The phenomenal expansion of transnational media markets throughout the 1990s has unleashed two contradictory tendencies in different parts of the world. On the one hand, the visual technologies and commodity logic of popular media have ruptured the seamless totality and imagined homogeneity of national cultures by lending voice and visibility to a plurality of alternative political visions. Television, in particular, with its ontology of "liveness" and lexicon of plentitude and choice—"free" entertainment, "free" opinions, "free" rights—has made it increasingly difficult to harness the dispersal of cultural identities in the public realm. The production of national subjects has become fraught with ambiguities. It is now commonplace to argue that developments in global media culture have eroded state hegemony in the cultural realm, making the fragmentation and dispersal of cultural identities inevitable.

Simultaneously, however, the explosive growth of commercial media have brought into the foreground new modes of identification with the abstract nation. The nation assumes a form of paramount reality, as its icons and narrative tropes circulate in an endless variety of commodity forms, across consumer and media markets. Belief in "the people" is reborn in two minutes of television time, through the remarkable achievements of individuals, be they football players, international award winners, or ordinary people who succeed in the face of insurmountable odds. The idea that the nation exists as a totality, and that "we" are in it, is confirmed daily as news reports identify the adversaries/enemies who threaten its integrity, who endanger its well-being, health, and morals. This mode of linking to the abstract nation reaffirms "the people," without, however, the imagination of a collective agency. It has come under criticism as "consumer citizenship" among social analysts, and embraced as positive nationalism" by the transnational advertising industry.

The unfolding of the 1990s, then, has accentuated two opposing tendencies inherent in the current expansion of transnational media markets. How the ensuing tensions of fragmentation and affirmation have been played out in different national/cultural sites, is historically contingent and politically mediated.
For the political site of struggles unleashed by these opposing trends continues to be the national, not the post-national or transnational.

What follows is an attempt to pursue this line of thinking in the context of Turkey's "televisual moment"—roughly ten years in chronological time. Specifically I am interested in how one of the most trenchant motifs of Turkish nationalism, we are all secular Muslims, has been simultaneously destabilized and reconfigured in the political conjuncture of the late 1990s. My main concern is not the insurgent politics of Islam per se or how it has challenged the mythologies of Turkish nationalism but rather the contradictory tendencies which have come into play. What I hope to trace is how the normative fiction of a secular Muslim has been reanimated and reaffirmed through commercial media, at a moment in time when its inherent ambiguities were highlighted and politicized by the growing visibility of Islam in the political arena.

My entry point of investigation into the dense political landscape of the late 1990s in Turkey will be to focus on the metamorphosis of a divinity professor into a super-subject on commercial television—"the phenomenon of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk." The centerpiece of my analysis will be how the chimera of a "secular Muslim" was constituted on a particular talk-show program which was on the air for more than five years, featuring Yaşar Nuri Öztürk as a regular guest every Friday morning. But, first, a parenthetical caveat on the generality and specificity of the "televisual moment" in Turkey.

The Unfolding of the "Televisual Moment" in Turkey

What defined the televisual moment in Turkey, as in many parts of the postcolonial world, was the historical coupling between the explosive growth of neoliberal discourses and the phenomenal expansion of commercial media markets. The dramatic failure of state-led development efforts to deliver its promise of national progress was already apparent by the 1980s, in a range of countries as diverse as India, Indonesia, and Turkey. The blowing winds of neoliberalism from the transnational arena, with its rhetoric of "freedom from state controls," "opening to the outside," and "integration to the global economy," promised the dawn of a new era. But what lent hope and optimism to such a Utopian possibility was the ease with which satellite technologies penetrated across space, suggesting that integration to a world of plentitude and choice waiting "outside" would be effortless, once "state barriers" were removed. It is all too easy to forget, with the hindsight of the present, that "the dismantling of state controls" was executed, at least initially, in the spirit of a heroic new beginning. The immediate burst of energy in media and consumer markets seemed to lend this hope tangibility, however brief, before it was displaced by the disillusionsments of neoliberalism.

In its broader outlines, the eventful history of Turkey's televisual moment is one variant of this narrative. It began sometime in the mid-1980s, with deregulation in financial and capital markets that spearheaded the "opening of the economy to the outside." The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989, which

228 Ayşe Öncü
spawned a set of new "Turkic" states in Central Asia, fostered dreams of Turkey's impending leap into the global arena. Coupled with a cycle of exuberant growth in the domestic economy, Turkey's neoliberal turn became a showcase for success in international circles. 4

Thus the year 1990—when a satellite venture, beaming from Germany, broke through state broadcasting monopoly—was a moment of heady optimism. The banking and advertising industries were already integrated into global markets through partnerships and joint ventures. Consumer markets were flooded with goods and brand names from distant parts of the world. The boom in domestic consumption, coupled with an unprecedented expansion in advertising markets made investments in commercial television highly attractive. A series of commercial networks were launched in rapid succession, followed by a spate of buying and selling to gain common control of newspapers, television, and magazines. The broadcasting industry expanded at a frenzied pace, becoming a hotbed of mergers and acquisitions, with growing concentration of corporate control within and across various commercial media markets. By 1994—the precise date when the provisions of a new law re-regulating commercial media markets went into effect—media markets had already undergone a dramatic transformation, and mainstream Turkish audiences had become familiar with the seductions of infotainment and tabloid television. 5

The downturn to Turkey's neoliberal episode was equally swift and dramatic. From around the mid-1990s on, the country began to suffer "economic uncertainty"—to use the favorite catchphrase of Turkish journalism—which became an endless topic for public debate. A succession of coalition governments began to follow one another in a game of musical chairs, lending credence to the diagnosis that "political instability in Ankara" was the main culprit for "economic uncertainty." 6 And, most important, insurgent politics of Islam and of Kurdish nationalism seemed to escalate concomitantly, bringing the Turkish nation on the brink of being drawn and quartered.

The fifteen-year conflict between armed Kurdish dissidents and the Turkish military, which claimed more than thirty thousand lives, was never officially recognized. The official rhetoric of "anarchy" and "the fight against terrorism," which was deployed from the mid-1980s until the end of the 1990s, cast a cloak of silence over the political trauma of mass deportations, empty villages, and large cities flooded by refugees from the war zone. The military—its budget, operations, and expenditures—remained (and remains) outside the boundaries of public debate. Direct censorship of news about the war—in which more than 2.5 million young men were immediately involved in the fighting—meant that reporting was confined to the ups and downs of seemingly scattered "terrorist incidents."

