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Whitney Mason is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

The Meaning of Virtue: A Fresh Start for Political Islam in Turkey?

ISTANBUL, Turkey **July, 1999**

By Whitney Mason

As I sat on the terrace of a fashionable Western-style restaurant in Ankara's leafy embassy district, the maitre d' approached and asked whether I might be waiting to meet Murat Mercan? Murat *Bey* had phoned, the maitre d' told me, to say that he had been unexpectedly delayed in Istanbul. Murat and I had met several times during the spring when he was directing the re-election campaign of the Virtue Party's candidate for mayor of Ankara and I had always found him reliable. Wondering what had kept him in Istanbul, I glanced down at the front page of the newspaper I'd just bought. The top headline read: "Virtue Party's young reformists leave fold: Deputy hints at establishment of new party following Monday's resignations; Gul mentioned as possible leader."

While the timing came as a surprise, the move did not. Over lunch the day before Murat had revealed to me that Abdullah Gul, the number two official in the Virtue Party and the leader of its progressive faction, was planning to challenge for the party's chairmanship. Because a state prosecutor was trying to have the party shut down, Gul was also looking for a delicate moment to jump ship and start a new one. Since the elections Murat, a former professor of management with a Ph.D. from the US, had reverted to his usual role in the party as Gul's principal adviser. That evening he and Gul would be travelling to Istanbul to meet with former Istanbul mayor Recep Tayip Erdogan, Virtue's other leading progressive, who had just been released from prison after serving four months for inciting religious hatred.

This meeting would be the first opportunity for the leaders of Virtue's reformist faction to discuss face-to-face the debacle the party had suffered in the April 18 elections. Before the polls, Murat Mercan and other Virtue officials had optimistically predicted that Virtue would top the results with 23 percent of the vote. Virtue, according to this rosy picture, would be followed by the Democratic Left Party (DSP) of Bulent Ecevit, and the center-right True Path Party of Tansu Ciller. Murat predicted that the Motherland Party, also center-right, might not even clear the 10 percent barrier required for representation in parliament. In the event, the DSP topped the elections with the ultranationalist MHP coming out of the political wilderness to finish a strong second with over 18 percent of the vote. The Virtue Party finished a distant third with just 15.4 percent — a drop of 6 percent from the 1995 elections. What had happened?

Murat had told me that Gul said after the polls that the party had deserved to do poorly. Erbakan had ruined Virtue's image, Gul said, by prevaricating about the document the National Security Council forced him to sign in February 1997 committing him to fight Islamic fundamentalism, by a variety of crazy statements, and by his trips to Libya and Iran. The straw that broke the camel's back was a

failed Erbakan-engineered gambit to delay the elections.

After the elections Virtue's bad press only increased, with MPs from the ruling coalition refusing to swear in Virtue MP Merve Kavakci because she entered Parliament wearing a headscarf. Later it was revealed that Kavakci had U.S. citizenship and had made a speech in Chicago exhorting Muslims to *jihad*.

Now, finally, Gul was beginning to make his break. The newspaper article said that Gul had resigned from the party's governing board, along with three other senior progressives, over frustration at constant interference by Necmettin Erbakan, the godfather of Islamist politics in Turkey. Though banned from politics for five years following the 1997 closure of Virtue's predecessor, the Welfare Party, Erbakan had continued to dominate the Virtue Party from the behind the scenes.

I had been hoping Gul would challenge Erbakan since I'd spent a day watching him campaigning for the April 18 elections. Such a split could have great consequences for Turkey. Since founding Turkey's first Islamist party in 1970, Erbakan had become a spoiler, issuing provocations that secular Turks could not ignore or forgive. If dynamic young leaders who respected both religious conservatism and Turkey's democratic and secular values could emerge from Erbakan's long shadow, they might be able to close the gap between the country's westernized elite and its traditional masses and thus finish the revolution that Ataturk began. If not, the old elite, backed by the army, would continue its disdainful treatment of Turkey's traditional majority, deepening the country's debilitating polarization between Turks who fear Islam and those who largely define themselves by it.

Few non-Islamists in Turkey see Virtue's young reformers as a force for good. Before telling the story of my own conversion, let me review the reasons that the reconciliation of westernized and traditional Turks matters — and why it will be difficult.

The call to prayer rings out five times a day across Turkey, as it does throughout the Muslim world. For centuries Turkey was the center of this world. The Ottoman sultan was also the caliph, the top figure in Islam, and led the Ottomans' military campaigns in the Middle East and the Balkans in the name of jihad or Islamic holy war. Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire were governed by Islamic law or *sheriat*.

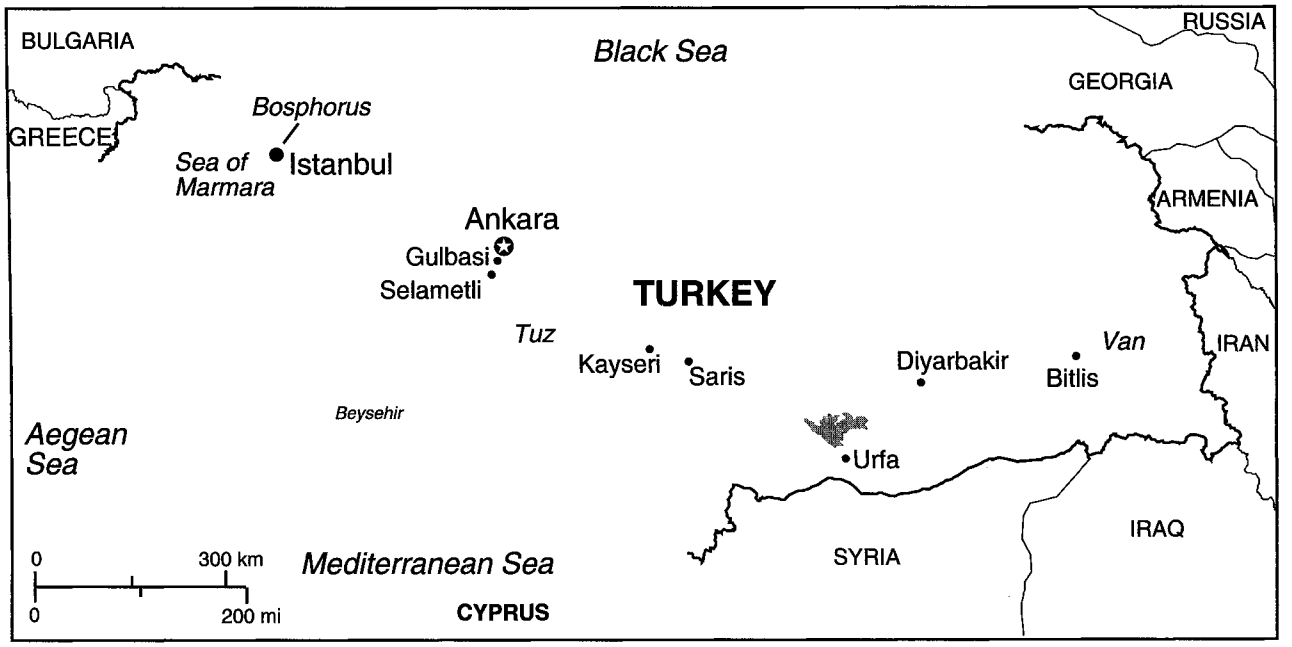
After the Ottoman empire dissolved following its defeat in World War I, the Turkish Republic's founding father, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, was convinced that the only way for the country to catch up with the West was to end the dominant role of Islam in Turkish life. Ataturk committed the young Republic to a crash course of secularization. Legal codes from Italy and Switzerland took the place of *sharia* and Turkey's new constitution enshrined a version of secularism that prohibits any mixing of religion and politics. For most of Turkey's 75-year history, the Turkish army has defended this extreme form of secularism as the cornerstone of Ataturk's republic.

Ed Sutton, ICWA Trustee and President of J.P. Morgan's Morgan Guarantee International Finance Corporation, told me that the first time he visited Turkey, in the early '80s, was to present a set of economic-reform proposals to then-Prime Minister Turgut Ozal. Many of the most important reforms recommended then still have not been passed, said Sutton, because since that time Turkey has never had a sufficiently strong government. The reason it has never had a strong government, in turn, is that Turks have failed to achieve a broad consensus on more fundamental issues, including the role of Islam. Turkey's long-term stability, not to mention progress, depends on achieving such a consensus.

