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### ‘Knowledge is a potent instrument for change’. Interview with Doğu Ergil

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## 'Knowledge is a potent instrument for change'. Interview with Doğu Ergil

Doğu Ergil

Interview conducted by Marie Le Ray, Ankara, June 15, 2006.

EJTS: Could you start by introducing yourself, and tell more specifically about your academic career within and outside Turkey. How did you come to get interested in the Kurdish question?

[2] DE: Well, I'm a professor of political sociology, chairman of the Department of Political Behaviour, at the Faculty of Political Science, Ankara University. My education is partly Turkish, partly American. I have earned my BA degree in Turkey; MA and PhD degree is in the US. After being assigned to an academic post at the Faculty of Political Science, I worked on political inclinations, ethnic relations, political parties and political violence. And in this context, I accomplished the first research on political violence in Turkey, which was consummated in a book called 'Social and Cultural Roots of Political Violence in Turkey' in 1980, based on interviews in the prison system, on right-wing and left-wing militants. And then, in late 1990s, when the Kurdish issue started exacting lots of blood in Turkey, and the whole Turkish establishment seemed to grasp the magnitude of the problem and the nature of the problem, I thought I should take part in understanding and letting people understand what is going on. I thought this was a civic duty but also an academic obligation. So I designed a research proposal which I presented to different levels of the government, which did not endorse my initiative because they looked at the problem from only the security point of view rather than seeing and labelling it as a 'social conflict', that could be solved by other means than sheer violence or police and military tactics. Unable to convince any government official or any politician, to the level of Prime Minister, feeling very frustrated, one day I met the president of the

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Turkish Union of Chambers of Industry and Commerce, the biggest business community in the country. His name was Mr Yalım Erez; He came from that part of the country and was, as a businessman, interested in the promotion of business in a place where business had almost come to a grinding halt. He invited me to his office in Ankara and told me that he understood the problem and it was everyone's national duty to put an end to it. Later, he asked the secretary of the Union to write to the University, making use of a clause in the law to invite advisers from the academia to work for the Union, although they keep their full-time position in the University. So I was charged with the management, or at least the realization of a social research with the title of 'Special Advisor to the President'. This is how I found the chance of conducting the seminal research entitled 'The Eastern Question' in the east of Turkey (TOBB 1995). The area was declared as a 'maximum security zone' and it was very hard to do anything at the time being. However, we could realize the research for four reasons. First of all, the Union had branches all over the country, even in smaller towns. So they helped me and the interviewing team I put together and trained in every step of the research...

[3] EJTS: We will come back to that but I was wondering much more about the academic perspective, the way you came to it and the sources you used to think about the Kurdish question. What were your readings at that time, in the 1990s?

[4] DE: Well, in the 1990s, ethnic relations had become a major issue in the world. And in fact, in my doctoral studies, ethnic relations concerning the Blacks and the Indians in the US, it was a major issue. So I was a part of that academic process during my MA and doctoral studies. So I had an affinity to the subject matter. Soon after I returned to Turkey, conflict resolution had become a major issue, which did not exist at the time when I was studying for my graduate degrees. So I took interest in conflict resolution and came to the conclusion that the Kurdish problem could be defined as a 'social conflict' rather than mere terrorism. The term 'social conflict' encompassed problems of integration and inclusion into the mainstream citizenry of the country. This meant that late nationalism, or incomplete nation building, had proved to be insufficient in the Turkish case to incorporate 'others' who define themselves differently than the official definition of citizenship and the nation, which means Turkish. Turkishness seemed to be not so inclusive as we thought it was for at least some of the Kurds. So starting from that point of view, I thought I should first address to this question because all other related issues like traditionalism of the East, economic backwardness, lack of individuality and so forth, which are matters of development, modernity and so forth, all come

together to make up the tumultuous problem of 'exclusion'. I felt we were faced with incomplete or insufficient nation-building and an exclusivist understanding of nationhood. The inner workings of this imbroglio was never understood by the Turkish establishment and hence could not be solved. So my starting point was this.

[5] EJTS: What about practical sources? At that time, it was quite difficult to study anything related with the Kurdish issue. There were few sources to rely on in those days, and most of them were coming from non-academic writers. Did you make any use of these sources? What do you think about the lack of academic sources at that time?

[6] DE : None of those were sufficient, in the sense that those that were written by the Kurds, was to affirm that eastern provinces populated by the Kurds were an 'internal colony', that the Turkish state was a colonizer and so forth. And the Turkish texts were a complete denial of what was going on. They all bore political statements blaming the Kurds for betraying the nation and to the state alike. So they were very insufficient, very partial, and very partisan.

[7] EJTS : Could you use of any of them?

[8] DE: Not really. However, I did two things : I went to the archives, especially the military archives, and studied the official reports written by inspector generals, governors, provincial governors, and regional governors overlooking problematic provinces that are parochially referred to as 'super governors'. You know in old times, just like today, they had established a central governorate attaching different provincial governors to it and, inspector generals that were sent for fact finding after each rebellion in the East. I studied their reports in detail, which goes back to the beginning of the Republic or even further, seeing that in every five or at most ten years, reports with almost the same wordings were written, pointing out the root causes of the rebellions and saying that these – presented as a list – precautions have to be taken, otherwise the phenomenon would repeat itself, as it did. But nothing serious was done along the ways that were advised by the authors of the reports. They were all candid reports because they were presented to the central authority, not the public. So they were reliable in order to see the real causes of the rebellion. But I also relied on statistical data that revealed how poor the region is, how traditional the region is, and so forth. But these did not suffice.

[9] Oh, yeah, there is a background to all of this. I wrote my associate professorship dissertation on political alienation. This was a pronounced phenomenon in the seventies and the eighties when dozens of villages refrained to vote *en bloc* at the national elections. When you look at the election statistics of these decades, you see that there are clusters of villages that refuse to vote; not one person, not even one person, voted. Put on the map, these villages were particularly in the East. Those villagers protested the elections, because they believe that election results – regardless of who is elected- bring nothing to them. The second cohort of villages that protested the national elections were mountain villages of the Black Sea region that overlook Central Anatolia. This group of villages were rather isolated. Their inhabitants were so alienated from politics and sickened by the politicians that they didn't even let the politicians enter their villages during campaigns, the only times they appeared at the villagers' doorsteps. This was back in the late 1980s. I completed writing my dissertation in 1989. 1988-1989 is when I came to realize the Kurdish reality.

[10] These were remote villages where only Kurdish was spoken. This meant I had a language problem. Yes, I knew of the Kurds, who were street peddlers, porters in the market place or drafted soldiers in the army. I had met them as private individuals, but I had not encountered them in their cultural settings speaking a different language as a community, and have a different perception of reality, social reality. I was ashamed of my late discovery of a fact of my country. After all we were a multicultural society that we have never acknowledged. How could I not be ashamed, I was at the stage of earning my associate professorship and I was practically ignorant of the most important problem of my country and the eastern reality that it was born in. This late discovery prompted me of course and the issue remained with me since then.

