
A Land Apart

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Walrus Magazine Canada - 12/8//2008

Can Turkey fulfill its promise as a bridge between East and West when its own peoples stand divided?

WEST

See Carolyn Drake's photo gallery from the Turkish town of Hasankeyf. Galip Karayigit was bursting at the seams, both sartorially and emotionally, as he held on to the statue of Ataturk at the centre of Istanbul's Taksim Square. Four more men hung on with him, each exhorting a separate section of the crowd with the same message: Turkey's honour and security are at stake.

Karayigit, a burly, perspiring textile factory manager, leaped down from the pedestal. Another man supported him, like a fellow soccer player after a hard-fought match. "I felt very sad when I heard the news this morning," he said. "I felt like the whole world had fallen around me." He was referring to an early-morning ambush by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (pkk) near Daglica, six kilometres from the Iraqi border. Twelve Turkish soldiers had been killed, and another eight were captured. Then, later that day, ten civilians had been injured when their minivan drove over a land mine believed to have been laid by the pkk.

Many of the divisions that define modern Turkey appeared to have dissolved that twenty-first of October, 2007. From Istanbul to Adana, streets pulsed with rallies demanding action, justice for the "martyred" soldiers, and a definitive end to the "Kurdish problem." The most unlikely of allies suddenly discovered a common cause: young rightists flashed the proto-fascist salute of the nationalist Grey Wolves next to pious middle-aged Muslim women in head scarves, old-school communists, and political agnostics. They poured down major thoroughfares by the tens of thousands, marching beneath the patriotic red blanket of a supersized Turkish flag. The attack itself was hardly a rare occurrence -- only two weeks earlier, thirteen soldiers had been killed in a similar ambush. But on this Sunday, something resembling consensus jigsawed into place.

An endless surge of excitable young men followed Karayigit, clambering atop Ataturk as though battling for a spot on a raft. Most singled out Turkey's allies for blame, soliciting anti-European Union and anti-American chants and jeers. According to Karayigit, so-called friends and neighbours were abandoning the country in its time of need. The French, the Americans, the British, the Russians -- all have had to deal with terrorism or insurgents, yet all were now counselling restraint and, in some cases, Karayigit believed, providing outright support to the pkk. "We only want the same power to defend our country," he said. Word spread that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was holding an emergency meeting of the country's generals; the Turkish parliament had passed a resolution that week authorizing the military to cross into northern Iraq and attack the pkk's mountain havens.

The Turks were already feeling embattled before this latest pkk ambush. In early October, an American congressional subcommittee had recommended that the US government officially acknowledge the Armenian genocide and Ottoman culpability for it -- a subject Turks

are loath to revisit. And accession talks with the European Union were prompting shots at Turkey's human rights record and its military's habit of meddling in government.

There was perhaps fair reason for Turks to feel, if not slighted, at least undervalued. As a secular democracy with a population that is 99 percent Muslim, Turkey is uniquely positioned to play a mediating role between the Islamic world and the West. Despite the country's lack of natural resource wealth, its mighty construction and shipping conglomerates are involved in major infrastructure projects across the Middle East and Central Asia. And while it has remained mostly loyal to its traditional allegiances with the United States and Israel, Turkey has recently worked to repair relations with Iran, Syria, and Russia -- a thaw that could have substantial benefits for the West. For instance, a pipeline is being proposed that would bring Iranian gas through Turkey to Europe, and Erdogan was a key figure in secret peace talks between Israel and Syria earlier this year. Turkey's strategic importance has only increased with the demise of the Cold War, and yet the country has often seemed to serve primarily as the West's put-upon sparring partner, taking flak from outsiders while mediating a diverse population with strong and often polarized perspectives on their country and its role in the world.

As the sky bruised into evening, demonstrators continued to surge toward Taksim, where they coalesced with still more mobs. I followed one of the offshoots as it continued up Cumhuriyet Street. Partway along, an elderly Kurdish beggar was splayed haplessly in the mob's path, cradling a small child in a bright cloth. The chanting and gesticulating marchers briefly parted around her, oblivious, like water gushing around a rock, then came together again.