And in case it's less than obvious why Turkey's stability matters to more than its own 65 million people, remember its position in post-Cold War geopolitics. As former U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and many others have argued persuasively, the area where national interests will conflict over the next half century is that immense territory stretching from Brest to Vladivostok known as Eurasia. Turkey, straddling the only waterway between the Slavic world of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and on the threshold of the newly discovered petroleum riches of Central Asia, is the heart of Eurasia. For now it remains a broken heart. Gul and Erdogan and the other young Turks of the Virtue Party, it seems to me, have as good a chance of healing it as anyone.

The seed of my hopes for Virtue's reformers was planted in March when I spent a day watching Oya Akgonenc, a female professor of international studies, campaigning for parliament in a village over an hour's drive south of Ankara. What impressed me was not Akgonenc's modernity, but her party's respect for her constituents' attachment to tradition. A professor at the private Bilkent University in Ankara with a Ph.D. from American University in Washington, in 1995 Akgonenc had run for parliament on the ticket of then-prime minister Tansu Ciller's True Path party and lost. After the defeat she pressed the party to remain active in increasing its base. Finding True Path unresponsive, Akgonenc accepted the Virtue Party's invitation to join its governing board as part of its campaign to soften its image. Topping Virtue's ticket for Ankara's second district, which includes nearly all of the city plus a large swath of hinterland to the south, home to 1.5 million people, she was virtually assured a seat.

Of Virtue's 14 candidates for the district, Agonenc explained, "Number four and number twelve are covered ladies, and number eight is open." This was the first



time women who wore the traditional Muslim headscarf had run for office in the Turkish Republic. Later I learned that the party's board had voted against running women who covered their heads, recognizing that it would never be tolerated by the secular establishment; the board was overruled by Necmettin Erbakan.

On the day I went along with her, Akgonenc was also accompanied by her husband Mohamad, a Pakistani-born, US citizen and also a professor of international relations, and her son Tariq. A thoroughly American graduate of prestigious Bogazici University in Istanbul, Tariq grew up in Silver Springs, Maryland, and is now an account executive in an Istanbul advertising firm. The family sat together in the back of a Peugeot compact as we drove from Virtue's central headquarters in Ankara to the district office in the modest regional hub of Gulbashi. There Akgonenc would meet with the district chairman, volunteers, and Virtue's candidate for mayor of the small town (pop. 3,000) of Selametli about 40 miles farther south where she would appear at a rally.

I asked Akgonenc whether she felt awkward about moving from the secularist True Path party to the Virtue Party, with its reputation for fundamentalism. She replied that other parties made gestures toward Islam too without ever being ridiculed for it. Former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, for instance, had distributed scarves and the left-of-center Republican People's Party started by Ataturk himself had even held a political meeting in a mosque. "What is a fundamentalist anyway?" demanded Akgonenc. "Is it just someone who wants to cover her head? Shouldn't we be judging people by their actions rather than their appearance?"

In fact, she said, there was nothing in Virtue's platform specifically addressing religion. Four of the platform's planks, however — democracy, human rights, civil liberties, the rule of law — could be interpreted to support freedom of religious observance that the secular judiciary and military are loathe to allow. Virtue's fifth plank was sustainable and fair economic development. Akgonenc cited a statistic that 57.6 percent of Turkey's wealth was in the hands of 20 percent of the population. Without saying how, Virtue was committed to decreasing this extreme distribution of wealth — as is its ultranationalist rival, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

As we entered Gulbashi, Akgonenc aired her conviction that it was important for a political representative to really understand the people she served. I asked her to show me the village of Selametli on a map of her district. After she'd spent a minute scrutinizing the territory south of the capital, a local volunteer steered her finger to our destination. "Ah, here it is," she said delightedly. "It is very small. Candidates never go there."

I asked Akgonenc about the local economy. Looking rather panicked, she says she didn't really know. The air in the town was fresh and we'd already passed through pastureland and cultivated fields to get to it. "Agriculture?" suggested her husband. Yes, agriculture, the candidate agreed with a relieved smile.

For the better part of an hour we drove across the monotonous, camel-colored steppe of central Anatolia. The remoteness of Selametli was coming to seem a bit comical when Mohamad remarked: "Where is this road going? It just goes on and on."

"But the weather is lovely," said his candidate-wife,

sounding like a New Yorker driving around the Hamptons.

"Yes," he agreed, "a lovely day for a drive into the country."

At last we reached the brow of a tawny hill and saw a convoy of probably 30 trucks and tractors bedecked in Virtue Party banners and campaign posters, including Akgonenc's, with the party's weirdly polyvalent slogan, "We're coming!"

Several men with mustaches and sun-darkened skin trotted over to greet the candidates. As the convoy began to move into the village, we saw a truck get stuck in mud; someone told Akgonenc: "Don't worry, if you get stuck, we'll carry the whole car!" The candidate glowed, visibly inspired by zeal of her constituents.

We wound through the village on the single dirt road, passing one clump of signs from ANAP, the center-right Motherland party of former President Turgut Ozal, and stopped among the densest cluster of buildings. There the mayoral candidate delivered a speech liberally sprinkled with "*inshallah*" and "*Alhamdulalah.*" God willing, he hoped Virtue would be the first party in the country, allowing him to pave Selametli's road and make it look like a town rather than a village. The current mayor, an ANAP man, had officially elevated Selametli from village to town but foundered when it came to making physical improvements commensurate with its new status. Akgonenc then took the microphone and delivered a spirited address that brought smiles and cheers from many of the 100 or so people gathered to listen. Perhaps a third of the crowd were women, all covered, who stood together and a bit apart. The mayoral candidate said he was glad to see the women at the rally and would like to see them be more active in the campaign.

A little kid who had been waving a toy gun and an ANAP flag when we arrive was brought to the microphone and sang a little song. After one line the crowd erupted in laughter. Afterward Tariq told me the kid had sung: "ANAP is so weak, they wouldn't even be able to win for *muhter.*" (A "*muhter*" is an archaic Ottoman elected position with the modest responsibility of maintaining a list of everyone living in her district. In small towns and villages, though, the office is still prestigious because it is often the only representative of the august authority of the state with whom people have regular contact.)

We drove to the other side of town to one of its grander houses. I briefly visited the outhouse — which smelled miraculously fresh — and took my shoes off to join the others inside. I was ushered into a room to the left, where all the men were seated. We heard the candidate talking to the women in the other room. Tea was poured and we were served some salty, rather chewy *gozleme*, crepe-like things with no filling. They also served *ayran*, a salty yogurt drink that's ubiquitous in Turkey.

As we ate and drank, the would-be mayor gave a little talk. The men gathered there supported Virtue, he said, because it defended their traditional values against incursions from the West. "In the West," he said, "children talk back to their parents; here never. Of Western people, why do we feel close to Muhamad Ali and Cat Stevens?" he asked. "Because they made the decision to become Muslims. In the West children leave the house at eighteen and aren't expected to do anything for their parents after that. Do we want that? Of course not. That's why we have to support Virtue." The mayor added that in America graduates of Christian schools were highly esteemed whereas in Turkey graduates of Muslim schools were considered backward.

Mohamad leaned over to me. "A rather limited understanding of the West," he said quietly.

The mayoral candidate said that although parliament has denied campaign funds to Virtue, "Ten Virtue units will go as far as one hundred for any other party" because of the zealous volunteerism of Virtue supporters. Virtue people, he said, were working for their values, whereas the other parties were just working for personal material advantage.

The mayoral candidate offered a final, rather more cynical, reason that people should vote for him: Ankara would be won by Virtue and if Selametli were controlled by a different party, it would get no support from the municipal government.

On the way back to Ankara Akgonenc said something about living in Washington for some 14 years that prompted me to ask whether she had an American passport. "Yes, I do," she said brightly. "I'm an American."

Looking like he'd just been stung by a bee, Mohamad whispered something in the candidate's ear. "I mean I have the right to work in the U.S., not an actual passport," Akgonenc amended herself. A party official later confirmed that, as I'd suspected, Akgonenc did indeed have a U.S. passport. In itself, this wouldn't be a problem, the official told me; but Akgonenc had used her U.S. citizenship to get the higher salary paid to foreign professors and to get Bogazici University to accept Tariq by the lower standards applied to a foreign applicant. This, said the Virtue official, didn't look good.

