

Materiality of Prayer Beads and Their Electronic Versions: Tespîh and Zikîrmatik

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Abstract

This study elaborates on the materiality of prayer beads and their recent electronic versions – called *tespîh* and *zikîrmatik* in Turkish. Through an ethnography of worshipping practices and prayer rituals that focus on counting prayers with these tools, it elaborates on the orchestration and appropriation of a repertoire of products for the accomplishment of practices in general. It details the ways in which objects are foreseen, adapted, and modified by subjects to conduct their prayer practices deservedly. The study also shows that objects enable religious practice to diffuse into other everyday life practices. In this way, on the one hand prayer practices and mundane everyday practices get entangled and are reproduced, on the other hand, this contributes to a more fulfilled sense of worship.

Keywords: Prayer practices, prayer beads, *tespîh*, *zikîrmatik*, counting prayers

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Tespah ve Zikirmatik: İbadet Pratiklerinde Nesnelere

Özet

Bu çalışmada, dua sayma pratiklerinde tespih ve zikirmatik kullanımı incelenmektedir. Burada ibadet pratikleri ve dua rituellere odaklanan bir etnografik çalışma ile pratik teorisi perspektifinden, bir ürün repertuarının nasıl bir araya getirildiği ve uyarıldığı detaylandırılmıştır. Bu pratiklerin icrasında, ibadetin uygun bir biçimde yerine getirilmesi için nesnelere ne şekillerde görülüp, uyarıldıkları ve dönüştürüldükleri incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmada aynı zamanda, nesnelere, dua pratiklerini diğer günlük pratiklerle iç içe geçirerek, birleştirdiği de gösterilmiştir. Böylece, bir yandan hem dua pratikleri hem gündelik pratikler değiştirilip, türetilirken diğer yandan da bu durumun daha güçlenmiş bir ibadet halini de sağladığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dua pratikleri, tespih, zikirmatik, dua sayma

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An Alien Materiality

Let me expand on the materiality of prayer beads. Prayer beads, a vibrant materiality with colours, materials, textures, are intriguing with their various meanings, uses, and types, such as electronic or digitalised versions. A dynamic and mesmerising material world for a product designer, who found herself on a site visit with a group of social anthropologists.



Figure1. Tespih

The site we visited is referred to as “Hacı Bayram” by the locals. It was an ancient settlement in Anatolia, BC 25., now Ankara, Turkey, formed around a worshipping centre, first built as a temple by Phrygians, then transformed into a church during the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, hence the name Temple of Saint Augustus and Rome. Currently, the temple and the church are partly preserved, partly overbuilt by a large mosque, Hacı Bayram Veli Mosque. The site is a divine spot for Christian pilgrimage, and a frequent stop by local Muslims, who want to improve on their path of worshipping Allah, and who through their offerings seek remedy to their illnesses, misfortune, or those who need help with pursuing their ambitions, wishes, desires.

Just right to the mosque (and the Roman ruins) and its courtyard, which gets full with people on the Friday prayer, is an arcade; one row of shops and a back street, in total about 10 shops, where various items, 'tools' of Muslim prayer practices are sold: prayer mats, pocket prayer mats, pilgrimage cloths, special undergarment against theft during pilgrimage, clocks shaped as mosques that alarm to the prayer times, non-alcoholic so Islamic appropriate cosmetics, such as perfumes, make-up material, toothpaste, aftershave, room sprays and the like, holy water from Mecca, sold in this case in plastic bottles, some silk products, not necessarily related to Islam but perhaps linked to some old tradition of silk road trade, religious books, talismans, and various toys for kids – dolls that recite Qur'an, laptop look-a-likes that recite verses from Qur'an and tell religious stories, Islamic board games, CDs that teach kids the daily prayer... All these items that can be obtained around this sacred centre if one is to practice Islam deservedly, and to pass it on to the following generations.



Figure2. Shop stall at Hacı Bayram

I was perplexed by and drawn into this vast materiality of what I assumed to be an immaterial context, and a world far from the realm of a designer. I was startled due to the common sense contradiction that Miller (2005, s. 1) points at as follows:

There is an underlying principle to be found in most of the religions that dominate recorded history. Wisdom has been accredited to those who claim

the materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real.

