

**GENDERING TRADE UNIONS: WOMEN IN TEKSTIL, 1965-1980**

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## Abstract

Based on archival research, other primary material, and the existing secondary literature this thesis aims to narrate the history of women organized in one of the left-wing trade unions in the 1960s and 1970s, *Tekstil Iscileri Sendikası*, (The Trade Union of Textile Workers, Tekstil) in Turkey. Beginning from the foundation of Tekstil in 1965 until the military coup in September 12, 1980, the main focus throughout the text consists of women's labor history in Turkey by holding a double focus; on the one hand it presents the organizational history of Tekstil, as the structure and politics of the union had a huge impact on women's union participation, on the other hand it focuses on female rank-and-file workers' activism by examining the journal of the union, *Tekstil*.

Initially, my argument is that beginning from 1975, due to a number of reasons, Tekstil transformed its gender politics and adopted a discourse in which several "woman's issues" were recognized. Employing the journal of the union *Tekstil* as a primary source, my work aims to explain this transformation and locates it within a broader context of women's and labor history in Turkey. Secondly, by focusing on rank-and-file level, the women's participation in Tekstil's activities is discussed and the significant role women played in the development of the union's politics is revealed.

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## List of Abbreviations

CHP	People's Republican Party ( <i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i> )
DISK	Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions ( <i>Devrimci Isci Sendilari Konfederasyonu</i> )
DKB	Democratic Women's Association ( <i>Demokratik Kadınlar Birliği</i> )
DP	Democrat Party ( <i>Demokrat Parti</i> )
ICF	International Federation of Chemical and General Workers' Union
IISB	Federation of Istanbul Labor Unions ( <i>Istanbul Isci Sendikaları Birliği</i> )
IKD	Progressive Women's Association ( <i>Ilerici Kadınlar Derneği</i> )
Metal-Is	Trade Union of Metal Workers ( <i>Metal Isçileri Sendikası</i> )
PAP	Above Party Politics ( <i>Partiler Ustu Politika</i> )
Tekstil	Trade Union of Textile Workers ( <i>Tekstil Isçileri Sendikası</i> )
Teksif	Textile, Knitting, and Clothing Workers' Union of Turkey ( <i>Türkiye Tekstil, Orme ve Giyim Sanayi Isçileri Sendikası</i> )
TIP	Worker's Party of Turkey ( <i>Türkiye Isci Partisi</i> )
TKP	Communist Party of Turkey ( <i>Türkiye Komünist Partisi</i> )
TSIP	Socialist Worker's Party of Turkey ( <i>Türkiye Sosyalist Isci Partisi</i> )
Türk-Is	Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions ( <i>Türk Isci Sendikaları Konfederasyonu</i> )
TUSTAV	Turkish Social History Research Foundation ( <i>Türkiye Sosyal Tarih Arastırma Vakfı</i> )

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## 1. Introduction

In her influential article, prominent historian Alice Kessler-Harris criticized the "superficial" question, frequently asked by male unionists and historians, "Why don't women organize?" and, rather offered to focus on the question "Where are the organized women workers?" which had been asked by the economist and labor activist Theresa Wolfson already in 1925. Changing the question, according to Kessler-Harris, would help us to understand the mechanisms which enabled women's participation in trade unions or, those effectively excluded them (1975, p. 94). The question has received many responses since then, from different parts of the world. In this thesis, I aim to provide an answer to this question by revealing women's labor activism beginning from the second half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s in Turkey.

I reveal women's presence, as well as their contributions, challenges, and conflicts within the labor institutions of Turkey, by looking at the history of *Tekstil Isçileri Sendikası* (the Textile Workers' Union, Tekstil)<sup>1</sup> from its founding in 1965 until its shutting down right after the military coup in September 12, 1980. By examining the gender politics of the trade union first, and the women's labor activism latter, I would like to contribute to overcome the double-marginalization of unionist women in academic literature and political discourse. The double-marginalization of unionist women refers to working-class women's marginalization by labor historians on the one hand, and by the women's and gender historians on the other. Until the 1980s, the literature concerning labor history took the working-class as the center of analysis and looked at it through a masculinist lens and thus, largely overlooked gender, if it

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<sup>1</sup> The Textile Workers' Union was founded in 1965 with the name of Tekstil. Until 1975, it was an independent trade union. In 1975, it joined *Devrimci İsci Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* (the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, DISK). After 1975, in the official documents and journal, Tekstil started to use the name DISK Tekstil. Yet, it is still largely known as Tekstil, so in this thesis, I will also use the name Tekstil to refer to the union.

did not ignore it completely. On the other hand, the literature concerning women's movements and activism marginalized working-class and unionist women's activism, especially due to their involvement in mixed-sex organizations and their alleged refusal to duly pay attention to feminist concerns. By taking this gap in the literature as a departure point, I argue that it is necessary to approach women's labor activism by focusing on class and gender concurrently.

I believe that such an approach will help go beyond the recent discussions about trade unions' patriarchal structures and women's underrepresentation within these institutions. Rather it will help us to answer the question: Did women workers also organize in trade unions in the 1970s, while labor movements were stronger than ever? And if so, why and how did they do that? These questions were the starting points of my research.

In order to understand women workers' activism in this period, I decided to focus on the history of Tekstil. Women workers shared a considerable amount of positions in the textile industry with men. For example, as of 1971 more than 40 percent of the textile industry was populated by women workers, in Istanbul (TIB, 1976, p. 129). Moreover, women workers in textile industry constituted a considerable segment of all female employment in Turkey. For instance, as of 1980, more than 50 percent of all female employment in manufacturing industry was employed in the textile sector (Ecevit, 2005, p. 57). Therefore, I found the textile workers' union as a good place to look for women's activism.

In this thesis, I aim to answer two research questions. First, I would like to understand the ways in which the trade union's political agenda and activism were shaped through the interplay of gender and class politics. In other words, I am interested in revealing the policies of the union concerning, explicitly or implicitly, women's work. To understand the ways in which Tekstil addressed these issues, it is crucial to understand the gender perspective of the trade union and to see how gender politics intervened and shaped working-class



politics. Second, I aim to examine the ways in which female rank-and-file workers pursued union activism in leadership structures and beyond. In other words, I am interested in revealing how unionist women struggled for their economic rights, considering the gender as well as class relations on a variety of levels. I believe that answering these two questions is critical to understand the union's gender politics and to reveal women's activism.

### 1.1. Sources and Method

Unfortunately, except an unpublished master thesis *Sendikalarda Kadın: DISK TEKSTİL İscileri Sendikası Örneği* (Women in Trade Unions: The Case of DISK TEKSTİL) which focuses on the current gender politics and women's representation in the union (Yildiz, 2007), there is not any published research about Tekstil. However, actually there is a substantial amount of primary sources which would allow researchers to study many different aspects of Tekstil's history.

*Türkiye Sosyal Tarih Araştırma Vakfı* (Turkish Social History Research Foundation, TUSTAV) has had a major contribution when it comes to preserving archives. Founded in 1992, TUSTAV devoted itself to collect primary materials that would help to do research on leftist, socialist, and labor history of Turkey. In 2005, with a protocol signed between DISK and TUSTAV, the usage right of the archives from DISK and its affiliated unions were transferred to TUSTAV. In 2007, the 40th year of DISK's foundation, The Archive Fund of TUSTAV DISK was classified and opened to the researchers.<sup>2</sup> I conducted a considerable part of my research in TUSTAV, examining many different types of documents, between 1965 and 1980, from The Archive Fund of TEKSTİL.

The materials included decision books of the local branches, letters from workers to the Tekstil Head Office, fliers distributed in the factories by different cliques in the union,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://tustav.com/about-tustav/> Last Access: May 20, 2016.

testimonies of workers within the scope of investigation launched against unionists affiliated with Tekstil, after the September 12, 1980 military coup. In that respect, I have examined the decision books of some of the branches of Tekstil to see women's impact on the decision mechanisms, and to search for the reflections of gender relations in these processes. The records of statement belonging to the women members of Tekstil in court-martials have been another important primary source for my project. Although the statements were given in highly oppressive conditions, so they might not exactly reflect women's real ideas and feelings about the union, they still provide profound sources in the sense that they show women's active engagement in labor politics.

A lot of printed materials of Tekstil are missing from TUSTAV archives, due to the fact that they were impounded as evidence by court-martials in the 1980 military coup and have never returned to the union. For instance, not even one issue of the regularly published journal of the union, *Tekstil*, is present among the materials.

For my research, I examined *Tekstil's* issues published between 1969 and 1979, and they constituted a significant part of my research.<sup>3</sup> *Tekstil* was published from 1969 to 1980. From 1969 to April 1971 it was published as a biweekly journal with four or five pages. From April 1971 to November 1971 *Tekstil* could not be published due to the hostile political environment of the March 12, 1971 military coup that I will touch upon in the third chapter. After eight months, *Tekstil* re-started to appear, but this time as a monthly journal and having more than twenty pages. Addressed to rank-and-file textile workers and distributed for free, *Tekstil* aimed to inform its readers about a variety of topics, including but not limited to, news from factories, the achievements of collective agreements, workers' strikes, and up-to-date political issues in Turkey. Moreover, the journal was considered as an instrument to mobilize

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<sup>3</sup> The issues published in 1980 were missing in Istanbul Beyazıt State Library, as well.

workers and to promote union's policies. Through regular columns, such as Workers' Dictionary (Isci Sozlugu), Tekstil tried to raise workers' class consciousness and inform them about concepts like capitalism, social classes and working-class consciousness or the history of Labor Day and the achievements of the working class in other parts of the world. In this vein, the journal is a significant primary source to explore Tekstil's political agenda, as well as its perspective on the nature and structure of unionism.

Among primary sources I have used, there are also publications of DISK and Tekstil, such as a book published in 1976 by Tekstil Publications which includes the Code of Conduct of DISK and the Code of Conduct of Tekstil. I have also examined *Ana ve Emekci Olarak Isci Kadinin El Kitabı* (The Handbook of Women Workers as Mothers and Laborers) which was prepared by DISK, and *Ilerici Kadinlar Dernegi* (the Progressive Women's Association, IKD) published by DISK.

All of the sources I mentioned above were originally written in Turkish language and all of the translations have been made by me.

My project which focuses on a particular trade union organizing in a particular segment of the labor market will, necessarily, leave out many different factors and experiences that shaped the relationship between gender and class in that period. However, by focusing on the two questions given above, I believe that my project will make a contribution to the existing literature on women's and gender history and also, labor history in Turkey. By taking gender and class as equally important and complementary categories informing the research, I believe that it would be possible to shed light on important dimensions of the unwritten history of working-class women's lives in the 1960s and 1970s in a comprehensive way.

## 1.2. Structure of the Thesis

The period I examine in this thesis begins with the foundation of Tekstil in 1965 and its shutting down in 1980 while I also present a chronological overview of the labor movements and trade unions beginning from the late Ottoman period.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature concerning women's labor history, particularly in Turkey. First, I discuss some important aspects of the developments in labor history and women's labor history, focusing on the works of prominent feminist scholars, such as Joan W. Scott, Bettina Bradbury and Kathleen Canning. In the second part, I explore the more recent stage of women's labor history-writing, by discussing particular examples of working-class feminism from different contexts. In the third part of this chapter, first I begin with summarizing the existing literature on women's and gender history in Turkey, in order to see the potential reasons for the scarcity of research on women's labor history. Then, I explore the literature in general, to reveal what has been done in terms of the research juxtaposing gender and labor issues in Turkey.

Chapter 3 provides a chronological overview of the labor movements and trade unions in Turkey, beginning from the late Ottoman period, until the September 12, 1980 military coup, with a special focus on the role of women in organized labor and the development of woman's issues within the context of labor movements. The plenitude of the secondary sources was both a chance and a challenge for me. To handle this long period, I cover it in three different chronological time periods. In the first part, I focus on the late Ottoman period and early Turkish Republic, until the end of the single-party regime in Turkey.<sup>4</sup> In the second part, I examine the 1950s, starting with the electoral victory of *Demokrat Parti* (the Democrat

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<sup>4</sup> In Turkey, the single-party regime (1923-1946) came to an end when the newly established Democrat Party (DP) run for the elections and managed to win some seats in the Turkish parliament. Thus, the period between 1946-1950 is considered as the transition to multi-party period, which ends with the victory of the DP in the 1950 General Elections.

Party, DP) and ending with the 1960 military coup. In the final part, I cover the period from the early 1960s until the 1980 military coup by examining the context of woman's labor and the history of DISK and Tekstil in three separate subchapters. First, I discuss some general aspects of female industrial employment throughout the 1970s and then, I locate my findings regarding women in Tekstil in this particular context of female labor in Turkey. After briefly examining the context of woman's labor, I explore the history of DISK and Tekstil to provide a background for my primary focus, and to reveal the left-wing ideology of DISK and Tekstil.

Chapter 4 is devoted to find an answer to my first research question: What kind of gender politics did Tekstil pursue throughout the time, from its founding in 1965 until the military coup in 1980? For this purpose, I analyze the working-class politics and gender perspective of the union, based on the various materials that I mentioned earlier. After briefly examining the class politics of Tekstil in the first part, I analyze the gender politics of the union. First, I focus on Tekstil's gender perspective in the period before 1975 and argue that in this period gender issues were considered marginal and excluded from the union's political agenda. Mostly based on the news and articles published in the journal, *Tekstil*, I subdivide this part in four sections. "Women's Demands in the National and International Arena" focuses on the increasing impact and strength of "left feminism" in the world as well as in Turkey. "A New (Feminist) Agenda in Tekstil?" questions how a new agenda which was attentive to women's issues was adopted by union officials as a response to the developments concerning women that I mentioned in the previous part. To illustrate my argument concerning the adoption of a new agenda, in this part, I discuss childcare issue in detail, as it was a recurring theme in *Tekstil*. "Tekstil's Perspective on the 'Woman Question'", on the other hand, discusses the gender perspective of leftist and socialist groups throughout the 1970s and the ways in which Tekstil approached the "woman question". And the final part of

this chapter, titled "The Unaddressed Issues" focuses on, despite the new agenda of Tekstil, the issues remained unexplored by the union officials as well as unionist women.

Chapter 5, mostly based on primary sources, analyzes women's labor activism in Tekstil in two different levels. First, I focus on women's representation in executive positions in Tekstil, in order to assess female influence on Tekstil's politics. In order to do that, I discuss women's representation in central leadership, on the local level and on the factory level, respectively. In the second part, considering underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and following Cobble's argument that we should not limit female influence with their representation in leadership (Cobble, 2004, p. 25-26); I look for alternative strategies might be used by women workers in order to influence the union's policies.

In the conclusion I provide a comprehensive summary of my research and discuss the conclusions that I can reach based on my research. Moreover, I discuss further implications of my research for future historical research regarding women's labor history in Turkey.

## 2. A Historiographic Assessment: Women's History and Labor History

As I noted above, although there are many studies regarding the history of the trade union movements and specifically the role and impact of DISK in this period, the research has remained largely gender-blind.<sup>5</sup> In not only Turkey but also all around the world, class has been the major concern for trade unions for a long time. Historiography concerning trade unions has often pursued a similar approach by making class the center of analysis. Similar to that trend, in Turkey it seems like that labor historians do not have much interest in women's labor, feminist historians do not have an interest in labor, and those who have an interest in women's labor are not interested in its history (Balsoy, 2009, p. 53; Makal, 2010, p. 15). All in all, women's labor history remains a largely unexplored issue in Turkey.