A week after my visit to Selametli I took a five-hour bus ride to the traditional but prosperous city of Kayseri to join Abdullah Gul, as he campaigned around his home town. Though it was past ten when I arrived, Gul told me over his cell phone to come straight over to party

Leading Islamist reformer Abdullah Gul, greets constituents young and old in Kayseri during his campaign for parliament

headquarters. I was ushered into the executive meeting room where I sipped tea and watched and listened as Gul and his fellow parliamentary candidates, dressed in suits but shoeless as is customary in Turkish homes, discussed the campaign. It was nearing midnight when I headed for my hotel, feeling impressed both by their energy and by their openness to me, a foreigner of ambiguous vocation whom they knew only from a phone call. This was the opposite of the hostile and suspicious reception I would later receive from Gul's ultranationalist counterpart, the Vice President of the MHP, the *Milliyetci Hareket Partisi*, or Nationalist Movement Party.

The next day we met at headquarters at 8:30 and set off in a small convoy for the village of Saris 60 miles away. As we raced down the narrow highway in the shadow of the snow-capped peak of Erciyes Mountain which dominates Kayseri, Gul and I discussed the secular establishment's misgivings about the Virtue Party and its banned predecessor, the Welfare Party. Even before the elections Turkish state prosecutors had filed charges to have the party banned on the grounds that it manipulates religious feeling for political gain, that it is a direct continuation of its banned predecessor and that Necmettin Erbakan still ruled it from behind the scenes.

During the 18 months that Necmettin Erbakan had been Prime Minister before the military forced him to step down, Gul had been his chief foreign-policy adviser. I asked Gul about high-profile trips Erbakan had made to Libya and Iran that had alarmed Turkey's allies and infuriated its generals. Gul said Iran was an important neighbor and there was nothing wrong with Erbakan's visit. "The Iranian Revolution grew out of their tradition, which is very different from Turkey's," said Gul. "There's no danger of them exporting their version of Islam to Turkey." Relations between the two countries could hardly be more stable, he said, pointing out that the border between them had been in place for longer than the United States existed.

The prospect of Turkey going the way of Iran is a bogey frequently raised by the military — and accepted by virtually every secular Turk I know. In making this comparison Turks ignore the fact that in Iran the Islamic Revolution represented both a social and a nationalist revolt by the mostly traditional masses against a westernized elite propped up by the United States. Among many critical differences between Turkey and Iran that makes such a revolution unimaginable in Turkey is the fact that the Turkish regime is not seen to be nearly as dependent on foreign support; on the contrary, Turkish nationalism is fused with the state and deeply devoted to defending it.

Gul said there was also no reason a Turkish PM shouldn't visit Libya, considering it had done $14 billion in business with Turkish construction firms over the past ten years. Nevertheless, Gul said, he had advised Erbakan against making the trip. "I hate the regime of Libya," he said. "Khadaffi is a dictator who kills his own people. Even though many previous PMs had visited Tripoli, I advised Erbakan not to go because I knew it would be misunderstood," said Gul. But his boss insisted on going at the behest of the Turkish Construction Association, which hoped he might help recover $250 million that Libya owed Turkish firms.

We stopped for gas and Gul popped into the station's store, returning with a couple of Ulker candy bars, one of which he tossed to me. I smiled: the Ulker company, Turkey's biggest candy manufacturer, is owned by a devout Muslim who has been a big financial contributor to Turkey's succession of pro-Islamic parties. Because of this, Ulker products are

The government built the huge Kocatepe mosque in central Ankara as part of its campaign in the early 80's to foster Islam as an antidote to communism. Beneath it is the Begandik department store. Because the store is owned by an Islamist, in 1997 the army told soldiers not to shop there. Soldiers were also prohibited from buying products made by Ulker, another company owned by an Islamist that also happens to be Turkey's biggest candy manufacturer.

often shunned by secular Turks, including the army.

We reached the outskirts of the first village and stopped to greet a delegation of male supporters who had come to escort the convoy into town. With much of the country regarding Virtue as the forces of darkness, its deputy leader couldn't have been blamed for worrying about his security. But as I watched Gul mixing with the crowd, I was impressed by how relaxed he was, not only pressing the flesh but kissing hundreds of male supporters on the cheeks, as Turks traditionally do with friends.

When we reached the center of the first village, the central street was full, despite a chilly drizzle. The candidates climbed to the top of a campaign bus equipped with loudspeakers and began to address their humbly dressed constituents. The candidates didn't exhort their listeners to be more God-fearing, much less promise to institutionalize "family values." They did pledge to respect the traditional values already prevalent in half the country, including women's right to wear headscarves. And they promised more attention to such worldly concerns as health, education and roads. As I watched these well-educated men passionately presenting their case to these humble people, I thought to myself, "This is how democracy is supposed to work." On the way to the next village Gul explained to me that many villages lack nurses and teachers because as state employees, they're not allowed to wear a headscarf. Uncovered city women don't want to live in villages and village women don't want to work with a bare head.

There were no women among the eight people running on the Virtue ticket in Kayseri. The most prominent and active woman in the party there was asked to run but declined because she wore a scarf and didn't want to be the focus of the controversy that would raise. There were several women — both covered and uncovered — running on Virtue tickets elsewhere in the country and I often heard it said that women are the backbone of the party. Nevertheless in all the villages I saw, the men stood together near the speakers' platform while the women, most of them covered, stood in a compact group to the back. It's impossible to imagine that these women will progress to the status of respected equals anytime soon, a fact disturbing to anyone who cares about women's rights.

But the unequal status of women in traditional villages and towns is not, contrary to the elitist impulse of many westernized Turks, an argument against the one

party that actively solicits their support. While other parties tacitly or explicitly support the military's condemnation of their traditional dress, Virtue speaks to their concerns — mostly health, education and welfare issues — and inspires and encourages them to get involved in the party. In the context of Turkey's disenfranchised masses this strikes me as revolutionary, or at least proto-revolutionary. After a generation of these women have been decisively involved in a political movement that's transformed the country, I would think it would be damned difficult to keep a lot of them down on the farm. This will be especially true if by then the secular establishment has stopped barring traditional girls from higher education with a dress code that prohibits the headscarf.

The headscarf, improbably, lies at the heart of the debate over Islam in Turkey. Women are now banned from wearing headscarves in government institutions, including universities. Like many secular Turks, Barcin Inanc, diplomatic reporter for *Milliyet*, one of Turkey's biggest and most respected newspapers, regards the headscarf as a shibboleth for people determined to impose their religious values on secular Turks. "I don't believe these people are wearing scarves just because of religious beliefs. I believe that they are politically oriented and I fear there could come a day when they're in the majority and they could force the other girls to wear scarves. And that's the fear... and yes, there is an unfairness in this but the prospect of a bigger danger is there too. This is the dilemma of Turkey."

But Abdullah Gul insists that his Virtue Party is merely defending a woman's right to choose: "We don't want to force people to wear headscarves, we want to make it free. It's up to individual desire."

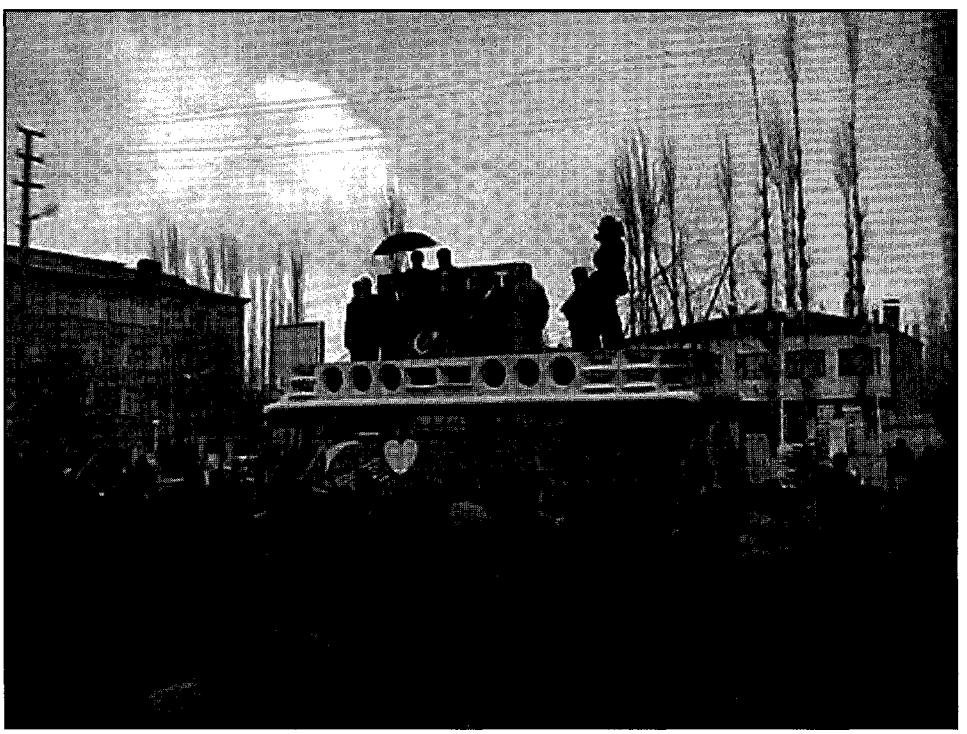
Inci Mercan, Murat's wife, told me she had never worn a headscarf while growing up in Turkey. It was while studying in Cleveland that American friends who had adopted Islam and wore headscarves convinced her that she should wear one too. "I had no difficulty in the States. I was going to school, getting my MBA and had no problems with professors or with American people. I didn't feel like a threat to the American system but after I came back to Turkey, people were treating me like a threat to the system."