By contrast, the growing significance of Islam in electoral politics (especially after a succession of landslide victories in large metropolitan centers beginning with Istanbul in 1994) became an incessant topic of public discussion and television "chat," next to none other than "economic uncertainty." In the ensuing debates, the centralized Directorate of Religious Affairs became a focal point of

Becoming "Secular Muslims" 229
controversy. As the representative of official Islam in Turkey, the Directorate of Religious Affairs is one of the largest and best financed state institutions in Turkey, with control over mosques, religious education, and a vast network of religious endowments and charities. Ignoring the details of a complicated history, it might be said that its emergent scope and powers are bound with the project of Turkish modernity and nationalism, aimed at creating "secular Muslims."

Two sets of state practices were involved in this process of social engineering. On the one hand, the Turkish state attempted to purge (with various degrees of vigilance or success or both at different times) all autonomous loci of Islamic thought and activity embedded in communal networks. On the other, it has sought to define and produce, under state auspices, the universal principles of Islamic doctrine and ritual for all Turkish citizens. The onus of interpreting the doctrinal and ritual injunctions of Islam was delegated to the State Directorate of Religious Affairs, along with the responsibility of training, certifying, and monitoring imams who preach in mosques, and, most important, the task of educating all Turkish citizens in the religious and moral precepts of Islam as part of the national educational curriculum. So the Directorate has evolved into one of the most powerful institutions in Turkey, with an organizational reach (as well as budget) next to none other than the Ministries of Education, Interior, and Defense. Needless to say, its doctrinal and ritual injunctions as well as its educational policies have been subject to the viscidities of party politics since the 1950s. But its institutional centrality and primacy in defining and supplying what constitutes public knowledge of Islam in the "secular" republic of Turkey was never seriously challenged until the 1990s.

In the political conjuncture of the 1990s the Directorate became a major target of attack for nearly all strategic groups in the political arena. Most immediately it was targeted by radical discourses emanating from Islamic circles, denounced as an anomalous product of Kemalist authoritarianism and state repression of Islam, in the guise of "secularism." The Directorate was identified as the site of state coercion, as opposed to "civil" formations of political Islam. Simultaneously the Directorate also came under vociferous attack by the gathering momentum of "secularist" forces, this time for allowing "Islamists" to infiltrate state bureaucracy and to benefit from its dispensations. Public outcry centered on the growing numbers and the expanding student population in schools for training religious functionaries (imam-hattip schools), where female students attended segregated classes in "covered" uniforms. The Directorate was accused of promoting a parallel educational system based upon sharia principles, through state funding and tutelage. Concurrently critical voices emanating from Turkey's hitherto invisible Alevi minorities (an estimated 20 percent of Turkey's population) began to be heard in the political arena. Threatened by the growing momentum of political Islam, Alevi minorities began to publicly criticize state policies for promoting Sunni-Islam as the official state religion, under the guise of "secularism." The Directorate was accused of using public tax money to subsidize an expanding network of Sunni-Orthodox mosques and

230 Ayşe Öncü
schools, not to mention a vast centralized bureaucracy from which Alevi minorities have been excluded by definition. Thus, in the neoliberal conjuncture of the 1990s, at a moment of dramatic reductions in state expenditures for welfare and education, not only the ideological role but also the budget and expenditures of the Directorate became a matter of heated controversy—furnishing rich material for columnists, talk show hosts, as well as academics in the media-saturated environment of the moment.

The Metamorphosis of Yaşar Nuri Oztiirk into a "Super-subject" on Turkish Television

In discussing the relationship between television and knowledge in general, John Ellis (1999) emphasizes the dialectic between two extremes of disorder and control. Television, he suggests, does not provide an overall explanation; it comes to no conclusions. Instead, it produces an unstoppable flood of events, spectacles of conflicts, intimations of crises of all sorts, people in desperate circumstances—unfolding before our very eyes in "real time" with cameras deliberately focusing on action. It also offers an enormous amount of "chat"—muscings about what may have happened, what may be about to happen, or what may be the result if events were to take a certain turn. We, as audiences, are desperate for some sort of conclusion, but the more bits of information we acquire, the more the complexity and contradictions. Television's perpetually shifting agendas leave us adrift in a sea of doubt and contingency.

This was certainly the case toward the end of the 1990s in Turkey, when the body politic of the nation appeared to be dissolving symbolically and literally, as a series of calamitous events—"shock news" in the language of tabloid journalism—began to tumble upon one another on television screens. The ongoing civil war between Kurdish independence fighters and the armed forces of the state remained invisible on television screens, apart from officially authorized references to terrorist activities. But as the death toll continued to increase, visual images of mothers crying over the funeral caskets of their sons, who died defending their nation, began to intrude with increasing frequency. Then there was a series of shock events involving "reactionary Islam"—young girls falling into the clutches of heterodox sects (Fadime Sahin event of 1996); provincial towns falling prey to Iranian extremists (Sincan event of 1997); the infiltration or the "bloody" Hizballah network into the heartlands of the nation (Hizballah event of 2000)—which brought the nation to the brink of disaster. Last but not least was a series of political scandals (uncovered by investigative journalists) which revealed the hitherto unsuspected existence of a "deep state," involving linkages between high-level state officials, drug cartels, and Kurdish tribal networks. For mainstream audiences, watching these "disastrous events" unfolding before their very eyes, interspersed with tabloid news on the "ordinary lives of the super rich" (the subject matter of innumerable tele-magazine programs)

Becoming "Secular Muslims" 231
and the "extraordinary sufferings of ordinary people" (featured "live" on "reality shows"), there seemed little doubt that the Turkish nation was on the verge of disaster.8

In this climate of doubt, contingency, and speculation, what mainstream infotainment broadcasting in Turkey (as elsewhere perhaps) offered audiences was a limited set of "super-subjects" who speak the truth as they say it.9 Such super-subjects address viewers in the category of the person, balancing out the moral and immoral, the acceptable and the unacceptable, the right and the wrong, even as events tumble upon us and there are no second guesses. Among them are a selected number of news anchors, some notables from the business community, some politicians (very few), and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk. These are not television stars or celebrities—"show biz" in the conventional American sense of the term. Nor are they merely representatives of particular channels, the media world in general, or "the public interest"; rather, they seem to represent a complex nexus of them all. They speak as the "I" (analogous to the "I" in a sentence), and their messages perform the "magic" of binding different elements and cultural institutions together to form a coherent "reality." The super-subject (at least on Turkish television) is not a "narrator" in the classical sense of the term, organizing "live" events and orchestrating them toward a particular resolution. He (nor she) does not provide narrative resolution but, by his very presence, seems to stabilize the chaos, discord, and disorder of the world beyond our immediate experience.

Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, then, is one among the limited number of such super-subjects on Turkish television and, akin to them all, stands in a category all its own. He has an impressive cachet of credentials as a scholar as well as positional authority—a theology professor at Istanbul University who specializes in Islamic philosophy—which empower him as an "expert." His prodigious writings include more than forty books, both scholarly works and popular "best-sellers." He is fluent in Arabic, Persian, and English; has committed the entire Quran to memory; holds a (secular) Law degree; and is equally at home with quotations from Nietzsche, Afghani, or Mevlana.10

In addition to his scholarly/intellectual credentials, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk has a lengthy history of engagement with the popular media. He started writing "Friday columns" for daily newspapers in the 1970s, starting with Son Havadis, later Tercuman, then moving up to Hurriyet (the largest circulating mass daily) in the 1980s. From 1987 on, he began to appear regularly on the World of Belief program, broadcast on state television on Friday evenings. But it was the advent of multichannel commercial broadcasting that catapulted Yaşar Nuri Öztürk into the national limelight, transforming his name into a household word, sweeping his books to the top of best-seller charts, and turning him into a highly visible public persona.

Since the mid-1990s Yaşar Nuri Öztürk has become the most sought after "guest" in innumerable studio debates, talk shows, and arena programs. He has prepared and presented such regular programs as Isiga Cagri (Call to Light) or Kuran ve Insan (Quran and the Human Being) for various commercial channels.
which have since been recycled endlessly, particularly during Ramadan. He
gives close to one hundred scheduled talks annually in settings ranging from
five-star hotels in Istanbul to provincial towns and cities in various parts of the
country. He is available on the Web to answer questions (paid) from the public
seeking advice on a variety of issues. His most recent book, based on the most
frequently asked questions on the Internet, entitled *7 Am Answering*, is cur-
rently on sale in supermarkets and R&D chains, along with other popular best-
sellers of the moment. And his personal life, ranging from his "hip" dress style
(polo-shirts, suits with ties or foulards) and his daily workouts, to his "modern"
home-style and "uncovered" wife, has become an endless source of fascination
in the magazine press.

The Superstar of White Islam?

Perhaps the simplest way of thinking about the phenomenon of Yaşar
Nuri Öztürk is how he embodies (literally and metaphorically) the blended cul-
ture of global consumerism. His public image is very much in tune with the
spirit of the times—Muslim but with a difference: Muslim Lite. Ever since mass
tourism took off in the mid-1980s Turkey has been marketing itself with a
montage of images intended to convey its spirit—whirling dervishes, sizzling
kebabs, sandy beaches, belly dancers, graceful minarets, and diners drinking red
wine. This cultural pastiche, constituted through the optics of the global tour-
ist industry, has been embraced as "multiculturalism" by the affluent and well-
to-do classes of the neoliberal era, now associated with a mythical "Ottoman" past.
Thus among the more striking features of Turkey's entry into the global
culture of consumerism has been the circulation of "Ottoman cultural heritage"
in a variety of commodified forms. So it is possible to interpret the phenomenon
of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk as part of the same process—the rediscovery of Turkey's
Muslim identity through the optics of global consumerism. When viewed from
the bird's-eye vantage point of global consumerism, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk encap-
sulates the summation of incompatibles—hybridities—which is the essence of
what might be thought of as a "global culture."

Still, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk is, first and foremost, a political figure—an active
combatant in the battleground of cultural politics in Turkey. His fame and
popularity on television cannot be divorced from the deepening cleavages of the
neoliberal era, which became increasingly apparent from the mid-1990s on. The
year 1994 was an important watershed, because a series of landslide victories in
local elections (including in Istanbul) revealed the growing success of political
Islam in developing a popular moral discourse of opposition—based on justice,
honesty, and abstemiousness—while simultaneously incorporating the language
of "human rights" and "civil society" from neoliberal discourses of the moment.
Thus, in the political conjuncture of the late 1990s, the "classical" divisions of
Turkish politics between the "progressive" left (secularist) and the "conserva-
tive" right (religious) were reconfigured. Political Islam succeeded in defining
itself as the voice of "civil" society, the major force of (progressive) opposition

*Becoming "Secular Muslims"* 233
Fig. 11.1. A portrait of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk.
against the secularist (conservative) establishment, with vested interest in maintaining the status quo."

Within this increasingly polarized cultural-cum-political scene of the late 1990s in Turkey, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk has emerged as a crusader for a Kemalist-modernist version of Islam in Turkey. He is, in this sense, "the superstar of White Islam" (to directly quote the weekly Aktuel, January 1998). But as I try to demonstrate below, matters are somewhat more complicated than this. For on commercial television, which has become the primary arena of endless debate about who "we" are and what "our" culture is, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, even when he draws upon and articulates the cultural themes and symbolic linkages of Kemalist-modernist Islam, recasts them in a different mold. Before proceeding further, therefore, I will attempt to provide a "close-up" of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk by focusing on a particular "talk show" program where he has been a regular participant for more than five years. This will allow me to discuss, in the last section of this chapter, how his polemical style and assertions have (re)politicized, in the public realm, a series of explosive issues that have (re)divided Turkey's Muslims.

Becoming "Secular Muslims" 235
A Close-up of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk on the Ayşe Özgürn Talk Show

Every Friday morning for more than five years (between 1996 and 2001) Yaşar Nuri Öztürk has been an "expert guest" on a talk-show program hosted by Ayşe Özgürn. The program itself is modeled after a very successful television genre (usually recognized as having been invented by the American Phil Donahue) which brings audiences into the studio as "real people"—an "audible public"—to create a sense of participation in a communal event. In its formulaic form, the talk-show format simulates a sort of town-hall meeting where topical social, moral, and political issues are debated among "ordinary people," with the host or hostess dashing about with a microphone in hand to catch different speakers, who give voice to different opinions among the members of the (studio) audience. Visually the studio audience is constructed as the focus of the show, and the ultimate success of the program is contingent on the audience's involvement in controversy and argumentation—each person representing him- or herself to express reactions based on personal experience—on a variety of topics ranging from problems of working women to drug abuse among youth and criminality. The role of the host or hostess is that of "mediator," allowing everyone to speak his or her mind, while simultaneously orchestrating the discussion so that officially invited "guests" (luminaries often sitting in panel formation) are invited to contribute their expert opinion.