Istanbul seemed stage-directed for the unfolding theatrics. Looming everywhere over the city, on massive banners and from bunting suspended above the streets, was the visage of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who founded the Turkish Republic in 1923. His mischievous semi-smile and upturned eyebrows were often accompanied by one of the Orwellian dicta for which he was famous -- most commonly "How happy is the one who says, 'I am a Turk.'" The line, inscribed in the country's oath of allegiance, is a sore point for Kurds and other ethnic minorities. A fifteen-year-old student in the country's southeast was indicted in 2003 for inciting hatred when he instead recited in front of his class, "Happy is he who calls himself a Kurd."

Ataturk's is perhaps the only twentieth-century personality cult that still plays a decisive role in a country's politics. His name is invoked daily by the Kemalist secular nationalists who dominate Turkey's judiciary, military, and sections of its civil service, to beat down those who question the limits placed on religion in public life, or who challenge the notion of "Turkishness." He remains the embodiment of the revolution and its highest aspirations.

A believer in scientific positivism and a fan of French civilization, Ataturk sought to remake his newly independent nation into a modern, westward-looking state. His first reforms were radical ones, designed to disestablish Islam from politics and public life: he abolished the caliphate that had ruled the Turks for some 400 years, moved the capital from the traditional Ottoman centre of Istanbul to Ankara, and shut down the country's religious courts. He also expanded rights for women, granting them access to education and later the vote, then enacted a hat law that circumscribed the wearing of religious headgear such as the fez or head scarf. In 1928, he instituted a new, Latin-based Turkish alphabet, on the grounds that Arabic was

a vestige of archaic Islamic influence, and ill suited to Turkish pronunciation anyway.

The concept of Turkishness, however, stands as perhaps Ataturk's most dubious and slippery bequest. In Ottoman times, "Turk" was an epithet, akin to calling someone a rube. Later, during the early days of the republic, the term referred simply to citizenship and geography. By the early 1930s, Ataturk had come to believe that the nation needed to be defined more strongly. His plan was to introduce a civic religion of sorts -- something that could sustain the social cohesion traditionally provided by Islam.

Influenced by H. G. Wells's Outline of History, he convened a historical society to investigate the roots of the Turks, charging academics with devising a collective narrative of origins. It was generally understood at the time that the nation's ancestors were the invading Oghuz Turkic nomadic tribes of Central Asia, who arrived in Anatolia around the eleventh century. His people's status as somewhat recent arrivals to their homeland became an obsession for Ataturk. Those Sumerians, Armenians, Kurds, and others who had lived in and around Turkey for thousands of years, leaving plentiful evidence of their existence? Well, Ataturk decided, they were actually Turks, too. (The leader's undisciplined intellect and fondness for late-night, raki-fuelled colloquia with friends sometimes led him to strange theories, including one that posited the Turks as the forebears of all peoples.) By asserting that these diverse ethnic groups were cut from the same cloth, Ataturk denied Turkey's multicultural past and present, setting it on a fractious path that continues to threaten both its security and its role as a link between East and West.

In the days following the pkk ambush, the forty-five-year-old Kurdish journalist Salih Sezgin rarely left his fourth-floor office at the newspaper Gundem. He felt safer there than at home. From his desk, he could poke his head out the window to scan the streets for shady characters, or see who was buzzing in. Occasionally, in the late afternoon, he would leave for a brisk, head-clearing stroll.

On the fifth day after the soldiers were killed, Sezgin paused briefly on Istiklal Caddesi, a bustling and very European boulevard lined with brand name boutiques and restaurants on Istanbul's western flank. A small rally was taking place, to demand that Turkey leave nato. Turning away from the protesters, he shuffled along narrow side streets, finally taking a seat at a caf  next to Ali Turgay, Gundem's twenty-something publisher. A stout, diminutive man possessing a gentle, rounded face framed with days-old stubble and a comb-over, Sezgin had the air of a struggling shopkeeper. "I spent nineteen years in prison," he joked. "I never look very healthy."

Gundem had recently had its right to publish suspended by Turkish authorities, who feared that the paper's pro-Kurdish reporting would embolden critics. For a few days, the pair had been able to get stories onto the paper's website, which had seen its traffic surge from a daily average of 10,000 hits to 80,000 during the crisis. But then the government blocked that, too, forcing them to use another url. Days later, hackers broke into their server, causing it to crash, and the website was gone again.