With an engineering degree and an MBA from the US, Inci applied for 15 jobs in Turkey. Every interview focused on her headscarf. "They would question me — 'Do you really speak English, do you really have a diploma from the States?' And I felt very humiliated... I mean if I were in the States, I could sue them because it's discrimination against my religion."

Murat Mercan said before the election that "In an ideal world, twenty years from now, over half the women in Turkey would wear scarves. The reason is simple: people are becoming more religious around the world, so why not in Turkey?" A recent study by the Konrad Adenauer Center in Ankara confirms that Turkish young people are in fact becoming more religious.

The conflict between religious Muslims and the secular state poses a troubling dilemma for Turks like *Milliyet*'s Barcin Inanc who believe in democracy, but fear its possible consequences. "Now I would want a system in which everyone is free to worship freely but I wouldn't want to be forced — and this is the fear in Turkey — that using democracy they can come to power by saying they want everyone to worship freely," said Barcin. "But does this mean they would allow freedom not to worship? Now *that*, we *don't* know."

In the U.S. and many other countries, it would be impolitic for a newspaper reporter to express such views on the record. But Barcin knows that virtually all of *Milliyet*'s readers would agree with her. In Istanbul and Ankara newsstands are everywhere. In cafes and teahouses, on buses and ferries and park benches, every-



Virtue Party leaders addressing villagers in central Anatolia

one seems to be reading a newspaper, giving the impression that Turks have a voracious appetite for current affairs. But with Turkey's population of 65 million, daily newspaper sales total just 3 million. Altogether, probably about six million Turks read a paper regularly.

Most of the other 59 million, not including children, represent what in Ottoman times were called the "*raya*," or flock: they are the mostly unlettered, unskilled and still traditional Muslims that most fruits of Turkey's social revolution and economic progress have yet to reach. As Professor Nilufer Narli writes: "The Islamist movement is an outlet to express political dissatisfaction with the existing order within which the masses on the periphery had long had disadvantaged economic and political positions vis-à-vis the elite at the center... The conflict between the center — comprising the military officers, senior bureaucrats, notables, and the industrialists emerged as a result of the state-endorsed efforts to create a local business elite in the young republic — and the periphery is the legacy of the Ottoman period. Ottoman society was divided into two categories: the sultan, military, and the *ulema* (Islamic lawyers) at the center, and the subjects (*raya*) comprising a large proportion of peasants on the periphery. The Ottoman central authority was suspicious of the peripheral elements and thus, never permitted their independent organization and input. There has always been a huge social and cultural distance between the imperial center and the Anatolian periphery. Despite the introduction of the equality of all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion and region, the gap between the center and the periphery was not narrowed in the first three decades after the Republic was founded in 1923." On the contrary, writes Narli, "the center geared its policies toward maintaining this gap."

This shop in Ankara's Metro Station sells goods advertised on an Islamist TV channel, evidence, the party's critics say, of the nepotism rampant under Virtue Party mayor Melih Gokcek.

In this regard Ankara's most potent weapon has been its control of religion through the Ministry of Religious Affairs that administers all mosques in Turkey. But the military junta that ruled Turkey between 1980 and 1983 tried to use Islam to help stabilize the country. In order to co-opt revolutionary sentiments — particularly among poor newcomers to the big cities and separatist Kurds — the junta promoted the idea of a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis," making religious education mandatory. In 1995 the overtly religious Welfare Party reaped the benefits of Islam's new acceptability, winning over 21 percent of the vote and joining the ruling coalition in Parliament. But just three months later, the army — again orthodox in its secularism — closed down the Welfare Party and banned its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, from politics. Istanbul mayor Recep Tayip Erdogan, once regarded as Welfare's future leader, was sent to prison for reciting a poem at a rally that authorities said incited religious hatred. Erdogan can be regarded as a victim of changing fashions. The poem he read, a line of which said that "minarets are our bayonets," was written by turn-of-the-century nationalist Ziya Gokalp. Far from being reviled as an Islamist, Gokalp has his name on the a major street in Ankara that intersects with Ataturk Boulevard, forming the busiest intersection in the capital.

But Islam was in fashion for long enough, in combination with the economic liberalization under Turgut Ozal, to create a new business elite originating in the tradition-bound provinces of central Anatolia. The old metropolitan elite's contempt for this new provincial elite is well expressed by Feroz Ahmad in his book *The Making of Modern Turkey*:

"This provincial bourgeoisie, in power since 1983, is ostentatiously devout since they have been raised in a milieu where the discourse and cultural values are still religious. Their exposure to the secular world has been limited to their professional lives and they tend not to have much familiarity with the West, only its technical civilization. For them the West is symbolized mainly by America for that is where some were sent to further their expertise. Given their education and experience of the modern world they tend to be narrow-minded men who

disguise the poverty of their intellect with the discourse of Islam and that partly explains why the Islamic resurgence has gained momentum during the past decade. They lack the *noblesse oblige* of the old elites and therefor show little concern for the welfare of the people as a whole; their main concern is to acquire wealth and to preserve the new order they have so recently created."

My landlady, Leyla Umar, who lives upstairs, epitomizes Istanbul's elite. One of Turkey's best-known journalists, especially admired for celebrity interviews ranging from Gregory Peck to Fidel Castro, Leyla is the granddaughter of the last Ottoman governor of Jerusalem. Sitting on her rooftop terrace with a matchless view of the Bosphorous one morning, I told her I'd been reporting on the Virtue Party and had a very good impression of Abdullah Gul. To my horror, she began *weeping*.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I suppose you think I'm very naïve."

"Yes, my dear, you are very naïve," she said, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. "I'm sorry for this," she said pointing to her eyes, "but we have worked so hard to build this country up for the last 75 years, and these primitive people just want to destroy it all."

Leyla's and my housekeeper, Zeynep, is a Kurd from a traditional family and grew up always wearing a headscarf outside her home. Leyla told her that if she wanted to work for her, inside the house she would have to go bareheaded. Zenep complies with good humor but has told me she still can't see why Leyla should care.

Another example of elitist attitudes: a young woman who now works at the UN High Commission for Refugees in Ankara and will next year be heading to New York to attend grad school at Columbia, told me she had no interest in anything Virtue Party members have to say. She was particularly contemptuous of a Virtue MP's proposal to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the founding of the Ottoman dynasty. Her uncompromising contempt for Virtue had recently been reinforced by a "briefing" on the dangers of Islamists that the military gave to university student leaders.

During the Islamists' 18 months in government, secularists had also been outraged by the statements of several of its top officials. In addition to Erdogan's speech, Ankara mayor Melih Gokcek had nude statues removed from public view, saying, "If this is art, I spit on it." Couples walking hand-in-hand in Ankara's Metro stations had been ordered over the public address system not to offend public morals by touching. Kayseri mayor Sukru Karatepe had been convicted of the same charge after a speech urging people to "nurse their hatred and seek revenge." How, I asked Gul, could these statements not be seen as inflammatory to the secularist establishment? I referred to this elite by the Turkish term "Ataturkce," meaning "followers of Ataturk," Turkey's founding father who had ended the dominance of Islam in Turkish law and government.

"Everyone uses Ataturk his own way," Gul replied. "Since Ataturk opened the door to modernization, no movement has tried to re-create a religious state. Even under the Ottomans Islam wasn't radical." Gul pointed out that since 1994 two-thirds of Turkey had been under Welfare or Virtue Party mayors so their performance could be measured empirically. With a few exceptions like the ones I've noted, Virtue administrations had been not only innocuous but industrious. Gul said that before being shut down by the military, Virtue survived 12 votes of no confidence, not one of which was based on charges of corruption (unlike the True Path and Motherland parties that had led other coalitions in recent years.)

