Hill's transformation, where restaurant and hotel facilities were opened and which was connected to downhill Eyüp with an aerial tramway (Eyüp Stratejik Plan). A second guide published by the Eyüp Municipality in 2008 mainly reprints the 1996 edition's text, but as a high-gloss paperback with numerous photographs, its design is completely different. The text in Turkish and English addresses foreigners as well as people from Turkey. The turn toward visitors and toward making Eyüp more consumable is also visible in the presentation of a route. Next to religious activities and heritage sightseeing, it includes moments framed as relaxation and enjoyment, such as having coffee at Pierre Loti Café, which "relieves all your tiredness of the day" (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 37).

While the 1996 guide connects Eyüp's significance to the Ottomans based on Eyüpsultan Shrine, the 2008 preface claims that the shrine has made Eyüp "one of the Islamic world's most visited sacred places after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem" (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 7). Eyüp's Islamic significance is stressed to attract Muslim tourists, especially those

from Arab countries, reflecting the AKP's foreign policy to make Turkey a central power in the region. Bolstered by the economic boom and the consolidation of the AKP's power since taking office nationally in 2002, by the mid-2000s the AKP was employing self-confident rhetoric about Turkey being an internationally powerful actor and about Istanbul being a "global city" (Insel; Öncü). At the same time, the AKP catered to European tourists as well, pursuing amiable relations with the European Union in expectation of Turkey's accession. Thus, the 2008 preface describes Eyüp also as the "shared heritage of humanity", important also for non-Muslims due to its numerous historical structures (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 7). Possibly for this reason, Ottoman Armenian Eyüp residents are mentioned in 2008 as well.

Compared to 1996, the 2008 guide shifts Eyüp's framing both in content and scale, describing its significance as an Islamic sacred place and part of the "heritage of humanity", not only for the Ottomans' descendants, but also on a global level. While the loss of Eyüp's historical structures was lamented in 1996, after several years of physical restructuring, in 2008 the presence of history is promoted as a main characteristic: "Nowhere [else...] is it [sic]

possible, [... to] experience history so thoroughly and become part of it." (*Eyüp City Guide 2008* 7) Tourists, unaware of Eyüp's earlier state, are now the main focus of the municipality's branding activities, rather than residents, as tourists promise economic profit and, through their mobility, can spread the image that the municipality creates of Eyüp.

In 2009, AKP member İsmail Kavuncu replaced Genç as Eyüp's mayor. A new edition of the 2008 guide was published in 2011. In the preface, Kavuncu frames Eyüp's significance mainly in Islamic terms, stressing that "being neighbor" to Ebu Eyyub "for us carries inestimable value" (*Eyüp City Guide 2011* 7). He references the prominent Islamist writer Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), whose teacher's lodge is located in Eyüp. Referring to a relatively contemporary figure's relation to Eyüp, Kavuncu portrays Eyüp as a "sacred" place with a "metaphysical" quality present not only in Ottoman times, but also today, and calls the guide a "handbook for religious tourism" (*Eyüp City Guide 2011* 7-9). More than a mere pilgrimage, this is to include heritage tourism of "our civilization" of Islam and the consumption of Eyüp's "mystical" atmosphere, catering to the growing Muslim middle and upper classes and providing opportunities for



Figure 1: Eyüp as the "Capital of Inner Peace" (*huzur başkenti*) - Slogan on the Municipal Poster  
Source: Annegret Roelcke 2015.

economic profit. The stress on Eyüp's Islamic identity occurs in the context of shifting Turkish foreign policies in the early 2010s. Following setbacks in the EU accession negotiations, internal consolidation of the AKP's power, and the Arab Spring in 2010/2011, the Turkish government turned more toward the Middle East and adopted Islamic rhetoric while aspiring to become a leader in the Muslim world (Insel 192).