Had they been able to publish, Turgay and Sezgin would have been reporting the growing incidence of attacks against Kurdish citizens. According to the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (dtp), its constituency office in Istanbul's Fatih neighborhood had been firebombed; other dtp offices across the city had to be protected

by police from angry mobs. In Kadiköy, a Kurdish student was taken to hospital after an attempted lynching; in other neighbourhoods, homes belonging to Kurdish families were singled out with derogatory markings. Some of these events were making it into the mainstream media, but most were not. Kurds in Istanbul were talking about a return to the grim days of the 1980s and early '90s, when skirmishes between the military and the PKK forced thousands from their villages in the country's southeast, destroying the region's economy and social fabric, and resulting in more than 35,000 casualties. The armed clashes of October were hardly on that scale, but rumours and reports of personal attacks were nevertheless keeping people indoors. "It's enough just to have darker skin to get harassed on the street," said Sezgin.

He leaned forward over his tea. "The problem is that everyone sees the Kurdish problem as an ethnic problem. But we are a part of this country. We are part owners; we now live all across Turkey; we are not simply an ethnic minority or immigrants. Turkey's problem is not an ethnic problem; it's an identity problem."

During the War for Independence, Atatürk openly acknowledged that the Kurds would eventually need their autonomy. He may have done so for strategic reasons: the war was being fought to regain Turkish territory and sovereignty lost with the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) between Ottoman representatives and governments of the Allied Forces. For the Kurds, the treaty was ostensibly a good thing -- it included a mandate for a Kurdish state -- but they nevertheless fought alongside Atatürk's Turkish forces, believing they were acting as Muslim brothers against Christian occupiers from Britain, France, Italy, Armenia, and Greece. (They had also participated in the 1915 genocide against ethnic Armenians.) Yet after the republic was founded, Atatürk never spoke of them in public again.

The autocratic nature of the modern Turkish state is very much a product of the persistent tension between the two groups. On the same day the caliphate, whose symbolic religious authority had united the Turks and Kurds for centuries, was abolished, all Kurd-centric social organizations were banned, too. The first Kurdish rebellion of 1925, a response to this suppression and to Atatürk's attack on Islam, was the pretext for the Kemalists' consolidation of power. Martial law was imposed across Turkey, empowering the government to close newspapers, persecute journalists, and deny the right of "reactionary" or "counter-revolutionary" groups to assemble. The rebellion also hastened the imposition of single-party rule, which lasted until 1950.

Until recently, the state officially denied the existence of the Kurds as a separate ethnic group, identifying them euphemistically as "mountain Turks." It banned the recording and performance of Kurdish-language songs until 1991, and between 1983 and 1991 even made it illegal to speak Kurdish in public. Elected officials in the southeast are still prosecuted for slipping Kurdish into the performance of their public duties.

Reforms introduced as part of the EU accession process have led to modest progress in recent years: for the first time, some schools are permitted to teach Kurdish, and the prohibition against Kurdish-language radio and television broadcasts was lifted in 2002. But the state still zealously monitors pro-Kurdish media such as Gundem and blocks access to popular websites, notably YouTube and ones using the blogging platform Wordpress.

The idealization of Atatürk, however, and the violence and censorship it justifies, fly in the face of the pragmatism he preached. "We

do not consider our principles as dogmas contained in books said to come from heaven," he once told the National Assembly. He feared the fanaticism inspired not only by religion, but by politics.

One could sense, in the wake of the pkk ambush, something more existential at stake than just the quarrel between Turks and Kurds. Militarily, the fight had mostly devolved into a low-grade regional conflict since the capture of pkk kingpin Abdullah Ocalan in 1999. Rather, the outrage on the street reflected deep-seated uncertainty about Turkey's sense of itself and how it interacts with a globalizing world.

In May, just prior to the escalation of the pkk conflict, the country had emerged from a polarizing political crisis. The governing Justice and Development Party (akp), an organization with Islamic roots, had put forward Abdullah Gul, a former foreign minister, as its presidential candidate, prompting Turkey's military leadership -- enshrined in the constitution as the protector of the state's secular character, and the instigator of four coups since 1960 -- to contest Gul's selection. The brass criticized him for comments he had made in the early 1990s questioning official secularism, and more symbolically for the fact that his wife wears the hijab. A constitutional court blocked Gul's appointment, prompting new elections in July, but these returned the akp with an even larger majority, and increased the party's share of the popular vote from 34 to 46 percent. The military boycotted Gul's swearing-in.