The Welfare politicians were not wrong, said Gul, to urge people to defend their rights. In any case, said Gul, "It's not just the Virtue Party that uses sensational rhetoric. Every party exaggerates to get attention." With regard to the inflammatory statements by Virtue's mayors, Ergogan and Karatepe, Gul pointed out that the measure of how provocative they were should be the reaction they aroused. No dramatic response had followed either speech.

Driving back to Kayseri, Gul described his vision of how a Turkey that reconciled Islam and democracy could serve as a bridge between East and West. "If it is successful, it can serve as an a model for democratic change in other Muslim countries; if it isn't allowed to succeed, it will reinforce the view that democracy doesn't work and that the West is hostile to Islam," said Gul.

Murat Mercan amplified Gul's point, arguing that how the Virtue Party is treated and how it performs will have repercussions far beyond Turkey. "If Virtue can be a Muslim democratic party, a conservative party, defending moral, ethical and conservative values emanating from religious principles, and at the same time using western language, western methodology and turning its face more to the west than the east — if Virtue can accomplish all these things then Virtue will definitely be a role model for the whole Muslim world." Murat agreed with my comparison of Virtue to the culturally conservative wing of the Republican party in the US.

"Now if, on the other hand, the Fazilet model is not successful then, that will increase radical movements in Muslim countries because if the Fazilet example fails, that means that with democracy the demands of these people can not be met."

But if Virtue — or any future religious party in Turkey — is to have a chance to realize this compelling vision, it must jettison the orthodox provocateurs led by Erbakan. As we pulled up in front of the campaign-office in Kayseri, Gul quietly allowed that Erbakan's advanced age was hurting his judgment and his in-

terference made it hard to manage the party.

Murat Mercan agreed that the Welfare and Virtue Party's old guard bear some responsibility for secular Turks' not trusting them. Necmettin Erbakan, for instance, had talked about *forcing* university presidents to bow down to girls in headscarves and threatened to build a mosque in Taksim, Istanbul's equivalent of Times Square. "This rhetoric is changing gradually as new people take over the party," said Mercan. "In my opinion, Virtue's true moderate face has been hidden by inflammatory statements."

"The older generation was raised in such a closed society, they had no idea what was going on in the outside world, even in Muslim countries," said Mercan. "When Erbakan talks about making '*jihad*', for example, he doesn't really even know what it means but naturally it scares people. It would scare me. The older people in the party may share the same ambitions as the young to make Turkey a modern western country with moral and religious values, but the old people don't have the intellectual infrastructure to achieve their goals."

On Guls' suggestion, I caught an overnight bus for the 11-hour ride from Kayseri to Diyarbakir, where the next afternoon party chairman Recai Kutan would address a rally.

The crowd in the station was almost exclusively male, my first step, as I later realized, into regions where women were scarce in public and where I began to empathize with westernized Turks' fear — and at some moments even loathing — of their more traditional countrymen. In the station men sauntered, men twirled their prayer beads, men flipped each other's hats off with the awkwardly flirtatious air of 12-year-olds in the U.S., men strolled beneath the fluorescent lights arm-in-arm laughing together with an intimacy that struck me as both homo-erotic and maudlin.

As the bus rumbled across the dark steppe, I promptly fell asleep. When I awoke dawn had not quite broken and the steep, parched hills outside were the shadowy gray color of skim milk. After a boxed breakfast of olives, cheese, jam and bread I nodded off to sleep again. I woke to see soldiers walking through the bus collecting identity documents with a perfunctory "you-know-the-drill" casualness. We were then required to get off the bus, as if we were crossing an international frontier. The soldiers showed an unwelcome interest in my U.S. passport and ordered me to open my bag for them to inspect. Before I knew it, they were telling the other passengers to get on the bus and that it could carry on. I, however, would have to stay behind.

After the bus had left, the soldiers continued rifling through my backpack and computer case. Flipping through a notebook, the most intense soldier saw the word "Ataturk" and jabbed his finger at it as if a reference to the country's ubiquitous founder proved that I was subversive. In my rudimentary Turkish I translated Gul's remark that everyone uses Ataturk in his own way. He continued to flip through my notes until he came to a page of Turkish slang vocabulary. Seeing a phrase that means (a woman's) "nice figure", a smile broke across his stern face and he motioned for his mates to have a look. Again he pointed at the notebook, but this time with a friendly grin, as if the phrase about a woman's body proved I was a regular guy.

Had I had breakfast? he asked suddenly. Not much, I said. He explained that unlike all the other men at this post, who were conscripts, he was a career soldier and the senior non-commissioned officer at the post. He invited me into his guardhouse on the far side of the highway and told a soldier to bring me a packet of chocolate biscuits and tea. "We're on the same side," I said, trying to drive home our new-found friendship. "NATO." Beaming at me as I ate, the sergeant asked whether he and his fellow soldiers resembled their American counterparts. Besides the fact that I'd never been pulled off a bus by American GI's, I wanted to say, you're identical. Instead I told him that it was hard to judge because in the U.S., unlike in Turkey, we had no war to contend with. He took this well, nodding gravely and pointing at a nearby knoll where he said just the other day he had been fired on by guerrillas from the Kurdish separatist group, the PKK. We chatted a bit more until the next bus arrived. Before putting me on it, the sergeant scrawled his name and phone number on a piece of paper and told me that if I ran into any trouble in Diyarbakir, I should give him a call.

It was only 11 o'clock but already very hot when I reached the bus depot. I caught a taxi and asked the driver to take me any decent hotel in the center. On the drive in we passed a gritty-looking military base in front of which a flock of goats was being herded by a old man with a staff. After being checked in by a burly man who looked more like a guard than a hotelier, I took a quick shower to rinse off the day's first sheet of sweat and grime and went outside to find the Virtue Party headquarters. For about half an hour I walked through the midday glare next to Diyarbakir's famous medieval city wall, apparently the only man-made structure visible from space aside from the Great Wall of China. Eventually I came to a street festooned with Virtue's familiar pennants showing a heart being shot with arrows. In front of the party office I asked a couple of men when and where the rally would be held. It turned out that it would begin two hours later just down the street from my hotel and a volunteer kindly offered me a ride back.

On the way to the intersection that had been blocked off for the rally I passed unmolested by several police who were frisking people. But since I planned to record the speeches, I was wearing headphones and carrying a tape recorder. Several uniformed policemen demanded to see my ID and asked what I was doing there. Finally,

just a moment before the convoy of party speakers pulled into the intersection, three men in suits demanded that I come with them. Who the hell were they, I demanded. Police, they said. But I'd already talked with half a dozen police, I told them. Not with their department, they said — the "information police." Shuddering at their Orwellian title and anxious to return to listen to the speakers, I reluctantly followed them to the edge of the crowd where a man in an elegant but unseasonable overcoat who seemed to be in charge told me to get in an unmarked van. There in the middle of tortured-journalist country, I had probably never been so far from complying with an order from a person in authority. Anything he wanted to discuss, I told him, could be discussed there on the street.

I showed him my passport and my ICWA ID card. He demanded to see my authorization to come to Diyarbakir. I told him I hadn't known such a thing was required. The entire area was under a state of emergency, he said, and foreigners required special permission to visit. Affecting the indignation of one who'd really never heard about the civil war that had killed over 30,000 people, I told him that since Turkey was a democracy it had never occurred to me that I'd need special permission to travel anywhere. The man in the trench coat told me that I had to understand about the problem with the Kurdish guerrillas. I didn't know or care about the Kurds, I said; I was writing about Islam and was in town only to see the rally being held by the Virtue party at that very moment. After 15 minutes or so, they seemed convinced that I was a harmless naïf and not only let me go, but allowed me to return to the rally with my recording equipment.

Party Chairman Recai Kutan had lived in Diyarbakir and made remarks mildly endorsing the extension of cultural rights to Kurds. Virtue hoped to do well in the southeast of Turkey, where 15 years of war between the PKK, a Kurdish and Marxist separatist group, and the government had left over 30,000 dead and left the economy in ruins. The response from the crowd to speeches from a dozen or so Virtue Party officials was lively but not impassioned. A man on the campaign bus from which the candidates were speaking told me I wouldn't be able to meet with Kutan or his retinue because they were all leaving town immediately.

Disappointed, I walked back to a kebab restaurant where I'd eaten lunch and asked whether they could recommend an English-speaker who could show me around. Following their directions, I walked to a teahouse where I was told to look for a certain Mehmet who spoke English very well and spent all his time there. A waiter pointed out a guy who looked to be in his late twenties with longish black hair and a few days' beard.