At the same time, beginning from the 1970s, but specifically throughout the 1980s, feminist scholars internationally started to challenge labor history writing and proposed the need for a new historiography that would not exclude women subjects from the flow of history and question the concepts and frameworks which establish the very field of labor history (Bradbury, 1987; Canning, 1992; Kessler-Harris, 1975; Lerner, 1975; Scott, 1987). Therefore, in the next part, I will discuss some of these feminist scholars' critiques of labor history-writing.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, see Feroz Ahmad, "The Development of Working-Class Consciousness in Turkey". In Z. Lockamn (Ed.) *Workers and working classes in the Middle East: struggles, histories, historiographies* (pp. 133-163). Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994; Donald Quataert & Erik-Jan Zürcher (Eds.), *Workers and The Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, 1839-1950*, Tauris Academic Studies, London, 1995; Yildirim Koc, *Türkiye İsci Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Hareketi Tarihi* [The History of Working Class and Unionism Movements in Turkey], Kaynak Publications, Istanbul, 2003; Yildirim Akkaya, *Türkiye'de İsci Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık-1* [The Working Class and Unionism in Turkey-1], *Praksis*, 5, (2002). pp. 131-176.

In this chapter, I will first, explore some of the early scholarly works contributed to the field of women's labor history in order to connect the broader discussions about labor history and women's and gender history. Then I explore some examples from the U.S, and Latin America in which historians write working-class women's history by holding a double focus of class and gender. Finally, I provide an overview of the studies on women's history in order to reveal the absence of historical research on unionist women, specifically for the period between 1960-1980. Then, I scrutinize a wider literature from various disciplines to discuss the existing research that combines gender and labor issues.

## **2.1. Feminist Challenges to Labor History**

The invisibility of women in the labor historiography of Turkey is not specific to Turkish scholarship. Rather, it forms part of a tradition of history-writing which takes the narrowly conceived working-class as the center of analysis, and leaves out any other categories, like gender. Therefore, the historiography concerning trade unions was highly criticized and challenged by many feminist historians, who proposed the urgency for feminist historians to intervene that field, beginning from the 1970s. The timing of such feminist critiques of labor history was not a coincidence. Rather, it was, to a certain extent, related with the broader developments in labor history-writing in general.

Beginning from the 1960s, labor history remarkably transformed. Within this new transformation, one of the major concerns was re-writing the "history from the bottom up" as a partial result of the radicalization in the 1960s (Brody, p. 114). Another major improvement was the far-reaching impact of E.P Thompson's work *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) on labor history-writing and its new approach which prioritizing the experience, agency and working-class culture. Therefore, it is important to locate the emergence of women's labor history in such broad transformation of the field in general.



In 1975, Gerda Lerner categorized the trends in women's history writing in general and suggested that the first attempts to write women's history was in a "compensatory" nature such as writing the history of "notable women" to prove women's presence as well (p. 5). The next wave of women's history writing, according to Lerner, was "contribution history" which aimed to reveal "women's contribution to, their status in, and their oppression by male-defined society" (1975, p. 6). Regarding these trends, Ava Baron (1991) stated that "motivated by the invisibility of women in existing studies, women's labor historians documented women's presence in paid production and their significant contributions to labor movements" (Baron, 1991, p. 9). Some of the key texts in the field belong to prominent American historian Joan W. Scott who has had a major role in conceptualization of women's history, as well as women's labor history as an academic field. Joan W. Scott (1999)<sup>6</sup>, in her article "Women's History", categorized these initial approaches under what some feminists called "her-story". According to Scott, researches within this tradition focused on "the issue of women as a subject, that is an active agent of history" (1999, p.18). As I mentioned above, many feminist historians challenged the "old", as well as "new" forms of labor history, as the issues related to gender has mostly remained unchanged.

For instance, Scott's article "Women in The Making of the English Working Class" (1999)<sup>7</sup> was a heavy criticism of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Thompson's work has still been considered an influential text in labor history, as well as in social history. Scott claimed that Thompson's work, despite his intention to develop a new theoretical approach to labor history which takes workers and their experiences and agencies at the center of his analysis, carries a significant amount of Orthodoxy. This is, according to Scott, due to the idea that "the shared interests that constitutes class is somehow

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<sup>6</sup> Originally published in 1983.

<sup>7</sup> The article, first, was delivered at a meeting in 1983. Then, an expanded version of the paper was presented in 1986. Scott, 1999, p. 68.

immanent in productive relations" remained intact in Thompson's work (1999, p. 69-70).

Within this understanding, Scott criticized Thompson not because he was gender-blind, rather because he considered working class as a masculine identity. She stated that:

[*The Making of the English Working Class*] is preeminently a story about men, and class is, in its origin and its expression, constructed as a masculine identity, even when not all the actors are male. For, of course, there are women in *The Making of the English Working Class*. [...] Yet the organization of the story and the master codes that structure the narrative are gendered in such a way as to confirm rather than challenge the masculine representation of class. Despite their presence in the book, women are marginal in the book; they serve to underline and point up the overwhelming association of class with the politics of male workers. (Scott, 1999, p. 72)

Scott's criticism of Thompson reveals the ignorance of gender relations and the major role gender played in the formation of the working class has remained unexplored in Thompson's analyses. For instance, "work, in the sense of productive activity, determined class consciousness, whose politics was rationalist", stated Scott whereas, "domesticity was outside production, and it compromised or subverted class consciousness often in alliance with (religious) movements whose mode was 'expressive'. The antitheses were clearly coded as masculine and feminine; class in other words was a gendered construction" (Scott, 1999, p. 79). Furthermore, Scott suggested that of course; to add women as historical subjects to such narratives, to a certain extent, was important yet insufficient on its own; rather she proposed a careful and detailed questioning of the (supposedly natural) concepts and frameworks used in this field (1999, p. 89).

Published in 1987, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History", was another essay written by Scott. In this article, Scott directed her critiques to labor historians in general

and argued that labor historians took women into account only when they discussed the family life in working-class formation due to women's different "roles" in that structure. In this way she suggested, "Gender is equated with and hence reduced to a set of self-evident social categories (the roles played by women or men) and has no critical effect on the way labor history is conceived" (Scott, 1987, p. 2). Along the same lines, Bettina Bradbury, in her article "Women's History and Working-Class History" (1987), argued that within the tradition of labor historiography, working-class women had not been considered and examined in a way to reveal "women's behavior as workers". Rather, they were considered as part of a working-class whose definition was taken for granted by labor historians. Hence, she proposed that to reveal women's experiences as workers, it was crucial to transform the analytical and theoretical frameworks historians use (1987, p. 24). In this respect, Bradbury echoed Scott who highlighted the importance of re-examining the concepts which construct the field.

All in all, both Scott and Bradbury by examining and criticizing the ways in which labor historiography had constructed the working class and its experiences, they argued that the new research on women's labor history should go beyond the "add women and stir " approach and re-question and re-examine the concepts, categories and frameworks via which the working class and labor history in general were constructed. In that vein, women's labor historians proposed the incorporation of gender into the framework of labor history. However, beginning from the end of the 1980s, the interest in labor history drastically decreased due to a number of reasons. According to Eley and Nield, the major structural transformations in the class composition during the period between 1970 and 1990 led to the loss of political attraction of class-based analyses (2000, p. 2) Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union and overall decline of class-based politics resulted in the "crisis of class" in social theory. Related with these developments, the field of labor experienced a drastic decline (Akin, 2005,

p. 74). In this picture, women's labor history remained as a newborn and, largely isolated field. In 1993, regarding the cultural turn appeared in "the historiography of the late 1960s and 1970s", Kessler-Harris stated that:

It did have the enormous advantage of making room for women largely by paying attention to their roles in the household and community and by asserting the relationship of domestic values to the workplace. But the relationship of these domestic values to issues of class and power have never received the attention they deserve. The role that gender plays in the construction of the ideational and normative framework of working people remains obscure. (1993, p. 193)

With these sentences, Kessler-Harris was expressing her disappointment about the failure of incorporating gender as a category of analysis in labor history. All in all, the feminist critique of the labor historiography and the first attempts to add women in such narratives through several ways can be considered as the first stage of the development in women's labor history. The second stage of this development, on the other hand, has been achieved more recently and it did not only reveal women's roles or contributions within labor history, but it did also show that this particular activism of women stemmed from the desire to defend their economic rights constituted a significant aspect of feminist movement. Thus, the history of "working-class feminism" or what Cobble calls "labor feminism" has, in this sense, provided important contributions to labor as well as women's and gender history. I will focus on some examples of this more recent approach below.

## **2.2. Writing Women's Labor History: Working-Class Feminism**

American historian Dorothy Sue Cobble is one of the key scholars of labor women's activism who manage to found a theoretical ground which takes both gender and class to the center of analysis. Cobble, in her highly influential book, *The other women's*

*movement: Workplace justice and social rights in modern America* (2004) provides a brand new perspective regarding women's and labor history. Her research is, what Eileen Boris called, "precisely one of those paradigm-challenging works that invite reflection on the political, historical, and theoretical assumptions we bring to the construction of history" (2004, p. 43). In her research, Cobble reveals that labor women's effective activism constituted a very significant part of the history of American labor movement.

In her book, Cobble offers a detailed history of American women who organized in mixed-sex organizations, particularly trade unions, and struggled to achieve gender equality at the workplace and more broadly, "to extend first-class economic citizenship to women" (2005, p. 145), beginning from the 1930s until the 1980s. Cobble calls and defines them as "labor feminists" and explains this choice of definition as such:

I consider them "feminists" because they recognized that women suffer due to their sex and because they sought to eliminate sex-based disadvantages. I call them "labor feminists" because they articulated a particular variant of feminism that put the needs of working-class women at its core and because they championed the labor movement as the principle vehicle through which the lives of the majority of the women could be bettered. (Cobble, 2005, p. 3)

Cobble, as it is apparent from her words above, considers feminism and feminist agenda in a more inclusive and broad fashion. According to Cobble, to be called as feminist, one does not necessarily need to have a "single focus" on gender and feminist concerns and, consciousness do not only belong to women in all-female organizations (2005, p. 8). The multifaceted and complex history of American labor feminists proved her argument. Cobble convincingly argues that beginning from the 1940s, through a process she calls "the rise and feminization of a new labor movement", women achieved to hold a double vision to demand both economic

and gender justice at the workplace (2005, p. 11). This double vision has had a huge impact on their political agenda, on the one hand they fought against, like their male comrades, low wages and long hours, on the other hand, they sought for the ways to close the gender wage gap, to value women's work, and to reject the "masculine pattern", when it conflicted with their demands (Cobble, 2005, p. 2).

Written in a chronological and thematical fashion, *The other women's movement: Workplace justice and social rights in modern America* explored different concerns and demands of working women raised in different contextual frameworks. By doing that Cobble not only sheds light on the history of labor feminists, but also she re-examines the history of feminism in the U.S and how class shaped the American feminist movement. In the 1940s and 1950s, through the alliances labor feminists established with social feminists, according to Cobble, it became possible to influence the broader political agenda in the U.S.A. She conceptualizes and defines this era as "missing wave" and reveals the history of activist women who challenged the accepted views regarding women's proper place, and the kind of jobs women were expected to engage with and they demanded new rights. Furthermore, Cobble's research proved that labor struggle were not reserved for men, rather long before a feminist movement, labor women activists were effectively struggling for their rights. The studies by Cobble are significant and convincing examples of the new approach to labor and gender historiography, in the sense of managing to have a double-focus on class and gender while studying working-class women.

Another significant example of the literature that I previously called the second stage of the development concerning the history of working-class and unionist women is an edited book called *The gendered worlds of Latin American women workers: From household and factory to the union hall and ballot box* (1997) by John D. French and Daniel James. The

articles in the book, which covers a variety of research topics, are carrying the double focus on gender and class while revealing the history of working-class women. The very first chapter of the book, "Squaring the circle: Women's factory labor, gender ideology and, necessity" which is written by the editors French and James, defines what I called the second stage of the historiographical development as "the key conceptual breakthrough". According to French and James, it is crucial to establish a non-essentialist analytical framework to be able to scrutinize "the articulation of gender and class in the lives of working-class subjects, both male and female" (1997, p. 4). Moreover, they point out the significance of understanding these categories as "far from being givens, they are socially and discursively constructed and simultaneously contested in specific historical contexts" (1997, p. 4). Hence, the articles in the book reflect this approach, while studying working-class and unionist women in Latin America in different contexts.

One of the significant articles in the book is "The Loneliness of Working-Class Feminism: Women in the Male World of Labor Unions, Guatemala City, 1970s" by Deborah Levenson-Estrada. In her article, she explores the experiences of a female labor leader from the 1970s, Sonia Olivia, to understand the relationship between gender and labor activism in Guatemala City. The study of Levenson-Estrada is particularly helpful for my own project since the labor movements in Turkey and Guatemala in the period had important similarities like the pressure of state which eventually led to the exile or imprisonment of almost all labor leaders and many members in the 1980s. The life story of Sonia Olivia sheds light on the difficulties of being an activist woman. According to Levenson-Estrada, Sonia Olivia had a gender perspective since she understood her own activism as the partial result of being single and living alone (1997, p. 209). In the factory where Sonia worked, when the efforts to unionize started, male workers chose Sonia to be in the leadership position because first, no other male worker volunteered for the task and second, she was the one who could devote

herself to work for the union as a single woman living alone (1997, p. 210). In this vein, the individual life-story of Sonia, even if she was an exception, who accomplished to be an activist gives us crucial information about not only the structures in the trade unions which were strongly shaped by gender as well as the limitations regarding women's activism.

### **2.3. Women's History and Women's Labor History-Writing in Turkey**

In this subchapter, first I focus on the possible reasons for the scarcity of academic research on women's labor history in general, and particularly women's trade union activism in the 1970s of Turkey. After discussing the issues left out by the scholars, I examine some of the prominent research connecting issues related with gender and labor, in order to assess the failures of current literature in a detailed way.

As I pointed out earlier, women's labor history is a widely unexplored issue in the Ottoman and Turkish history. Women's history, on the other hand, has received quite a lot attention in Turkish academia. This attention, of course, has to do with the development of feminist activism. Beginning from the 1980s, scholars who engaged with feminist activism have started to discuss different aspects of feminism, feminist theory and patriarchal relations in Turkish society. I consider that it is important for my own work to pay attention to this growing academic field and discuss the possible reasons for the labor movements' and trade unions' non-existence in these narratives. I argue, in other words, that this research, due to a number of characteristics and contexts, while making visible (some) women and their activism contributed to the continued silence about other women and their activism.

Research on women's history in Turkey has gone parallel with the development of feminist movement, as elsewhere in the world. Beginning from the second half of the 1980s, studies on women's history and specifically Ottoman women's history have emerged. The struggles of women in the late Ottoman period (1869-1923) were "discovered" by feminist



women's groups in and outside of academia (Cakir, 2007, p. 61). With the abolition of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Kemalist regime initiated a series of reforms of social and political life in Turkey to achieve the goals of modernizing, urbanizing, secularizing and Westernizing the country (Diner & Toktas, 2010). Within this nation-building project, a particular identity of woman was constructed, as women have always been considered at the heart of such projects. Among the reforms, there was also suffrage for women.<sup>8</sup> The rights Turkish women gained in this period, particularly the right to vote which was absent even in some of the Western countries when it was initiated in Turkey, created "the myth that Turkey was ahead of some Western countries" and led Turkish women to be grateful to the Kemalist regime (Tekeli, 2012, p. 166). Some scholars identified (educated and urban) women's ideology in this period of the early Turkish Republic (roughly 1920-1950) as "state feminism" and argue that Turkish women considered themselves as equal with men thanks to the Kemalist reforms (Tekeli, 1992; 2012). However, "reformist legislation affecting women", Kandiyoti suggests, was often used by authoritarian regimes "whose aim was not to increase the autonomy of individual women, but to harness them more effectively to national developmental goals" (2004, p. 54). Feminist scholars argue that the history of *Türk Kadınlar Birliği* (the Turkish Women's Federation, TKB) was the best example revealing the approach of Kemalist regime towards women and women's political activism. TKB was founded in 1923 by a group of women who wanted to engage in politics and banned in 1935 by the state rather offering them to establish a women's committee within the single party of the period *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (the People's Republican Party, CHP) (Tekeli, 1992; Arat, 1994; Kandiyoti, 2004).