Needless to say, there can be an enormous range of variation within this formula. The size and composition of studio audiences can vary from a "living room" with predominantly middle-class women, for instance, all the way to "town meetings" with a conscious mix of gender and age groups from different class backgrounds. Studio audiences may engage in a shouting match among themselves, or they may act as polite commentators, or their function may be limited to a select few who wait their turn at the microphone to recite a prepared statement on a particular position. The implied dynamic between "expert guests" (representing scientific knowledge) vis-a-vis studio audiences (representing ordinary common sense) can be that of one-sided deference. Or the entire program may be orchestrated (by the host or hostess) so that the status of expertise is challenged by real-life testimonials and exposed as trivial or pompous. And since the host or hostess is the trademark of the talk-show genre, his or her choice and handling of topics, as well as performative style, is crucial to the success of the formula. (Carpignano et al. 1990; Livingstone and Lunt 1994).

Home-grown versions of nearly all these variants have proliferated across television screens in Turkey. But Ayşe Özgürn remains the first successful talk-show hostess, both as the "trademark" and also the producer of her own programs. Her talk show has been remarkable for its longevity, aired every morning on one of the major infotainment channels for more than five years. Although her show is scheduled at a time when networks target female viewers, Ayşe

236 Ayşe Öncü
Ozgun's own proud claim is that her home audiences include many men—which is possible, given the numbers of retired and jobless in Turkey. Regardless, however, her choice of "social issues" for discussion (such as public health, municipal services, and crime rates) as well as performance style imply a mixed home audience. Her studio audiences are consciously gender and age mixed. The "expert guests" she invites differ according to the choice of topic and the exigencies of programming—except every Friday morning, when Yaşar Nuri Öztürk is the unchanging and indisputable authority.

Below I focus on the Friday morning program exclusively, to illustrate the dynamic between Yaşar Nuri Öztürk (as the expert), Ayşe Özgün (as the hostess), and the studio audience (as a protagonist), such that particular kinds of knowledge are constructed. For analytical purposes, I take up "the performance" and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's own discourse and rhetoric as different "layers" that operate separately.12

The Performance and the Players

On Friday mornings the show begins as usual, with generics and music followed by camera shots of Ayşe Özgün's face addressing home audiences directly as "our dear" or "very dear viewers" as well as "our respected viewers." Ayşe Özgün, as the producer and hostess of the program, is, of course, a "celebrity" herself; after all, the show bears her name. She is a hefty woman in her fifties, with a cherubic face, elaborately coiffed and costumed in brightly colored matching ensembles—who appears on camera as if she had just walked out of a Brazilian telenovella (to my mind at least). Her appearance, as well as the dynamism she projects as she rushes around with a microphone in her hand, seemingly caught up in the heat of the discussion and eager to give everyone in the studio audience a voice, makes her performance one of the main objects of watching during the show.

But the program proceeds with a solemnity that befits Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's status and knowledge. Ayşe Özgün's own performance is a skilled combination of "sincerity" and "congeniality"—enacted somewhat differently when addressing studio/home audiences and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk himself. She is "sincerely" ignorant on matters pertaining to "Islam"—which allows her to be awkward when posing questions to Yaşar Nuri Öztürk (on behalf of audiences). But because she is "honestly" concerned about what she is asking, "lack of knowledge" is transformed into an emotional appeal.

She addresses Yaşar Nuri Öztürk as hocam, a word that has been assimilated into everyday Turkish as a general term of respect for someone of learning, but much less distant than the alternative sayım which acknowledges official stature, as in the English "sir." She seeks "illumination" in the third-person plural "we," but lapses into "I" when emotionally moved.

But in addition to the "we," for those of "us" in the studio and at home who seek illumination, Ayşe Özgün periodically brings into the picture "poor

Becoming "Secular Muslims" 237
people" or "people who are in very difficult economic circumstances" or "people who live in villages" by raising questions that begin with the words, "What about those people . . . ?" So there are always disadvantaged "others" whom "we" need to think about ("others" who are also watching the program). These are "our other people" (bu insanlanız), who might find the ongoing discussion either too abstract or irrelevant. So Ayşe Özgün is concerned about sending "the right message" to "these people."¹³

The "studio audience," chosen to simulate "a bus full of people in Istanbul (according to Ayşe Özgün), sit in rows facing the front. On Friday mornings only a selected few stand up to ask questions individually (obviously coached), rather than engaging in discussion among themselves. Most of the time they are "quiet moral sitters," facing Yaşar Nuri Öztürk.

Yaşar Nuri Öztürk sits behind a small desk throughout the program, rarely moving until he begins to talk. In the opening long shots, he appears dwarfed by the large bouquet of fresh flowers placed on the desk, totally incongruous against the background of wallpaper decorated with leaves, butterflies, and the program logo—Ayşe Özgün's own signature blown up in pink—with a generic music reminiscent of soap operas. But as the camera moves in to show him close-up and he begins to answer, explain, and elaborate his arguments, he is transformed into a figure of immense power. Thus when the studio audience

238 Ayşe Öncü
bursts into spontaneous applause after one of his impressive soliloquies, the sense of watching a contrived performance is transformed into a shared moment of "togetherness."

Apart from these "electric" moments (which I discuss later), Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's discursive style is much closer to classroom lecturing than to sermonizing intended to inspire emotional leaps of faith. His claim to authority and self-framing is that of a "man of scientific learning" (bilim adami) as distinct from a "man of religion" (din adami). He continuously promotes "reason" and "logic" (akıl ve mantık) against "muddled thinking" (kafa karışılığı).

In the overall progression of the program itself, Ayşe Özgün's own "muddled thinking" serves to highlight Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's "reasoned" explanations, giving him the opportunity to sort out the significant from the irrelevant, and to expound the real issues (esas meseleler). To illustrate:

[following upon a series of comments-cum-questions from the audience]

**Ayşe Özgün:** We are doing something that Allah does not want. To bring us together, he has sent the book, he has sent the prophet, we are sharpening the divisions and so if I say something I am afraid of reaction from this group, if I say another from that, is this something good? We are doing something Allah does not want. This is what I see. But how we get out of this situation, that I do not know. Is it with tolerance, I mean getting away from the mentality of imposing our own ideas that I do not know either. But once again after our last week's program many viewers, twelve to thirteen viewers who did not agree with your views, telephoned us. Would you believe it? But one viewer called in such anger, thanking Allah for those who give us correct or wrong religious information. Now this is where I am flabbergasted. I mean, what does it mean to be thankful for wrong information, this I do not understand, this kind of thinking.... You say the truth but I do not want to accept it, it is true according to one side of course and this viewer of ours was raising hell last week. So thir-teen telephone calls came like this. Now this is my question to you: Is it wrong or right to say thank God for wrong religious information as well as right religious information?