[11] Ten years later, I appealed to the branch of the Secretariat of the National Security Council which was called the 'Social Relations Unit' (headed by Ret. Gen. Hilmi Sengun) and I said I'd like to go to the East, at least for observation, to see what is going on. This was a time when the PKK had grown into a formidable paramilitary force and had destabilized the entire Turkish east. They didn't answer me for months. I visited them after three months. They said : 'Why don't you write a report'? I said, 'How can I write a report without knowing the problem at first hand?' They said, 'Well, write something, we'd like to see how you assess the problem'. They wanted to see, whether I was trustworthy or not. So I sat down, at my typewriter at that time, there were no computers.

[12] EJTS: When was that?

[13] DE: Early 1989. In 1989 bloodshed was at its height. I sat down and wrote six pages. This was the product of a sociologist with some common sense, based on no special knowledge. I took the assignment to them and waited for another three months and called the General in charge. 'Come, let's talk' he said. So I went there and asked : 'Is there any research on the subject'? He called someone, a major came in, saluted the General and presented a dossier. I was very excited hoping that something fruitful was done in the meantime. Alas. it was my own paper; all underlined in red ink. There had been no other study whatsoever! It was incredible, the problem had started in 1984 and we were in year 1989. There was still no scientific work around. No guideline to understand and to deal with the question! And I said: 'Look, allow me to go, make observations and share my assessment with you. This is our country and it is in shambles. There is an internal war – of course I didn't use the word 'internal war' then – fought against an enemy we do not know much about. Let me find out who they are, what do they think...' Indeed we had been whipping them, we've been putting them behind bars but we knew little about them because we never listened to them. The General (and the Council's Secretariat said OK. Of course, I didn't have to ask for their permission. By then I was a full professor and becoming a public figure with my articles, books and TV appearances. However, something could happen to me in this turbulent and unstable region wrought with violence. Furthermore, the provinces I wanted to visit was a military zone under a maximum security measures. If an obscure soldier or policeman had arrested me and put me under custody, most likely I would be interrogated in a harsh manner to understand why I was roaming in the region. Not even my mother would recognize me after those few weeks. Aware of the reality, they said: 'Let's give you police escort, let's give you helicopter lift when necessary'. I said no, 'I want to go and speak with Kurds at every level of the society and I want to do it freely. You just watch me for security reasons but please do not interfere otherwise I will loose my credibility as an independent researcher'. They indeed remained invisible. That helped me a lot.

[14] I was also advised to take along someone with me. So I called on a friend, who was in the process of making a shift between one newspaper to another. At that time Koray Düzgören transferred from *Milliyet* to *Güneş*. Koray got some money from his newspaper for conducting in-depth interviews. Now our mutual mission had both a scientific and a journalistic angle. Before flying to Diyarbakır from Ankara, we had obtained a rich list of names that we would contact. We rented a

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car from Diyarbakır and went to 7/8 provinces like Batman, Bitlis, Şırnak, Siirt, Diyarbakır, and so forth, and to some smaller towns like Cizre and Nusaybin. This was a two-week trip.

[15] While in Diyarbakır, we asked the permission of the authorities to visit the Diyarbakır prison – where all the infamous tortures and so forth were taking place – to listen to PKK militia and members of other Kurdish organizations. Some of these Kurdish organizations were against the PKK, but authorities made no distinction and utilized the democratic potential of some of them. Rather than allowing diversity on the Kurdish political scene out of which more peaceful alternatives to the PKK could have emerged, the government had cracked on them all leaving the scene to the most radical organization. Manifestation of anything associated with 'Kurdishness' was treason.

[16] My contacts and observations in general gave me a comprehensive perspective on the issue because I had spoken to intellectuals, local leaders, common people in the coffee shops, people working in the fields, most probably PKK affiliates under different guises without knowing who they were.

[17] I came back with a ton of impressions. I was full and excited. I visited the Council's Secretariat told them that rather than giving them a written statement I wanted to give a recorded oral account of my findings to a group. There would be questions and answers that would later be put on paper from the audio-visual tape of the presentation. They recorded everything I said. Later I asked for the written form of the interview. They said it was secret material now and they could not give me a copy of the secret state document. Isn't it beautiful! Once it became official, it was no more mine. Believe it or not I do not have that document. It is a pity because I could have compared that data with my work that followed.

[18] EJTS: What about the people you interviewed at that time? Did you get any feedback? Were they annoyed by the military?

[19] DE: No, they were not annoyed. Because I promised not to reveal their names and I kept my promise all along. I had met so many people, with some of whom I still continue my contacts and benefit from their assessments. It gave me a broad understanding of the problem. And also the conviction that the government or the security apparatus doesn't understand the complexity of the matter, as it still does not. Against this backdrop, in 1994, I presented a comprehensive research proposal to the president of the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The structure in the

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proposal was so that I would go to three provinces (Diyarbakır, Batman and Mardin) in the midst of the conflict zone and conduct interviews with a ten person team. Then we would move on three provinces out of the conflict zone (Adana, Mersin and Antalya) that had received a heavy doze of migration from the conflict zone to find out whether expected results of integration had taken place or were people more radicalised politically?

[20] In the chosen provinces we planned to ask the people of their self-perception, self-identity, expectations from life, expectations from the state, their view of the PKK, their relationship with the PKK, which were all problematic issues of course. The predominant majority of the interviewees spoke as if they were aloof of the problem and used expressions like, 'there are people who say or act the way...' They didn't say 'we are directly involved' but, you know, it was so obvious from what they said that many families were involved by way of their youthful members who were affiliated with the PKK in one way or the other.

[21] EJTS: How did you select the three provinces in the Southeast?

[22] DE: They were the hottest places where armed conflict raged. Some people who were opposed to such a research said these three provinces were not representative of the whole Kurdish region. This is partly true but it was pretty representative of the conflict area but I wanted to get to the root causes of the conflict not to obtain statistical data on the Kurdish society. Another question I had to answer was, because it was so dangerous to travel in the east and people trusted no one how could I get reliable data. The success of the research was based on four factors. First of all, Mr Yalım Erez was the man who was instrumental in making Ms. Tansu Çiller the prime Minister, by way of having her appointed to the presidency of the DYP (Doğru Yol Partisi – Party of the right path), after Mr. Suleyman Demirel had moved up to the Presidency<sup>1</sup>. Most of the delegates of the DYP (Doğru Yol Partisi), who elected the leader of the party, were member of the Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği - TOBB) because they were local businessmen. So it was very easy for the president of TOBB to guide theirs members. Mr Erez was a charismatic man. Of course, a prime Minister close to the organization would facilitate the interests of the business community and make life easy for them. So when we called on the governors of the provinces where we would be carrying out the research, it made a huge difference. First we sent a

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<sup>1</sup> Yalım Erez became Minister of Industry and Trade in the coalition government formed between the DYP (True Path Party) and the AP (Motherland Party) after the December 1995 general elections.



letter from the presidency of TOBB, signed by Mr Erez, informing them of our intention and asked their assistance. Later we phoned the governor in person. They easily got the impression that this was an initiative of the Prime Minister's office and the government was behind it.