Despite the akp's Islamist bent, the party has proven itself to be the most adept and progressive manager of Turkey's affairs in decades -- a moderate, broad-based organization whose policies more closely resemble those of the centre-right Christian Democrats in Europe than Hamas or Hezbollah, and that draws support from across the political and ethnic spectrums. The akp has successfully wrestled with the chronic inflation that plagued the economy, dramatically increased foreign investment, and implemented the strongest steps yet to fight corruption in the public and private sectors. It also stepped up accession talks with the European Union and made substantive overtures to the country's Kurdish population. In the symbolic debate over the hijab, meanwhile, it positioned itself as a defender of individual freedoms, overturning the law that prohibited women from wearing head scarves on university campuses.

Although Kemalists accuse the akp of secretly harbouring a radical Islamist agenda, the only evidence of this has been the implementation of dry zones in a few conservative neighbourhoods by local party officials, and a quickly rescinded attempt to criminalize adultery nationwide. Nonetheless, secular nationalists have gone to absurd extremes in their efforts to discredit the akp. A quartet of bestselling exposés last year asserted that the party's leaders were in fact Zionist Mossad agents. More recently, after a statue of Ataturk astride a horse was vandalized in Denizli, the town's mayor appeared at a press conference, holding up a photograph of the damaged statue. "As you see, the penis of the horse Ataturk sits on has been broken," he said. "We think akp cadres have broken the penis."

The pkk attacks, however, united the two sides. Wounded by its recent loss of face, the military saw an opportunity to reassert itself, while the akp had to demonstrate that it could handle a terrorist threat. The rest of the world, though, and particularly the United States and Europe, urged Turkey to proceed carefully. The Americans, who had reason to fear that a military incursion into northern Iraq would destabilize that country's most secure region, agreed to

provide intelligence about pkk positions there. But the perceived lack of support from Europe was more aggravating, and it fed into Turks' frustration with the EU accession process. Leaders such as France's Nicolas Sarkozy had already made alienating comments, while other officials had expressed fears that if Turkey were granted full membership it would become the second-largest nation in the EU after Germany, with 17 percent of the assembly's vote. The West's pressuring of Turkey to acknowledge the Armenian genocide, to improve treatment of its Kurdish citizens, and to back off from the dispute over Cyprus were also irksome. Turks have yet to work out these issues for themselves.

Over 70 percent of Turks once supported the bid for EU membership, but recent surveys indicate that fewer than half are still in favour. Proponents of EU membership, such as Sedat Laciner, director of the Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organization, have grown discouraged by the EU's inclination to move the goalposts for admission, and to undercut internal support for accession with meddlesome and untimely criticism. "The EU so crudely pressures and humiliates Turkey that the Turkish politicians cannot defend their pro-EU stances, and the non-democratic forces are emboldened," he wrote in an op-ed column in the autumn of 2006.

Such critiques, Laciner argued, undermine Turkey's potential influence as a moderator between Islam and the West. For instance, the country's most popular Islamic movement, Gulen, is expanding into such places as Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan, where it serves as a moderate and modern counterpoint to extremist groups. "Turkey's participation could have proved that the West is not solely a Christian Club and that the West could have genuine cooperation with the Muslim world," he wrote. Instead, the perceived double standard Turkey faces has become a tool for radical Islamists and secular nationalists alike, each arguing that Europe will never deal with Muslims and Turks as equals.

As yet another demonstration-filled day got under way in the streets below, an odd celebration was taking place in Gundem's office. One of the paper's younger reporters had just been convicted of "denigrating Turkishness," thanks to a recent article he had written about Ocalan. "It was decided I will get one year in prison," he told me. But everyone was smiles and laughter, as though this were merely another episode in an elaborate running joke. "Every day we publish a paper, they open another case against us."

It was unlikely that the reporter would serve a day of his sentence; rather, he would seek refuge outside the country, as many do. Which is why it felt like a going-away party, or perhaps a rite of passage. Sezgin, however, wasn't sharing in the good spirits. "I don't wish anyone to go through what I went through," he said.

Sezgin was seventeen years old when he was thrown in Diyarbakir prison, Turkey's most notorious penitentiary. It was September 1980. The National Security Council had just dissolved the government in the hope of securing a country wracked by factional terrorism. In the aftermath of the coup, the army instituted a crackdown on Kurdish militants. The murder of two police officers in Diyarbakir spurred mass arrests that netted Sezgin as a suspect. On scant evidence, he was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Through the intervention of the EU, his sentence was commuted to twenty years.