I introduced myself and Mehmet's eyes lit up and English began to gush out of him as if a dam had broken. He immediately addressed me with a familiarity as if to say, "Though you happened to find me sitting in this smoky teahouse off a gritty street in an area under Emergency Control, you and I obviously share the same culture." Mehmet told me how he'd made an erratic living as a journalistic fixer and guide to the unusually intrepid tourists who made it this far east. He alluded to a succession of romances with Scandinavian girls. His great love was in New Zealand and he had very nearly visited her there after a vacation in Thailand which he'd had to abort early because he couldn't stand the food. Mehmet's enthusiasm brought to mind an image of an interpreter for the U.S. military whom the Americans had left behind when they abandoned Saigon to the communists.

After a while we walked over to the Virtue Party office where I hoped to talk to the mayor, who was running for re-election. Though as a secularist Mehmet had no great fondness for Virtue, he told me that Mayor Ahmet Bilgin had done a lot for the city, improving sidewalks, putting in ramps for wheelchairs and prams, developing parks and a huge water system. He was also a professor and a remarkable linguist who spoke Japanese and Arabic in addition to English and French. After we'd waited for an hour or so in the campaign office, which was like a big cafeteria that, like most of the city it seemed, was full of men sipping tea and smoking, Bilgin entered. An assistant with whom I'd spoken who was also a relative caught his ear and explained that a foreign journalist wanted to speak with him. Sitting down under bright lights on a little dais at the head of a table in the center of the room, Bilgin beckoned me to him.

Supplicants crowded around the table waiting to speak with him stared as I asked Bilgin a few questions about Virtue's prospects in Diyarbakir. The problem of the Southeast, he told me, echoing the line in Ankara, was not ethnic but economic. Unemployment was over 80 percent. He had done his best to improve the city's infrastructure, he said, but real progress would depend on investment from the western half of the country. Bilgin conceded that Diyarbakir's parliamentary seats would go to HADEP, the main Kurdish party. But he hoped to be returned on the strength of his practical successes. "So," he said in a louder voice, nodding toward the intent faces crowded around the table, "please tell us who you think will win the mayor's race here in Diyarbakir?"

Doing my best to balance tact and truthfulness, I said that based on all I'd seen I could hardly imagine that anyone but Bilgin himself had any chance. Given that I couldn't name any other candidate, this was quite literally true. (In the event, the mayor's race in Diyarbakir, like nearly all other cities and towns in the southeast, was won by the HADEP candidate.)

Mehmet and I had a dinner of meat and rice in a fluorescently-lit restaurant occupied, like every place I'd seen since darkness had fallen, exclusively by men. I asked Mehmet to show me a bar and, since we were far from the tourist circuit, perhaps a place with belly danc-

ing. He said he knew two places that would be perfect but first he wanted to introduce me to his Uncle Fezi. Fezi, it soon emerged, had a shop. A carpet shop. It was about ten when we reached entrance to the underground shopping arcade and an old watchman let us in. Fezi was waiting for us. He said he was in his early fifties but he looked like an old man. He offered me tea and chit-chatted with affected casualness while pulling various beautiful and intriguingly wrought carpets in front of where he'd seated me. I didn't have to feel any pressure to decide anything right away, he said airily. I tried to explain that I was supported by a foundation that paid only vital expenses and had no money of my own. As you can imagine, this explanation was as clear as mud. At the same time that I was practically squirming with awkwardness, I couldn't blame Mehmet and Fezi for doing their best to sell me something. I knew that I was very likely the only foreigner in the entire city at that moment. Assuring him that I recognized that the quality and prices of his carpets couldn't be beaten, I promised Fezi I'd return sometime when I had my own money and wasn't busy reporting on the Virtue Party.

After finally extricating myself from Fezi's carpet shop, Mehmet took me to his favorite traditional bar, known as a *meyhane*. We ordered beers. The only woman was the hostess. I asked Mehmet whether women ever came there and he pointed out a partitioned area for women. It was empty but nearly every other table was full. On a little stage lit with blue lights, a man played an electric keyboard while another sang. It was the most dramatic, or melodramatic, music I'd ever heard. Kurdish music, Mehmet said, about the rigors of crossing the high mountains where Kurds had lived for over a millennium and about unconsummated love.

There was certainly a lot of unconsummated love, it appeared to me, at the tables around us. The faces of these mustachioed men shone with that combination of playfulness and affection bordering on rapture that is the essence of sexual foreplay. They draped their arms around one another. They pulled flirtatious faces. They danced dances charged with erotic tension. Many Westerners who have spent time in the Middle East claim that the affection men show one another has nothing to do with sex. I don't buy it. It is entirely possible, of course, that none of these men had ever had homosexual intercourse. But even if they reached coitus only alone or with their wives, it would still be the climax of a buildup that took place mostly among their male friends. How could it be otherwise? These men had had almost no contact with women in their lives apart from their mothers and others who looked after their meals and other material needs. If these men were to experience any link between emotional intimacy and sexual excitement, it would have to be with men.

One solidly built man at the table next to ours was sitting alone and wearing a rather droll expression. I leaned over and invited us to join Mehmet and me. A Kurd, he taught Turkish language and literature in a high school in his hometown, the small city of Bitlis near Lake Van northeast of Diyarbakir. During his teaching career the education ministry in Ankara had transferred him all over Turkey and even for a few years to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. He was on his way home from a conference in Adana and had missed the last bus.

As we sat talking a couple of men at the next table who minutes before had been dancing together jumped up and began shouting and flailing their arms around. Their friends drunkenly tried to restrain them. Whatever had inflamed the angry men infected a couple of others and within moments glasses were smashing and half the men in the room had risen to their feet and were grappling with one another. The singer pleaded for calm. The instigators of the trouble looked wildly around, vowing that they weren't going to stand for whatever outrage had incited them. It was beginning to look like a brawl except that I couldn't identify the opposing side. Our new friend explained that the enemy had already left. For some reason a man had made the sign of the ultranationalist Gray Wolves. Others at his table had responded with the sign of the Kurdish party and soon hustled him out of the bar. But seeing the sign of the Gray Wolves had been too much for a few of the revelers, their nerves raw from alcohol and idleness and frustration, to handle. After about 15 minutes of tumult, the face of the main protagonist dissolved into a saucy smile and he embraced several guys who had manhandled him during his outburst.

I was finding the Spartan atmosphere suffocating and suggested to Mehmet and our new friend that we move on to the belly-dancing place. The nightclub had the pedestrian decorum of an airport transit lounge, with low lights, white table cloths on tables set far apart, a wall-to-wall magenta carpet and a small army of waiters in bow ties and cummerbunds that matched the carpet. A waiter asked what we'd like and I ordered a bottle of red wine. My friends, unaccustomed to any drink but beer and *raki*, the anise-flavored liquor, were considered this an elegant choice. And what would we like to eat? the waiter asked. Nothing for me, thanks, I said. After a moment of awkward silence, Mehmet explained that it was customary — as in obligatory — to order food while drinking. After ordering bread with beans and a sort of thick salsa called *ezme*, I asked whether the eating requirement reflected the discomfort traditional Kurds and Turks still felt about alcohol. As long we ordered food, we could maintain the fiction that the alcohol was just to wash it down. My friends said this explanation rang true.

Around midnight, the belly dancer finally emerged. I found her plump and homely. Mehmet loved her dishwater-blond hair and fair complexion. To Turkish pop music — not traditional belly dancing music — the girl swiveled her hips and shook her breasts artlessly while circulating among the tables where men stuffed small bills

into her brassiere and bikini bottom. Perhaps recognizing my lack of enthusiasm, she skipped me.

There next appeared a beautiful dark-haired singer wearing a red, full-length gown with no back. She sang traditional Turkish songs — not Kurdish. I liked her voice. She moved around the room but didn't get as close as the dancer. A handsome young man at one table looked thoroughly smitten. He managed to hold her gaze much more than duty required and she returned often to his table. Eventually he ordered a bottle of champagne and begged her to share a glass with him between songs. Mehmet was flabbergasted. The young man, he said, sold sunflower seeds on the street and that bottle of champagne would cost two months' earnings. I hoped the singer would be kind to him when she realized he was poor.

The next day, after walking around with Mehmet and some of his friends, I caught a bus for the one-hour ride to Urfa, very close to the Syrian border, from where I would catch a flight back to Ankara. It was dusk as we entered the city and I asked the young man sitting next to me to recommend an inexpensive hotel. He promised to take me to a good place and we introduced ourselves. He explained that he was a university student living in a communal apartment paid for by Fetullah Gulen, a rich philanthropist who supports a network of religious schools and a popular newspaper, *Zaman* (Time). The purpose of these activities is to propagate the theology of Said Nusri, a turn-of-the-century Muslim scholar. I had first heard of Nusri and Gulen from a friend in Seoul who was a correspondent for *Zaman* and knew that the movement had the reputation of combining piety and tolerance.