Beginning from the 1980s, the legacy of Kemalist discourse on women's rights was re-questioned and challenged by feminist scholars who argue that women's rights in Turkey were

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<sup>8</sup> The right to vote for women in municipal elections was issued in 1930; and in national elections it was issued in 1934.

not merely a gift from Kemalist reforms, rather there had been Ottoman women activists who had been struggling for these rights long before the foundation of Kemalist Republic (Cakir, 2007). Historical research reveals that in the late Ottoman period, women organized via women's magazines, journals and associations they established (Cakir, 2007, p.65). As Cakir puts it, feminist historians "discovered" Ottoman feminist women and they devoted their efforts to write the history of this period, as well as biographies of some of the prominent female activists in this era. Within these efforts to make women's history visible, the contribution of the Women's Library and Information Center Foundation which was established in 1990 should not be dismissed. Publishing books such as *Women's Memory* (October, 1992), *Institutionalizing the Women's Movement and the Novel "Ask - ı Vatan"* (Love for the Country) (1994) and several bibliographies; *Bibliography of Women's Periodicals Written in Ottoman Script, 1869-1927* (April, 1993), *From Hanımlar Alemi to Roza, 1928-1996: Bibliography of Women's Periodicals* (1998), and *Women's Writings: Bibliography of Literary Products, 1955-1990* (2000), the Women's Library and Information Center Foundation has successfully helped researchers studying in the field of women's history.<sup>9</sup> Thanks to those efforts, women's activism which emerged in the late Ottoman period and continued for some time during the Republican era is widely known today.

In the feminist literature, Ottoman feminism and state feminism have been widely studied as I have shown some examples above. Tekeli, categorizes feminist movements in Turkey under three periods. The first one is the Ottoman feminist women's activism which she identified as the first-wave feminism emerging in the late Ottoman era and maintained in the first years of the Republic. The second is what she called state feminism I explained above. The third period of the feminist movement, according to Tekeli, is the second-wave feminist movement which emerged in the 1980s (as cited in Sunata, 2014, p.5). The 1960s

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.kadineserleri.org/en/yayinlar.asp>

and 1970s, on the other hand, are left out by many, if not most, of the feminist scholars. Women's activism in mixed-sex socialist groups and parties has been excluded from and thus marginalized within women's history writing. Feminist scholars considered suffice to say a few sentences about *Ilerici Kadinlar Dernegi* (the Women's Progressive Association, IKD) by adding the "anti-feminist" label while defining the organization. Therefore, the scarcity of research on women's movements throughout the 1960s and the 1970s to a large extent, I believe, stems from the tradition of second-wave feminism in Turkey. Scholars like Sirin Tekeli, who is a pioneering figure for the emergence of feminism in the 1980s was herself first politicized through and organized in socialist organizations in the 1970s. However, beginning from the 1980s, engaging with the second-wave feminist activism, Sirin Tekeli has strongly emphasized and, I would argue, overemphasized, the importance of autonomous organizations, thus developing a feminist approach which has not paid attention to and thus in effect excluded other forms of women's political activism. For instance, she states that the perspective of the 1970s socialist groups "defined the issue as the 'women question', borrowing concepts from orthodox Marxism, was fundamentally anti-feminist. [...] To end the 'woman question' in Turkey we were invited to fight against class exploitation side by side with socialist men" (1995, p. 13). Furthermore, she accused one of the most powerful and autonomous women's association of the 1970s, IKD, again of being anti-feminist. Tekeli states that: "In the mid-1970s a left-wing political movement emerged, and powerful organizations like the *Ilerici Kadinlar Dernegi* (Association of Progressive Women) were created. Their aim, however, was the mobilization of working-class women for the "forthcoming" socialist revolution and they were openly anti-feminist" (2012, p. 166). Therefore, Tekeli criticized the left-wing socialist organizations, including women's organization IKD, by accusing them to be anti-feminist. Although she has a fair point in the sense that many gender issues were indeed, ignored by the IKD; instead of examining the

context of this particular approach, Tekeli completely overlooks the success of this movement.

Her analyses of socialist organizations in general, and IKD particular, led another group of women to join the discussion and shed light on this discussion from their own perspective. For instance, Emel Akal, who is one of the founders of IKD, in her oral history research on IKD, emphasizes her disappointment regarding the Turkish feminist literature which accused them of being anti-feminist and using women to organize them in socialist parties (2008, p. 11).<sup>10</sup> She highlights that even though in the 1970s IKD rejected the ideology of feminism considering it as a bourgeois movement, later on they realized that the ideas and politics IKD had supported in that period were considered Marxist or Socialist feminism in the international feminist literature (Akal, 2008, p. 15). Furthermore, Akal states that throughout the period IKD was active (1975-1980), they were frequently accused of being feminist by the socialist groups and circles. Therefore, the history of IKD presents a rather interesting case for feminist and socialist politics in Turkey. The former accused them of being anti-feminist, the latter of being feminist. I believe that we should incorporate the history of IKD to the history of women's movements and not underestimate the importance of such a mass socialist women's organization with more than 15,000 members from all over the country during when leftist movement was at peak.

Nevertheless, the studies on the history of IKD and women in socialist organizations have started to increase recently. Besides Akal's research, a group of women, who are former members of IKD, published a book in 1996 called *Ve Hep Birlikte Kostuk: Bir IKD Vardı* (And we all ran together: There was an IKD). And more recently, Birsen Talay Kesoglu (2007) wrote her PhD thesis on "Socialist Women's Organizations in Turkey, 1975-1980". In

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<sup>10</sup> I will discuss the emergence of IKD and its connections with national and international organizations in the next chapters in more detail.

her research, besides IKD, Kesoglu also examines *Demokratik Kadınlar Birliği* (the Democratic Women's Association, DKB) which was the women's association of *Türkiye Sosyalist İsci Partisi* (the Socialist Worker's Party of Turkey, TSIP), and the women's section of *Türkiye İsci Partisi* (the Worker's Party of Turkey, TIP). Focusing on these three women's associations, which one way or the other had connections with the socialist parties of the period, Kesoglu questions the contribution of socialist women to the strength of the left in the 1970s, as well as discusses why Kemalist construction of womanhood remained unexplored among socialist women (2007, p. 373). In her research, she concludes that the 1970s women's movements cannot be considered as feminist, due to their lack of interest in issues related to their own secondary positions in society and in their organizations. However, Kesoglu argues that:

It was a movement which explained the oppression to which women are subject with the ideology they have; which approached the solution of the women's question only in terms of class but at the same time allowed women to create their independent spaces, empowered them and raised their political consciousness. And with all its deficiencies and achievements, it transferred a considerable number of its cadres to the feminist movement of the post-1980 era. (Kesoglu, 2007, p. 386).

As Kesoglu suggests, the 1970s socialist women's movements greatly contributed to the feminist movements emerged in the 1980s. Furthermore, according to Kesoglu, "[o]ne of the main reasons behind the neglect for the women's movement of the 1970s is that the cadres of the feminist movement were composed of "former leftists"" (2007, p. 386). In the same vein, Fatmagül Berktaş argues that the old leftist- new feminist women in Turkey recognized the gender-blind politics of their left-wing organizations, their own inferior positions within the organizations, and their personal relationships with their male comrades, when they questioned these organizations from a feminist perspective (as cited in Gazioglu, 2010, p. 43).

Similarly, Ozar argues that this questioning led the second-wave feminist movement to deliberately stay away from the left-wing politics in Turkey (2012, p. 274). Furthermore, this questioning led to a drastic refusal of any kind of practice or policy associated with left-wing politics. In other words, the new feminist women shaped their political standings through the criticism of their old parties and groups. This is clear from the words of Tekeli in which she describes the initial attempts for feminist organizing in the 1980s. She states that:

Our philosophy was “pluralistic,” hence open to diverse interpretations of feminism, and we adopted the basic notion of direct democracy, with no leadership, no hierarchy, no central organization. That is to say, we rejected all basic notions of the left-wing organizations of the past. Feminists who called themselves “radical,” “socialist,” and “liberal-democratic” worked hand in hand with ex-Maoist and ex-Trotskyite women. We had lively debates without any ambition to monopolize the feminist discourse. (Tekeli, 2012, p. 167)

Therefore, the criticism of Marxism and socialist organizations, including a self-criticism led many feminist activists to exclude other forms of women's activism from feminist politics and history and miss the chance of considering gender oppression along with class. This point is crucial for explaining the exclusion of the women's movements of the 1970s from the history of women's movements, as well as, until recently, the disunity between feminist and labor movements of Turkey. While “rejecting all basic notions of the left-wing organizations of the past”, the feminist movement in Turkey also rejected to keep their interest in workers male or female, and who have been at the center of left-wing, class-based politics. Therefore, after 1980 except for a few socialist/ Marxist feminist organizations, feminist politics has mostly ignored workers' rights struggle, which I believe, has had a profound impact on the exclusion of women's labor history from feminist history-writing in Turkey.

Although women's labor movements and activism have not found a sufficient place in women's history-writing yet, there are scholars from different disciplines who focus on several aspects of the issues relating women's labor. For example some feminist scholars have studied women's (un)employment in Turkey and provided a feminist reading of the role of women's labor within the history of Turkish economic development (Ilkkaracan, 2012; Toksoz, 2012). Others have conducted sociological research on women's labor relations by focusing on a particular segment of the labor market (women in textile sector or daily cleaners in Turkey) (Ecevit, 2005; Kalaycioglu & Rittersberger-Tilic, 2001). Ozbay's interdisciplinary research on the "Transformation of Reproductive Labor in Turkey: From House Slaves in Ottoman Empire to Today's Illegal Immigrant Workers" (2012) can also be considered as an example here.

Among the labor historians, on the other hand, women's history and gender issues remained extensively marginal. Some of them even analyze women's presence as a factor which they consider as a negative aspect of labor history. For instance Yuksel Akkaya, a prominent (male) historian, informs us that throughout the latter half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the Ottoman Empire women and children played a major role working in the spinning mills, providing a cheap labor source for the economy. In the next sentence, however, he claims that one of the reasons for the weakness of labor movements in the Ottoman period was the overwhelming majority of women and children in the labor force (Akkaya, 2002, p. 133-134), as women and children were less likely to organize and struggle for their rights. Some others, on the other hand, were more attentive to the issue. Quataert, for instance, points the lack of "gender as a tool of analysis" within the labor history of Middle East and states that "[w]e should not leave gender studies to our female compatriots" (2009, p. 190). From some of the researches by Quataert, we learn valuable information regarding women's labor in the Ottoman period. For instance, in *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*,

Quataert argues that women and children played a significant role in the economic history of the Ottoman empire and that the prevalent trend of cheap female labor shaped the Ottoman manufacturing sector in a certain way. He states that:

Their [women's] participation in the workforce hardly was new to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but their level of involvement mounted impressively. In many urban and rural homes, women wove, spun, and knitted goods for merchants who paid piece work wages. In the Ottoman universe, as elsewhere in the world, women obtained less money for equal work than men. And so, a vital part of the story of Ottoman manufacturing centers on the shift from male, urban, guild-based production to female, unorganized, rural and urban labor. (Quataert, 2000, p. 137)

In another book, *Ottoman manufacturing in the age of the Industrial Revolution*, Quataert touches upon women workers' activism by indicating a strike which was held in 1908 and clearly reveals the Ottoman woman workers' activism; "some 50 men and 250 women working at the dyeing and knotting facilities of the firm in Izmir striked for a full week, demanding higher wages. They seized the plants and, in the struggle, one woman striker killed a soldier" (1993, p.160). Thus, it is obvious that women did not only participate (and maybe organize) the strike, but also they were militant in the protests. In sum, some of Quataert's studies reveal very significant archival documents regarding Ottoman women workers. However, it is possible to say that gender is not a central focus of his historical research.

Gulhan Balsoy's research, "Gendering Ottoman Labor History: The Cibali Regie Factory in the Early Twentieth Century" is among the few examples of history-writing focusing on women's labor. In her research, Balsoy uses photographic images of the Cibali Regie factory. By examining the photographs, she focuses on women's work in this particular factory describing gender composition, social conditions of work, sexual division of labor and



also spatial segregation on the basis of gender. Although the research of Balsoy is far from presenting a comprehensive history of Ottoman women workers, it still gives important insights about The Cibali Regie Factory and the gendered structures of the work and factory in that period.

Although I pointed out the scarcity of research on women's labor history, specifically women's labor activism in the 1970s, there are several research focusing on the relationship between women and trade unions in Turkey. The problem is, however, that scholars have *only* studied this issue by problematizing women's underrepresentation in trade unions, the patriarchal structures of the institutions and the unions' neglectance of women's issues from their policies. Based on these analyses, scholars have proposed solutions for increasing women's membership as well as leadership in decision-making structures (Secer, 2009; Toksoz, 1994; 2011). Besides these academic studies, there are a few published books written by women union activists, mostly, in the form of a memoir. For instance, written by Zehra Kosova who is considered as the first female union leader in Turkey, *Ben Isciyim* (I am a Worker) can be considered as an example of this genre. While writing her own memories, Kosova (1996) reveals important aspects of the labor and socialist activism in Turkey, beginning from the 1930s. *Kadin ve Sendika* (Woman and Trade Union) which was written by Yasar Seyman and published in 1992 has a similar tone. In her book, Yasar Seyman focuses on her own memories, experiences, and perspective regarding organized labor, as a woman unionist in the 1980s. Although the book itself is clearly important, it is a combination of memoir and autobiography, rather than an academic study. Therefore, these books do not adequately fulfill the need for historical research on women's labor activism.

In a broad sense, the history of unionist women in the 1960s and 1970s, as I have discussed so far is greatly missing from the feminist as well as labor history. Although the amount of research on socialist women's activism in this period has increased and these

studies have shed some light on the history of women in trade unions, those do not suffice to fully understand unionist women's activism. Of course, there is a close link between such groups and unionist women, as socialist groups primarily engaged with working-class politics and within the working-class there were people who identify themselves as socialist. However, in order to study working-class women and their activism, we need a different framework and to ask different questions.

In the next chapter, I will present an overview of the labor movements and trade unions in Turkey, beginning from the late Ottoman period to the 1980 military coup.