**Yaşar Nuri Öztürk:** If someone makes a mistake out of ignorance, I would not blame him. Even when he telephones in anger, if he is not deliberately misleading but believes in what he says, what could we say? Wake up.

**AO:** No. Let us wake up but life is continuously changing.

**YNÖ:** Ayse hanim, let us not trivialize matters. There are those who deliberately lie and mislead the people. A person may lack knowledge, may not have enough education, but believes in something. If he says "salt" instead of "sugar," this should not be exaggerated. Now this is not the issue. This is not the problem Turkey is facing. This is never the real issue. The real problem is that people who know the Quran do not reveal all of it. Or people who say the Quran says this, but such and such important man

_Becoming "Secular Muslims"_ 239
says something else. This is the issue. This is the destruction. Is our religion to be revealed by the Quran, or by others? This has to be decided. We have been saying for years that there are two religions in the Islamic world as well as in Turkey. Of course, there are many distinctions, but two main religions that go under the name of Islam. There is the Islam that has been brought down by the Quran, and then there is the Islam that has been invented. Do you know how long this division has existed in the Islamic world?...

The excerpt above is typical of how Yaşar Nuri Öztürk responds to "muddled questions" from Ayşen Özgün, which she invariably poses in binary form. He does this in a highly polemical style, rephrasing Ayşen Özgün to formulate and answer his own questions, bringing in scholarly references, points of fact, examples from everyday life. What is lost in (my own) translation is the ease with which Yaşar Nuri Öztürk alternates between religious language and everyday colloquialisms while speaking. Each soliloquy is a tour de force, an exercise in reduction and simplification, delivered with "inner conviction" by someone authorized to speak the truth as "a man of scientific learning." The program ends with Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's speech amid enthusiastic applause.

Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's Discourse and Rhetoric

During his lengthy soliloquy's on television Yaşar Nuri Öztürk adopts various overlapping frames of self-representation—always speaking in the first-person plural (rarely "my" or "I"), for instance, which simultaneously asserts his indisputable authority as a theologian, and also underscores his self-certainty when speaking as a social diagnostician who provides explanations of and remedies for social as well as personal ills. And, of course, he acts as a dedicated "educator," who never tires of clarifying abstract ideas by using everyday metaphors "to reach the masses." The skill with which he alternates between these different frames of self-reference, taking time to articulate a set of "reasoned" arguments and explanations, simultaneously informing and convincing his viewers, is undoubtedly the key criterion that makes his performance worth watching for "educated" viewers.

But the "interpretive contract" between Yaşar Nuri Öztürk and his wider, more heterogeneous audiences is based, I would suggest, on the anticipation that there will come a crucial moment in his performance when he will adopt a "combative" or "fighter frame." Nearly every Friday morning there comes a dramatic moment when he loses patience and bares his knuckles—boldly standing up (metaphorically) to state the truths that audiences know from elsewhere. This is when Yaşar Nuri Öztürk lapses into "I" (or when "we" becomes an all-inclusive term rather than self-referential) and he is transformed into a passionate fighter in a battleground of political adversaries, fighting on "our" behalf—not only those in the studio or at home but seemingly for the whole nation. During such "exceptional" moments the hiatus between Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's

240 Ayşe Öncü
"expert" knowledge and the "lay" epistemology of audiences seems to disappear, and the studio participants burst into spontaneous applause (rather than respectful clapping). But, of course, it is precisely the anticipation of such "exceptional" moments that lends interest to his television performance and constitutes the highpoint (for lack of a better term) of the Ayşe Özgün Show for most viewers.

Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's statements during such moments of high drama are framed within a master binary opposition, which he repeats almost every week, as in the quotation above: "There are two kinds of Islam, one which has been sent by Allah and the other invented." And the only way of learning the Islam sent by Allah is for everyone to read the Quran.

Thus, for instance:

YNÖ: I have been telling this millet to examine the Quran's original for the past twenty years. I tell them to take it out of the chests, to bring it down from the attics, and to read it. But the man who is supposed to read it does not know Arabic. They have told him, the perpetrators of this racket, don't touch it if you do not know Arabic. This racket, to protect itself, has sanctified Arabic. Now, according to these people, what is holy is not Allah's word. It is Arabic letters that are holy. We are saying that what is sacred is the message Cenab-i Hak has sent us. And we can learn this message when we read the Quran in the language we understand. The citizen listens to me and telephones the muftii offices. Can I read the Quran in Turkish? No permission, no such possibility.

Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's emphasis on reading the Quran rather than memorizing and reciting it in Arabic is obviously a very modernist stance. Ayşe Özgün interprets this as follows: "Hocam, you want everyone to acquire a Kur'an'i Kerim and read it from beginning to end." But as the paragraph above reveals, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk continues to say much more than this. Not only does he bring up the politically charged issue of 'vernacularization' and attack its opponents—as 'perpetrators of a racket'—but refers directly to the office of the muftii (which is part of the centralized Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey).

When Yaşar Nuri Öztürk begins to attack "those" or "they" who benefit from invented Islam, not only do they seem to increase in numbers but we discover that they are in "our midst." There are, for instance, the "seytan evliyasi" (the devil's saints or emissaries) who are the "profiteers" from Islam.

YNÖ: Now they have brought this contemptible Islam into our midst. Now a Muslim cannot be close to Allah without paying a commission, without mortgaging his mind and belief. Now I am asking this mass, wasn't this mass Muslim before these profiteers came onto the scene? Now no one should expect to get anywhere by bowing [scece] to the devil's saints [seytan evliyasi]. If the Islamic world were to get anywhere by bowing, it would have become the leader [efendi] of the world. Tur-key would have become the leader of the world. A mosque is being built.

Becoming "Secular Muslims" 241
every six hours. In the six centuries of the Ottoman Empire, the number of mosques built was around fifteen thousand, in the sixty-five years of the Republic, the number of mosques has exceeded one hundred thou-sand. Why are they being built? There is something wrong here. Muslims must free themselves from those who first put artificial distances between themselves and God, and then ask for a commission to remove them.

The illustrative excerpts above are chosen from particular moments in Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's performance, when his facial expression and gestures imply that he has cast aside what he had come prepared to talk about (as an expert guest), and his voice and intonation suggest that he is now speaking "spontaneously." Within the anticipatory framework of the Ayşe Özgün Show, "we" (studio audiences, viewers at home, as well as Ayşe Özgün herself) expect and wait (respectfully) for the moment when Yaşar Nuri Öztürk will assume a "fighter" frame, lashing out against the enemies of "real Islam" rather than elaborating on what "real Islam" is.