Since his accession in 2014, AKP mayor Remzi Aydın has branded Eyüp the

"Capital of Inner Peace (*huzur başkenti*)" (figures 1: In contrast to mass tourism, as aimed for in 2006, Eyüp is portrayed as a calm, peaceful, and spiritual place of escape from modern chaotic urban life. A new guide published in 2016 illustrates increased efforts to make Eyüp consumable, containing six routes and information on restaurants, hotels, and souvenirs. The preface welcomes visitors to "one of the centers bearing our civilization" and a place of "escape from urban life" (Özağşar and Uyar 1). The text is in Turkish only,



Figure 2: "Ramadan in Eyüp with Inner Peace - [Sultans'] Enthronement Street's Gate" - Municipal Street Sign  
Source: Annegret Roelcke 2015.

intended for visitors from Istanbul and Turkey more broadly. Most of the routes' headings seem to offer objective representations of the areas by applying neutral-sounding categories in accordance with geographical references.

The route "Eyüp Center" suggests a spatial concentration of Eyüp's identity. It is composed entirely of Ottoman-era monumental structures, mainly tombs of religious and state authorities, mosques, and lodges. The only exceptions are the

Feshane factory and an Armenian church (Özafşar and Uyar 34-67). Byzantine ruins, reminders of Ottoman social history, and republican structures are not included. The route propagates only a particular interpretation of Eyüp's identity related to the Ottoman state and the religious elite, and as Islamic.

The route "Eyüp Cemetery and Pierre Loti" attempts to change the image of the hill with the panorama spot, famous also among Istanbulites and tourists uninter-

ested in what many perceive as Islamic downhill Eyüp. The route's sites, Ottoman-era lodges and mosques, with Pierre Loti Café only appearing at the end (Özafşar and Uyar 70-78), suggest that the place's identity is mainly Ottoman and Islamic rather than related to the French Orientalist.

Eyüp's industrial past does not feature in Eyüp's heritage. While the guide includes factories, they are, except for Feshane, only points on the route "The Golden Horn's Opposite Side". The fact that also Eyüp's side of the Golden Horn was lined with industry is omitted. The geographical separation implies a qualitative difference between the opposite bank and "central" Eyüp. The guide values the factories as an attractive environment in their current use as museums and a conference center (Özafşar and Uyar 82-85); but by not mentioning that some were built during Ottoman times, it dissociates industrialization from the Ottoman heritage (Öztürk 41).

### **Eyüp as Inclusive Symbol for a Larger Imagined Community**

The 2016 guide uses seemingly objective language coupled with a rhetoric of recreation, entertainment, and a return to one's origins, as it is common in contemporary



Figure 3: Eyüp as the “Capital of Inner Peace” (*huzur başkenti*) - Municipal Poster  
Source: Annegret Roelcke 2015.

tourism discourse. In this way, and by including elements not usually associated with Eyüp's Islamic-Ottoman image, such as the area's industrial heritage and Pierre Loti, the guide also addresses feelings distant from the AKP's Islamic-Ottoman rhetoric. However, within Eyüp, the guides and the physical environment prepared by the Eyüp Municipality direct visitors to experience the place in a way leading to a very particular interpretation of Eyüp's identity as Islamic and Ottoman.

The notion of *huzur*, (inner peace), as in Eyüp's slogan “Capital of *huzur*”, is central to the municipality's discourse. Visible on the widely distributed municipal information and self-promotion posters, the slogan is very present in Eyüp's public space. *Huzur* is a complex concept of social and inner peace that entered the Ottoman language via Islamic mysticism. 20th-century Turkish literature treated it in terms of its lack in the early republican years of social change (Tanpınar) or as an ideal lifestyle based on Islamic and Ottoman social

norms (Şenler). Today, the term can have an Islamic meaning, but it is also used without any religious connotations to refer to social or inner peace (Glassen 13-26). In Eyüp, *huzur* can be understood as being physically close to the saint. Additionally, the Eyüp Municipality uses the notion in branding Eyüp as a positive place, in opposition to modern, stressful urban life. With *huzur*, it unites the different aspects of Eyüp's image, such as its sacredness, its historical atmosphere, and its natural environment, including the cemeteries' trees and the Golden Horn's water. Presented in this way, Eyüp relates to more general desires for harmony, spirituality, and recreation (Öztürk 42).