### **3. A Brief History of Trade Unions in Turkey**

In this chapter, I will present a brief history of trade unions in Turkey from the late Ottoman Empire to the end of the 1970s, in order to provide a historical background for the context that I primarily focus on in this thesis. While discussing the history of trade unions, I will pay a particular attention to women's presence and activities, as well as to the issues related to gender. In this way, I will also reveal the scarcity of the research on women's labor movements in general, but particularly in the 1970s. I will review the Turkish labor movements and trade unions in three chronological periods. The reason of this classification is based on the fact that each period has its distinctive characteristics in terms of the ways in which labor movements emerged, were organized and controlled. In the first part, I will briefly summarize the emergence of trade unions and labor movements in the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republic period. This period, roughly between 1908-1950, covers the late Ottoman period which began with the Second Constitutional Era by the Young Turks and the Early Republican Era which came to an end when the single-party regime was over. In the second part, I will focus on the 1950s and approach it as a significant but overlooked period, considering its positive impact on the labor movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, the period between 1960-1980 is the span that I will give a greater importance in this work since it includes the foundation of Tekstil in 1965 and its shut down in 1980. Therefore, in the third part, I will explore the golden ages of labor movements in Turkey from 1960 to the 1980 military coup, including the foundation of DISK and Tekstil.

### 3.1. From Ottoman Empire to the Early Turkish Republic

Labor movements in Turkey go further back the Turkish Republican era with significant continuities to the late Ottoman period. Hence, in this chapter, my aim is to provide a brief history of labor movements and trade unions beginning in the late Ottoman period to emphasize continuities and change.

Up until 1863, the labor movements in the Ottoman era were largely in the forms of destroying the machines, quitting the jobs, and presenting complaints to the higher authorities (Akkaya, 2002, p. 137). As the scope of my analysis is primarily trade union movements, in this research, I will focus on the more institutional forms of labor movements. Although there had been labor-related organizations before 1908, these organizations were mostly founded as workers' aid societies, not as trade unions or workers' organizations (Karakisla, 1995, p. 26).

Within the literature of labor movements in the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, the founding of *Osmanlı Amele Cemiyeti* (the Ottoman Workers' Society) in 1894 is considered the very first "modern" workers' organization of the Ottoman labor history (Karakisla, 1995, p. 26; Sulker, 2004, p. 33; Tokol, 1994, p. 3). Among the members of this organization, there was Yasar Nezihe who is known as the poetess writing first May Day poem in Turkey.<sup>11</sup> Coming from a working-class family, in her poems, Yasar Nezihe touched upon many issues such as the struggle between workers and employers, strikes and workers' unity. Furthermore, her poem "Ode to May Day" was published in the socialist journal of the 1920s, *Aydinlik* (Ahmad, 1994, p. 137). Her poems were also published in women's magazines of the late Ottoman and early Republican period, such as *Kadin Yolu* (Woman Way) and *Kadinlar Dunyasi* (Women's World).<sup>12</sup> The editors and authors of these journals were mostly upper-class, educated women who advocated for women's rights; coming from a

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.Istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/yasar-nezihe> Last Access, May 24, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

working-class family Yasar Nezihe was very different from the others (Timuroglu, November 31, 2013). Yasar Nezihe is an important figure within the women's labor history, as her political life and activism in women's and labor organizations reflects an early example of an "intersectional" approach.

Although there are a few labor organizations, before 1908 "the majority of the strikes occurred spontaneously" which reveals the weakness of labor organizations (Karakisla, 1995, p. 28). The 1904 Cibali Regie Factory strike which was organized by 50 female and 200 male workers demanding a payment for the Easter break (Balsoy, 2009, p. 64) can be given as an example for such spontaneous and local actions of the workers in this period.

The proliferation of workers' organizations in terms of number and strength could occur after 1908. The beginning of the second constitutional era in 1908 marked by a new phase regarding, especially organized, labor movements. With the beginning of this period, there was a dramatic increase in the number of strikes (Akkaya, 2002, p. 138; Karakisla, 1995, p. 26; Tokol, 1994, p. 6-7). The increasing number and the impact of the strikes led to a new legal regulation to control the movements. In 1909, the Work Stoppage Act (*Tatil-i Esgal Yasasi*), as the very first legal document limiting workers' organizations, prohibited strikes (Tuna, 1964, p. 414). Furthermore, the act banned to found unions in industries related to public services, abolished the organizations in public services existing prior to the act and proposed to solve the conflicts in the workplace through negotiation (Tokol, 1994, p.7; Tuna, 1964, p. 414).

While the literature in general discusses the weakness of the trade union movement in this period, Karakisla suggests that some of the labor organizations managed to transfer into the republic. He states that in 1924 (only one year after the foundation of Turkish Republic), "there were ten trade unions in Istanbul, nine in Izmir, two in Edirne, and one each in Adana,

Konya, Bursa and Eskisehir" (1995, p. 28). Unfortunately, neither Karakisla, nor any other historian mentions the gender composition of those trade unions.

Shortly after the abolition of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of Turkish Republic, the Izmir Economic Congress (Izmir Iktisat Kongresi) was organized by the new government in 1923. The "workers' group" attended the congress and offered a number of principles including the celebration of the May Day (Ahmad, 1994, p. 136). Guzel (1996) suggests that among the 120-130 workers' representatives, there were women as well (p. 131), although he does not give any further detail. Hafizogullari, on the other hand, informs us about a women workers' representative, Rukiye Hanim, who gave a speech at the congress in the name of women workers in Turkey and expressed women workers' gratitudes to Mustafa Kemal for inviting them to the congress (November 4, 1999). At the congress, the right to unionize was recognized and the workday was limited to eight hours for the industrial and service workers. Furthermore, for the first time, social protection measures for workers, such as health insurance and compensation for occupational accidents, were designed at the congress (Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 290). Another resolution taken at the congress brought restrictions to the employment of women and children in heavy works (Guzel, 1996, p. 135). However, the single-party regime of *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (the People's Republican Party, CHP) (1923-1946) marked the hegemony of Kemalist ideology. During the nation-building project, social groups organized on the basis of class, ethnicity and language were severely oppressed by the state (Akkaya, 2002, p. 147). Ahmad states that "[t]he Kemalists recognized the potential power of the Turkish workers and the threat they posed to their classless, corporatist vision of Turkish society" (1994, p. 136). One of the main goals of the CHP was to create a "classless national society" (Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 290; Tokol, 1994, p. 17). Kaleagasi Blind (2007) states that:

On various occasions, the CHP questioned the need for a labor movement. Groups such as peasants, craftsmen, businessmen, workers, professionals, merchants and civil servants were desired as constituents of the new Turkish society. At the same time, however, it was essential that these groups maintain harmonious relations with each other. Class struggle was not a desired ingredient in the Turkish nation-building project. (p. 290)

In this vein, to create the Turkish worker identity became a political strategy to spread the ideology of nationalism in the society through workers' organizations sympathetic to the regime (Akkaya, 2002, p. 149). A new Labor Code (Is Kanunu) was designed and enacted in 1936. The new Labor Code included the eight-hour workday which was taken as a resolution in the Izmir Economic Congress. However, Guzel (1996) argues that the resolution regarding eight-hour workday was not effectively adopted, especially in the private sector. Therefore, the demand for eight-hour workday was one of the reasons for many strikes and protests held after 1936. Among other reasons of the strikes, in this period, there were also equal wage demands of workers in order to eliminate the pay gap between female and male, or between Muslim and non-Muslim workers (Guzel, 1996, p. 182).

The new Labor Code did not make any reference to trade unions and brought severe restrictions on strikes and lockouts by imposing legal penalties. In 1938, through the adoption of new Associations Law (Cemiyetler Kanunu), the establishment of class-based organizations was explicitly prohibited (Akkaya, 2002, p. 154; Tuna, 1964, p. 414). However, these legal sanctions on establishing trade unions could not achieve to completely demolish organized labor activism. For instance, beginning from the early 1930s, tobacco workers, most of whom were immigrants in Istanbul, had been organized in the illegal *Mustakil Tutunculer Sendikasi* (Autonomous union of tobacco workers). Zehra Kosova, prominent female union leader, was also among the members of the union and she pursued labor

activism until the 1950s in different trade unions and socialist parties. Furthermore, she was also a member of the *Türkiye Komünist Partisi* (the Communist Party of Turkey, TKP) which was also illegal in this period. In the framework of the party programme, she went to Moscow to study at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in 1934 and returned to Turkey in 1937. After her return, she continued to work for organizing workers and for the legalization of trade unions (Girgin, 2005; Treske, 2016).

In 1946, with the transition from single-party regime to the multiparty system, Associations Law was re-regulated and forming trade unions finally became legitimate in Turkey. Within the same year, the number of trade unions, as well as leftist and socialist organizations immediately increased, such that, the strike wave in this period called as "the unionism of 1946" in the labor history of Turkey (Akkaya, 2002, p. 154; Akin, 2009, p. 170; Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 291). In this period, the votes of the working class gained crucial importance for the competing parties. The CHP maintained its perspective regarding "developing a classless society with unified nationalist labor" (Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 291). In 1947, to control the rising unionism, the CHP enacted the Employer and Employee Unions and Union Federation Law (*İşçi ve İşveren Sendikaları ve Sendikalar Birlikleri Kanunu*) which gave the state the right to shut down any trade union whose action was considered against the national interest (Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 291). According to Akkaya (2002), through the implementation of this law, the CHP aimed to intervene into working-class politics by making trade unions dependent on the state (p. 156). In 1948, as another step to intervene in working-class politics, the CHP formed its own workers' organization with the name of the CHP Worker Organizations which later unified and took the name of *İstanbul İşçi Sendikaları Birliği* (the Federation of Istanbul Labor Unions, İİSB) (Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 291). *Demokrat Parti* (the Democrat Party, DP), which was the new opponent of the CHP established *Hür İşçi Sendikaları Birliği* (the Free Unions Federation, HİSB) in 1950, as a rival



to IISB (Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 291). Among the 15 trade unions which established *Istanbul Isci Sendikaları Birliği* (the Federation of Istanbul Labor Unions, IISB), there were trade unions organizing in textile, food-beverage and tobacco industries (Kocak, 2014, p. 64). The photographs (Figure 1) from the congress of the federation held in 1949 show that among the eleven representatives of *Cibali Tutun ve Sigara Sanayii Iscileri Sendikası* (the Union of Cibali Tobacco Workers), there were three women. The other photographs in the same collection, showing representatives of seven trade unions, did not include any female representative, although many of them related with so-called women's trades, such as textile and food workers. The Union of Cibali Tobacco Workers was the labor organization of the Cibali Regie Factory in which women workers had been employed since the Ottoman period (Balsoy, 2009) In the 1940s, women workers constituted the 75 percent of the all employees in the factory. Furthermore, the Cibali Regie Factory was one of the few workplaces which had a sufficient childcare center in Istanbul (Makal, 2012, p. 67). We do not know the names of any women in the photograph, yet this photograph indicated that women, eventhough limited, not only did take role on the factory level, but also they participated in the congress of the federation. However, there is no further information about the extent of women workers' participation or representation in organized labor for this period.



**Figure 1: *Istanbul Isçi Sendikaları Birliği* (the Federation of Istanbul Labor Unions, IISB) Legislation Congress (1949, Pasabahçe), Representatives of the Union of Cibali Tobacco Workers**

**Source:** Yusuf Sidal Collection, Metal-Is Archive.

From 1946 to the 1950 general elections, the DP gave a huge significance to the labor movements and organized its election campaign by promising the right to strike when it would come to power (Akkaya, 2002, p. 157; Sulker, 2004, p. 47). The DP suggested that the right to strike was not against the national interest, as it was argued by the CHP. Kaleagasi Blind argues that this supporting approach of the DP played a significant role in its winning the 1950 general election by receiving the more than 50 percent of the votes (Kaleagasi Blind, 2007, p. 291). In a similar manner, Sulker (2004) argues that the position of the DP favoring the right to strike contributed a lot to the legitimization of the workers' demand for the right to strike. Coming from a right-wing political party like the DP, the demand for the right to strike was started to be perceived as more legitimate, which had been considered as a threat when the socialist parties had demanded it before (Sulker, 2004, p. 50).

### 3.2. The 1950s as a critical era for the Turkish labor movements

Within the labor historiography of Turkey, the 1950s are often excluded from the analysis of Turkish labor history and instead, the 1960s are considered as the golden age of labor movements and unionism (Akin, 2009; Kocak, 2008). The most significant reason for excluding the 1950s from the analysis of labor history can be found in a certain Kemalist bias characterizing the historians' interpretations. The idea that the 1960 military coup was a progressive development has been highly dominant in Kemalist discourse. The first party that won the election after the long time of the single-party regime of the CHP, the Democrat Party, which was associated with religious groups and practices, was considered as counterrevolutionary by the Kemalist ideology. According to Hakan Kocak (2008), the Kemalist interpretation considers the 1960 military coup as progressive due to the recognition of the right to strike for the first time under the 1961 Constitution (p. 71). Furthermore, Kocak argues that:

It is understandable that the Kemalist perspective, which interprets the recent history through the concepts of *modernization, westernization and civilization*, considers the beginning of labor history with the recognition of rights in the constitution. [...] With the rights given to the workers, significant steps were taken in the way of reaching the Western democracies and these steps were taken thanks to *the progressive forces which were faithful to the Kemalist mission*. (2008, p. 72, my emphasis)

Marxist and leftist interpretations of history also ignored the 1950s and overemphasized the importance of the 1960s. This is due to the approach equating labor history with the history of labor movements, which were strong in number and effect in the 1960s. In this vein, the 1960s are considered as the golden age; however, the link between the 1950s, which made strong labor movements possible in the 1960s, could not be established in such tradition of history-writing (Kocak, 2008, p. 72). Although the dominant interpretations ignore the 1950s,

for some scholars this period is considered as a significant one for the formation of the working class in Turkey (Akin, 2009; Kocak, 2008; Kocak, 2015; Yildirmaz, 2008).

As I have emphasized earlier the CHP was against promoting the right to strike considering it dangerous for the national interest. Whereas the Democrat Party eagerly supported the demand for the right to strike during its campaign for the 1950 general elections. However, during the DP's ten years in power, there had been no progress in terms of legalizing the strike either. Feroz Ahmad suggests that:

In the 1950s, the workers divided their political loyalties between the two major parties, the ruling Democrats and the opposition RPP [CHP]. They failed to win any significant rights (essentially the right to strike and to bargain collectively) not because they were ignorant and lacked consciousness (as most writers claim) but because the two parties had tacitly agreed not to make any concessions to the workers. (1994, p. 142)

In this political environment, to struggle for obtaining the right to strike became vital for trade unions whose actions were considerably limited due to the prohibition on strike. In contrast to the common view that the right to strike was "given from above" with the 1961 Constitution, Kocak (2015) claims that the 1950s witnessed the struggle of trade unions for obtaining the right to strike (p. 335). According to Dogan (2015), the Turkish working class used two different strategies to obtain the right to strike. The former included several protests and political efforts at the micro level, the latter included lobbying for the right to strike (p. 333). Similarly, Kocak argues that "the demand for the right to strike was embraced and defended by the majority of the working class, and with a number of work stoppages, even if limited, the right was used" (2015, p. 342). For instance, employing various newspapers as primary sources, Ahmet Makal reveals that workers from very different and sometimes marginal occupational groups such as sex workers and orchestra members went to strikes in the 1950s.

Some of those actions lasted less than a day and they were generally in the form of protest rather than strike. However, considering the legal and political framework of the period and severe sanctions against such activities, these protests/strikes were very significant and mostly used as last resort (Makal, 2004, p. 28).