The young man took me to an inn that was basically a flophouse, with a dirty room down the hall with a hole in the floor as a bathroom. A night on a rough-spring mattress with an army blanket in a room the size of a closet would cost me about a dollar. Not wanting to offend him, I said it would be fine. After dinner, I accepted the young man's invitation to visit the apartment he shared with other followers of Gulen and Said Nusri. The apartment was shared by five young Kurdish men who slept on beds lining one room. Another room was equipped with one old computer and served as a study. All the boys had grown up in villages between Diyarbakir and Urfa and none had been as far north or west as Ankara.

Though the boys were studying various subjects and only one of them was planning to be an imam, or prayer leader, all of them wanted to talk to me about religion. Was I a Christian? No. A Jew? No. What, then, was my faith? I strained my limited Turkish trying to explain that I was a liberal humanist. My explanation came down to the crude formula that I believed that human beings had to think for themselves, not believe what others told them. Predictably, they were not impressed by this point of view. For two hours they regaled me with the teachings of Said Nusri, most of which I couldn't understand. I did, however, notice how they savored the glottal stops of words in Arabic, which Muslims revere as the language in which Allah chose to communicate with the Prophet Muhammad.

Eventually I asked whether they supported the Virtue Party. They did, they told me, though it wasn't as orthodox as they'd like. I asked them to tell me their vision for Turkey. With a chilling zeal in their eyes, they told me that they wanted to see *sheriat* imposed throughout the country. Thinking their notion of Islamic law might be less medieval than mine, I asked them to elaborate on what this meant. "You know, real Islamic law," they answered, "like in Iran."

Here, then, was the hidden enemy that all my secular friends in Istanbul and Ankara were sure existed but most had never met. It wasn't surprising that these guys could foreswear alcohol, since their watering holes would be limited to such unappealing places as the *meyhane* in Diyarbakir and they couldn't really afford even that. It was natural that they believed the heads of their women should be covered, since for them women were not friends but only props to support the spiritual vocation of men. These guys hadn't seen anything beyond this sexually segregated, inclement and impoverished corner of Anatolia and their desperation to identify with something bigger than themselves and their materially bleak lives was perfectly understandable. But so, I thought with a sudden shiver, was the determination of secular Turks to beat these people — by any means necessary.

Back in Istanbul, on a balcony surrounded by bougainvillea bushes and overlooking the Bosphorous, I discussed *sheriat* with Ahmet Davetoglu, a professor of political science at Marmara University whom Gul had recommended to me. A female graduate student, dressed in jeans and with her long hair uncovered, brought us tea. After she left, service was taken over by a studious-looking young man wearing a wispy beard. Davetoglu himself wore a moustache and his prematurely weathered but warm face reminded me of Charles Bronson in the vigilante film *Deathwish*.

Though more gentle than Bronson in his methods, Davetoglu was equally implacable in the face of his ideological foes, those who insist that Islam can only be regressive. First he emphasized the importance of clarifying terms. What, for instance, was meant by *sheriat*? The essence of Islamic law, he said, is what it is designed to protect: life, intelligence, dignity, family lines and property. How that is achieved is open to interpretation. I pointed out that the reason secular Turks fear *sheriat* is that, like all systems of law, within its jurisdiction it admits no exceptions. Davetoglu acknowledged this and put it in a positive light by citing how the arrival of Islam in Egypt ended the sacrifice of young girls to the Nile.

"But what I'm pointing out is that you have to understand Muslims in their own terms, and that what a Virtue Party supporter means by *sheriat* would be very different from the western conception," said Davetoglu.

"What we have in Turkey," Davetoglu continued, "is a clash between two elites. Every country is set up to serve the interests of its own elites — the U.S. was founded by merchants to serve mercantile interests, Germany was founded by industrialists to serve their interests and Turkey was created by bureaucrats to serve the state." A survey by a professor at Bogazici University found that 75 percent of Turks oppose headscarves being banned in state offices and 80 percent think it should be permitted in universities. "Virtue doesn't worry most Turks, it's only a focus of tension between competing elites," said Davetoglu. The banning of the Welfare Party in February 1997 didn't provoke a sharp clash," he said, "precisely because most Welfare supporters are mainstream and didn't want to cause turmoil in the society."

"In the Muslim world, secularism has been seen as being hostile to Muslim history and tradition. In 1927 Basil Matthews wrote a book called *Young Islam on Track: a Clash of Civilizations?* Observing the modernization project of the early Republic, Matthews wrote that Turkey was 'converting to Christendom without becoming Christian.' Ataturk said the modernization process was natural and universal," said Davetoglu, making a gratuitous reference to the founding father that reminded me of Soviet academic's citation of Lenin. "Matthews, on the other hand, thought of modernization as a wholesale adoption of Europe."

Davetoglu said the modernization process that began under the Ottomans with the adoption of the *Tanzimat* reforms in 1839 became a radical shift in the 30s and 40s. Matthews's view that modernization requires a self-imposed cultural colonialism came to dominate Kemalism, as the secular philosophy of Ataturk is known, and created a "divided self." Since then Republican officials and traditional people had vied for influence with the Kemalists typically referring to religious people as "*irtica*", or "backwards-moving."

"The Virtue Party," said Davetoglu, "has been a spokesman for the traditional Anatolian vision of space and history, accepting modernization as a natural and universal process, as opposed to a wholesale conversion to another culture." Davetoglu remarked that the conceit at the heart of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*, that his society represented the apogee of civilization, was hardly unprecedented; the Ottomans declared that they had reached "the end of history" in the 16th century and Hegel repeated the same claim in the 19th.

Fukuyama's claim, said Davetoglu, implied that other cultures were outside or irrelevant to the historical process. While teaching at the Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur Davetoglu was asked to teach a course on the history of political thought. The department handed him a curriculum that covered only European thinkers. His students came from some ten countries, including China, the name of which in Chinese means "the center of the world." Davetoglu realized, he told me, that if he were to teach this Eurocentric curriculum he would be implying that all his Asian students were either outside the history of political thought or even its victims.

"In 1995 *Milliyet* ran a headline announcing Turkey's acceptance into the European Customs Union as 'the realization of a dream to be part of Europe'. On the back page of the same paper was a story about Istanbul's Galata Saraj football team beating a German team. The headline: 'Watch out Europe, here we come.' (cf. Virtue's slogan, 'We're coming'.) These headlines," said Davetoglu, "reflect Turkey's conflicting desires to be accepted as part of Europe and to beat it. After centuries of considering themselves challengers to and rivals of Europeans, Turks nowadays are told to imitate them."

A good friend of mine in Istanbul, or rather his ex-girlfriend, offers a rather intimate example of the "divided self." My friend is the son of a French father and a staunchly secular Turkish mother. His girlfriend came from a traditional family. Following her parents' lead, she voted for the Virtue Party in the April elections. Because my friend couldn't imagine the relationship evolving toward marriage, since his parents and hers could never get along, they broke up. Afterward they agreed to continue seeing each other occasionally — exclusively for sex. The arrangement seems to suit the secularist and Islamist equally well.

My friend's lover isn't the only religious Turk who's feeling confused. Murat and I had lunch the day after Gul and the others resigned from Virtue's board. He offered to arrange meetings with Gul and Erdogan and anyone else in the party whom I wanted to meet. Then he asked, "So, Whit, what's your analysis?" Given how new I am to Turkey, it struck me as extraordinary that Murat should be so keen to know my views. I could only imagine two explanations. One was that the progressives were truly at such a loss about how to proceed that they were casting about everywhere to get their bearings. The second was that although I'd never consciously said anything to lead him to believe so, Murat might also hope that I would be a conduit to people in Washington with some influence in Ankara.

I told him, for what it was worth, that from talking to people, especially those who voted for the ultranationalist MHP, I believed there were other reasons for the party's reversals. One was that because of the military's hostility and the prosecutor's case to shut the party down, many Turks didn't believe Virtue was viable.

Beyond that, the election results represented a pro-

This Coke billboard in Ankara reads: "From Atlanta to Ankara, everywhere the same enjoyment." Economic growth in the early 80s led to domestically produced sodas and traditional liquid yogurt, known as ayran, *being replaced by global softdrink brands. In Turkey the culturally threatening aspects of globalization have helped to fuel both Islamism and nationalism.*

test against the two center-right parties that had been discredited by corruption and poor performance. As a protest Virtue had lost much of its appeal by trying so hard to moderate its image. The problem for the Reformers was that it would be difficult for a new Islamist party to win back the protest vote lost to the ultranationalist Gray Wolves. The military-dominated establishment will always be more tolerant of criticisms coming from those who wrap themselves in the flag, meaning the Gray Wolves can get away with much more provocative rhetoric.

