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A YOUNG PROFESSOR WITH BIG IDEAS

The folklore is called "Halk Bilimi" in Turkey, "the science of people"... And Sedat Örnek, who is a professor of this science at the University of Ankara, has explored this sphere with passion. He is making researches, undertaken by him for the first time in Turkey.

He has analyzed the inhabitants of this country, through what he meets: The three big events of Life: birth, marriage and death. In the East, in the West, in the North and in the South of a country stretched out like Turkey, these traditions don't change, nor the behaviour of the society towards them. From these traditions springs a more solid psychology than from even the human skeletons, stretched out or crouched, which are discovered during the archeological excavations and which also make it possible to reach to the bottom of the inhabitant of this country.

We shall translate a passage from one of his works, concerning the present traditions as to death... The most poignant passage according to us is "The Mourning". Poignant, yes, because it reveals many things.

But let us give him the word:

(He is from Sivas, in the East of Anatolia. He was born in a small village, Zara).

— I was born in a small poor village of Sivas in 1929. The Kızılırmak flows through it. It was the only diversion

of our childhood, this river. Far from the sea, we were able to learn how to swim.

In spring the river was overflowing. The inundation did not frighten us. We were used to the waters of this river. Today at Zara, it is only a small trickle of water due to alluvium.

He is kind of sad about this... decadence of this tempestuous ancestor.

— My father had a coffee-shop. It was a modest business. When I went for studies to Sivas... Zara seemed to be at the end of the world. I threw leaves into the river, hoping that the stream would bring them to Zara and that my mother would collect them.

He seemed ill at ease... how we are modest in our nice feelings!...

— Life at that time was very monotonous in Zara. We waited for the spring in order to live out in the open air.

My paternal grandmother was considered as some kind of a clairvoyant by the people. She always had stories to tell, to which we listened open-mouthed. She even remembered dreams she had had while being a young girl.

Everything was arid around us. Her words reawakened in me the nostalgia for greenery.

Zara lived on business, breeding of cattle and above all produced... drivers.

SIVAS FROM A SERIOUS ASPECT

Yes, serious.. even the Seljuk monuments there have difficulties in breathing wedged as they are between the shops. But Sivas has given the best errant poets to the country! Perhaps because of the long winters, when the soul, turning inwards, finds nourishment in its own richness.

Sivas has its wheat and its poets!...

I was impressed... They had electricity day and night. At Zara, no! It was quite a different life. I was there during my secondary school.

At high-school I could take advantage of the library of the People's House. I read Dostoyevsky. I cannot say that I understood a lot at that time... but it was like poison, which I haven't been able to get out of my brain since then... no, I haven't been able to get rid of it.

There were performances at school. At that time I wrote my first comedy. The subject? The villager, who, when in town feels out of place.

How can a provincial newspaper have another name than Hakikat (truth)... and my first short story was published in that one: 'A handful of hair'... in the "Truth".

It was in 1948. I became night secretary of this newspaper.

The one who opened the large horizons, not only to me but to many young people in Sivas, was the great poet Fazıl Hüsni Dağlıca. We devoured his poems. He was astonished to learn that he was that popular in Sivas. He was a captain in the army. I will never forget this young captain, who with one hand on the flank of his horse, was giving orders.

"This great poet has quit the army. "Because", he said, "I have two great loves, the army and the poetry. Two great loves cannot live together in one single heart!"

He uncovered for us a world, which we never would have been able to discover without him. Not far from the garrison there were five poplars. He closed his eyes and told us that each of them had their own music in the wind. He could tell without looking, which one of them was moving more. I have revised and corrected Sivas in my head, through the eyes of this poet.

He is a citizen of honour of Sivas. He is the only one upon whom my "country" has bestowed this honour.

In Ankara... I entered the faculty of religious science. It wasn't a choice. There I would be able to get a scholarship. A hundred competitors showed up. Fifteen of them gained entrance. I was the third one amongst these fifteen.

What taught me most about life and men was the time I spent in Korea. I went there when the cease-fire was already in force. This war could break out again any

moment. We were waiting, tensely. The quarrels started from this tension, all the time.

Already on the ship, we had entered a new world.

The ship was so big, that it had taken us three days to explore it. Everything was according to detailed rules made in advance, even down to the menu.

Our people were grateful for the smallest thing. I went to the doctor, a character, who later could have given his life for me. It was very hot where we stayed. At the doctor's it was cool and nice. Young men in white, like young deities, examined me. Later, he several times proved this friendship, though this wasn't supposed to be proper between an officer and a simple soldier.

There was also another one, Çiko Ataş, from Malatya, whom I wanted to teach how to read and write. He never wanted to go farther than to A and B, but he was always the first one to apply for the fatigue party. Neither will I forget him.