The number of trade unions and the number of workers organized in the unions increased in that period. Furthermore, a lot of trade unions of different sizes were founded in the 1950s (Kocak, 2015, p.342; Tokol, 1994, p. 31). The number of trade unions and organized workers jumped from 73 in 1948 to 432 in 1960 and 52,000 to 282,000, respectively. The percentage of workers belonging to a union also considerably increased from 15 percent to 34 percent for the same years (TIB, 1976, p. 105). No statistical information exists about women's unionization rates for this period. However, Makal estimates that it was quite low and women's participation to the strikes was also rare. A significant reason for this, according to Makal, in the 1950s the majority of labor movements were organized by workers employed in all-male occupations, such as construction workers, and dockers (2012, p. 107). Still, he informs us about two different strikes held in 1959 by textile workers most of whom were women, yet both of them were quite local and limited in size and effect (2012, p. 107). Furthermore, in his article on women's labor in the period 1920-1960, Makal claims that there was almost no woman in the unions' leadership positions in this period (Makal, 2012, p. 106), yet he did not mention the first female labor union leader of Turkey. In 1955, Dervise Koc was elected as the general president of *Tekel Yaprak Tutun Bakim ve Isleme Evi Iscileri Sendikasi* (the Union of Tobacco Processing Workers). She became the very first female union leader in Turkey and she was selected as leader eleven times, one after the other between 1955- 1966. Furthermore, the vice president of the union was also a woman named Fevziye Sari and in the management committee, there was another woman called Gulsum Basgirgin (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, Vol 2, 1998, p. 187).

Another important event for the organized labor was the foundation of *Türkiye İsci Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* (the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions, Turk-Is) which was the first trade union confederation of Turkey. Founded in 1952, Turk-Is has played a critical role in Turkish labor history. Furthermore, many occupational groups which today are considered to have very little chance of organizing, such as bakery workers, waiters and musicians established their own trade unions in that period (Kocak, 2015, p. 340).

As I have discussed above, contrary to the accepted view regarding the weakness of trade unions and working class movement, the 1950s witnessed a struggle for the right to strike by trade unions. Additionally, the percentage of workers belonging to a union was considerable. Considering the legal consequences of organizing and participating in a strike, every attempt of workers, no matter the duration or strength of the action, should not be underestimated. Despite the severity of the sanctions, workers continued to defend their rights. All of these developments were influential in the latter periods when labor movements gained a far-reaching strength and impact in the political space. The absence of statistical information on women's participation in trade unions poses a difficult challenge to understand the extent of female labor activism in Turkey. The biographies of some prominent women labor activists such as Yasar Nezihe, Zehra Kosova and from a more recent period Dervise Kocoglu are among the few studies regarding women's labor movements in this period. However, as I have discussed above, there were women labor activists in this period, like the representatives of the Cibali Regie Factory workers, even though the number of them might be very low.

### **3.3. Labor Movements in Turkey, 1960-1980**

In May 27, 1960, the first military coup in Turkey hit the country and the Democrat Party in particular. A considerable part of society supported the coup against the authoritarian and religious government of the DP and glorified the coup as "the May 27 Revolution". In the

aftermath of May 27, 1960, Kemalist groups even conceptualized the period as "the Second Republican Era" (Celik, 2010, p. 318). A new constitution was prepared and issued in 1961, which was "dramatically more liberal than the previous system of government. Empowered with new freedoms and protected by greater civil liberties, the next two decades would bring increased political participation, as well as ideological polarization to Turkish political life" (Mello, 2010, para. 25).

The demand for the right to strike was finally fulfilled with the 1961 Constitution. This was a significant development for the labor organizations in Turkey since most of them had struggled for it throughout the 1950s. No matter the political orientation, or the understanding of unionism, Turkish labor organizations in general enjoyed these new and relatively more advanced regulations in terms of rights and freedoms. As Gary Marks (1989) notes:

Unions in a particular society share a similar fate in an important and overtly political respect. All unions in a given society are subject to the same laws; their ability to organize, strike and picket is determined beyond the labor market by the state. Every union, no matter how economistic it is, is concerned to gain the legal breathing room to go about its business in the labor market. The legal regulation of industrial relations is thus an essential link between the labor market activities of a union and its political activities. (p. 13)

Although the right to strike was recognized under the new constitution, the law legalizing strike had not been issued until the Sarachane meeting in December 1961 which was organized by the Association of Istanbul Workers' Unions with an immense participation of workers. Ahmad (1994) reports that "[t]o press their demands for laws on collective bargaining and the strike the Association of Istanbul Workers' Unions organized a mammoth meeting in the city on 31 December 1961. Groups representing various unions around the

country came to Istanbul, until over 100,000 were present" (p. 147). This Sarachane Meeting in 1961 and the Kavel Strike in 1963 were two significant vast labor events of the early 1960s (Celik, 1994, p. 318). Along with these two events, the number and impact of the trade unions mushroomed in this period. The number of workers organized in trade unions jumped from 295,710 in 1963 to 2,362,787 in 1971 (TIB, 1976, p. 146).

According to Celik, the period beginning with the 1960 military coup marked an era in which pluralist and libertarian politics became dominant and the opportunities for trade unions considerably increased, which eventually led the way to the politicization of the unions (2010, p. 317). The foundation of *Türk İsci Partisi* (the Turkish Workers' Party, TIP) in 1961 can be considered as an example of this politicization and the increasing strength and visibility of the leftist and socialist ideologies in Turkey (Mello, 2010, para. 26). Moreover, the founders of the TIP included many (male) unionists who would, later on, also be influential in the foundation of DISK.

Starting with the early 1960s, different perspectives regarding the nature of unionism started to be voiced in the public domain by various actors within the Turkish labor movement. Among the leadership of Turk-Is, a significant part of the labor activists became sympathetic to socialist and communist ideologies, which eventually led to the rise of alternative perspectives concerning the ways in which trade union activism was supposed to be pursued (Mello, 2010, para. 26). Hence it is possible to see Turk-Is's official declaration of the principle of Above Party Politics (*Partilerustu Politika*, PAP) in 1964, to an extent, as a consequence of these competing views in Turk-Is (Mello, 2010, para 29). The principle of Above Party Politics (*Partilerustu Politika*, PAP) referred to the idea that labor politics should not involve in party-politics at any level. However, Kaleagasi-Blind (2007) suggests that:

It [Turk-Is] entailed maintaining friendly relations with the governing party or parties, regardless of their ideology, their stance on labor, or whether they were democratically



elected or not. PAP was not about staying above or outside politics, as it seemed to imply. Quite the opposite—it was about getting more entrenched in it. It was, to say the least, an implicit pact of collaboration between unions and the government wrapped in a nice package of the rhetoric of “patriotic unionism.” In practice, PAP helped preserve a stable and predictable *quid pro quo* relationship between labor and the State: labor would acquiesce to the policies of a given government who, in turn, would let the corresponding unions leaders mind their own business." (p. 293)

The Above Party Politics of Turk-Is would, later on, constitute the major difference in approach between two rival confederations Turk-Is and Devrimci *Isci Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* (the Confederation of Revolutionary Labor Unions, DISK), which was founded by unions that broke away from Turk-Is. After briefly presenting the state of woman's labor in this period, I will explore the foundation and development of DISK, in more detail.

### **3.3.1. Social Change and Woman's Labor, 1960-1980**

In order to provide a background for women's labor activism, here I discuss the state of women's labor in the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, I focus on women's participation in the workforce, general characteristics of female labor in the 1960s and 1970s and specifically, the role female labor has played in the textile sector and then, the unionization trends among women workers in the textile industry.

In Turkey, the period beginning from the 1950s has been marked by a migration wave from rural areas to urban cities, such as Istanbul and Izmir. The repercussions of this process have had huge impacts on every aspect of social and economic life in Turkey. From the 1950s onwards, the rural population has constantly decreased, whereas urban population has gradually increased. For instance, in 1950, the distribution of rural and urban population was 81 percent and 19 percent, respectively. In 1980, this picture was dramatically different with

55 percent for rural and 45 percent for urban population (Icduygu, Sirkeci & Aydingun, 1998, p. 219). The big cities like Istanbul and Izmir were particularly important for pulling the new labor force from rural to urban areas. As a result, cities have expanded and the population of the big cities immediately increased. Furthermore, women's labor force participation was dramatically higher in such big cities. For instance, in 1966 the total number of women workers being employed in big industries<sup>13</sup> was 83,500 and 33,100 of them were working in Istanbul and 18,900 in Izmir. In 1971, the number of female workers in Istanbul increased to 63,900 (TIB, 1976, p. 129). The female workforce was concentrated in several industries, such as tobacco, food-processing and textile industries. Although the number of female workers increased in such big cities, women's overall participation in the workforce has had a declining trend in Turkey, especially after 1970. Scholars have tried to understand the underlying reasons of this trend, in comparison to many other countries in which female labor force participation has gradually increased (Kavak, 1997; Ozer & Bicerli, 2003; Bugra, 2010). Scholars have pointed out the fact that a majority of women lost their working status, when they left agricultural production and migrated to big cities (Toksoz, 2012, p. 51).<sup>14</sup> Immigrant women's low levels of education and lack of marketable skills, along with traditional ideas stigmatizing women working outside home and the male "breadwinner" norm have been considered as some of the barriers for women's labor participation (Kavak, 1997, p. 23).

According to the statistics of the social security institution of Turkey (*Sosyal Sigortalar Kurumu*, SSK), in 1975 the total number of workers covered with insurance was approximately 1,800,000 and the number of women workers was only 143,000 (TIB, 1976, p. 205).<sup>15</sup> Although women's participation to workforce has declined after 1970, women's

<sup>13</sup> Here, the statistics of women working in industrial jobs refer to workers employed in workplaces with ten or more employees. So, these figures exclude a significant proportion of women work force.

<sup>14</sup> "Unpaid family worker" is the status of women engaging with agricultural production and they constitute a considerable amount of female labor force in Turkey.

<sup>15</sup> Here, the statistics of SSK concerning female labor force participation rate might be misleading, as social insurance measures itself might include a gendered dynamic, in terms of inclusion and exclusion of particular

employment rate in industry has shown a small increase. However, the percentage of women employed in industrial jobs was quite limited (Bugra, 2010, p. 27). As I have discussed above, women employed in the textile industry constitute a significant majority of the female industrial labor force in Turkey. As of 1980, women employed in textile industries constituted 51 percent of all female employment in manufacturing industry, followed by 18 percent in the industries related to food, beverage and tobacco production (Ecevit, 2005, p. 57). Therefore, female textile workers constituted a critical part of working-class women in Turkey.

While discussing women's employment in textile industry, another point we should be attentive to is women's earnings and the meaning women attached to their work. Although some scholars point out that women's wages have been considered only as supplementary income, Ecevit's field research, conducted in 1980 with women factory workers in the textile factories of Bursa, reveals that women's wages were crucial for the household economy and women did not define their earnings as "pin money". On the contrary, Ecevit states that:

They work for reasons such as insufficient family income, husband's unemployment, death and illness in the family, and to have a house. There is no doubt that the earnings of women constitute a significant part of many household budgets: 35 per cent of the wives in the study earned as much as their husbands and 16 per cent earned more. (2005, p. 59).

As Ecevit's research points out, the economic necessity has been the major reason for working-class women's decision to work outside home. Women rank-and-file workers in Tekstil, also frequently complained about economic hardships and insufficient household income despite their working, which indicates the crucial role of women's work.

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sectors (such as exclusion of domestic workers), thus "increasing the distance between women's and men's working and living conditions"(Zimmermann, 2011, p. 122)

In terms of the relationship between unions and women, we have no statistics about women's membership in trade unions of the 1960s and 1970s, however, considering current statistics, it is possible to guess the percentage of women workers in the total unionized workers were quite low. According to 2014 statistics of the Ministry of Labor, in textile industry, out of 1,000,000 registered workers, 387,000 were women. Only 95,000 of those workers were organized in trade unions and, only 21,000 of them were women. Thus, the percentage of women organized in trade unions was approximately 22 and, the unionization rate among women workers was approximately five percent (as cited from Beken, 2015, p. 170). One of the reasons for women's limited participation in trade unions is considered to be the fact that women have been employed in industries like textile, in which informal employment is very prevalent and thus there is no chance for unionization (Toksoz, 1994, p. 440). Ecevit, on the other hand, suggests that women's participation in trade unions in the textile sector heavily depends on the size of the factory where they work. According to that, women's unionization rate in the large factories is higher than the rates in small factories. She explains this trend as such:

One of the reasons for this was that according to the Collective Labour Agreements, Strikes and Lockouts Law, unions that represent the majority of the workers in any particular industry were allowed to negotiate with employers on behalf of the workforce. Therefore, unions concentrated their recruiting efforts on the larger rather than smaller factories. Another reason was the paternalistic and anti-union attitudes of employers in small factories. (Ecevit, 2005, p. 71)

As I have noted before, we do not have detailed information regarding the distribution of the female workforce. However, we know that industrial jobs, which were concentrated in big cities, were mostly occupied by immigrants. This is consistent with some of the documents I have analyzed during my research. For instance, after the September 12, 1980, military coup,

Tekstil Head Office was sued, and in 1982 the court declared the decision of non-prosecution. Among the people who were detained within the scope of this particular investigation, there were 149 people who worked or held positions in Tekstil's Head Office or its local branches and eleven of them were women. Among eleven women who held positions in several Istanbul branches of Tekstil, only three of them were born in Istanbul. The background of women varied, some of them were born in cities in Eastern Turkey, whereas two of them had migrated from Macedonia and Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup> The variety of women's backgrounds, at least for women workers in Istanbul, confirms their immigrant status in the city.

To some extent, the rural background of women played a determining role in women's work lives. Kesoglu (2007), for instance, emphasizes the crucial impact of the lasting relationships between rural and urban areas, on women's participation in the workforce in the 1970s. According to her, many women suffered from the absence of their parents in the cities, since most of the time elderly people did not move to the cities with their children. Thus many women in the big cities, Kesoglu suggests, lacked the traditional female support networks (mothers, mother-in-laws) and as a result, they "could not find any suitable solution for taking care of their children, thus remained outside of working life" (Kesoglu, 2007, p. 115). The ongoing relationships between family members in different cities, according to my research, had continued to be crucial for some women. For example, although we do not have any information about how prevalent such relationships were, there were some women workers who sent their children to their villages where they could be taken care of by other women in the family, usually their mothers and mothers-in-law. I will discuss this issue in more detail, in chapter 4.

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<sup>16</sup> *Kovuşturmayaya Yer Yoktur Kararı* [The decision for non-prosecution] (1982). Document No: 1980/3971, Docket No: 1982/2480, Decree No: 1982/185, Box 1/5, TUSTAV, Istanbul.

### 3.3.2. *The Foundation of DISK, 1967*

The foundation of DISK is considered as one of the most significant events in Turkish labor history, since it marks a radical break from the paternalist relationship between trade unions and state (Celik, 2010). The different concerns and reactions of the union leaders in Turk-Is, to a large extent, paved the way for the foundation of DISK (Celik, 2010, p. 508).

In March 1965, a wildcat strike<sup>17</sup> lasting for two days in Zonguldak (a city in the Black Sea region) by coalminers and Turk-Is's reaction to the strike was a critical point which made union officials' different perspectives in Turk-Is visible. The government tried to repress the strike brutally through sending troops to the region. In the clashes two workers lost their lives. Since the strike was held without the support of the local union, Turk-Is did not support the workers. Rather it took a position similar to the government which accused "communists" for the events and claimed that the strike was organized by TIP (Celik, 2010, p.509). "While the 'bread and butter' issue of pay provided the genesis for the strike, the strike demonstrated a growing rank-and-file discontent with existing social, economic and political conditions, and with the more moderate strategies advocated by Turk-Is's leadership" (Mello, 2010, para. 33).