I was to learn along the way, where there are humans there are objects, starting with the first humans, who sheltered in the caves and made stone tools for their existence. I was to comprehend the true sense of Miller's (2005) appropriation of Hegelian dialecticism to material culture that gently leads you from the above dilemma to a holistic understanding of subject-object, a mutual construction. And so, I was able to embrace the materiality of prayer that is pointed out by scholars (Keane, 2008), and to understand and to appreciate the ways in which objects are used, utilized, adopted or appropriated (Shove et al., 2007) in practicing Islam. As a product designer it was a world I never knew it existed, nor that so many products have been produced for. Clearly, these artefacts were not 'designed' in the sense of professional product design, but somehow, as I realized, these objects were foreseen, adapted, and modified by people to '*realise themselves*,' in this case as what they believe to be proper Muslims.

Of this rich material world, the most fascinating ones for me were the prayer beads, in Turkish *tespiah*. They are beautiful objects on their own, with their gorgeous shiny beads of vibrant colours, of various precious or mundane materials, and of various sizes or organisations that were adapted for various practices, some were to pray some were to show off apparently, as my respondents expressed some were for "true Muslims," some were for "apaches." I've come across *tespiah* that cost a few pounds, or a few thousand pounds. And what also stroke me that *tespiah* had mechanic versions, which were rather clunky, and were getting out of date at the time of my research to be replaced by their digital electronic versions – *zikirmatiks*.¹ These were the most bizarre, for me idle objects; away from the religious context of the stalls at the site, they look nothing religious or Islamic. These objects have the same plastic casings used for Tamagotchi toys, mp3 players back then. So rather than objects of prayer they look like those technological objects, with a little screen showing only numbers. One especially, was the most customised for a praying or counting function; it could be worn around the finger with its strap, hence called the *ring zikirmatik*, a very tiny thumbnail sized body with a button on it to be pressed for each prayer. So if it is worn around the index finger with its body towards the thumb, with each stroll of the thumb, the user would mimic rolling the beads of a prayer bead while counting, this time, however, recording the numbers safely digital.



Figure3. Metal Zikirmatik Figure4. Ring Zikirmatik Figure5. Zikirmatik in the shell of an mp3 music player

Before I know, trying to understand what people do, and how they do things with these objects I have started my research there at Hacı Bayram with the sellers of these objects and extended my research to the users of these objects. The shops on the site are somewhat improvised, traditional shops with shelves behind and around a counter desk, and the owners (and sometimes their close relatives) are the sales persons themselves as well. I interviewed, from 3 different shops, 3 shopkeepers, aged 46-53, who have worked in Hacı Bayram for more than 20 years, so they have witnessed the introduction of zikirmatiks to the market. My interviews with the shop owners were not bound with any time frame, I conducted in-depth enquiries in the quiet early hours of the day. I visited the shops regularly for a year, and almost weekly for the first few months. I would sit in a chair at a quiet corner of the shop, observe as customers interacted with tespihs, other objects and sales persons, and chatted with the owners, and made notes.

I extended my research to the users of these objects who had in common the fact that they were practicing praying daily and mostly day-long, they have accepted the five pillars of Islam as guides to their lives, and they lived for the love of Allah. Of perhaps a larger group of participants who meet this criteria, my participants were chosen based on accessibility through prior relationships with key persons. Otherwise my acceptance in these communities would be impossible due to my position as an outsider and due to the private nature of the subject matter. Via the Imam of a mosque who was the parent of a student at my father's class at a primary school in a local suburb, I interviewed frequenters of this mosque, 4 males, aged 35-78, including the Imam of the mosque. Through my hair dresser – I approached anybody to be able to find participants – I could talk to a group of women who were praying day long and using tespihs. I was allowed to join as an observer when they gather to pray, and practice

becoming further in their way to Allah. My hairdresser's sister was, as I realised later, one of the woman who leads prayer rituals. For about a year, I joined in their gatherings, observed as they prepared for key events and festivals, and performed prayer rituals. This allowed me to participate in and observe the ways of doing, and to learn about much more than I could think of enquiring about. I conducted additional in depth interviews, without any time constraint again, with 13 of these women, aged 15-70, all with the same aim of becoming better Muslims, and teaching me was part of it.