Guards at Diyarbakir prison regularly asked new arrivals, "Do you want a room with television and shower or a regular room?" Sezgin soon learned that "shower" meant a hole in the ceiling that allowed sewage to pour constantly into the cell. To amuse themselves, guards sometimes

ordered prisoners to roll around in it. This was the "television" part.

Sezgin estimates that about sixty of his fellow inmates died from hangings, hunger strikes, suicides, or fatal injuries due to torture. He wept as he recounted being ordered to clean an area where guards had stashed a friend's dead body in the garbage for him to find. Survival, he said, was paramount. "The sense of belonging to my people gave me an aim, so that I wanted to live. They forced us to march to Turkish songs, put pictures of Ataturk in our cells. They try to make you a Turk, but you remain a Kurd." During his sentence, Sezgin taught himself to read and write. He wrote a memoir of prison life, *Hanging Nights*, published pseudonymously, which eventually earned him some notoriety and launched his career as a journalist.

By the time he was released, in 1999, the struggle for Kurdish rights had changed. pkk leader Abdullah Ocalan had been captured and was trying to fashion himself, unconvincingly, as a Middle Eastern Nelson Mandela. The exodus of the Kurds from more than 3,000 villages during the fighting had transformed them from a predominantly rural to an urban people. Like many Kurdish activists from the 1970s and '80s, Sezgin considered himself a Marxist and a separatist, but the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War shifted his ideology. "We were sad when the Soviet Union fell, because it was something we thought we were fighting for," he said. "But then we all learned more about the kind of oppression the communist countries put on their people. Within such a society, it would have been no better for the Kurds."

The pkk kept to its hard-line Marxism, but for moderate Kurds the ideological vacuum was filled by globalization, which they saw as an opportunity to build a more equitable society within Turkey while consolidating a pan-Kurdish identity beyond it. "As Kurds, we are happy to accept that borders should be less important," Sezgin said. "We are living in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran. More open borders should make it easier for us to travel and visit our relatives, and to work. With technology, too, it should make it easier for us to discuss the issues that affect us. An open society is what many of us want."

For a people often cited as the world's largest ethnic group without a state of its own, scattered across four nations historically hostile to their interests, the notion of diminished borders still resounds. This is especially the case with EU accession, given that improvement of Kurdish civil rights is one of the conditions attached. As one former prime minister has commented, "Turkey's road to the European Union goes through Diyarbakir."

EAST

There were few signs on the city's streets that it was a national holiday. A few perfunctory-looking flags flew on Diyarbakir's office buildings and mosques, but the genteel morning bustle persisted as usual, oblivious to the Republic Day celebrations happening across the country, or the frequent thunder of jets taking off from a nearby military base -- the primary staging point for reconnaissance and bombing missions into Iraq.

Famous for its imposing ancient basalt walls, Diyarbakir otherwise unscrolls its long history with only modest fanfare. Today's city rests upon what is likely one of the oldest settlements on earth -- one that served as a strategic centre for the Upper Tigris River Valley for as long as 5,000 years. A cavalcade of empires have ruled it, including the Romans, Arabs, Persians, Selcuks, Turcomans, and Ottomans. As

recently as the mid-nineteenth century, Diyarbakir's population was almost half Christian and home to a polyphony of peoples, including Assyrians, Armenians, Arabs, Chaldeans, Alevis, and Jews.

With 665,000 residents, this now predominantly Kurdish city is the de facto capital of the troubled southeast. It was here that the first Kurdish rebellion of 1925 largely played itself out, and here that its perpetrators were later tried and hung. During the fighting of the 1980s and '90s, it was a hotbed of separatist activity, and in the Turkish mind it became deeply associated with pkk terrorism -- a reputation it has yet to shake.

There's a Soviet quality to the newer apartment blocks of Diyarbakir's suburbs, west of the city walls, where I located the offices of the Tigris News Agency (diha). Another jet scrambled the heavens as I sat in a video editing suite with Veysi Polat, diha's director. He and his colleagues were reviewing footage sent to them by the pkk. Onscreen, about five score pkk fighters were marching in a tranquil, green mountain valley. The reporters were debating what to do with the tape, which was clearly propaganda intended to show that morale remained high despite the tensions.