Next year, in March 1966, Pasabahce bottle and glass factory workers in Istanbul went to strike demanding higher wages and better working conditions, again without the permission of Turk-Is. When local union leaders and workers did not accept the agreement offered by Turk-Is to end the strike, workers occupied the factory. From Kocak's research, we know that there were women workers in the factory, employed in several positions (2014, p.165). Although we do not know the gender composition of factory, it seems like overwhelming majority of workers were male. There is no information about whether women workers participated in the strike held in 1966. In April, some of the unions within Turk-Is which supported workers' action over the decision of Turk-Is founded the Pasabahce Strike Support

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<sup>17</sup> Wildcat strike refers to "a sudden strike (act of refusing to work as a protest) without any warning by the workers and often without the official support of the unions." (Cambridge Online Dictionary)

Committee (Mello, 2010, para. 37). When Turk-Is suspended the unions which gave support to the Pasabahce Strike, those unions left Turk-Is and established DISK in February 1967. The founders of DISK were *Türkiye Maden-İs Sendikası* (the Mineworkers' Union of Turkey, Maden-Is), *Türkiye Lastik, Kaucuk ve Plastik Sanayi İşçileri Sendikası* (the Rubber Workers' Union, Lastik-Is) *İstanbul Basın İşçileri Sendikası*, (the Istanbul Print Workers Union, Basın-Is). Besides these three unions which broke away from Turk-Is, *Türkiye Gıda İşçileri Sendikası* (the Union of Food Industry Workers of Turkey, Gıda-Is) and *Türk Maden İşçileri Sendikası* (Turkish Mineworkers' Union, Turk Maden-Is) which had been independent unions, ranked among the founders of DISK. Except Gıda-Is organizing workers in the food industry, other trade unions were mostly from the industries in which women often did not have any chance to be employed. However, there is no information regarding the gender composition of the trade unions which found DISK.

The foundation of DISK, therefore, marked a new attitude concerning workers' radical activism vis-à-vis the approach of trade unions. During the foundation process, the "Report Regarding the Withdrawal from Turk-Is Membership" was published. Some of the reasons for the withdrawal provided in the report were Turk-Is's incapacity to commit to its own principles, its failure to solve workers' problems and its ties with the U.S. (Mello, 2010, para. 39). Based on these criticisms, the founders of DISK believed that "Turkish unions needed to be independent from foreign exploitation, defend the rights of workers provided in the constitution, and improve the quality of life for the working class. The existing labor organizations and the existing system of state-labor relations were seen as insufficient for addressing these concerns" (Mello, 2010, para. 40).

The foundation of DISK was critical for breaking of unionism from paternalism and for the radicalization of unionism (Celik, 2010). According to Mello, DISK which was founded as a rival to Turk-Is granted "its increasing membership a basis of solidarity based

ultimately on political unionism and a rejection of the state's limited interpretation of legitimate behavior for workers and unions" (Mello, 2007, p. 222). At this point, it is worthwhile to mention the Events of June 15-16 in 1970, as one of the massive and influential workers' protests in Turkish labor history and revealing the competition between DISK and Turk-Is. The governing party of the period, *Adalet Partisi* (the Justice Party, AP) proposed a change concerning legal trade union regulations which would restrict unionization and the right to strike. The primary aim of this change was considered as smashing the increasing influence and strength of DISK (Alper, 2010, p. 75; Guzel, 1996, p. 222; Urhan & Celik, 2010, para. 33). DISK called upon its members to protest against the proposed amendment. The response of the workers was massive and far beyond the expectations of DISK. On June 15 and June 16 1970, thousands of workers from every part of Istanbul and beyond, protested the proposed legislation. Although we do not know the gender composition of the protesters, many secondary sources state that women were in the front lines of the crowd. For instance, Samim states that to prevent the protests to move forward, "the authorities raised the bridges over the Golden Horn to try and stop the march. But with women in the lead [...] the demonstrators breached the defences" (Samim, 1981, p. 72). Similarly, Guzel states that "hundreds of thousands of female and male workers" attended the protests (1996, p. 222). Another source indicates that on June 16, police officers "clubbed women workers who were at the front row" (TIB, 1976, p. 189). In the clashes between workers and police forces, three workers, one shop-keeper and one policeman died. Around 70,000 workers on the first day and 150,000 workers on the second participated in the events. The demonstrations were shocking for every segment of the society including trade unions and the government. To end the protests, martial law was declared by the government and lasted until the end of summer (Alper, 2010, p. 76). An interesting remark regarding the protests was the position of Turk-Is which considered the protests as a "try out for red revolution". Despite the sharp positioning



of Turk-Is which desired to eliminate DISK at any cost, many rank-and-file members of Turk-Is supported and also attended the protests (Guzel, 1996, p. 223).

In the aftermath of the Events of June 15-16, 1970, 25 unionists from DISK were arrested, the strikes in the regions where workers attended the protests were postponed, and hundreds of workers who were mostly members of DISK were fired from their jobs (Guzel, 1996, p. 223). Furthermore, the protests and their unprecedented impact on the political scene led off the March 12, 1971 military intervention (Alper, 2010, p. 76). The military regime aimed at and achieved to eradicate the socialist groups which had gained quite big strength in this period. Thousands of revolutionary students, activists and workers were arrested and tortured by the military forces (Samim, 1981, p. 72). Furthermore, three (male) popular socialist student leaders, Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan and Yusuf Aslan were executed in 1972. There is no information about the number of women arrested in this period. However, one of the most famous political prisoners in this period was Sevgi Soysal, a prominent female novelist of the period.

In 1974, the government issued an amnesty and the arrested activists and workers were released. Despite the repression by the military regime in the early 1970s, the left continued to grow, but in an even more fragmented fashion (Samim, 1981, p. 73-74). Samim argues that divided into two main groups as "Maoists" and "Soviets", the Turkish socialists competed with each other over the best theoretical approaches to be applied for the Turkish case. (1981, p. 82). He states that:

As the groups gathered around their 'theories', [...they] are thus isolated and inevitably pushed into *defensive* positions—defensive against the bourgeoisie as well as towards *other* groups. The Turkish left has for some time ceased to speak in a coherent way about national problems: a critique or analysis of questions of health and medicine, or transport and urbanization, or village organization, or factory life, is not

even attempted. Instead of demonstrating that there are rational and reachable alternatives to the urgent—and obviously social—problems of everyday life, Turkish socialists offer voluminous debates as to whether or not the ‘Theory of the Three Worlds’ is opportunist. (1981, p. 82-83).

Unsurprisingly, the competition among socialist groups had repercussions on the leadership and rank-and-file workers in the trade unions, specifically in DISK which was considered having a high potential for the revolution by many socialists. On May 21-24, 1975, the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress of DISK was held in Istanbul. At the congress, among many other unions, Tekstil joined DISK and the number of trade unions in DISK jumped to 25. According to the official statistics, founded with 50,000 members in 1967, DISK increased its membership to 600,000 in 1975 (Türkiye Sendikacılık, Ansiklopedisi, vol. 1, 1998, p. 312). Unfortunately, there is no information concerning the percentage of women workers.

Again at this congress, many members of *Türkiye Komünist Partisi* (Turkish Communist Party, TKP) took important positions in the management committee of DISK. The TKP which had been founded in 1920 for the first time, yet had been inactive from the 1950s, restarted to organize in 1973, right after the first democratic elections after the military coup. The TKP was among the socialist parties supported *Soviet ecologie* and had close links with *The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR) (Akal, 2008, p. 84-85). Organizing workers, but specifically workers of the leftist trade unions, was a major concern for TKP, like many other socialist parties in Turkey. For that purpose, a considerable number of TKP members achieved to take significant roles and positions within DISK in 1975. According to Samim:

[T]he TKP cadre within DISK were faced with the challenge of leading the majority of the left in supporting the slow, arduous work of organizing the new segments of the working class and consolidating DISK’s power on a national scale. The TKP

leadership, however, were more concerned with the selfish preservation of their own dominance within DISK and refused to unite with other left-wing currents. Indeed, they joined with right-wing organizers and bureaucrats to purge the other left elements- especially the TİP supporters in DISK unions. They acted virtually as a political police force within DISK to prevent all other socialist 'infiltration.' (1981, p. 79)

Consequently, despite its increasing membership and strength, within the federation DISK often suffered from clashes and conflicts stemming from the fragmentation of the left. Divided among different socialist groups and social democrats, DISK had a variety of leaders and members affiliated with different political perspectives and organizations. In the 1969 Turkish elections, DISK gave its support to TİP, since among its founders there were TİP members.

In the 1973 general elections, on the other hand, DISK supported the CHP. In 1975, the effect of the TKP was more dominant, whereas, after the 6<sup>th</sup> General Congress of DISK in 1977, the leftist wing of the CHP as well as other socialist groups increased their effectiveness (Koc, 2000, p. 102). In this vein, the competition among and within labor organizations on the one hand, among leftist and socialist groups and parties on the other, as well as often violent clashes between extremist right-wing and socialist groups dominated the political stage of Turkey during the 1970s (Mello, 2007; 2010; Samim, 1981). The military regime took over the government, once again, on September 12, 1980, and paralyzed the social and political movements in Turkey-a process that still has repercussions in the political life of Turkey today. The process which became publicly known as the "DISK Case" began with members and managers of DISK and its affiliated organizations being taken into custody and this process lasted more than ten years. Almost 2000 people were taken into custody and 264 of them were arrested. The sentences included the death penalty for 78 managers; however, in

1991 the case was concluded with the acquittance of everyone involved (Pekin, Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, 1996, p. 319).

### **3.3.3. The History of Tekstil, 1965-1980**

In 1963, 42 union activists resigned from the Textile, Knitting and Clothing Workers' Union of Turkey (*Türkiye Tekstil, Orme ve Giyim Sanayi Iscileri Sendikası*, Teksif) due to internal conflicts among the leadership of the union. On 21 October 1965, those members broke away from Teksif, established the Istanbul Textile, Knitting and Clothing Workers' Union (*Istanbul Tekstil Orme ve Giyim Sanayii Iscileri Sendikası*, Tekstil). The first General President of the union was Alaattin Buyukdere. The first (all male) management committee members were Hudaverdi Talay, Orhan Seyfi Soysal, Mehmet Altınbilek, Omer Karaaslan, Faik Gultekin, Orhan Cokdiker, Tayyar Oncu and Mehmet Cagdas (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 3, 1998, p. 192).

On 21 November 1965, the first general congress of Tekstil was held and a new management committee was elected. According to that, Rıza Guven was elected as general president, Halil Gurel as vice general president, Yunus Kara as general secretary and Huseyin Akduman as vice general secretary. Furthermore, among the elected 17 management committee members, there was also one woman; Munevver Dumaner (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 3, 1998, p. 192). However, there is no further information about her in any source. The general president Rıza Guven was elected as general president over and over again, from 1965 to 1979. At the annual general congress on March 31, 1968, the name of the union was changed to the Union of Textile Workers (*Tekstil Iscileri Sendikası*, Tekstil) (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 3, 1998, p. 192).

Broken away from Teksif, yet competing in the same industry to organize textile workers, Tekstil situated itself as a rival to Teksif, and to the confederation Teksif affiliated, Turk-Is. In 1966 Pasabahce Strike, Tekstil supported the workers and the unions opposed to

Türk-İs (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, 1998, p. 192). However, until 1975, Tekstil remained as an independent trade union. In 1970, to struggle against the government's declaration of a new legal regulation concerning trade union rights which would restrict unionization and the right to strike and causing the major protests known as the Events of June 15-16, Tekstil, along with four other trade unions, established the Independent Trade Unions Resistance Committee of Turkey (*Türkiye Bağımsız İsci Sendikaları Genel Direniş Komitesi*) However, the four of them including Tekstil, later on, joined DISK (Koc, 2003, p. 58).

In 1973, Tekstil was admitted to the membership of the International Federation of Chemical and General Workers' Union (ICF), and the general president of Tekstil, Rıza Güven, attended the 15<sup>th</sup> Statutory Congress of ICF which was held in Geneva, from November 7 to November 9, 1973. In the journal *Tekstil* published in December 1973, Rıza Güven wrote an article concerning the importance of ICF and his views on the congress. According to that, Tekstil was aware of the significance of international struggle against the exploitation by multinational companies, specifically in the developing countries. Furthermore, in the journal, it was made explicit that the membership to ICF which had over 4,000,000 members in 64 countries was a very important development for Tekstil (December, 1978, p. 6-7).

In 1975, Tekstil attended the 5th General Congress of DISK and joined it. The fragmentation within the political and social movements, specifically after 1975, and correspondingly, competing views among DISK leadership and member unions reflected to Tekstil as well. Some of the local branches of Tekstil pursued political perspectives and goals different from the main leadership. Due to the delays in holding the general congress in 1978, the conflict and unrest increased in Tekstil, which eventually led the court appointed trustees to take over the union's management (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, 1998, p. 192). The

conflict stemmed from the delays in the congress; however, it was actually a reflection of the deeper problems with respect to different political views of the unionists. The fraction which was known as "İlerlemeciler" (Progressive ones) referred to unionists who had connections with the TKP or its legal organizations the Progressive Youth Association (*İlerici Gençlik Derneği*, IGD) and the Progressive Women's Association (*İlerici Kadınlar Derneği*, IKD)<sup>18</sup>. Some of the "Progressive ones" went to hunger strikes to protest the delays in the congress, to criticize the main leadership and to demand a more democratic and revolutionary unionism. In the banner with the photograph of the workers on hunger strike, out of five workers, two of them were women, although there is no information on the actual number of workers on hunger strike.<sup>19</sup> After the hunger strikes, nine branch chairpersons published a joint declaration called the *Revolutionary Unity against Conventionalism, Liquidationism, and Separatism*. The chairpersons included Rıza Budak who was in charge of Cerkezköy Branch in that period, and who would be the general president of Tekstil in 1979. The Revolutionary Unity criticized the main leadership as well as the "Progressive ones" which they accused of dividing the unity of Tekstil and DISK. Furthermore, in their declarations, they accused İlerlemeciler to be in cooperation with Tekstil's Head Office, no matter what they said or did. Besides, many other groups and cliques distributed fliers and declarations which they called upon workers to support their organization, unity, or party.

Such conflicts and problems, of course, had repercussions on the rank-and-file level as well. There are documents in TUSTAV Tekstil archives which reveal that in this period, workers applied to the DISK Head Office describing their problems that their local branches and Tekstil's leadership could not solve. For instance, in 1978, a female worker, Zehra Tulumen, wrote a letter to the DISK Head Office, and stated that after holding a strike for 6 months an agreement was signed between factory and Tekstil, and workers restarted to work.

<sup>18</sup> I will provide a more detailed analysis of IKD in the next chapter. I will also discuss the level of autonomy within this organization.

<sup>19</sup> *İsciler Aclik Grevinde* [Workers on Hunger Strike], Banner, 1978, TUSTAV Tekstil Archive, 16/80.

However, the employers now started to discharge them from the factory, one by one, without any reason, she claimed. Since Tekstil's executives did not show any interest nor help to their case, she asked the DISK management to find a solution to their problems<sup>20</sup>. In another petition given to the Istanbul Labor Court, another worker who was recently discharged from his job with his friends argued that due to the appointment of trustees, the management of Tekstil became "a union without any management" and the employers took advantage of this situation and fired many workers. The worker was asking for justice for workers as well as for DISK<sup>21</sup>.