[23] Needless to say, the first thing we did when we travelled to the site of the research, was to visit the governor's office and ask each of them to invite the chief of regional police and Intelligence and ask them not to interfere. Our rhetoric was common with the official parlance : that we are doing this for the sake of the country, for the unity of the nation. Which in fact was true, in principle. I mean we were not doing it for official ends but we wanted to keep the country intact by understanding why a part of its population was up in arms and rebelling.

[24] EJTS: Was the government's support something very effective?

[25] DE: Of course, our interviews were conducted in city centres. The countryside was controlled by the military which had its own mind and hierarchy. But in town centres, it was the police and the Intelligence that were in charge. So we had no problem with the local authorities that were part of the civilian government. Secondly, I was not labelled as a 'traitor' then. In fact, I was often appearing on the television, that was the pass-time of millions with limited number of channels at that time. I was almost the darling of the system with fresh insight and analysis uncommon among stereotype official views. This won me great respect and trust among the common people, especially in the east. The Kurdish issue was a taboo subject, it was not mentioned in the media in any fashion, except treason and terrorism, when I adopted a different terminology, which led to my acceptance by the locals as a bipartisan actor. Otherwise local people would not answer the interview questions. If they did to protect themselves, the answers would be meaningless. But when they saw me there at the head of the research team, someone they trusted and reached them in their homes echoing their troubles and expectations, they opened up. There I discovered the power of the media really.

[26] The word went around rapidly labelling the research as an initiative of TOBB, a homegrown institution and I was the chief researcher. This sufficed to get sincere answers and healthy results. Two events reinforced the public sentiments. In both Diyarbakır and in Mersin, two policemen, who happened to return to duty on the day of research there without being informed of our activity, arrested two of our interviewers on the grounds of 'suspicious activity'. People and leaders of local NGOs that helped us observed the way I responded to the police authorities, saying

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things like, 'How dare you to stop this national mission' or, 'I will report this transgression and you will bear the consequences' etc. Having witnessed such an unprecedented reaction made in public, the word immediately got around that made our penetration into the local community much easier.

[27] EJTS: Why did you choose to make your research as a survey, as a quantitative study? How did you choose the terms and the questions? How did you think about it, how did you select them?

[28] DE: Well, you see, if you speculate on a subject, no matter how wise you are, how knowledgeable you are, it's a matter of speculation. And other people speculating would claim equal legitimacy to their own reasoning. Speculation, no matter how sophisticated it is, does not provide proof of what you say in real life. But if you compile data out of the field (human reality) you scrutinize, then you can obtain quantifiable results to substantiate your assertions. No one can deny your findings if they do not conduct similar and comparable research. This happened too. After our research results were published, the government was quite upset. They were not used to confront reality. In consequence, the government immediately retorted back with another field survey to refute the TOBB research. And funny enough, it was made in the name of a right-wing labour union, because ours was sponsored by the Union of businessmen.

[29] Needless to say their findings came out quite different from our findings because they asked questions emphasizing national unity and obedience to the State. However when it came to objective criteria, like use of white merchandise in the house, you know refrigerators etc., or the size of the household, the language used in the house, papers read and hours spent following radio-TV programs, figures were almost identical. So, most probably they would get similar answers if they had asked the same questions we had asked. Nevertheless, the significance of that research was, first of all, it made a taboo subject debatable. It took it out of the hands, or the prongs, of the establishment and carried it into public life, public space. So people started debating. This was indeed a historical task that I'm very proud of. Secondly, it changed, or it challenged if not changed, the official mentality that all Kurds are separatist: that, they all support the PKK and they want to establish a different state.

[30] Our research brought two very important issues under the light of truth: First of all, 90% of the Kurds did not want a separate state of their own. They supported the PKK because this

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organization represented the Kurdish identity, which was denied until then. In my view the journey of the PKK was like the movement of a train. People got on and off at different stations while the PKK goes to the last station that is independent Kurdistan. But other people jumped on board or bailed out for targets such as better living conditions, a more modern life style, more income, better education, justice, acknowledgement and respect and most of all emancipation from the oppression of a conservative traditional society that they were trapped in. So, support of the PKK as separatism should be viewed differently than expressing dissent to prevailing confining conditions and expectation of respect for their cultural identity and better living conditions. This was a revolutionary revelation that went unheeded by the authorities.

[31] EJTS: How did the Turkish political side and the Kurdish political side receive your findings?

[32] DE: First of all, the warriors, not politicians, dominated both the Kurdish and the Turkish political sides. The way warriors manifest themselves is warfare. They shoot, they don't talk.

[33] EJTS: Didn't you get any support from local politicians or parties?

[34] DE: The PKK had dominated the Kurdish political scene, either by way of partial political representation, or by way cowing those who did not endorse its violent tactics and separatist agenda. No Kurdish group could say or do anything against the PKK, even today; yes, even today. On the Turkish side, you could do nothing except comply with the way the security bureaucracy had said and done. In the face of this reality, the findings of our research were very important. The Kurds were quite willing to accept being obedient citizens of the Republic of Turkey on the grounds that their Kurdishness was to be acknowledged and respected. Secondly the predominant majority did not want 'out'. In fact they wanted 'to come in' to a multi-cultural society where citizenship was not defined on ethnic or religious grounds. They made it obvious that they opted for an inclusive definition of citizenship. These were revolutionary findings. Any wise government would be very happy about these results. But then, you had to make two major changes. First of all, if you say that these people are not separatists, then you can not send your people to a war within your own country to fight against a part of your citizens. You cannot legitimise that. Secondly, by accepting Kurds as citizens (the way they define themselves), then the whole concept of citizenship, as ingrained in the Constitution (defined as Turkish), and the political ethos which national identity was built on would

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change. This would be a political earthquake that would shatter an uniformist understanding of nationhood and the whole legal system that legitimised it.

[35] The government – or the establishment, which is more than the government- could not afford this. I do not know whether they understood it or refused it without grasping the repercussions of the findings that could be a guideline for solving the fratricidal conflict. And in the last research I have conducted in the eastern provinces in 2005 (Ergil [2006](#)), I found yet another very important factor that would definitely please the establishment: the people of eastern provinces (mostly inhabited by Kurds) evinced no significant difference in internalising democratic values than their fellow citizens living in the more affluent and developed western provinces. This meant, the Kurds living in more traditional, less affluent and modern social formations were capable of supporting democracy just as any other citizen group in the country. This was good news for a candidate country to the European Union. You and I would just get up and start dancing with these data at hand. But no! Not one politician or political party called me to ask for the full research, just as they didn't for the former. And you know, even the opposition, for example Mesut Yılmaz, as the head of ANAP (Anavatan Partisi/ Motherland Party) at that time, labelled the research as a CIA plot, without even turning the first page. So this is indicative of the inability of the Turkish politicians to understand the reality of their own country, set aside global realities. They do not need knowledge for knowledge is a potent instrument to/for change. They do not want to change the system that provide them status, privilege and unaccountability. In fact they see new knowledge as subversive as they did in both accounts of my research realized 10 years apart from each other. Both the government and political parties refused to heed and to utilize the research findings. In the first instance (1995) five people called me in appreciation and support; three of them were business leaders. This is very important. The business leaders wanted peace and tranquillity in the country. Stability meant capital accumulation, releasing of funds going to warfare, expansion of markets and investment in the future by both domestic and foreign entrepreneurs.