During my field research my participants always knew I was a 'researcher from the university,' this was how I was introduced usually. As one of my participants explained, she was reluctant to talk to me before she got to know me, in her words: '*because these matters, faith and such, are not things you talk with strangers.*' And one of my participants remarked surprised: '*...it is strange that you are interested in these matters [faith and prayer].*' I was a total outsider, whose researcher identity received acceptance by the members of these communities for a short while, with openheartedness of most members, but also with apparent reservations of some others. My genuine interest made up for my obvious lack of knowledge in the subject matter, and most participants happily took on the role of teaching me, therefore from their perspective explaining me, how to do what, how and why, and so openly explaining me from their point of view their doings with these items and the broader subjects surrounding their practice.

Practicing Islam: Temporal, Spatial, and Moral Organization of Bodies and Objects

Religious traditions around the world are varied, there are different gods and saints, and also different ways of expressing faith and of being in the world. Even for one religion, as Saktanber (2002) reveals in her study of cultural multiplicity of Islam that there is no Islam but 'Islams'. As for the individuals practicing these religions, they are even more varied, where an individual is 'a crossing point' of different agentic practices (Reckwitz, 2002). To grasp the communal but also individual dimension of the doings of the participants of this study I adopt the ideas of practice theorists, and of philosophers of religion, who align religion with action theory and practices (Arens, 2005; Kurtz, 1995; Repstad, 2006), emphasizing the routinized and habitual way of religious practices (Maret, 1909).

It was indeed revealing for me to listen to women talk proudly of their infants who apparently named 'Allah' and 'Father' as their first words. In another instance, I have witnessed how an 11 months old baby, who was given a *tespih*, started to rock his body back and forth, as his mother enthusiastically joined in the play tapping on her knee 'Aaaal-lah, Aaaal-lah...' I was to comprehend Bourdieuan 'habitus' by *living* in it; 'em-bodied' (Bourdieu, 2003) – bodily, spatial, mental – structuring structures that are themselves structured (Bourdieu, 2004). Islam was 'carried (Träger)' and 'carried out' in the sense that Reckwitz (2002, s. 250) defines practices as 'a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood.'

For my participants, practicing Islam is pervasive – its extent will get clearer in the rest of this article. Although ways of knowing and ways of doing varies among the participants, one thing is common: they regard every act of a Muslim as worshipping Allah. This means that Islam diffuses into daily life and any mundane daily practice can be regarded as practicing Islam. Practicing Islam is embedded in the moral, temporal, spatial, and bodily organization of daily life, in terms of both prayer practices and also other mundane practices. It produces and reproduces its own routines, know how, and ways of doing.

Problem solving in daily life, its *moral* organisation is informed by practicing Islam. One of my participants expressed that they agreed to talk to me because we would be talking about Allah, and the conversations in which Allah's name was recited were also meritorious.

The *temporal* organization of the daily life is again structured around the worshipping practice, *Salat*. *Salat*, five times a day prayer, is the first principle of Islam incumbent on a Muslim, and the exact time frames announced by prayers from the mosques must be followed; one in the morning at sun rise, one in the late morning, one at lunch when the sun is up top, one in the afternoon at sundown, and one at night. One of my participants explained that she does not watch television until late so that she is able to wake up on time for the morning *Salat* (between 4-6am, depending on the time of the year). I observed and quite a few participants expressed as well that other daily activities are arranged according to *Salat* times. For example, many participants expressed that they would go out for shopping or for leisure in between *Salat* times, to be back on time for the next *Salat*.

The *spatial* organization (within the scope of my study mainly of the house) is informed by practicing Islam. The houses I visited are decorated with Arabic calligraphy of Allah's and Muhammed's names or certain phrases, hung high towards the ceiling. These, as my

participants say is to remind them of Allah and worship thus helps to create close relationships to Allah. The households had a basket full with brayer beads, which was placed quite centrally in the main saloon of the houses, and the guests could pick one and use during their visit. In some houses there is a special prayer room, some I saw, and of some participants talked fondly. One prayer room was decorated with a Kaaba figurine and prayer beads around it, on a high chest, placed diagonally in the direction of Kaaba, on the corner of the room, and two prayer mats in front of it, diagonally placed, directed to Kaaba as well. In some houses there was no prayer room, although participants hoped to move to a larger house where they can have a separate prayer room. In these cases, participants preferred praying in their bedroom, where the façade that is on the direction of Kaaba is devoid of any picture frames or photo frames on the wall. In any case, imagined or real, decorated with Kaaba figurines or devoid of decoration or symbolism, objects are used and modified as a way of balancing 'doing' and 'having' (Shove et al. 2007).