Ayşe Özgün, as a shrewd and experienced producer, knows that such "electric moments" (her term) are crucial for her program ratings. During the interviews she narrated a "mistake" during the second year of the program: "We decided that instead of telling people to read the Quran, we would read it together on the program, chapter and verse. Our ratings fell immediately, so we gave up after two weeks." She lamented that "people were not interested in learning the Quran," immediately qualifying that she would never admit this in public.

Overall, during the five-year period when this particular program was on the air every Friday, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's language and attacks have become progressively sharper, along with his growing visibility on commercial channels, in a range of other programs. When asked, program directors have one answer: "ratings."

A Heroic Fighter against "Fake" Islam?

Moving outward from the microcosm of the Ayşe Özgün Show to draw conclusions about Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's "ratings" on commercial television in general is obviously a hazardous task. The foregoing analysis suggests that a crucial component of "watching" him on television is his readiness to assume a "fighter" frame—cutting across different groups of viewers to engage them in a melodramatic conflict between "real" Islam and "corrupt" Islam. What lends him credibility as a "lone fighter" against forces of corruption is the recognition, on the part of diverse audiences, that he is a man of "scientific learning"—that is, that his scholarly knowledge of "real Islam" is formidable. So regardless of how ambivalent or even confused perhaps "we" (as his viewers or as Turkish people) might be about "real Islam," there can be no doubt about Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's own qualifications as a man of prodigious scholarship (since he continuously refers back to his own writings) and his perfect recall of the entire Quran (since he quotes exact words and phrases in Arabic along with their in-

242 Ayşe Öncü
terpretations in Turkish). But, most important, of course, is the urgency of the ongoing battle in the present, which demands united opposition on the part of different groups of viewers.

When Yaşar Nuri Öztürk situates himself within a melodramatic conflict between "real" versus "invented/fake" Islam, he does not target "political Islam" directly but only "those people" who distort "real Islam" for their own gain. His true enemies are the "racketeers" or "profiteers" (tezgahlar), which might be translated into the everyday experience of his viewers in a variety of ways. In Turkey of the 1990s "they" might include Islamic Financial Houses that attract clients by offering "interest-free" banking. Or "those people" may be offshoots of religious orders that channel "great wealth" through foundations (vakıf). And, as in one of the direct quotations I have given above, "they" might also include people who solicit contributions from "innocent" believers to build a new mosque every other day. So each time Yaşar Nuri Öztürk begins to attack "profiteers" and "racketeers" (combined with the viewing experience itself), the timeless opposition between "real" versus "fake" Islam, one good, the other bad, both acquires fresh urgency and becomes an immediate problem calling for united opposition.

But why are (some) "Turkish people" deceived by these profiteers? Why don't they "wake up"? The answer appears to reside in "muddled thinking" based either on hearsay (kulakdan dolma bilgiler) or "superstition" (hürafe)—terms Yaşar Nuri Öztürk often uses interchangeably in his television performances. He frequently dismisses questions about the morality of everyday practices (such as the appropriateness of handshaking between men and women or the permissibility of men and women swimming together at the beach) as trivial because they amount to no more than "hearsay" rather than being based on true knowledge of the Quran. He continuously berates his audiences for believing what they hear from others, instead of reading the Quran to decide for themselves by "reasoning." Similarly he dismisses such "popular" rituals as visiting shrines of holy men or seeking help from healers as hürafe—superstitions that corrupt "real Islam." But the distinction between "muddled thinking" and hürafe (an assimilated word from Arabic) also connotes a symbolic hierarchy, between (modern) literate people who are simply confused and the (traditional) illiterate masses who remain steeped in superstition. Hence the word hürafe captures the time immemorial opposition between the literate culture of Sunni Orthodox Islam and the popular Islam of the periphery, as well as its numerous reincarnations throughout Republican history—enlightened elite versus uneducated masses, urban versus rural, modernity versus tradition. So, once again, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's battle against hürafe in the immediate urgency of the present becomes part of a ceaseless struggle between Orthodoxy and heresy, between enlightenment and backwardness.

Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's struggle to rescue "real Islam" from hürafe and tezgahlar, then, invokes the familiar tropes of Turkish nationalism while simultaneously recasting them in the immediacy of the present. In the act of watching him on television, the contradictions, ambivalences, and ambiguities of the couplet

"Becoming "Secular Muslims" 243"
"secular Muslim" recede into the background, as "we" become united in the fight against those perpetuating "fake Islam."

The "Young Turk" of the Divinity Establishment?

Public arguments acquire their meaning from what is known and anticipated on the part of those who listen, read, or watch. But their public nature means that they enter into circulation in cross-reference to other arguments, as part of a broader field of citations, controversies, and emissions. To assert an argument "publicly" means entering a field of interplay with other discourses, or what Warner (2002) describes as "a cross-citation field of many other people speaking." Circulation of arguments in public is therefore a "reflexive process" he suggests, rather than one of passive relay and mechanical diffusion. Arguments acquire "talk value" as they move in different spaces of circulation, mobilized, reframed, or challenged by interested strategic actors, both dominant and subordinate.

What has lent "talk value" to Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's polemical arguments—beyond his immediate appeal to television audiences—has been his readiness to publicly challenge the official stance of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs on a variety of issues. Since he himself is a product and prominent member of the same establishment, he has come under heavy criticism within its closed circles as a "sensationalist" and "publicity seeker," accused of trivializing serious theological debates for the sake of ratings. But his arguments have found wider public resonance, because they came into public circulation at a time when the centralized Directorate of Religious Affairs was under growing political criticism, from multiple vantage points.

Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's polemical arguments entered the public field amid a multiplicity of critical discourses that targeted the official stance and practices of the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The silence of Turkey's Divinity Establishment amid raging political controversy—or, more accurately perhaps, its efforts to maintain its official status above and outside public debate by refusing to respond to any and all public criticism—created a chasm, a silence if you will. Within this vacuum Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's solo voice was amplified, resonating beyond his immediate audiences, to be picked up and reframed by various strategic actors in the public arena. His ideas began to make headlines as "sensational news"—because they contradicted the official injunctions of the Directorate. And Yaşar Nuri Öztürk himself, ever the publicity seeker, seemed to bask in media attention as his arguments were interpreted and framed as "breaking taboos." Public speculation began to center on whether he was—as the popular weekly Aktuel put it boldly on its cover story in 1988—"the Young Turk of the Divinity Establishment?" or "the Ventriloquist of the Military?"