[36] EJTS: I was about to ask about today's AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Party of Justice and Development) government, because AKP as a party, and its ancestors, they have their own sayings about how to solve the Kurdish issue. How did they welcome the last report? Did you have any feedback?

[37] DE: One of the basic particularities or qualities of the AKP is that it is not a staunch nationalist party as the others are. It's a more, how would I say, communalist party. It believes in the merits of communal life : the brotherhood, the solidarity of the believers, disregarding their ethnic roots and so forth. However, when it comes to policy implementations, policy options, it could not really differ from the established political culture, as well as the monolithic understanding of the society. The monolithic vision of the society is fused with the state; in that the society is perceived as a part of the state. This perception, that is the foundation of Turkish political culture is also ingrained in their minds. The only diversity that they would accept is the diversity of the Muslim community from the political community; political community defined here as a secular one. If it wasn't a secular polity, I have little doubt that they would also opt for the unity of the political sphere and the cultural sphere as well. So they do not differ in their understanding of the society as a monolithic entity. But they rather to reduce it to a community of believers rather than as a nation with diverse components born out of political consensus.

[38] EJTS: Did you submit your last results to the government?

[39] DE: They didn't ask me to. It was published but they didn't contact me for further information or the totality of the research results. In fact no one did. No official authority or any political party seemed to be interested. It's incredible! There seems to be a political blindness in this country that evinces itself with an assortment of anxieties against imminent change and the loss of what we already have. Such a reflex is so conservative and stultifying that to be an agent of change in this country is equal to treason. Yet people expect improvement and advancement. But because they do not facilitate the improvements and or changes they want all efforts end up status quo maintenance. This is relative regression while the world goes ahead.

[40] Most politicians' vision is limited with the boundaries of this country, and we call those people 'statesmen'. Those who have a vision of aggrandizing the interests and influence of their group is what we call 'politicians'. And the time-span of their policies is the day, well may be the year. So we are infested with the problems of short-minded and short-term politicians and policies. That is the main problem of Turkey; politic is retroactive. Such actors with such qualities cannot solve problems and manage change. They run behind problems. They see problems coming but do not act in time. Things happen because they are not prevented, then we try to minimize the damage. That

is a pity but this is the general trend and the main problem of Turkish politics : it is reactive not proactive.

[41] EJTS: Could you contrast the 1994/95 fieldwork and survey's results with the last one's?

[42] DE: First of all, the initial research that was published in 1995 was conducted at the height of the internal warfare in Turkey. It was the autumn and winter of 1994 and early summer of 1995. Those were dire days and the country was immersed in bloodshed and an aura of uncertainty. In the last instance (late 2004 and the first half of 2005) there was no such thing. PKK attacks resumed later. We travelled to seven south-eastern towns with no security concerns and were not net with suspicion by the local authorities and public. Furthermore, the research that we had designed was part of a youth democracy-training project. Indeed we wanted to raise democracy youth-leaders in this traditional and less developed part of Turkey that would act as community leaders later. The field survey we have realized was to serve two ends : 1) to see if the people in eastern Turkey were ready to support the democratisation process that Turkey had to undergo in order to be an EU member. 2) To allow our trainees to see whether their parents, their city-dwellers and their country had the values that we taught and socialized them into. In fact, this was a learning process for both our youthful trainees and us.

[43] EJTS: Who was sponsoring this democracy-training program?

[44] DE: A group of idealistic academicians and philanthropic volunteers from the business community. It was a, how would I say, a group of responsible citizens. It was not an institutionalised support. Although the initiative was totally a civic endeavour, research done was academic. That is why we wrote at the top of the interview sheets that we were from the Ankara University, because chief researchers (I and prof.Murat Şeker ) were two professors from Ankara University (Faculty of Political Science) and our assistants and so forth. And after reactions in the press, university administration wrote me a letter saying that 'Don't use the university's name in your research'. And I said, I have no other title than being a university professor and it's the duty of the university to conduct research according to its legal statute. What was more shameful was that the university administration had stamped the letter as 'secret' so that I could not publicise it. But I'm sharing this so called 'state secret' with you as challenge to the authoritarian control they want to impose on free thought and research.

[45] EJTS: Were the trainees involved in the survey?

[46] DE: Yes. We needed local aid that the community knew and trusted. Furthermore interviewing their citizens were a part of the training we were carrying on among the towns' youth. Another major problem was to get the permission of the local authorities because the area is still sensitive in terms of security. To make sure that no problems would crop up when we were in the area, we wrote to the governors of seven provinces we planned to visit. By this time, my name was pretty much distanced from the 'traitorship' attached to it after the release of the first research in 1995. Events had vindicated me, plus I continued with analysis that shed light on later developments that did not look like treason but rather scientific assessment. In short, I became an acceptable man again in a matter of ten years. Of course, lots of television discussion shows, interviews and articles I had published helped a lot. Everyone understood that, first of all, I was not a Kurd and secondly, I did not support the PKK (Partiyên Karkerên Kurdistanê / Kurdistan Worker Party), both easy ways of brandishing people and their work.

[47] So, when we wrote to the governors, in our letter we said that we were coming to their province for a very benign, very useful activity. We said we were paying for our expenses, secondly we request two things from them : 1) to instruct the provincial directors of education to choose best of 40 senior year students from different high schools, observing gender equality (20 boys, 20 girls). And if there were higher educational institutes in town, to choose 14 or 15 first-year students. We also requested from the governors to arrange a leave of absence for the participants during the three days of our democracy training. We made sure that they got our message right : we want to raise them as democracy leaders and peer trainers. In order not to disrupt the education of the youth we organized our activities covering Friday, Saturday and Sunday. 2) To find us a venue for the training to be conducted. It could be a conference hall or it could be an auditorium in one of the high schools or anywhere in town. And these were all arranged before we went.

[48] Our contacts were not limited to provincial governors. We had contacted Minister of Education and Minister of Interior in person. I knew them personally, and spoke to them in person. After these contacts they called their local branches saying that there is a good project coming their way that need their assistance. That is why everything went very smoothly. However, the ultra-nationalists and religious obscurantist caught up with our work towards the end of it. Through their



triggermen in the press, they wrote very nasty things against our intentions and the 'imperialist forces' we were serving!! Then we witnessed the spineless nature of politics. Those cabinet ministers with whom I spoke in person denied their involvement. After all we might be serving subversive and foreign dark forces that want to partition our country!! Up until the end of the project wherever we went, we were met by the director of education, later were invited to dinner by the governor and always a junior assistant governor helped us in the organization. Local authorities often provided vehicles to take the kids out for field research after the each day's training. In late afternoon, they went out to interview local citizens chosen as part of the sample group. The second research leader, Prof. Murat Şeker, trained our youth group in techniques of interviewing people.