All in all, beginning with the 1960s and escalating through the end of the 1970s, student protests and increasing strength of leftists and socialist movements went hand in hand with the increasing strength and politicization of the labor movements in Turkey. On the one hand, these developments aligned with the radicalism of the late 1960s and the 1970s in the U.S and Europe, specifically during the campaigns against the Vietnam War (Sayarı, 2010, p. 199). However, the internal fragmentation of the socialist and leftist groups and the emergence of extremist right-wing political groups which positioned themselves against the whole socialist movement led to the often violent clashes between right-wing groups and socialist parties which would provide the cause for the 1980 military coup which took over the government to finish the "anarchy" and restore the peace and stability of the country. Neither DISK, nor Tekstil was outside of these clashes and competing ideologies. Yet, the conflict and disagreements in Tekstil did not stop the increase in its membership. On the contrary, throughout the 1970s Tekstil continued to grow. On December 31, 1970 Tekstil informed the Ministry of Labor that the number of its members was 15,574. According to the last statistics before the military coup in September 12, 1980, Tekstil's membership had

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<sup>20</sup> Zehra Tulumen, (1978, n.d.), *DISK Genel Merkeze Mektup* [Letter to DISK Head Office], TUSTAV Tekstil Archive, 16/80.

<sup>21</sup> *Istanbul 5. Is Mahkemesine Dilekce* [Petition to the Istanbul 5<sup>th</sup> Labor Court], (1978), TUSTAV Tekstil Archive, 16/80.

increased to 44,506, as of July 1, 1979 (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, vol. 3, 1998, p. 192-193). However, we have no information about the percentage of women in these statistics.

Along with DISK, and many other trade unions, Tekstil was shut down and all of its activities were terminated because of the military coup of September 12, 1980. 285 members and managers were taken into custody and eight of them were arrested, total prison sentence given to Tekstil managers were 58 years, 10 months and 20 days (Pekin, Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, 1996, p. 319). Tekstil could restart its activities only after being acquitted in the lawsuit against DISK and its affiliated organizations in 1991.

In the next chapter, by using primary sources and specifically the journal of the union, I will analyze the working-class politics and gender perspective of Tekstil, from its founding to 1980.



#### **4. Gender and Working-Class Politics in Tekstil**

In the period 1965-1980, Tekstil had a significant number of female members. Especially in the 1970s, women were active members in Tekstil, specifically in the shop-floor leadership positions.<sup>22</sup> The increasing strength of trade unions along with the flourishing social and political movements in the 1970s of Turkey had a positive impact on women's labor activism in trade unions and other political organizations. Although this activism was mainly triggered on the basis of class solidarity, in this chapter, I would like to explore the interplay between gender and working-class politics in Tekstil. In the first section, I will briefly discuss the working class politics of Tekstil, including its perspective regarding the nature of unionism. In the second section, I will focus on the ways in which the trade union's political agenda and activism were shaped through the interplay of gender and class politics. In other words, I am interested in revealing the demands of the trade union concerning, explicitly or implicitly, women's work. I will examine how Tekstil dealt with the gender issues raised by women in the national and international arena. To understand the ways in which Tekstil addressed these issues, it is crucial to understand the gender perspective of the trade union and see how gender politics intervened and shaped Tekstil's working-class politics.

##### **4.1. Working-class politics in Tekstil**

The problematic relationship between trade unions and women has been a topic of much scholarly attention, and even more of discussions in many trade unions. There is no doubt that in unions women have, all too often, been excluded from leadership and power positions. Furthermore, the unions have not properly represented the interests of women workers (Cobble, 1993, p. 5; Milkman, 1990, p. 87). Yet, many studies reveal that in some

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<sup>22</sup> The shop-floor leadership refers to the union representatives or shop stewards who are elected by their fellow workers and work voluntarily as a bridge between the union leadership and rank and file members. Yet, these positions are considered crucial by the union leaderships, and as "an entry point into union politics" (Tshoaedi, 2003, p. 218).

historical contexts women were able to effectively organize in trade unions. They challenged the unions' male-dominated leaderships and gender-blind policies, and demanded economic and gender justice at the workplace (Cobble, 1993; Cobble, 2004; Cobble, 2005; James & French, 1997; Leonard, 2005; Walton, 2005).

There are two broad theoretical explanations concerning the underrepresentation of women in trade unions: a structural explanation which suggests that male-dominated unionism is a result of gender inequality in the larger society and reproduced by patriarchy and a cultural explanation which finds the roots of the problem in the hegemony of *male culture* in the unions (Milkman, 1990, p. 89-90). Although these explanations are, to some extent, useful, Milkman (1990) asserts:

Rather than presuming that men will always act to protect their gender interest, we must ask: Under what circumstances have they done so, and when they have instead pursued their class interest in gender equality? Similarly, rather than presuming that women's culture and unionism are inherently incompatible, we should explore the conditions under which they have and have not proved to be so. (p. 92)

In this vein, it becomes very important to understand the particular characteristics of a trade union in terms of the historical context in which the institution emerged, its strategies and perspective regarding unionism and class, as these features would have a large influence on the ways in which gender relations can be understood. Therefore, while analyzing the gender politics of Tekstil, it is equally important to understand its class politics and perspective regarding unionism and strategies of mobilization to be able to grasp the gender politics.

Tekstil is a trade union which, even today, suffers from underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. For instance, today there is no woman in the General Management Committee of Tekstil which is composed of five members. In the Supervisory Board, there is no female member either and out of five members of the Disciplinary Board, only one of

them is occupied by a woman. In the management committee of the local branches, female unionists occupied only twelve seats out of 53.<sup>23</sup> The lack of information and statistical data about women's participation in the labor organizations during the 1960s and the 1970s poses a challenge to fully understand the proportion of female workers. In 2007, the total number of workers organized in Tekstil was 75,998 and 21,478 of those were women. So, women workers composed almost 30 percent of the total membership (Yıldız, 2007, p. 72).

Furthermore, the issues of women and gender have been substantially marginalized in Tekstil. This marginalization mostly stemmed from the union's class perspective which aimed to organize all workers through working-class politics. However, after 1975, for a short period, the union policies seemed to be challenged, changed or reformulated due to the demands of women in and outside of the unions (on the national and international scale), the increasing legitimacy of demands regarding "gender equality" in the broader political discourses and, relatedly, the proliferation of women's activism in international unions. For instance, regarding women workers in the U.S., Cobble (1993) suggests that thanks to the women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s, women's status at work has gradually transformed and for women having a job outside the home and demanding equality at the workplace became legitimate for the society (p. 7). Hunt (1999) echoes Cobble by stating that "throughout the 1960S and 1970s, more and more women joined forces to pursue the goal of eliminating gender-based discrimination in all facets of society, including the workplace.[...] The changed union demographics and growing awareness of women's issues within the broader society eventually forced change" (p. 294-295).

As I have explained in detail in the previous chapter, Tekstil was established as an independent trade union of textile workers and as a rival to Teksif in 1965. Therefore, Tekstil had to compete with Teksif to organize the textile workers under its own roof. These two

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<sup>23</sup> Based on the members declared in Tekstil's website. <http://disktektstil.org/> Last access, April 20, 2016.

trade unions, however, have held entirely different perspectives regarding the nature and structure of unionism.

Tekstil, which can easily be categorized at the far-left of the political spectrum, frequently and severely criticized Teksif for pursuing a politics of "yellow unionism".<sup>24</sup> In Turkey, leftist and socialist trade unions and political parties use the term "yellow union" as a political insult. The term refers to a trade union which is considered as dependent on, or dominated by the employers or the government. In this vein, both Turk-Is and Teksif have been defined as yellow unions and often accused to betray the working-class and its interests by establishing informal alliances with employers and governments regardless of the latter's political affiliations. Yet, Teksif had a lot more members than Tekstil. For instance, in 1975, Teksif had 115,000 members, whereas Tekstil's members remained approximately 20,000 in the same period (TİB, 1976, p. 246-247). Thus, for Tekstil, to organize workers who were members of Teksif was equally important as to organize nonunionized workers.

The journal of the union, *Tekstil*, beginning from the very first issue to the last ones, gave wide publicity to the critiques of Teksif and Turk-Is in a variety of ways. One of the most important and frequent criticism towards Turk-Is was its principle of Above Party Politics (*Partilerustu Politika, PAP*). Tekstil, on the other hand, vigorously argued that trade unions should interfere in the political arena since it believed that trade unions should go beyond "bread-and-butter issues" and fight for promoting "social change" to be able to truly defend the rights of the working class. Accordingly, Tekstil has never limited the responsibilities of a trade union to the economic sphere. Rather, it radically proposed that the workers' struggle should be organized in three spheres: economic, political, and ideological.

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<sup>24</sup> The origin of the concepts yellow and red unionism dates back to the aftermath of World War I. Two new international organizations, uniting the various trade unions of Europe, as well as of a number of countries outside of Europe emerged in this period. The first one was the International Federation of Trade Unions and its center was in Amsterdam. The second was the International Council of Trade and Industrial Unions which had a center in Moscow. The former was "dubbed by its opponents as the "Yellow" Trade Union International", whereas, the latter was known as the "Red" Trade Union International. (Pavolsky, 1922, p. 621)

On the economic front, Tekstil frequently emphasized the incapacity of yellow unions in general, and of Teksif in particular, for pushing higher wages and better working conditions. In the journal *Tekstil*, the differences between yellow and revolutionary trade unions were explained over and over again. As such, yellow unions were criticized to submit to the interests of employers, to be concerned about the interests of employers rather than of workers, to have hidden agendas and undemocratic union structures (1975 June, p. 22). In terms of political struggle, in contrast to the Above Party Politics of Teksif, Tekstil explicitly manifested its support for the political parties which the union leadership considered the best to serve the interests of the working class. Moreover, through the journal, Tekstil asked its members to vote for a particular political party in the elections, arguing that this voting was necessary to advance workers' rights. However, the journal also stated that workers should fight to increase their representation in parliament. For instance, regarding the Turkish General Elections in 1973, like DISK, Tekstil supported the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and called upon its workers to vote for the CHP. In 1972, Bulent Ecevit became the general president of the CHP which had been founded by Mustafa Kemal and remained the leading party until 1950. Regarding the 1973 elections, Bulent Ecevit embraced "an increasingly radical" politics and shifted the ideological perspective of the party to social democracy, which brought the electoral victory in 1973 (Ahmad, 1994, p. 150). In its journal, Tekstil's perspective was explained as such:

It is a reality that in Turkey, a labor party does not exist. But we should not forget that such a party will not appear out of nowhere. Rather, the emergence of such a party is dependent on the development of democracy. Workers have to gain strength to form their own parties. To gain strength, they need more advanced democratic rights, such as the right to strike, and freedom to choose a trade union. At this point, we see the

importance of the CHP in terms of democratic and union rights of the working class (1972 July, p. 10).

In terms of ideological struggle, Tekstil positioned itself with a mission to "help" the Turkish working class to form a class consciousness. In order to achieve this, it organized various trainings and seminars, published informative articles in the journal and frequently emphasized the importance of reading and learning. Therefore, rather than viewing unionism simply as a vehicle for economic justice, Tekstil advocated a much broader struggle.

#### **4.2. Gender politics in Tekstil**

In Tekstil, women have never been excluded, at least explicitly, from official membership as happened in many unions throughout the nineteenth century at the national and international level (Cobble, 1993, p. 5). This was mainly because in the textile sector women workers have composed a numerically significant part of the workforce, which makes exclusionary policies meaningless for trade unions. However, not having exclusionary membership policies does not guarantee the inclusion of women workers. As Cobble (1993) points out, "formal barriers [regarding membership policies] fell in the early twentieth century, but many unions remained skeptical or at best indifferent to the organization of women" (p. 5). Remaining indifferent to the organization of women has significant consequences in terms of gender politics of the unions. While discussing the history of women in American trade unions, Milkman convincingly argues that "union hostility toward women is mainly based on the fundamentally gender-neutral dynamic which nevertheless can and frequently does have a gender-specific outcome" (1990, p. 93). In Tekstil as well, a supposedly gender-neutral dynamic was dominant in its official discourse, especially before 1975.

On the one hand, Tekstil pursued a supposedly gender-neutral strategy and developed a working class politics, while on the other, Tekstil's leaders saw an essential difference

between male and female workers in terms of their abilities to organize, struggle and develop a working-class consciousness. Some feminist scholars have called these accusations "the conventional wisdom" that women are less organizable, less militant or less active in unions (Cobble, 1993; Kessler-Harris, 1975; Milkman, 1990). In *Tekstil*, the union's male leaders, as well as male members frequently complained about the difficulties of organizing women and about women's disinterest regarding the journal and the politics of the union. For instance, Erol Yalcin, who was one of the board members and had a regular column in the journal, in 1972 explicitly, stated that:

[i]t is important to pay attention to the differences among the masses in terms of their ability to learn. For instance, in the sectors where children and women constitute the majority, it is much harder to teach them to be united. For this reason, trade unions should pay attention to those differences. (Yalcin, 1972, p. 18)

Another example of this attitude can be found in the words of a (male) shop steward. When the officials of the press team visited the Ayaz Barburi factory in which almost all workers were women, the shop steward complained that "our young girls and women workers do not have any interest in the union's journal" (May 1973, p. 6). Although from time to time the journal gave place to such statements regarding women's subordinate position and agency in the labor movement, sometimes it also gave place to women's voices, through interviews with women workers, by publishing letters and poems written by female members, and by publishing photos of women workers in picket lines, meetings, and seminars. As I will discuss in the next chapter, there were militant women in *Tekstil* who spoke at its congresses, wrote letters to the journal, established solidarity networks with other women workers and participated in women's autonomous political organizations, which all illustrate women's active participation and interest in the union.

In this vein, before 1975, "the conventional wisdom" and the documents revealing women's active participation co-existed within the same issues of the journal. Furthermore, Tekstil did not develop a broader gender perspective regarding the female members of the union or women workers. Rather, gender-neutral strategies were dominant in the union, which primarily aimed at organizing and mobilizing workers along class lines by promising higher wages, better working conditions and more social benefits than "the yellow union Teksif could ever provide" (April 1970, p. 1).

In 1971, one of Tekstil's local branches in Istanbul initiated an activity, specifically for women workers and this was the only attempt of Tekstil in terms of organizing an activity addressed to women workers only. The Bakirkoy (a district in Istanbul) Branch made a decision to organize a tailoring course for female members of the union, starting from 1971. (1971 November, p. 22). The general secretary of the Bakirkoy Branch stated that organized as a two-years program, the course aimed to help women workers to specialize in their fields and improve their skills (1972 June, p. 19) so that they could be employed in better jobs. When it began in 1971, 105 women attended the course. However, only 25 of them could finish the first year of the course. Therefore, the union's attempt to improve women workers' skills remained as quite local and limited. However, the course remained active at least until 1976. So, it is possible to argue that even if limited, a group of unionist women enjoyed this advantage provided by the union. Another attempt of Tekstil concerning women workers was its announcement in November 1971 that there would be a woman column in the journal of the union, *Tekstil*. Despite the announcement in 1971, the column was not included as a part of the journal until 1976, without providing any explanation about it.

Nevertheless, after 1975 several gender issues could enter into the union's political agenda thanks to the women's movements in the national and international arena, as well as



women's demands from the below. I will discuss the impact of rank-and-file workers' activism in Chapter 5, in detail.