So the drama of "Yaşar Nuri Öztürk versus the Directorate of Religious Affairs" acquired an autonomy of its own as a public text, open to alternative political readings. Many of the "radical" ideas he propounded had a lengthy history of ideological struggle behind them. His arguments for vernacularization,
for instance—such as translating the Arabic call to prayers (ezan) into Turkish, conducting mosque worship in Turkish, or reciting daily ritual prayers (namaz) in Turkish—have been subject to intense debate, negotiation, and compromise since the formative decades of Turkish nationalism. But when retold in the media-saturated environment of the 1990s, they became something new—the litmus test of political standing in the immediacy of the present. And, as such, they were transposed onto a different plane, reconfigured in the public arena in terms of "people's choice versus state controls." Whether Yaşar Nuri Öztürk was a "hero" or a "false hero" in this struggle remains open to question. But the drama itself, by repudiating the functionaries of the centralized state, and calling them to account for interfering with people's choice, offered the potential possibility of "freely choosing" to become united as "secular Muslims." Perhaps the "magic" of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk in the political conjuncture of the 1990s resided in making this impossible dream sound plausible.

In terms of substance, what produced the "phenomenon of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk" was a double-dynamic. His television audiences embraced him as a way of affirming who "we" are and "what we stand for" as secular Muslims. His statements were mobilized by different constituencies to concretize ongoing struggles over the issue of "whose interests" the Directorate of Religious Affairs promoted and "what it stood for" in the secular Republic of Turkey. Neither of these is reducible to the other, in the sense of what came before and what came after, or which was primary and which was secondary. What linked them together, in mutual feedback, was the historically specific ways in which "the affair of state" and "the affairs of religion" continue to be entangled in Turkey. The "phenomenon of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk" was both a product of this entanglement and part of its renegotiation in the political conjuncture of the 1990s in Turkey.

I began this essay by proposing the notion of a "televisual moment" as a way of capturing both the generality and also the specificity of the 1990s in Turkey. In the broadest sense, this was a historical moment when the blowing winds of neoliberalism in the transnational arena coincided with declining optimism and faith in the Utopian promise of state-led development and progress in much of the postcolonial world. The entry of television into history at this particular moment, I suggested, brought into the foreground two opposing tendencies associated with the global expansion of media and communication networks. On the one hand, it revealed the fragility of a phalanx of "modern" institutions associated with the nation-state, undermining official scripts of who "we" are and "what we stand for." On the other hand, it brought into play new modes of identification with the abstract nation, by annexing familiar motifs and themes from narratives of nationalism, and reproducing them through visual formats and popular genres of global media culture.

Focusing on the "phenomenon of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk" was a way of "cutting" into the dense political landscape of the late 1990s in Turkey, to explore how one of the key motifs of Turkish nationalism—"we are all secular Muslims"—was being reanimated through the visual formats and commodity logic of tele-

_Becoming "Secular Muslims"_ 245
vision. Rather than reinventing the unanswerable question of who is a secular Muslim, I assumed that, like all cultural identities, its boundaries are inherently blurred. By situating myself in the terrain of the present—wherein insurgent cultural politics of Islam, and of Kurdish nationalism, were intermingled with political discourses of neoliberalism and its anti-state rhetoric—I hoped to avoid the conceptual pitfalls of a genealogical account. Instead, I started out with the metamorphosis of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk into a "super-subject" on television, and tried to plot the overlapping constituencies for whom he "made sense" and the intersecting social spaces wherein his voice was amplified.

Yet even as I tried to map out the multiple meanings of what he was saying and the competing interpretations being constructed around them, additional aspects of the phenomenon I was investigating came into focus. The object of my analysis seemed to recompose itself as my search for situated knowledge continued. I had begun by thinking of him as a "super-subject" on television—addressing viewers in the first person to stabilize the perpetually shifting agendas of the moment, performing the "magic" of balancing out the moral from the immoral, right from wrong. Was this because audiences embraced him as a sermonizer in tune with the spirit of the times—a happy blending of Islamic theology, aerobics, the Internet, English, and a "modern" (uncovered) wife? His own self-positioning, however, was that of an eminent scholar. The primary content of his lengthy soliloquies on television, reminiscent of classroom lectures, seemed to be pitched to literate, urban, middle-class audiences. So what was the secret of his magical "ratings"? How did he cut across multiple audience segments to bring them in front of the television set? This line of questioning led me to focus on moments of passionate intensity in Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's performance, when he assumed a "fighter frame" to lash out against the enemies of "real Islam." What brought diverse audience segments in front of the television set, and knit them together, I concluded, was the desire to watch him fight the perpetrators of "fake Islam"—the identities of whom invoked a shared fund of knowledge based on narratives of Turkish nationalism. The question of who "we" are and "what we stand for" as secular Muslims acquired facticity in the ongoing moral struggle between "real" and "fake Islam," even as the term, as an abstract concept and political practice, became more meaningless, implacable, and illusive. What seemed an impossible illusion to sustain—"we are all secular Muslims"—was fabricated in the heroic fight against "those" who benefited from "fake Islam."

If the line of questioning I pursued led me to a more layered understanding of his "magical" relationship with audiences, it also revealed the terra incognito of my research. What about the way that his arguments underwent public circulation? During the course of my research I had become increasingly aware of the difference between the primary content of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's "political sermons (addressed to viewers) and the way that his statements were selectively picked up and amplified as they entered public circulation. His "magical" television ratings and the "talk value" of his statements in public circulation were obviously linked. This link, however, was not a matter of temporal ordering in
time (first one, then the other) but was politically defined and interactive. There existed (already) a range of controversies surrounding the centralized Directorate of Religious Affairs in the political conjuncture of the late nineties. I risked the crudities of an abbreviated account in order to emphasize the preexistence of strategic interests (both dominant and subordinate) whose political agendas were at odds with the official policies of the Directorate. Within this politically charged context, the television persona Yaşar Nuri Öztürk proved to be a readily accessible signpost, lending concrete form to ongoing debates. His public addresses provided a repertoire of statements likely to prove "controversial," which were immediately picked up, abridged in the journalistic catchphrases of the moment, and reproduced as the latest installment in an ongoing drama—Yaşar Nuri Öztürk versus the Directorate of Religious Affairs. I termed this a "public text," because it provided a popular idiom of "circulation," one that allowed for multiple, divergent interpretations of what the Directorate stood for and whose interests it served.