Journalism has never been easy in the southeast, especially for members of the Kurdish media. Military checkpoints and restricted areas make information gathering difficult, and journalists are frequently prosecuted for publishing stories critical of the military. Four of diha's correspondents were serving jail sentences as a result of their reporting. The agency was also facing a court case for suggesting that the army had burned an area of forest so it could better survey the surrounding area.

"It's difficult to get real news here," Polat said. "We take what the government says, compare it with what our reporters and contacts in the villages say, and sift out the reality." I asked if pkk sources could be trusted. "When you take what the pkk reports about an incident initially and what is later confirmed to be true, the pkk often proves to be more reliable than the government. But in the end, we trust only our own reporters."

In the aftermath of the October ambush, the Turkish media was reporting that upwards of 100,000 troops had moved into the southeast, but locals insisted most had already been there, at the behest of Yasar Buyukanit, the hard-line chief of the Turkish General Staff. Many in the east believed Buyukanit's machinations had provoked the pkk.

Electorally, the akp has done well in Kurdish areas, taking almost half the vote, thanks to the party's willingness to address cultural and economic issues here. Many traditionally minded conservative Kurds also share the akp's Islamic values. But the akp was risking alienating its Kurdish con-stituency by allying itself with the military. Some in Diyarbakir were sympathetic, though, arguing that the rebels were setting back progress on Kurdish civil rights and the economy. "The state is like your father," a middle-aged man who had fled to a Diyarbakir gecekondu (shanty) neighbourhood in the 1990s told me. "When you turn against him, you are going to have problems."

Despite the mobilization, a tenuous dÃ©tente prevailed. There were fewer incidents of Kurds being harassed on the street, and the city was calm. I asked Polat how he saw the security situation for Kurds. "In Diyarbakir, we don't have racist, nationalist attacks like those in Istanbul and elsewhere," he said, "but it doesn't mean we're safer. There are 100,000 Turkish troops here. You never know what

can happen. We've seen too much before."

Intent on visiting the ostensible heartland of the Kurdish resistance, I rented a taxi and left Diyarbakir, crossing the Tigris, a sluggish little watercourse bending below the black ramparts of the city. The two-tone browns of undulating fields consumed much of the horizon, interrupted only by the foothills in the hazy distance. These fields are famous for their watermelons -- the biggest, sweetest melons in the world, people bragged to me.

The rural southeast is home to another conflict between the state and the Kurds, this one over resources. The Southeastern Anatolia Project (gap), launched in 1980, is a massive dam-building exercise in the Euphrates and Tigris basin. With many of the project's twenty-two dams already completed, including the pharaonic Ataturk Dam, the world's ninth largest, the system is improving agricultural irrigation and dramatically expanding electricity generation capacity throughout the region. The benefits are thus far most noticeable west of the Euphrates, where crops are bursting and the city of Gaziantep is luring manufacturers with the promise of cheaper power. But the dams have also submerged villages, adding to the thousands of Kurds previously forced to relocate. Across the southeast, the tips of old minarets pierce the shimmering surfaces of newly created lakes, marking the watery graves of abandoned Kurdish settlements.

We drove on for an hour, on patchy, unmarked roads branching off the main highway, finally pursuing one to the village of Kocaköy, where I was to meet Sabri Tanrikulu. A nimble man, Tanrikulu scurried over the rubble of his family's former home like a mad archaeologist half his fifty years. "Here was our kitchen," he said, "and this is where we kept our livestock." The ruin was surrounded by similarly demolished dwellings. A handful were intact: new domiciles, made either of poured concrete or mud and stone, with scraps of metal fastening everything together.

On a December morning in 1992, Tanrikulu was fiddling with the television antenna on his roof when the Village Guard militiamen arrived, an army unit not far behind. He thought little of it at first, since the guard -- made up of compliant but sometimes coerced locals, including Kurds -- frequently patrolled the road that cut through the town of some 100 families. But this time, the cars halted in a storm of dust outside the school. Guardsmen sprang into action, firing shots into the air and at random houses. A bullet winged past Tanrikulu as he fell to the roof.

Women and children fled frantically for open fields and neighbouring villages as the guards rounded up the men. Tanrikulu was held at the schoolyard with the others, guns trained on them as they lay on their stomachs. Limestone dust was laid down throughout the village, from home to home, stable to coop. Soon it was set alight. The chilly morning sky blackened. A helicopter spun overhead, whorling up smoke and dust. Livestock burned alive in their stalls.