[49] It was exhilarating to see interview sheets piling up. We thought we were sitting on a pile of gold. This was fresh data that would set us on an intellectual journey. What a joy! But then all this data was particular to only one geographical region. We had to compare it with the West, to see whether it presented significance or not. Otherwise all this data would not have any scientific value. So again, out of our pocket, we paid the expenses of a professional group, which Murat employed, for other field research earlier. This was a team on whose services he had drawn on often, because Murat very frequently conducted public opinion surveys for political parties and local governments. That is why we did not have to pay more than necessary expenses to the group to apply the same research instrument in two 'western' provinces selected as control group. After much deliberation we agreed on two places, one in Thrace and one in the Aegean region that would be represented of 'western Turkey'.

[50] EJTS: What about the 1994-1995 survey? Were you conducting the survey all by yourself?

[51] DE: No, no, I had a team of 10 interviewers. These were people trained for the job for a month and they were all university graduates.

[52] EJTS: Were they coming from the region?

[53] DE: No, they were from Ankara. However, we were accompanied and supported by local people like TOBB members, as I have explained before. They were the indigenous and respected people of the local community. This had an enormous impact on the credibility of the research we have conducted. This is all the more true when you sample the people and knock on the doors that



constitute the sample group. People get agitated when they learn that not their neighbors but they are interviewed. Our local partners did all the convincing under our guidance to assuage their anxieties. Mind you, those were dire days and everyone suspected the other and the authorities were very harsh on the people if they detected any deviance from loyalty to the government.

[54] EJTS: Did you go first to the relatives of the TOBB members?

[55] DE: No, we went to whoever was in the sample group. Our target was the head of the family or the wife. That's generally how social research is conducted, you know, the head of the family is the primary target.

[56] EJTS: What about the language of the survey?

[57] DE: Turkish but if it was necessary, it was Kurdish. So the person who accompanied one of our ten interviewers did the translation to or from Kurdish as well.

[58] EJTS: What about cooperation between foundations and universities? The first survey was conducted under the sponsorship of TOBB...

[59] DE: Yes, TOBB sponsored the first research but no university was involved. The (Ankara) university only allowed me to be advisor to the president of TOBB. The university remained aloof in the first instance and reprimanded me for conducting the second research. In synopsis, the university did nothing in support.

[60] EJTS: Did that type of cooperation multiply after your research? Did universities use this?

[61] DE: Not that I know of. Individual academics used the research results but that was all. For example, Kemal Kirişçi wrote a book with Gareth Winrow. Their work was not a Boğaziçi University thing although they worked there, it was their personal enterprise. In Turkey, academics seem to be independent but in fact they are not. The 'big brother' always breaths over their necks. You have to get official permission to conduct research and get little funding if any. For example I got no financial aid from the university throughout my academic life. On the other hand if people know that you are conducting research for official ends in sensitive issues like security, people will answer your questions to look cooperative but will mislead you. You will get foul results. That is why I always sought after local support and cooperation and got it. In eastern Turkey you must also get the

blessing of the authorities to conduct research otherwise they can abort any such effort. This is a fine line to tread : get their consent but don't get them involved so that the local people would believe in your independence.

[62] EJTS: Concerning funding, did international organizations play a role?

[63] DE: They could have and we could get at least partial funding. However, anything done in the east of Turkey, mostly populated by Kurds is closely scrutinized. Any clue of international involvement would be considered equal to selling out the country. It's dangerous. If it's known, you could be prosecuted and brandished at the same time.

[64] EJTS: What about in your case. As a fellow of the International Endowment for Democracy for example, could you face with problems?

[65] DE: Of course. You know, anti-American sentiments are in their high ebb lately in this country. Anything you do that is related with the outside world –not necessarily with the USA- is labelled as a CIA initiative. Even issues quite unrelated with security matters are put into the same basket. Take the health issue for example; if you campaign for a healthy family, the rumour will be that the 'imperialists' want to make us sterile and weaken our nation! Efforts to collect bone marrow to treat leukemia is interpreted as an initiative to decipher the Turks genetic code and to dilute it! Everything is reduced to ideology, politically coded as 'near and present danger'. This is pathological but that is the way it is. We have to deal with these fabricated fears born out of ignorance of global affairs and the anxiety of being overwhelmed by forces that we can not cope with.

[66] EJTS: Were your questions in any way influenced by this fellowship?

[67] DE: No, how could they be? I had conducted the surveys before I was awarded the aforementioned fellowship (Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellowship for International Scholars). Furthermore, the focus of the two surveys, that were ten years apart from each other, was different. The first wanted to unearth how the Kurds defined themselves (manifested their identity); defined their relationship with the state, with the PKK; what kind of a regime they wanted; what their expectations were as citizens of Turkey, etc. The focus of the second survey was whether the Kurds – now that they are Kurds, not 'mountain Turks' - were equipped with the necessary democratic values to sustain a full fledged democracy in which they would take part. The other side of the coin

was to see whether they opted for a religious or a secular authoritarian regime rather than democracy. Their choices would be instrumental in the long and arduous way Turkey had to tread towards EU membership. So the focuses of two research projects were quite different. However, the social universe of both surveys was the same: Kurds.

[68] EJTS: Did you communicate interviewees the results of the survey?

[69] DE: The results were publicised in an explosive manner. The minute the research was published in August 1995 it changed the public discourse in Turkey. So everyone had access to it through the media that discussed and dissected it for a whole month.

[70] EJTS: But did you come back to the people you interviewed? Did you get any feedback?

[71] DE: No. They were not interested. They were interested in letting the central government and the rest of the people know about what they think and what their problems were, that is all. It was the first time in their whole life someone has asked their opinion rather than telling them. They were asked for the first time who they were. They were grateful. I remember going back to Diyarbakir later in the year to receive the 'Author of the Year Award' given by the Association of Journalist of South-eastern Anatolia. A cortege of 300 hundred cars came to meet me at the Diyarbakir Airport and followed me into the city centre. It was a scene to be seen. Another touching story is my visit to the Chamber of the Turkish Union of Doctors of Diyarbakır during my research to find about elite perceptions of the 'Kurdish problem'. The executive board insisted to give me a briefing on the medical problems of the city and the region. I said, 'Sorry gentlemen. I'm not the person to listen to this and do something about the problems you will lay out. I'm just a humble university professor and political scientist'. But they said, 'It doesn't matter. You are the first one who were willing to listen us'. Mind you, these were the doctors; they were the elite of Diyarbakır. This phenomenon is ingrained in my mind and soul: it was obvious that these people wanted to be heeded, to be treated as equal citizens. This lesson stayed with me since then.

[72] EJTS: After the publication of the report in 1995, you created TOSAV (Toplum Sorunları Araştırma Vakfı). Could you tell us more about this foundation ?