One's relationship to even their own *body* is an element of practicing Islam:

You never know when Azrael is here to take you away, thus you should keep the custody of Allah [pointing at his body, implying that one's body is the custody of Allah] clean and submit to Him when the time comes.

Participants of this study explained to me 'proper' ways of cleaning one's body, cleaning routines before the Salat, which materials to use, which clothes to wear and how, what to eat what not to... They had at times different ways of knowing and doing, at times very similar. It is plausible to conclude though using Shove et al.'s (2007) ideas 'both social order and individuality' are consequences of practices, in this case of practicing Islam.

In placing religious rituals and prayer in practice theory, this study eschews discussions on religious beliefs, nor the purpose of the study is not to achieve a scholastic philosophical enquiry of religion or Islam. So, the sole focus of this study is to understand the ways in which prayer beads unfold in prayer practices.

Materiality, Worship and Prayer Beads

Locating Islam, and more broadly religion, in practices emphasizes an understanding that involves bodily and material interactions. Echoing this insight Keane (2008, s. 124) expresses that 'Religions may not always demand beliefs, but they will always involve material forms.' In this part I open up the implications of this involvement for my participants. Their intricate

relationship to materiality is, using Shove et al's (2007) term 'a mutual constitution' of belief, knowledge, self, worshipping practices, and objects. The embeddedness of materiality is intricate. As my analysis shows; on the one hand, objects *make* and foster relationships, in this case the relationship to the divine and immaterial, and thus, the object, comes to stand for the relationship it configured. And on the other hand the relationship, the immaterial, and the self is believed to make the object.

Participants of this study enclosed themselves, as much possible as with objects that remind of Allah, such as Arabic calligraphy of Allah and Muhammed's names, talismans, paintings, symbols and the like. Many participants expressed this as 'filling your life with Allah and living for Allah' which helps build closer relationships to Allah, as these objects constantly remind of Allah. In this respect the explanation of an elementary school teacher, who was quite clear about the distinction between respecting religious symbols and attaching them sacred symbolism, deserves quotation in full:

... These remind of Allah, and they're good for inner piece of man. It's important to have symbols around like the writings of Allah and Muhammed hung on the wall, and to remember them when we see these symbols, thinking of them is important... maybe it's meritorious to take the Qur'an at hand and read it by holding at hand... I usually pray from the memory, but maybe it's important to open the Qur'an and read it from the book. Holding the Book at hand might be important. As I said faith goes away. As you hold yourself back from something it also holds back from you. So Allah and Allah's symbols are important.

Half regretful half reflective, he elaborates on the significance of surrounding oneself, also literally materially, with certain materiality that enables one to 'touch' Allah and so feel Allah closer. Materiality of the senses, touching, seeing and a bodily experience of certain objects '*makes*' the belief, constructs bonds to Allah, fosters relationship to the immaterial.

These objects, next to *making* the relationship, 'stand in' for it as well. Especially in the case of *tespîh*, which is also a very visible object, objects stand in for one's relationship to Allah, belief, and the self. The intricate dilemma of the Imam of the mosque, particularly on *tespîh*, demonstrates how objects come to stand for the self and are used to negotiate identity in certain communities. The Imam was very careful about his explanations to me and the representation of his relationship to objects of prayer so as to prevent misunderstandings among the community. Particularly on *tespîh* he expressed that prayer did not prerequisite the

use of tespih, and relevant numbers can be counted on fingers. However, he himself uses tespih, and explains the reasons why as follows:

It is not appropriate if all the community has tespih, but the Imam hasn't. Not having a tespih will be regarded as a lack in belief, so if I don't have a tespih among these people as the Imam, it will be regarded as a deficit in faith.