Returning to the notion of a "televisual moment," there is a tension between two opposing tendencies of fragmentation and affirmation that are embedded within the "televisual moment." How this tension unfolds, however, is "open-ended" in the sense that it is bound with prevailing power configurations, contingent events, and emergent resistances. Television is obviously not some sort of trans-historical agency, capable of lending direction to events. But it is far more than decor or wallpaper against which players enact their rehearsed parts. The claim of television to "reach everybody" opens up new discursive spaces and maps out new constituencies, augmenting some political voices and choices while muffling others. Thus any attempt to move beyond the generalities of a "televisual moment," to trace and unpack its unfolding in specific contexts, necessitates particularizing, or what William Sewell has named an "eventful" history.

Epilogue

As I was trying to knit together various strands of my research into a narrative conclusion, the incumbent coalition government fell apart, and new elections came on the political agenda. Yaşar Nuri Öztürk succumbed to the lure of publicity (very predictably) and announced his political candidacy on the ranks of the CHP (Republican People's Party) amid a media blitz. He was elected to parliament, on November 3, 2002, to be precise. He is currently seated (presumably) on the back benches of the national assembly, suffering the common fate of all deputies from opposition parties, namely, oblivion. He is unlikely to be heard of again unless he becomes involved in corruption or a sex scandal. So outworking of political events have relegated Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, the person, into obscurity. He is now part of the very recent history of the present.

The landslide victory in the November 3 polls belonged to the AK (Justice and Development Party), which was defined by its critics as "Islamist." Having won a comfortable two-thirds majority in parliament, the newly inaugurated
AK government immediately rejected the label "Islamist." Both AK's new prime minister (Abdullah Gül) and its charismatic chairman (Recep Tayyip Erdogan) affirmed their belief in the separation of religion and state, and declared their vision of a new future—a modern, democratic, economically prosperous, secular, Muslim Turkey. This summation of incompatibilities suggests that the divisive issues that produced the "phenomenon of Yaşar Nuri Öztiirk" will continue to haunt Turkish politics in the coming decade, in ways that remain to be investigated.

Notes

1. I use the notion of “a televisual moment” so as to avoid the universalistic connotations of the concept of a "millennial moment" developed by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000). So I have come up with a phrase that reiterates their emphasis on the significance of neoliberal discourses, and also highlights the concomitant boom in domestic media and consumer markets.

2. I refer to India and Indonesia specifically, because accounts of the changing media scene during the 1990s seem so remarkably similar to the Turkish case (Pendakur and Kapur 1997; Sen and Hill 2000; Rajagopal 2001).

3. Tsing (2000, 115) describes the 1990s decade in Indonesia as follows: "From the top of what was called a ‘miracle,’ Indonesia fell to the bottom of a ‘crisis.’... So recently an exemplar of the promise of globalization, overnight became the case study of globalization’s failures."

4. There is a vast literature on Turkey's neoliberal turn. For an overview and extensive bibliography, see Cizre-Sakallıoğlu and Yeldan 2000. On the rise of an "Islamic economy" during this period, see Bugra 1999, 1998; Öniş 1997.

5. For a discussion on the interaction of markets and politics in the transformation of the media scene during the 1990s decade in Turkey, see Öncü.; forthcoming.

6. The expressions within quotation marks are all direct translations from Turkish. That they sound so familiar reveals how rapidly catchphrases from the global language of neoliberalism were appropriated by Turkish journalists and entered into public discourse as well as everyday language.

7. The paucity of research on the history of the Directory of Religious Affairs is remarkable. For a notable exception, see Tarhanlı 1993.

8. What Langer (1998) describes as "the other news" or "tabloid news" has been main fare of prime time news programming since the mid-1990s in Turkey.

9. The concept of a "super-subject" was developed by Morse (1986), with specific reference to television news personalities. Although television producers use the word "magic" to describe Yaşar Nuri Öztiirk's appeal to audiences, I prefer to avoid Weber’s notion of charisma, used by Marshall (1999) to discuss the celebrity phenomenon in general. Morse's concept of a "super-subject" emphasizes the significance of direct address on television, in the subjective, conversational mode, which brings into play the powerful codes of equality and reciprocity in everyday talk. She suggests that when a super-subject speaks to me, the truth conditions or rules of verification of "secondary or mediated experience are suspended, and what he says assumes the paramount reality.

248 Ayşe Öncü
of direct experience. On how this is accomplished through visual signs, see Johansen 1999.

10. For a discussion of how Yaşar Nuri Öztürk's scholarly credentials set him apart, both from the notables of the state divinity establishment in Turkey (a closed community of scriptural scholarship) and also the publicly visible "Islamist intellectuals" whose antiestablishment "radical" rhetoric identifies them with political Islam, see Özcan 2000.

11. For three excellent books that offer grounded analyses of how Islam has penetrated the public culture and everyday experience of the 1990s decade in Turkey, see Saktanber 2002; Navaro-Yashin 2002; and White 2002. For a broader comparative perspective on politics of Islam in Turkey, see Zubaida (1996, 2000).

12. The "analysis" I offer is essentially based on video recordings of ten programs broadcast on different Fridays between 1998 and 2000, "randomly" selected by the archivists of ATV channel. I have transcribed these into writing, as well as watching them repeatedly—alone, with students, as well as with colleagues willing to spare the time. I have also interviewed Ayşe Özgün at length, and had to "reciprocate" by becoming an "expert guest" on one of her programs. I have deliberately avoided interviewing Yaşar Nuri Öztürk himself.

13. Ayşe Özgün describes her involvement with television in terms of "reaching the people." She "wants to do something for this country." But she also admits that "we have not been able to reach the mass [kitleye inmeyi başaramadık]." Here is one of her illustrations: "I was in the south, stopped and got out of the car. People were picking cotton in the heat with Omo [detergent] cartons on their heads. They all came rushing to embrace me. They watch my program. But when I ask, 'do you do what we say?' they mumble 'things are different here.'" So Ayşe Özgün is the prototype—almost a caricature—of modern/modernizing woman of her generation. Her life story and the ingredients of her success as a talk show hostess are interesting in their own right but are beyond the immediate concerns of this essay.

14. According to Mardin (1969) the word hürâfe has been in circulation since the end of the nineteenth century, with more or less the same connotations; that is, it is used to dismiss all popular beliefs and practices associated with oral traditions of "folk" Islam as "superstition."

References


Becoming "Secular Muslims" 249


250 Ayşe Öncü