[73] DE: After this research was published, I came to the realization that we cannot solve this problem because it involved more than one side. There was an ignorance factor in defining the

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problem because only one side had defined it. Indeed, we had punished the Kurds for their unruly behaviour but had never listened to them. This one-way relationship was like a parent beating his or her children but not listening to why they cry. What we needed was a common definition of the problem: a common definition reached by both the Turks and the Kurds. Another necessity was to work out a list of negotiated solutions : what was possible and what ought to be done. Both of these points were very important but it needed an organizational set-up and financing to bring a selected experimental group from both sides to deliberate. However, I neither had the expertise in managing negotiations and facilitating conflict resolution sessions. Nor did I have access to the resources that could be used to bring together those representative Kurdish and Turkish vanguard groups. So I appealed to international organizations like the Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in the USA, and the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO).

[74] The findings of the 1995 research were published both in Turkey and elsewhere. While many circles looked at it as a CIA plot, it was received as the first serious field work on the Kurdish problem that involved millions of people and the stability of both Europe and the Middle East. So it was really received very positively. Research results made me the centre of attraction as well. So when I called on international institutions to find a negotiated settlement to the problem, they took me seriously. The two institutions that I contacted sent their experts to discuss with me the modus operandi of how we should approach the problem.

[75] Not only they brought their expertise, they also appealed to different international funders to put together a sizeable sum of money, which I do not know the amount of. Then we chose 7 Turks, 7 Kurds from different walks of life and professions. Among the Turks was a recently retired General for example - you know, you can do a lot of things outside the army, but not against the army in this country- so we had to know the limitations of the military mentality. We had a high ranking retired government official to get the feeling of the civilian bureaucracy. We had merchants on both sides, women on both sides, even ultra nationalists that hated each other's guts at first sight. They couldn't look eye to eye. But at the end of the year, after meeting in several places – Belgium, France, Switzerland and Turkey, we saw that the Kurdish nationalist and the Turkish nationalist were walking arm in arm at the Château near Brussels, we said there is light at the end of the tunnel. These were all confidential meetings for our peace of mind but not secret. We were determined not to give information to outside the group before we achieved something significant. Deliberations were

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full of tension at first. It broke off several times because of disagreement on terminology and unrealistic demands. But the facilitator was a very famous man from Harvard, Prof. Bill Ury, who is the author of 'Getting to say yes' and other conflict resolution masterpieces. Under William Ury's able guidance, courageous and responsible men and women negotiated, deliberated, argued and reconciled. After tense sessions that went on for a year, they agreed on 70% of the things that they had discussed. Pleased with the results, the group said, 'OK, what we have produced is a baby in the oxygen tent, let's see if this baby can live on by itself. Let's put on paper all these principles that we agreed on and call it the 'Document of Mutual Understanding', and carry it to the public to start a popular discourse. Our intention was to build consensus around it and to further enriching it through public debate. However, for this we needed an organizational instrument. That is how we came to the conclusion of founding TOSAV or the Foundation for the Research of Societal Problems. However, prior to doing this we have discussed whether the organization should be an association or a foundation. A foundation was found to be more legally secure and a little more independent from police scrutiny.

[76] After founding TOSAV, we embarked on a challenging task of organizing regional meetings for almost three years. We proposed a multiple-year project to the EU that was accepted. So TOSAV started its civic adventure with an internationally backed initiative. To each meeting place, a major town in different regions of Turkey, we found local partners (opinion and community leaders) to whom we had sent the document and the things we agreed on for scrutiny. Thus they studied the material before the meeting and avoided repetition. New points were introduced, discussed and added to the original text after deliberations ended up in consensus.

[77] This was not the only activity TOSAV carried on. It started realizing projects which were sponsored by other donors, like initiating a radio program with a large outreach called 'Democracy Radio'. In this program a weekly issue was taken up, first discussed by invited experts, then opened to public debate through telephone call-ins. This project persevered for seven years. Lots of other civic projects were realized, especially directed to civil society capacity building and democracy training. The bulk of these were internationally funded. We were also publishing a bi-monthly journal called the 'TOSAV Letter' in both Turkish, Kurdish and English, and we were distributing it as part of the project.

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[78] The EU sponsored project ended in May 1999 with a last meeting held in Istanbul, to which we had invited the leaders of the non-Muslim communities as well. Our intention was to build a national consensus on an inclusive citizenship and the principles of a pluralist democracy, not a democracy built on merely Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation. At the end of all the regional meetings, we have published all the points that were agreed on in three languages. Unfortunately the authorities confiscated the Kurdish version. What happened was that we got the Turkish and the English out of the printing shop before the publisher himself informed the police. We immediately distributed the English and the Turkish versions of this historic document. Funny enough about a month or a month and a half ago, I received a letter from the prosecutor's office, saying that you can get the document from the impounding or the confiscation office. This was in 1999, now we are in 2006. Seven years has passed to legalize Kurdish. It is no more a legal problem publishing in Kurdish. This is indication of our accomplishment. But at time of the confiscation, we were again summoned to the State Security Court, process that ended in the suspension of TOSAV. A part of us left TOSAV to its legal fate and immediately organized TOSAM or the Centre for the Research of Societal Problems (Toplumsal Soruları Araştırma Merkezi). TOSAM was founded as an association. [79] EJTS: Is TOSAM going on now?

[80] DE: Look, you need creativity, you need vision as a NGO. When I went to the States to enjoy my fellowship award in September 2005, I told to my younger colleagues 'to study the currents in the world, see what is in fashion, what is being sponsored by international organizations' and so forth. I advised them to write and present projects and promised to help them in their endeavour. I believed that they would do so and get the necessary funds to carry on the projects they had put together. This did not happen. They have concluded what I left behind and depleted the funds on which the organization was running. Anyone familiar with project oriented civic organizations that each project starts in September and ends in June. For several years my younger colleagues at TOSAM had made a habit of lining up in front of my door to get a salary for July and August. For the sake of solidarity, I felt compelled to pay their salaries and all the other expenses of TOSAM out of my own pocket. The team started resembling government employees, expecting to get paid no matter what. So I told my comrades that I could not afford their sustenance and the organization's expenses if they did not put their creativity to work and find funding. It was to no avail. So we had to

close, we went bankrupt! Civic initiative needs commitment and creativity. We learned his lesson the hard way.

[81] EJTS: Could we say that the creations of TOSAV and TOSAM reflect the difficulties to work on 'sensitive' issues within Turkish academic field?

[82] DE: Yes, but we shifted our emphasis in TOSAM. TOSAV was the creation of a wish to get a mutual definition of the burning 'Kurdish problem', by both Turks and Kurds, and secondly searching for possible negotiated solutions. TOSAM shifted its emphasis into promoting democracy, democratic culture, and strengthening civil society. I am proud to say that we have realized many successful projects in that respect. While we made a taboo subject publicly debatable through TOSAV, we tried to promote culture of democracy, reconciliation, tolerance and so forth, and to build up the effectiveness of the civil society through TOSAM. One of the main projects that TOSAM participated in was a trans-Caucasian project bringing together Azeri, Armenian and Turkish NGOs in order to build trust, peace and stability in the Caucasus by way of cooperation among civil society organizations.