Figure6. Tespih made of amber

There is more at stake in this explanation than straightforward symbolism. Surely as Saramifar's (2018) study of crafting prayer beads elaborates, symbolism is an important aspect to understand the significance of an object. In the quotation above however, this materiality with its symbolism can stand in for individual agents, it can make or demolish their respective positions in their groups, and can be utilized to negotiate their positions in certain groups.

My participants had different ideas, preferences, principles, about the very materiality of tespihs, the material, colour, and ways of doing with it and of making the self. Some gave importance to the material, plastic, date wood, amber etc., the beads are made up of. Some said man should have black or dark coloured beads: *"Not a single man would use a green tespih, he uses dark colours"*. Women indeed told they have colourful tespihs that match the colour palette of their outfit. Some gave importance to the number of beads on a tespih, as they explained 33 or 99 (Allah has 99 names), to be holy numbers. And a daily use tespih, which is a tespih to be carried around or to be swung occasionally, should have one less or one more

bead, as this would be an irresponsible behaviour to a holy object. Some participants were reluctant to carry a tespih that has Allah's or Muhammed's names on it. One participant told that maybe her kids might play with the tespih or drop it on the floor and this would be disrespectful, and yet another participant told he might need to go to toilet and that it would not be appropriate to carry such a tespih to toilet.

So on the one hand materiality and tespih makes the immaterial by establishing close links with Allah. On the other hand, this relationship configured by the object itself and related practices *make* the object in return:

I'll get really irritated if somebody touches my tespih. I'll get extremely annoyed. I won't let others touch my tespih. This tespih is shaped in your hands. Everybody reveals himself in the tespih. The haram and sin are reflected on one's skin. The haram eaten, the sin committed is reflected on the skin. Those who live on haram stink... Likewise tespih is shaped by man, it's sweat and oil at hand. If a person who lives on haram touches my tespih, the tespih will go mad at me.

Tespih is an object that facilitates close relationships to Allah, through tactual stimuli. In return belief, the relationship to Allah, shapes the very materiality of and relationship to the object. The intricate relationship to materiality is one of mutual constitution of beliefs, knowledge, practices, objects, and the self.

Counting, Marking, and Appropriation of Objects

The etymological sources state that the word 'bead' was derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'bede', which means to pray (Klein, 1966; John D. Miller, 2002,). As in many other religious traditions that supersede Islam, my participants were using prayer beads to count their prayers within certain praying practices. Muslims call their prayer beads 'tasbih' (in Turkish 'tespih') which comes from the Arabic root 'sebh', meaning to 'respect Allah' or to 'accelerate' in worshipping Allah (Yıldırım, 1971, s. 9).

There are two types of worshipping practices in which tespih is used by my participants. One is Salat, in which a specific Salat tespih is used. It was advised by the prophet Muhammed to recite 33 times Subhanallah (Glory be to Allah), 33 times Alhamdulillah (Praise be to Allah) and 33 times Allahuakbar (Allah is Great), after each Salat. This is a very common understanding of how one of the five pillars of Islam, Salat, should be performed, so there is a particular tespih for this purpose. It consists of 99 beads that are separated after each 33 with a differently

shaped or smaller shaped bead. Only the elementary school teacher told that he does not have a Salat tespih, even so he had a system of counting which made use of the parts of his fingers to make it to the exact amount of 33 of each phrase.

The other practice is called dhikr, allusion, which is a remembrance of Allah, performed by either reciting one of Allah's names (He has 99) or Muhammed, or certain prayers, is a devotional act that is believed to reinforce one's bonds with Allah (Kassam, 2006; Sells, 2009). Due to good deeds promised to those who perform dhikr as advised by the prophet Muhammed and as expressed in Qur'an, Muslims try to dhikr as much as possible. There is no limit nor a defined amount to how much one should dhikr. As one participant asked me in a rhetorical way: *"Does a Muslim ever have spare time? A Muslim is supposed to worship and recite Allah continuously"*. Another participant said:

the duty of human heart is to dhikr... Blood travels through the veins with the name of Allah... It is told in the Book [the Qur'an] to recite Allah while sitting, laying and standing. As it is advised to dhikr in all the three states of man, we must dhikr continuously.