I stayed in Korea during one and a half year. There the rains were unending. We were waiting for our return. I wrote a play down there: "At the foot of the ramparts".

Later I wrote a play, taken from a story I had heard



I came back from Korea, in order to go to Germany, after a stay of six months in my country.

I studied ethnology and religion in Thüringen...

After having returned I entered the faculty of Letters, where I have been a professor since 1972.

... since 1972.

PROFESSOR OF FOLKLORE

At that time I translated a play by Brozek "The Policemen", which wasn't any success.

The story passed in an imaginary country... however, it wasn't that imaginary...

You have asked me to talk about the important characteristics of the Anatolian... They spring from three manifestations in life, about which I speak in my works: Birth, Marriage and Death.

A lot of traditions have accumulated thereupon and have formed the behaviour of the human beings.

My Students? I have started to make researches about my children just recently.

I study the factors which indicate the personality of the child before primary school.

I have very intelligent students, but victims of an education which leaves them fearful. The classic education in Turkey kills the curiosity and the spirit of initiative... It kills more, but much less.

I try to approach them. I try to stir them up. They are reserved. During the third year they will open up a little, like flowers. The following year, they leave!...

AT VAN

Two years ago my wife and I went to Van. A friendly couple always accompanied us. They are doctors. All doors in Anatolia are open to doctors.

In the most backwards places, my wife and her friend had the same thought: Here they consider us as human beings, not only as females.

My wife helps me a lot. Her branch? History of Art. She has a passion for it. In Siirt the people are beautiful and unbelievably slim. In Bitlis... the hospitality is mixed with honey and with a special kebab from the region of "Buryan Kebabi"...

Istanbul... I have been frightened by the noise... I love İzmir. Do you know that the inhabitants of Van prefer to settle down in İzmir, in case they have to leave Van?... Perhaps it is because of the Aegean Sea, as blue as their big lake!...

I love the East... it is the solitude which is shared there, which shares everything with you. It is the hospitality itself. It is the power of tradition. Even death reconcile people. The neighbours are precious. They take care of you. You could live with your pain, when you suffer.

The people live, so to speak, interlaced. Perhaps the ego is shrinking.

In the fight for life, this doesn't give too good results

The distrust, the insecurity could dominate the child's psychology.

In my last work I take the child at the threshold of the uterine life. I study the human material available at school and which tries to adopt itself to the social life... And this child, so obedient and docile, can one day wake up to the desire to dethrone his father brutally, completely in power.

... I know that our father loved us... but he never showed his tenderness.

The course of life of the children from the lost corners of Anatolia doesn't perhaps start with the same conditions as of the children in the big cities... those latter ones perhaps have all the advantages... but the others have an incredible sensibility and intuition!

People have golden expressions, thanks to which we can get to know them:

"Death, oh death, which destroys,
which wanders from house to house,
which says Fie! to all established rules."

This conversation has left a glow in us. Death, this last manifestation of life, throws into relief the Anatolian character, which the traditions have chiseled. In order to help you in getting to know it, we introduce a translation of a chapter called "Mourning" from Sedat Örneş's book. You can draw your own conclusions from it.

THE MOURNING BY SEDAT VEYİS ÖRNEŞ

Reaction towards the loss of someone, who is dear and close to us through social, economic, biologic and sentimental bonds. Nothing more human altogether.

Mourning rests on the irreparable, on the impotence to put things back into place. It's the expression of a grief which is expressed in public, under a ritual etiquette.

The traditions, the behaviour which is connected hereto, the abstentions which are involved, have the purpose to adapt people to their new condition and to alleviate the pain little by little.

In all primary and refined societies these traditions are followed.

With certain variations in its form and according to regions, but which don't change with regard to their ethymologic sources, Anatolia keeps this tradition alive.

FACTORS DECIDING THE PERIOD OF MOURNING

In Anatolia, to be correct, this period is not fixed and ranges between three days up to one year or more, with periods of one week, one month, forty days, six months in between...

Generally it is forty days... a prophetic and religious number — like after recovery from an illness, like for the child after its birth, purification period of some kind.

People have been able to be either very strict or very easy-going on this subject. The psychological, economic, religious, traditional and social factors have had their say.

"This period has always varied and depends on the following:

1. How closely related the person was
2. The sex of the deceased
3. His Personality
4. His social position
5. His surroundings
6. The affection he was shown
7. The cause of death
8. The number of people who have paid their condolences.

Sometimes the religious holidays decide the period of mourning.