[83] EJTS: How do you look at the works of Turkish scholars on the Kurdish issue? If there was no research on the subject before yours in 1995, did your report have an impact on the Turkish academic field? More generally, how do you look at the works of these Turkish academics in the 1990's? Do you see any change, any evolution within academic circles?

[84] DE: Yes, more people felt that they could analyse the subject. But fieldwork is quite different. Fieldwork is almost non-existent. There are fieldworks but it's more cultural and anthropological than sociological and political. Fieldwork is limited to issues of women, fertility and so forth. But an overall political analysis in general is very scarce and it's not based on field research. It's more a learned analysis of things.

[85] EJTS: What about Kemal Kirişçi and Goreth Winrow's work (1997), published in 1997?

[86] DE: It is good work but their approach was from a legal point of view; I mean from the point of view of international law.

[87] EJTS: What about the work of Ismail Beşikçi?



[88] DE : He is the one who started all this. Unfortunately, Beşikçi was lost on the way. He was so severely abused and persecuted by the authorities that he lost his impartiality and became a party to the conflict. Few people could endure the harassment and decades long prison sentences. I do not blame him but we lost a courageous scientist along the way. So the academic world didn't take his work as impartial and scientific. However let us give the credit that it was him who drew our attention to the Kurdish issue; not as the Kurdish problem on the onset but then as the 'Eastern question'. But he was made to suffer so much that he lost his scientific position and became a defender of the Kurdish case. But I observed that he has recently distanced himself from his militant position into a more moderate one. This may be because he saw that the Kurds themselves, unfortunately, remained disunited and did not create the conditions of a peaceful solution but chose incessant fighting as a political position. So he may be equally disappointed with Kurdish militancy just as the Turkish establishment.

[89] EJTS: So according to you, who are the academic figures who did create a breakthrough in the question? Mesut Yeğen worked about the way different frames shape the saying of the Kurdish issue by the state. It affects the academic saying as well. So who are the academic actors working out of these frames and able to transform them?

[90] DE: The problem with this is that, such research, although very valuable does not make its way to public knowledge and discourse. It remains an academic endeavour. There is nothing wrong with this of course. But one wishes that it reaches to wider media and shapes creative policies. I know Mesut Yeğen in person and his work. He has analysed this deviation of Kurdish identity into 'otherness', by way of association with negative symbols like linking Kurdishness with Armenian ancestry. For example, Abdullah Öcalan has often been called the

'Armenian sperm'. Unfortunately, what determines what is important or not is not in academic criteria in this country. It's the press who carries the officially 'suitable' or appropriate view or values to public attention. If it doesn't, no one really knows about it, except a handful of academics people. That's the trouble in Turkey; the best of academic work either remains obscure or debased, without revealing its contents and consumed for political ends.

[91] EJTS: So you are not so much hopeful about the evolution of political research within the academic circles?



[92] DE: No. There is no bridge between the academia and politics in Turkey.

[93] EJTS: Is academia itself changing?

[94] DE: How can I say no. Like everything else, the academia is also changing but not to the better. This is an institutional statement. On the other hand there are very important private contributions. However, they are individual cases. That is why research has shifted to the NGO sector. Think tanks like TESEV is doing what the universities should be doing. That is a pity but universities have on the whole become extended lyceums.

[95] Ironically, faculty deans receive an official document with a secret stamp on it, asking for research results pertaining to the 'eastern question'. What a farce! If you do independent things, they won't allow you. They don't support you economically and what they want is information from you. What they want is to legitimise ongoing policies, legitimising ongoing policies meaning prolongation of military methods. So they don't want anything novel from you, only endorsement of what the establishment is doing, and doing wrong.

[96] EJTS: There is this interesting research program in Boğazici, working on the transformation of conflict in Southeast. And I think the university endorses this, I don't know exactly to which extent but...

[97] DE: Very good. All that I can say is lots of success. Congratulations for those who have started and are running the program.

[98] EJTS: Let's come to the last survey. Why this new survey and why in 2005/06?

[99] DE: Well this was important because Turkey had embarked on this long and arduous journey of EU membership. Turkey will change so much in such a short time that –of course provided that it stays the course and does not lose its resolve- we have to make sure that we have the necessary values to undergo such a drastic transformation. The Southeast is still a problematic region of Turkey. It is more traditional, less developed, poorer and less stable than the rest of the country. I wanted to find out whether the East would be able to go along with this fundamental challenge to change and to democratise or retard or even abort the process. It would also be nice to see the continuity between the 1995 and the 2005 reports, after a 10 year interval. Finding out what has changed in the East would be very enlightening. And, to my joy, I would say that the East is

capable of supporting the expected democratic transformation of Turkey, provided that the potential it holds is utilized by the establishment.

[100] EJTS: Could you detail some more the criteria along which you selected the provinces in the Southeast and in the West?

[101] DE: We selected the towns we did because they are representative centres of the Kurdish community and culture in their respective region. Furthermore, they had been problem areas once upon a time while they are much more stable now. To find out what has changed was very important. I must admit some of our choices are somewhat subjective. For example, choosing Siirt over Muş is a case in point. What I can say is that our chosen sites have been problem areas, heavy clashes had taken place there while there is tranquillity now. Why? That question had to be answered. Secondly, accessibility was an important criterion. If you have limited time to travel there must be an airport either in that town or in the next place so that you can travel by car to the next place without too much difficulty.

[102] EJTS: What about the western provinces?

[103] DE: This was more deliberate in terms of our choice. Thrace had a different population texture, let's say, because mostly migrants from the Balkans mainly populated it. In the Aegean region, Aydın possesses all the qualities of the region both economically and demographically. It is in the middle of the Aegean region. And why Salihli was chosen in the province of Aydın is because the size of its population resembles the towns in eastern Anatolia, except Diyarbakır.[104] EJTS: In 1994-1995 the selection of western provinces was based on the presence of Kurdish migrants there...

[105] DE: Yes, Adana, Mersin and Antalya all had received heavy doses of Kurdish migration. And they were close to the region of origin of the migrants.

[106] EJTS: So this time the principle is completely different, isn't it?

[107] DE: Yes.

[108] EJTS: You announced two axes organizing more generally the survey : traditionalism and religiousness on the one hand, the openness to democracy on the other. Was the religious variable present in the 1994-5 survey?

[109] DE: Well, I asked questions about religion then too. I wanted to know how important religion was for the Kurds. And religion proved to be of little importance to them then. Kurdishness was much more important in defining their identity. In the 2005 research, religion seems to play a more important role in their self-perception. But the majority still does not want a regime based on religious principles.

[110] EJTS: How did you come to these two main axes and articulate them?

[111] DE: In fact my concern was to see whether traditionalism would inhibit democratic inclinations or not but it didn't. Traditionalism is a fact of life there. They are trapped in a traditional society.