Moreover, as some participants told me and some I saw written on a piece of paper distributed around Hacı Bayram, there are prayers that should be recited in certain numbers in case of fear, or worry, or phobias, or to get pregnant to quit smoking, to be successful and the like. So there was always a reason within the daily life for participants of my study to pray and to count their prayers.

While some participants aimed to dhikr as much as possible, especially some were particular about the exact number of prayers. For them it was a way of living Islam as proper Muslims: *"Islam is a religion of measurement, and a Muslim is a person who lives in measured terms."*ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, there were practices that required that certain phrases are recited in certain amounts to get good deeds, sins to be forgiven, or wishes to come true: *"for example praying 70.000 times kelime-i tevhid counts as a hatim [reciting Qur'an from the memory]. Can you now say that numbers don't exist?"* In these practices or in the case of offerings counting was important.

Counting prayers as a practice involves different elements of knowledge, know-how and motivational knowledge. It was partly duty, partly friendship and form of help, partly competition, partly advancing in worship. In some cases, somebody would offer certain amount

of prayers for a certain deed and women helped each other by praying certain amounts and donating these prayers to each other.

As one of them said: *"Numbers are of course not important but we still talk about how much each of us prayed."* So numbers in this way by quantifying one's worship to Allah, solidify their relationship. One participant, for example, explained that the quantity is relevant to improving oneself:

This is to improve oneself. Think about it like this; for example, you were reading 80 words per minute in primary school, is it like that now? It's more now... Likewise these numbers are to improve yourself in praying to Allah.

To cope with the demand of keeping an account of these vast numbers of prayers a variety of objects are orchestrated. Some women use tespihs with 500, or 1000 beads. Some tespihs have some spare beads at the tip of them to count how many rounds have been completed.



Figure7. Tespih made of tortoise shell, with 500beads

As dhikr is a pervasive activity continuing day long and in many moments of the daily life, devout Muslims orchestrate a repertoire of objects to meaningfully organize their daily lives. Some use pen and paper to note their prayers. Another woman explained that she always coordinates two tespihs, one is to count up to hundred and the other to count how many hundreds she completed. Some use safety pins to mark where they were left, or how many rounds they accomplished. One of the male participants explained his wife's adoption of safety pin and appropriation of materiality as follows: *"For example during dhikr phone rings, or doorbell rings,*

oor she goes to check the oven or so, so she marks where she was left and continues from there when her task finishes.”



Figure8. Tespah marked with a safety pin.

Zikirmatik offers a practical solution to the issue of marking and counting, so it was successfully integrated into dhikr practice. Instead of the mechanical versions which were rather clunky, uncomfortable to the grasp, and made an unpleasant clicking sound when the button is pressed, participants preferred the digital versions. These digital versions are mostly smaller, and especially ring zikirmatik is easier to carry. As one of the participants explains, she had one metal old mechanical zikirmatik, and two digital ring zikirmatik of different colours, all of which she assigned different prayers and was keeping a record of their counting separately. She carried all these zikirmatik everywhere in her bag. Each participant formed their unique ensemble of objects to carry out their practices.

Practices Prosper, Objects Diffuse

Zikirmatik by successfully addressing issues to do with counting and marking has enabled prayer to diffuse further into daily life. Participants, who constantly pray, became able to pray on the go, in public transport or while being busy with other things. Zikirmatik has become increasingly appropriate for outdoor usage: *“In daily life I use zikirmatik, outside I mean, while travelling*

here and there, out of the house. Tespih is too demanding to use outside. Zikirmatik is easier, besides its practical."

New usage areas have sprouted, especially with ring zikirmatik. Practicing prayer have become simultaneous with other daily practices, consequently diffusing into every moment of daily life. Women whom I interviewed expressed that they can wear the ring zikirmatik on their finger and keep it and so are able to pray while doing household chores or other activities; they can clean and tidy up the room, and do laundry still carrying and counting with the ring zikirmatik around their finger. Some said they do knitting and sewing with the zikirmatik around their finger. One exclaimed: *"Thanks to ring zikirmatik I can dhikr while driving now!* In these doings we can observe that objects shape and reshape practices. Both praying practices and mundane daily practices are reinvented; as objects get adopted, and appropriated they alter the very practices of which they are a part, not only the prayer practices and practicing Islam, but also arguably knitting, reading, driving. Dhikr, as practiced by the participants of this study, is pervasive and so also shapes the everyday of a devout Muslim; it produces and reproduces its own routines, know how, and ways of doing. Zikirmatik, has not replaced the traditional tespih, but have opened up new practice domains for prayer. In doing so, objects have enabled furnishing everyday life full with prayer, and so enhancing religious conduct.