I argue that the complex concept of *huzur*, connected to a mystical atmosphere, through its ambiguity can invite people from various backgrounds to experience Eyüp in a way directed by the Eyüp Municipality, and therefore promote the municipality's narratives about Eyüp. *Huzur* acts as an “empty signifier” (Laclau 72; Laclau and Mouffe), which, through its polysemy and underdetermination, can connect to and unite different groups and help to establish cultural hegemony. Especially in the context of the rising social and political tensions in Turkey, *huzur*, while understood differently by different



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people, can function as a unifying signifier of something desired but absent. By promising to deliver this desired quality and to revive the “golden age” of the imagined community identified as Ottoman, of which the condition of *huzur* is promoted as a central feature, the AKP is trying to legitimize its power. As the *capital* of *huzur*, Eyüp is constructed as a powerful center of that imagined identity, from where the quality of *huzur* is supposed to spread. Additionally, Eyüp itself is portrayed as a symbol of the larger imagined Islamic-Ottoman community.

#### Conclusion

Based on a diachronic comparison of city guidebooks, the article demonstrates how the Eyüp Municipality, ruled by the AKP and its predecessors, despite its revivalist rhetoric about an essentialist quality of Eyüp's identity, has considerably modified its narratives and branding strategies for the place in accordance with changing prospects for economic benefit and political influence in shifting social and political contexts.

After taking office in 1994, the RP promoted Eyüp as being significant for the Ottoman state and society in the context of the party's Islamic neo-Ottoman activism and as an attractive, modern place to

live, in order to stabilize its new hold on power among Eyüp's residents and to attract higher-status residents. After several years of physical restructuring and the AKP's consolidation of its power on the national level, as well, in the late 2000s the municipality described Eyüp as one of the most important spiritual centers of the Islamic world and as the heritage of humanity to attract tourists from various backgrounds. Following setbacks in the EU accession negotiations and in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Eyüp Municipality focused on attracting Islamic religious tourism in the context of Turkey aspiring to become a leader of Muslims in the region. In contrast, since 2014, Eyüp has been branded as the “Capital of Inner Peace”, aiming at diverse types of visitors. The changing framings of Eyüp indicate the constructedness and volatility of a place's identity, which is always produced by specific actors at specific moments in time and is therefore unstable and open to change (Laclau and Mouffe 96, 99-104; Massey). The transformations in the narrative by the same party and its predecessors point to the possibility of even more varying interpretations of Eyüp by other actors.

The shifting narratives about Eyüp matter beyond the quarter, as the AKP and its

predecessors present Eyüp as a concentration of a larger imagined community's essential qualities and therefore as that community's symbol. By presenting themselves as the saviors of Eyüp's and thereby the imagined larger community's identity, the AKP and its predecessors seek to legitimize their political rule on various levels. The branding activities by the Eyüp Municipality thus demonstrate the political nature of place branding toward local residents and various groups of tourists.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Eyüpsultan" respectfully refers to the Prophet's Companion Ebu Eyyub, whose shrine is in Eyüp. Using it for the whole quarter stresses the saint's significance for the place's identity. The administrative district was renamed "Eyüpsultan" in 2017. As my research concerns pre-2017 times, I call the place "Eyüp".

<sup>2</sup> It is debated whether the RP (1983-1998), the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP, 1997-2001), and the AKP (since 2001) constitute successors. For Eyüp's local context, the description seems adequate because of various continuities, such as Ahmet Genç's mayoralty (1994-2009), which has continued under all three of the parties.

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