[112] If a woman her free will, let us say sexually, they will kill her. Their family elders kill even forcefully defiled girls. But then when you ask whether they would vote for a woman, they say they would. It is pretty obvious that tradition is the prison that they are living in, that they are born into. But then, in principle, or down in their hearts they seem to accept equality with woman. But they cannot allow equality with woman in their present life. Have you been reading the papers recently? There is a girl who just got married. But before that, her elder sister's husband raped her. She got pregnant. The family had her abortion and had her virginity repaired. Later, they got her married. Her husband returned her back to her family saying that she's not a virgin. And the family acted in such a hypocritical way that they had their son, the girl's brother, kill her because their honour was tarnished. They knew that it was her sister's husband; they had her an abortion and so forth. But group/community pressure was overwhelm they bowed to tradition and killed their own daughter/sister. This is hypocrisy but also clash of values of a modern and non-modern world. They wanted to avoid the problem in a very expedient way by adopting modern ways (virginity operation, not disowning a dishonoured girl and trying to provide a respectable social status to her through marriage) but it didn't work out. So they did what the tradition expected of them : cleansed their family honour with blood and killed the poor girl. This unfortunate event is a good proof of how these people are trapped in a traditional culture that victimizes its members. For when asked they say they have no objection for a woman to be a judge or Member of Parliament. They would even vote for a woman for Presidency. It's incredible. So values and practices seem to be two different things. The contradiction we found out is indicative of the wish to break out of this prison of traditions. This is wonderful.

[113] EJTS: A well-known difficulty of conducting such survey is linked to the imposition of the researcher's perspective and categories on the interviewees, who in turn affect the interview situation, to some extent pre-empt the expectations of the interviewer and answer consequently. While answering questions about democracy, dictatorship and women rights for example, where do you think interviewees were drawing their categories from?

[114] DE: We were providing the categories, not the interviewers. We had pre-prepared interview sheets that were economical in terms of the number of questions, bearing variables that were inter-connected.

[115] EJTS: Isn't it kind of imposition?

[116] DE: Why? Every research instrument (interview sheet) has a certain logic because it has the aim of unearthing particular attitudes and values. Ours was no different. Secondly, members of our sample groups had the option not to answer. Furthermore, interviewees could ask reciprocal questions to the researchers and could get satisfying answers pertaining to the interview queries. In that sense, the interviewees felt quite free in attributing their own meaning to the questions.

[117] EJTS: Then, how can you compare answers of people having different things in mind?

[118] DE: No research result reveals standard answers. This is against the aim of field research. Answers could be very different from each other and they should be. Only then we can find out about the variance of opinion and inclination. Variance also shows that there was no feeling of imposition by the interviewees.

[119] EJTS: Could your interviewees, looking at the survey's categories, have been answering in conformity with what they suppose to be 'western-minded', 'modern' positions?

[120] DE: No. When you asked them whether 'this world' (life) or the 'other world' (heavens) is important, the answers were very close to each other. The other world is also important for them, other world meaning after-life. So here you could see their sincerity in choosing a traditional value. They are not trying to be modern because we were questioning whether modern or not. We never gave them this impression. They didn't know what they were questioned for anyway. So they were not directed into saying something other than they felt or thought; not at all.

[121] EJTS: Were they answering considering the national scale, the regional scale (the 'Southeast') or something very local, linked to their everyday experience?

[122] DE: We said that we were from the Ankara University and conducting a survey on democracy. We also said names were not involved and they could refuse to answer any or all the questions. So this was a voluntary undertaking. Many people thanked the visiting interviewers for asking these important questions and expressed their pleasure for choosing them to participate. Those who rejected altogether were very few. They were in their homes and felt comfortable in general. They had the impression that this was a local endeavour, at best regional. Interviewers were home boys and girls. Most people have never been asked such questions; they felt important and being a part of something bigger than themselves. They are very happy to be taken seriously, that their opinion was sought after. That is why they did not hesitate answering even the most sensitive questions like, 'Would you endorse suicide bombing?' None of them said, 'We don't want to answer this'. They felt at ease with the questions and the whole research effort that called on them.

[123] EJTS: You said that the survey showed a great variety of answers. Would you use this in order to highlight the differences that exist between the provinces and within the provinces themselves, between different categories of people?

[124] DE: Yes, but that variety did not point to a contradiction between opinions.. There were clear inclinations, and the variances did not obfuscate those clear and common inclinations. So we could say that the East could be economically backward, more traditional, more pious or more religious, age wise younger and so forth. But in terms of political values and political inclinations, they did not differ much from the West. This is very important you know. I was amazed myself. I did not expect that. The findings made me very hopeful for the future of Turkey.

[125] EJTS: Did the survey show some specific articulations between the local political scene and local political attitudes, and the national ones?

[126] DE: We didn't ask any question related to that.

[127] EJTS: But you asked questions about the participation to local and national elections and the trust they have in public institutions.

[128] DE: Yes. But we surmised that in the East, there is more trust to elected officials. But this trust couldn't be directed to the central government because in other answers, they made it clear that they don't trust the government much. But they trust the elected officials; it must be the local ones, i.e. the mayors. But we did not ask any particular question to find out the difference of importance attributed to local elections and national elections.

[129] EJTS: What is your next research project?

[130] DE: Nothing immediate. I have done my share with pleasure in this matter. No one asked me to do what I did so far. It was all my own choice driven by civic responsibility and sense of academic duty. Of course I will not abandon the subject altogether. I will follow developments, make and share my assessments. But to conduct a research of this scale on the field is very hard. It requires funds, organization and support from local people and the central authority alike. I don't think that I'd be able to do anything like this in the absence of this happy combination. But I will be definitely visiting the area, making observations and will write about my findings. But to conduct a research project like this requires putting so many things together and I could do it twice in ten years. Being brandished rather than hailed for your efforts is another setback for researchers. Few people who owe nothing to anyone can take on the challenge and the burden it brings along. Yet, I will go on for seeking solutions to the 'Kurdish problem'. After all, this is our major headache and, without eradicating it, we cannot use our head to solve other problems. For example now there is a group called the *Barış Grubu*, the Peace group. They have met in different towns seeking reconciliation and peaceful means to solve the problem. I attended their two conferences in Ankara and shared my views. They have good intentions but they do not have a clear agenda yet. In the two meetings I took part I said, 'first of all you have to be clear about what you want to accomplish. Secondly you have to dissociate yourself from the PKK'. At times some of the participants are acting as if they are the spokesmen of this organization. I'm also talking with Leyla Zana and Orhan Doğan, occasionally and sending messages to their entourage concerning non violent ways of conflict resolution and confidence building. In short, a research of this magnitude is very hard to do. I do not know whether I'll be able to do such a thing in the near future but my interest in the problem, which is a Turkish problem, Turkey's problem, will of course go on.

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To quote a passage, use paragraph (§)

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[131] EJTS: You told about the *Bariř Grubu*, Leyla Zana and so forth; are they more receptive to the research results?

[132] DE: I proposed DEP once upon a time to do the research that I did for TOBB. They went and asked the Big Brother. And the Big Brother said 'no'. Today they are more interested but do not know how to utilize the findings except waiting for the 'Big Brother' to tell them what to do.

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