Tactics and Making the Self: Disguised Doings and Silent Objects

As prayer practices prosper, and permeate into mundane daily life, and get mixed with other practices, they are carried out within new networks of elements, at the 'outside;' outside of and other to the social group within which the particular prayer practices have originated and evolved. To operate in this outside world, they have developed, using DeCerteau's (1984) concept, 'tactics' of hiding and disguising.

'Outside' for the participants of this study meant a domain or public that is outside the religious domain. And objects are central to navigate themselves outside. For some, hiding or disguising their prayer to operate outside is to construct themselves as true Muslims, and to practice Islam the right way:

I keep the zikirmatik in my pocket, and pray conveniently, can anybody ever understand what I'm doing? You can't pray outside; Allah says to hide the worship and the sin both. One should be modest, it would be a conspicuous act to take out a huge tespih and pray.

A male participant explains how he hides his practice from within a similar know-how:

In buses I hold my tespih between my legs like this [showing me how he puts his two hands facing down between his legs while sitting]. If I sit in the front seat especially, no one can see. I don't know, not to hide, but also not necessary to show. At mosques and such I pray comfortably.

Another female participant explained how she hides her tespih in her bag and prays in her bag: *"In the bus, I hold the tespih in my bag like this [demonstrating to me how she keeps her tespih in her bag and prays]."* And she continues by suggesting another way of disguising accomplished through shifting domains of objects, from prayer to fashion, fashion to prayer: *"If you say I can't do without a tespih, you can disguise it as a bracelet, with a matching outfit, nobody would understand you're performing dhikr. I used to do so a lot when I was young."*

To construct the self as a thoughtful and caring Muslim, or as a Muslim performing prayer deservedly and appropriately, to construct the self as they choose to be and to practice as they believe it should be practiced, subjects modify their ways of doing, utilise and adopt objects to hide and to disguise. By changing ways of doing or adopting other objects devout Muslims continue praying and so continuing practicing Islam as they believe it should be done. These participants do not give up their practice, nor continue the way they did, but by developing tactics they operate in the society, they position and disposition themselves through their ways of doing and adopting objects. And zikirmatik, the object, is central to this tactical operation.

Concluding

What started off as a bewilderment at the vast materiality surrounding an 'imagined' immaterial culture, very soon reached a level of complexity where material and immaterial were 'co-constituted;' as this study showed the more the objects got involved in the religious practices, the more the religious conduct, the immaterial prospered, therefore embedding materiality in becoming more and more religious.

Looking at prayer practices from a practice theory point of view has shown how practicing Islam has produced and reproduced its own ways, know-how, through tactical moves of its practitioners to operate in the habitus and to construct the self, in this case as modest, as true, decent Muslims. And, as much as ways of doing, objects have been central to the conduct, facilitation, organization, and arrangement of practicing Islam, and constructing

oneself as a true Muslim. Subjects use, utilize, adopt, modify objects in making daily life as they believe it should be lived. 'Belief' in this case is not to be understood as religious faith, but rather as how practitioners know it to be, knowledge and know-how in the sense Reckwitz (2002) lists elements of a practice.

This study detailed the ways in which practices – exemplified over practicing Islam and practicing prayer – are dynamic; reproduced and keep evolving within complex relationships among the elements that make up the very practice, the social groups and individual agents, their knowledge and know-how, domains of practice, objects, and nexus of practices.

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Sonnotlar

ⁱ 'Zikir' in Turkish means to dhikr, allusion, repeating Allah's names. '-matik' is a suffix used to suggest some sort of automation, practicality, or ease. It can be thought of as a usage similar to the sense of 'bank-o-mat' or 'vend-o-mat,' for example ATMs are called 'bankamatik' in Turkish.

ⁱⁱ The word game here on 'measurement' and 'measured terms' loses meaning in translation. 'Measured terms' is used to imply 'responsibly, prudently.'