Kocaköy was one of more than 3,000 villages in the Kurdish southeast that stood empty by the mid-1990s. There was rarely ever a warning, nor any explanation other than that a town was suspected of being friendly to the PKK. The dispossessed migrated across the country, part of a million-strong tide that bloated the gecekondu neighbourhoods of Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, and, closer to home, Diyarbakir and Batman. It's a tide that has yet to cease fully, as Kurds continue to forfeit their lands so they can search for work or because of the gap.

The soldiers and militia fled Tanrikulu's smouldering town at dusk. He walked to the next village and located a tractor he had rented to a friend, then returned home to collect what clothes had escaped the fire. He then drove his tractor sixty kilometres to Diyarbakır, where he reunited with his wife and daughter."

The city was suddenly full of new people," he told me. "My problems were just like everyone else's." Accommodations and work were in meagre supply, but he found space for his family and took jobs wherever he could. He drove a bus, sometimes as far as northern Iraq, and did construction in Izmir, living away from home for months at a time.

We broke for lunch with Tanrikulu's uncle, who had returned four years ago and built a clean, spacious concrete bungalow for his family, one of about twenty-five clans that now reside in Kocaköy. We bowed deeply to the old man out of respect for his having completed the hajj. Hanging up my coat in the cushion-lined living room, its bare walls unadorned but for a calendar, I noticed a framed photograph of a young man in military uniform on a side table. It clearly wasn't a Turkish army uniform. I nipped out to wash my hands, and when I returned the picture was gone.

Over a lunch of cucumber, fresh yogourt, flatbread, and tea, we discussed the pkk. In the wake of October 21, nationalist politicians were demanding that the pro-Kurdish dtp publicly denounce the pkk as terrorists. But as a dtp official in Istanbul told me, this was impossible; every Kurd, he said, knows someone who has gone off to fight for the pkk. "How can you denounce your brother or sister, your sons and daughters?"

Tanrikulu felt the same. "Just calling them terrorists does not solve the problem," he said. "The suppression of Kurdish identity, the violence -- this is what created the pkk. I have a friend, a doctor, who joined. Why would he give up the city to live in the mountains, sacrificing normal life, eating only what's available? It's a hard life. So we have to ask why 3,000 guerillas are hiding in the mountains."

Like almost every Kurd I spoke with, Tanrikulu had long ago given up on the idea of statehood. This is no longer even the professed goal of the pkk, though the Western media often reports otherwise. Still, it is a favourite bogeyman of Turkey's nationalists, who argue that recognition of Kurdish distinctiveness could eventually sever the country. But the mass migrations of the 1990s rendered partition all but impossible. And most Kurds don't even speak Kurdish anymore, thanks to decades of suppression. "Ask 90 percent of Kurds," insisted Tanrikulu. "They don't want to live in a different land. It's impossible to divide Turkish and Kurdish anyway. Where are the most Kurds living in one place? Istanbul. You can't solve by simply dividing."

As we took one last stroll around the village, we encountered another elderly couple who had returned to Kocaköy. They wanted to talk about the commission of Turkish officials that arrived two years ago to interview the villagers. The pair said they'd been offered compensation for their hardships. "The commission promised me 7,000 lira [about \$5,700]," said the man. "Others here were told 5,000 or 3,000 lira." The small gesture of redress, he argued, was merely intended to placate European Union observers who were also visiting Kocaköy. "I accepted the government's offer and signed a piece of paper. That was two years ago, and I'm still waiting."

WEST

My friend Yagmur was circling a quartet of life-sized plaster statues depicting a Pakistani terrorist and a pretty dame in various explicit embraces. I was back in Istanbul, taking in the final day of its tenth biennial. Many of the artworks on display across the city, presented under the banner "Optimism in the age of global war," were conceptual, prankish attempts to be topical, riffing on terrorism, cultural homogeneity, global capitalism, and war. But they seemed to have little to do with local realities.

Among the few exceptions was the most popular work in the entire exhibition: a series of eighteen posters, each depicting a different caricature that played on "How happy is he who says, 'I am a Turk.'" Beneath a line drawing of a Kurd, for example, it read "How _____ for the one who says, 'I am a Kurd.'" The public was invited to scribble words in the blank space, as well as on the poster itself. There were prints of an Armenian, a homosexual, a communist, a longhair, a secularist, a prostitute, and even he who simply says, "I don't care." People were scrawling their remarks right off the posters and onto the temporary wall on which they were mounted.