Women are usually in mourning for a longer time than men. A human being who lives more than a man with her feelings, the woman is more attached to her house and lives more on memories. She receives those who come to offer their condolences. She enjoys a social personality through procuration, you could say. Her husband is her economical support. The loss of him creates a big painful emptiness around her, while for the man, more extrospective, it is not the same. Moreover, his economical responsibilities don't permit him to indulge in his grief.

RULES

The members of the family in mourning avoid gaudy dresses and ornaments. They don't take part in feasts. They don't play music. They stay at home. They don't go to work. They do not wash themselves. They don't shave.

Engagements, marriages, circumcisions are postponed to a later date, or take place with the most possible discretion.

Relatives and neighbours share your grief through their behaviour, because death disturbs the balance of a whole community for some time.

Clothing and other demonstrations of mourning

The colour of mourning is black in Anatolia and seldom white. People are wearing their clothes inside out.

At Yemençay village near Kars (Eastern Turkey) the clothes are worn inside out during 52 days. Moreover, the women wear black veils. At Doğan, a village of Erzurum, the women refrain from washing their clothes during one month.

In other villages, the women cut their hair. In others, they shave their head. In other regions it is only one side of the head that undergoes this tonsure.

Around Erzurum a woman in mourning gives vent to her grief through this complaint:

"I have plaited black
I have plaited white
Shed my hair for you."



For man it's not a question of mourning clothes, but he avoids taking care too much of his clothes and he doesn't shave.

THE END OF MOURNING

"Lifting" of the mourning is a Turkish expression which means to break the period of mourning.

This return to normal life takes place by following certain customs and practices.

After the first religious holiday (Bayram) which follows the mourning, the period ends.

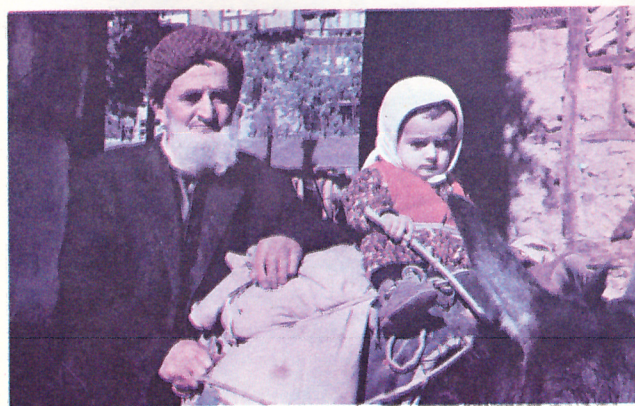
In certain regions only one holiday isn't enough. They break the mourning period after several religious feasts following each other.

Feast of sorrow, feast of mourning, feast of grief, black feast; the religious feast takes its name according to region.

At these Bayrams, the elder ones take care of the house. It is them people are visiting in order to renew their condolences and they offer the visitors cigarettes

and coffee without sugar, instead of the usual sweets.

They break their habits of mourning. The women don't wear their clothes turned inside out anymore. Their black veil is replaced by a white one. The men shave.



Like that, the period of mourning ends.

The relatives and the whole village go back to their usual daily life.

The engaged young people, receive new dresses from their future parents-in-law. The black clothes are changed to coloured ones. Then comes the visit to the Hamam (Turkish bath), post-mourning. The water cleans, the water purifies.

The neighbours conduct the members of the family in mourning to the Hamam. They invite everyone who has brought food during the difficult moments. They invite them for a meal at the Hamam.

The time for this bath varies according to regions. In certain places, it takes place ten days after the death, in others after forty. But this ceremony takes place all over Anatolia.

They cry before entering the Hamam, they cry inside the Hamam. In certain regions they sing complaints. Even the crying is according to protocol.

Everyone in Anatolia believe that death is announcing its arrival by certain signs. The imagination doesn't delimit the border between illusion and reality.

Appearance of certain animals, dreams, changes in the condition of ill people, astronomic, cosmic and meteorologic phenomenons are interpreted. They pour water and food in order to prolong the coming of death

to the house. They awaken the ones who are sleeping when the coffin passes. They return the pots in which the water for the last washing of the dead one has been boiled. They put out the fire.

Certain beliefs mean that death is contagious.

Nobody believes that the corpse is still sensitive to what is happening around it. They are frightened by it.

During the procession, a bough is carried in front of the coffin.

The objects belonging to the dead one, are either burnt, consigned to the attic, or handed out to the poor.

The most important days are the 40th and the 52nd day after the death.

All these practices contributes to a tightening of the solidarity. Besides, the real reasons for these rites are the following:

1. To facilitate the passing from one life to the other of the dead person.
2. To attempt to give peace little by little to the souls upset by grief.
3. To let people give vent to their grief and to recover from the loss.

What can be concluded mostly from these still living traditions, is the boundless fraternity between the members of an Anatolian community.