Because their ultimate loyalties to the state are considered suspect, Islamists' statements are held to a higher standard of moderation.

The reformers, said Murat, hope to recapture the center with a platform of pragmatic governance, a western orientation in foreign policy and respect for cultural pluralism, including the wearing of the headscarf. Murat said the reformers are all committed to a separation of religion and the state. This would mean that the Ministry of Religious Affairs would be dismantled and mosques would be responsible for their own upkeep — and their own sermons. It also means, Murat promised, no prayer in school or any other infiltration of Islamic values or practices into state institutions.

Murat said the party had three options: to start a new party, fight for the party leadership, or to watch the party get banned and hope that Gul doesn't get banned from politics at the same time. The risk of starting a new party was that splinter parties never do well in Turkey because there's too much loyalty to the leader. Mercan said it's particularly dangerous for Islamists to be seen as "dividers," which are condemned in the *Quran*.

If Gul challenged for the leadership, that would be difficult too, said Murat: "Erbakan has huge advantages over any challengers: money (Mercan wouldn't confirm that Virtue gets much of its money from "taxes" levied on traditional Turks living in Germany); a broad power base developed over his 30 years in politics, with supporters in every city; and control over the management of the party." Mercan said party leaders can almost always retain control of their parties even after losing the support of the majority of members. In Virtue's case, 1,200 deputies will attend this autumn's party convention and Erbakan will probably be able to engineer the election of deputies who support him.

The best option for the reformers would be for the party to be banned, as they expected to happen in a couple of months. The reformers' resignation from the board strengthened the prosecutor's case against Virtue by confirming that it was still controlled by Erbakan, despite his ban from politics. The risk is that Gul will get banned along with the party for statements that he'd felt obliged to make in defense of Kavakci after she was ejected from Parliament. Until being banned from politics for life after his conviction on charges of inciting religious hatred, the enormously popular Istanbul mayor Recep Tayip Erdogan had been expected to take the helm of the party. If Erdogan had his political rights restored through some change in the laws, Murat predicted, he'd probably be the leader of the party and in that case Virtue would win more than 30 percent in the next elections due in 2004.

I for one hope the reformers succeed, at least in forming a party free of Erbakan and with the participation of Erdogan. It is possible, of course, that as most secularist Turks believe, in their hearts the reformers are not as progressive as they appear. One of them, indeed, once said that flirting was equivalent to prostitution. But like democracy itself, it is a risk worth taking: the potential payoff is so enormous, while the alternative is continuation of profound gridlock in all spheres of the country's development. As Lincoln said, a house divided against itself cannot stand.

In the grandest vision, if the reformers succeeded in melding Islamic values and democracy, Turkey might realize Gul's vision of forming a bridge between the Muslim world and Western Europe and North America. Only a little less ambitiously, a party that respected the customs and values of traditional as well as those who do not share those values could bridge the gulf that has divided the country since its founding. ❑

A Chronology of the Turks' Relationship with Islam

861 Turkish slave soldiers kill the Muslim caliph al-Mutawakkil. Turks become arbiters of the caliphate.

1789 Selim III, first Westernizing sultan, ascends the throne.

1839 The *Gulhane Rescript* ushers in the major period of Ottoman reform known as the *Tanzimat*.

1923 Turkish Republic proclaimed with Ankara as its capital and Mustafa Kemal as its first president.

1924 March 3 – Parliament abolishes the Islamic Caliphate, Ministry of Religious Affairs and religious schools.
April 8 – Abolition of religious schools.

1925 Religious brotherhoods, known as *tarikats*, are suppressed, the fez is abolished and the Western calendar is adopted. Ataturk closes sacred tombs as places of worship.

1926 The Swiss civil code and Italian penal code are enacted, replacing elements of the *sheriat*, or Islamic law.

1928 The Latin alphabet officially replaces the Arabic one; secularism replaces Islam as the official ethos of the state.

1930 Religious riots in Menemen, near Izmir, are followed by trials and executions.

1934 Women are given the right to vote.

1961 With the provision of civil liberties by a new Constitution, Islamist groups begin to operate openly.

1970 Necmettin Erbakan establishes the National Order Party (NOP), the first explicitly pro-Islamic party since the founding of the Republic.

1971 May – NOP outlawed.

1972 October – The National Salvation Party (NSP) is founded as the successor to the NOP.

1973 Drawing on the support of provincial merchants, shopkeepers and artisans as well as the Nakshibandi and Nurcu religious brotherhoods, the NSP achieves surprising success in general elections, polling 11.8% nationally and over 15% in provinces in central and eastern Anatolia.

The NSP forms a coalition government with the staunchly secularist Republican People's Party led by (current Prime Minister) Bulent Ecevit.

The NSP passes a bill giving religious high schools (known as "*imam hatip* schools") the same status as non-religious schools, allowing their graduates to enter universities.

1975 March 31 – The NSP becomes a coalition partner in the first "National Front" government under the premiership of the right-of-center Justice Party led by (current President) Suleyman Demirel.

1977 The NSP polls just 8.6% in the general elections. Despite this poor result, the NSP is included in the second National Front government.

1980 September 12 – General Kenan Evren leads a military coup.

1981 The military abolishes all political parties.

1983 July 19 – The Welfare Party is formed under the leadership of Ali Turkmen, standing in for Erbakan, who is still banned from political activity.
November 6 – The Motherland Party led by the openly devout Turgut Ozal wins general elections with 45% of the vote.

1987 September 6 – Party leaders banned after the 1980 coup are allowed to return to political life.
November – In the first general elections entered under Erbakan's leadership, the Welfare Party polls 7.2% of the vote.

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Chronology

1989 March – Headscarves are banned.

October – Welfare polls 9.8% in local elections.

December – Ban on headscarves rescinded.
Turgut Ozal becomes president.

1990 Young pro-Islamic businessmen found MUSIAD, the Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, as an alternative to the older TUSIAD, which is comprised of the more westernized CEOs of Turkey's 300 biggest corporations.

1991 October – In an electoral alliance with the ultranationalist Nationalist Work Party under Alparslan Turkesh, Welfare wins 16.7% in general elections.

1993 July – An Islamist mob burns a hotel during an Alevi conference in Sivas, killing 37.

1994 March – The Pro-Islamic Welfare Party tops municipal elections, taking 28 city halls, including Istanbul and Ankara.

1995 December 25 – The Welfare Party tops general elections with 21.3% of the vote, winning 158 seats in the Grand National Assembly.

1996 July 8 – Welfare Party coalition with Tansu Ciller's True Path Party receives a vote of confidence in parliament.

December – Islamist officers are purged from the army.

1997 February 28 – The military-dominated National Security Council sets out an agenda to reinforce secularist ideals of the Republic.

Enrollment in the religious *imam hatip* schools is banned.

Casinos are banned.

June 18 – Under intense pressure from the military, representing Turkey's secular establishment, Islamist Welfare Party Prime Minister Necmetttin Erbakan resigns.

January 31 – A parade in which anti-government and pro-Iranian slogans are shouted is held in the Welfare-controlled Sincan district of Ankara, leading to the arrest of the mayor.

December 17 – 33 former Welfare deputies found the Virtue Party under the leadership of Recai Kutan, a crony of Islamist godfather Necmettin Erbakan.

1998 January 14 – Parliament passes a bill enacting measures to protect women and children from domestic violence over opposition from the Welfare Party.

The Welfare Party is outlawed on the grounds that it had violated constitutionally-guaranteed principles of secularism. Erbakan is banned from political life.

MUSIAD'S membership reaches 3,000, representing companies with annual turnover of $2.79 billion.

1999 April 18 – The Virtue Party finishes a disappointing third in general elections, behind the left-of-center Democratic Socialist Party and the ultranationalist MHP.

July 24 – Former Istanbul Mayor and leading Islamist progressive Recep Tayip Erdogan is released from prison after serving four months for inciting religious hatred.

July 26 – Virtue Party Deputy Chairman Abdullah Gul and Murat Mercan meet in Istanbul with Erdogan.

July 27 – Gul and three other leading reformers resign from the party's governing board in protest against Erbakan's continuing interference. Gul is mooted as a possible challenger for the party's leadership.

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Phone: (603) 643-5548 E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net
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Four West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 USA