#### **4.2.1. Women's demands in the national and international arena**

The 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of Tekstil was held in January 1975 and in close vote, the Assembly decided that Tekstil would join the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (*Devrimci Isci Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*, DISK). After 1975, women workers in the union and "their specific issues" became relatively more important concerns for Tekstil. Although the success and efficiency of the actual (and, indeed very limited in their scope) policies have remained rather ambiguous, in this period Tekstil's leaders started to build a gender politics to satisfy these newly emerged political needs.

Yıldız Ecevit argues that during the 1970s the radicalization and politicization of the Turkish society had a considerable impact on the ways in which trade unions set their agendas and excluded gender issues. She claims that:

Particularly between 1975 and 1980 all unions devoted themselves to political struggles. The wealth and well-being of workers was viewed as of secondary importance. Involvement with political issues decreased the significance of the material conditions of the workers. Issues like improvements in work conditions, housing, and crèches had become unimportant in the eyes of the union officials.  
(Ecevit, 2005, p. 71-72)

Although I agree Ecevit with respect to the politicization of organized labor in the 1970s, I suggest that, contradicting Ecevit's claim, this politicization had a positive impact on the ways in which trade unions approached gender issues. Women were, by no means, out of the radicalization and politicization of the society during the 1970s. On the contrary, women organized in different socialist and leftist parties and groups, and it was these same women who, during the 1980s, would belong to and be important figures amongst the group of the

first feminist activists of Turkey. Women's increasing participation in the socialist parties and eventually the foundation of the Progressive Women's Association (*Ilerici Kadınlar Derneği*, IKD), which provided a political space to women to raise their demands effected trade unions (specifically DISK) in a positive way. Furthermore, on the one hand the competition among the leftist groups and competition between two confederations (DISK and Turk-Is) motivated organizations to prove themselves as the true representative of the working class. For instance, after 1975, through several articles and news published in *Tekstil* the advantages of being organized in Tekstil for women were highlighted. I will discuss certain aspects of this issue below. Although the overall success of this period in terms of promoting gender equality is open to debate, I believe that it is important not to underestimate the transformation of the gender discourse in trade unions.

One of the important developments that had an influence on Tekstil was the foundation of the IKD in 1975. IKD was one of the very first socialist women's organizations in Turkey and had a huge success in terms of its impact on the existing social and political movements in the 1970s. However, at least in the beginning, the foundation of IKD was not the decision made by women. Rather, in 1974, the Turkish Communist Party (*Türkiye Kommunist Partisi*, TKP) took a decision to establish a women's organization as an attempt to expand its politics. Thus, rather than an interest to women's issues, the decision was more of a political strategy following many other communist parties in the world (Akal, 1998, p. 106). To this end, TKP initiated connections with the *Women's International Democratic Federation* (WIDF). The WIDF which characterized as a massive "left feminist" organization by Francisca de Haan (2010), was founded in 1945 and pursued its political activism within the Cold War context. As the largest women's international organization in the post-1945 period, WIDF was "a global 'coalition of women of the anti-Fascist, pro-Communist left' [...]"

and [it] espoused four principles: anti-fascism, lasting peace, women's rights, and better conditions for children (de Haan, 2010, p. 548).

One of the founders of IKD and a member of TKP, Seyda Talu states that although the idea of founding a women's association belonged to TKP, in practice everything else was determined by a much broader women group (as cited from Akal, 2008, p. 106). As a socialist women's organization, IKD attributed great importance to women workers, and in its political agenda, IKD focused on promoting policies for higher wages and better working conditions for women and also for reducing their domestic burdens (Akal, 2008; Pervan, 2013). To do so, they turned the leadership of trade unions to raise their demands concerning women's work.

Brenner suggests that in the U.S. "organized feminism, while predominantly middle-class in membership, helped working-class women develop the language and political resources to articulate demands for political and economic equality within their trade unions and communities" (1998, para. 6). In a similar fashion, not only did IKD provide means to women workers for raising their demands towards unions, employers and the state, but once IKD increased its memberships, it also revealed the unfulfilled potential of women workers in the eyes of union leaders, including Tekstil. Therefore, I consider the foundation and organization of IKD as an important historical development contributing to the union's increasing attention to women's issues. The agenda of IKD as relating to women workers aimed to achieve at least two purposes. The first one was to increase the organization of women workers and empower them within trade unions. To achieve these goals, they pushed trade unions to organize seminars and literacy courses for women workers, as well as they demanded autonomous women's branches within the trade unions. Furthermore, they helped working women to be organized in the trade unions, and encouraged them to take roles in the decision-making bodies of their unions. The second objective of IKD was to improve

women's working conditions. As far as women's working conditions were concerned, women in IKD raised well-known demands such as having day care centers and breastfeeding rooms in the factories and workplaces, equal wages for equal work, and protection of women's and childrens' health through collective agreements (Pervan, 2013, p. 71).

In Turkey, the limited attention of trade unions regarding issues of women workers, was also largely shaped by the unions' interactions with international organizations of the working class. Tokgoz and Sayılan (1998), for instance, argue that labor organizations in Turkey started to grasp the importance of organizing women workers in unions, yet the women's committees or departments in the unions were not established, or even if they were established, their responsibilities were mostly restricted to organizing annual activities for the International Women's Day (p. 297). Furthermore, for many trade unions, to have a few women members who when needed could represent their unions at the international level has been considered very progressive and more than enough in terms of achieving gender equality in the organizations.

Parallel to these trends, soon after Tekstil had joined the International Federation of Chemical and General Workers' Unions (ICF), the 15<sup>th</sup> Statutory Congress of ICF was held in Geneva, from November 7 to November 9, 1973. The leader of Tekstil, Rıza Guven attended the meetings and also gave a speech about "The problems of the Turkish labor movement". Furthermore, one of the congressional resolutions was organizing campaigns for women's demands regarding "equal wage for equal work", (December 1973, p. 7). Thus, women's issues like the gender pay gap, before the campaigns organized by IKD, in fact entered into the political realm of Tekstil through the resolutions of ICF.

The declaration of the year 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY) by the United Nations (UN) had extensive repercussions in many organizations at the national level, including DISK, as well as Tekstil. Ellina (2003) argues that "demand of the national feminist

movements did not rise independently of international developments. National, regional and global policies do not develop in isolation of each other. Women's mobilization was concurrent ... with the UN Decade of Women and the UN Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975" (p. 39). The argument of Ellina was also relevant to the women's demands raised in mixed-sex working-class organizations. One of the most significant manifestations of the impact of IWY in Turkey was the resolution concerning women workers adopted by the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of DISK, which was held in Istanbul from May 21 to May 24, 1975. This specific resolution was one of the very first official attempts to develop a gender policy in DISK and its affiliated organizations. The impact of IWY was made quite explicit in the resolution. "Acknowledging that in the year 1975, declared International Women's Year by the United Nations, despite the progressive egalitarian provisions of the laws, Turkish women are found to be lacking many rights and freedoms" (The 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of DISK, 1975). Moreover, this resolution adopted by DISK was also responsive to IKD's demands concerning childcare. "The 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of DISK decided that to improve women's living conditions, DISK will seek and provide the required means for establishing day care centers in the workplaces where, women workers composed the majority " (The 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of DISK, 1975). The last part of the resolution stated that "for promoting equal rights and wages to working women within the family, in society and at the workplace, and to save rural women from their subordinate positions vis-à-vis men, the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of DISK, decided to organize seminars and panel discussions" (The 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of DISK, 1975). In the journal *Tekstil* as well, International Women's Year was glorified and used to emphasize the value and importance of women workers. Erol Yalcin, in his article asked the government to give up its policies aiming to fool women "at least in the year 1975, declared as the IWY", and he demanded a better retirement plan for working women (Yalcin, 1975, p. 11).

In 1976, *The Handbook of Women Workers as Mothers and Laborers (Ana ve Emekci Olarak Isçi Kadının El Kitabı)* was written and published by the joint efforts of IKD and DISK. The purpose of the handbook was twofold: the first aim was to teach women workers about their already existing rights, so that women would be better able to protect themselves from the violations of their rights by the employer (1976, p.5), and the second aim was to mobilize women workers through raising the demands for more advanced (working) women's rights (1976, p. 8). The issues raised in the handbook, along with the resolution adopted by the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of DISK, were crucial for shaping the gender politics of Tekstil after 1975.

#### **4.2.2. A new (feminist) agenda in Tekstil?**

In 1976, *Tekstil* published several articles from *The Handbook of Women Workers as Mothers and Laborers*. In August, *Tekstil*, published the article "Do women get the same wage as men?" (1976 August, p. 20-21). This article argued that in Turkey, although the principle of equal wage for equal work irrespective of sex was recognized under the constitutional framework, in reality women's earnings were less than men's. To change this fact and transform women's working conditions, the article addressed trade unions: "Women, first, should learn about their already existing legal rights and push their employers to respect these laws through trade unions" (1976 August, p. 20). Moreover, the article emphasized the achievements of their female comrades who were fighting for the very same rights in the U.S, Germany and France and called upon Turkish women workers to fight for their own rights. "In Turkey, for higher wages, women should organize in trade unions and women's associations, raise their voices, push their trade unions to include the equal wage principle in collective agreements, control its implementations and when needed, women should organize strikes, protests and marches to achieve their goals" (1976 August, p.21). In the next issue, in September, another article called "Can women be employed in every job?" from the same

book was published (1976 September, pp. 20-21). The article was a criticism of the "Regulations on heavy and dangerous work" and it argued that the regulations do not take women's increasing capabilities due to the technological developments. It states:

Recently, some jobs previously considered heavy and dangerous have been simplified or can be performed with machines thanks to the technological developments. However, the same technologies also create new methods and materials that can be harmful for women's reproductive functions. In these regulations, lathe work, for instance, which now can be easily performed by women is prohibited, whereas, the harmful effects of assembly line remained unaddressed. (1976 September, p. 21)

By publishing these articles, Tekstil revealed that it found the women's demands for the above issues legitimate and embraced them. Having childcare centers for children was another demand raised by women, and this issue was also addressed in the journal several times. In March 1977, with regard to International Women's Day, the leader of the union Rıza Guven wrote an article called "Working Women and the problem of Childcare Centers". He stated that:

Regarding women's struggle for equal rights, there is a crucial role and responsibility of trade unions. The most important one is to increase women's membership and participation in the unions. Along with difficult working conditions, women's domestic responsibilities restrict their class struggle. Since its foundation, Tekstil has pursued its struggle to advance women's work and life conditions. Along with pushing the state to transform the legal framework, Tekstil has tried to solve women's problems through collective agreements (1977 March, p. 3).

As is clear from Guven's words, in this period, Tekstil tried to prove that it was paying attention to women's demands and had a gender-aware politics. Therefore, it is possible to

trace a shift from gender-neutral politics to gender-aware politics in Tekstil, as a response to the women's movements in the national and international arena. In his article, Guven acknowledged that the attempts of Tekstil (through collective agreements) were not sufficient and that was necessary to address all working women's demands. Furthermore, the demand for day care centers was considered within the framework of "the protection of sacred motherhood in society". This understanding was not specific to Tekstil, women's responsibilities as mothers were considered as another contribution of women to society (raising good child for the society) by both IKD and DISK. The handbook (1976) for instance, suggests that "to get pregnant is not a crime, but a positive social contribution. Motherhood should not be punished by employers through low wages. It should be supported" (p. 8). In Guven's article, there was also this emphasis on the protection of motherhood. He states that "we have to understand this problem considering the necessity of raising all working women's children as good citizens for the society" (1977 March, p. 3). In other words, women's roles as "mothers" were naturalized by union officials, as well as by socialist women. Furthermore, besides the need for free day care centers, women's domestic works were not problematized in this discourse. The construction and then, protection of motherhood within the scope of social and national interest has similar characteristics with the ideal construction of womanhood by Kemalist ideology. White (2003) states that "Modernity, as defined by the Turkish state, included marriage and children as a national duty for women" (p. 146). Therefore, the way IKD and Tekstil discussed the childcare centers for women reveal the legacy of Kemalist ideology and state feminism, as I discussed in detailed in the second chapter of this thesis.

In the beginning of 1977, a woman's column called Tekstil Woman (*Tekstil Kadın*) began to appear in the journal. However, the column was published in three issues only, and then it disappeared from the journal. The column Tekstil Kadın aimed to reveal women's activism and the problems they experienced as "mothers and workers". Related with Tekstil's



support for childcare centers, in the issues of *Tekstil* published in March and April 1977, Tekstil's press team asked women workers about who was taking care of their children, while they were at work. The answers of the women were published without their names and the only information given was the name of the factories in which women were employed. Since the journal had been prepared and published in Istanbul, women workers who were interviewed were also from different factories located in Istanbul. Women workers' answers to this question revealed the alternative strategies used by women workers, in the absence of childcare facilities provided to them. As I have noted earlier, women's lasting relationships with their (or their husbands') parents proved to be useful for women in terms of solving the childcare problem that they often experience when they were at work. In March 1977, a woman worker from Ileri Mensucat factory answered the question in *Tekstil*, as such:

One of my children is in the village with my mother-in-law, and the other is here with me. My husband and I work in different shifts in the same factory. So, when I go to work and until my husband comes home, she stays alone at home. I have a neighbor who takes care of children for 50 lira per month. But we can't afford it. So, I leave my one and half year old daughter to God, when I am at work. (1977 March, p. 7)

In the issue published in March 1977, Tekstil's press team asked seven women about the ways they dealt with the childcare problem. Out of seven women workers interviewed, five women stated that they sent their children to the villages where their mothers-in-law or mothers lived; when children were very young, (one of them stated that she sent her children, when she was 40 days old; the other sent her children, when she was 2 months old). Another women worker stated that she and her husband took care of the children by rotating over the shifts and during the two hours of break, her neighbors took care of the children. In the next volume of *Tekstil*, published in April 1977, the same issue was covered in the journal's woman's column.

Women were, again, asked about the ways they dealt with the problem of childcare. Three women stated that other (female) family members, such as mothers, mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law took care of their children, some of them for free and some in exchange for money. Furthermore, while answering the question, women often expressed their feelings about being far away from their children, or leaving them alone at home without any guardian, with sadness, worry, and guilt. For instance, a woman from Oren Bayan factory stated that:

I leave my child to my mother who lives in Hendek [a small town in Sakarya, Marmara region]. It has been very difficult for me. I always wonder if he is sick. I see him only during holidays. They have talked about nursery rooms. It should happen soon, our longing should end! (1977 March, p. 7)

Another woman from Oren Bayan factory stated:

I sent my 2 months old child to my mother-in-law in the village. What should I say... poverty. I barely work out of worry. (1977 March, p. 7)

A woman from Santral Dikis factory said that:

I have two children. One of them is ten years old, the other is two. The older one goes to school. Until noon, she takes care of the young one. Until I come home, the young one is alone. I always think about them. I worry that something bad can happen to them. (1977 March, p. 7)

A woman worker from Avrupa Corap Factory said that:

I am a widow. I have three children. I pay 750 lira and get them taken care of. My wage does not cover anything. Now my only hope is to have a nursery room in the

factory. I don't want this for myself only, but for all women workers. (1977 April, p. 17)

A woman worker from Haskoy Yun Iplik factory stated that:

I have two children. The older one is one year old, the other is three months. Since I can't look after them, my mother-in-law does. (1977 April, p. 17)

A woman from Kom Tekstil factory:

My mother takes care of him/her. I pay 700 lira for this. She/he can't walk because of the insufficient care. I take him/her to doctor three times a month. Don't ever write my name. If she reads, she won't take care of her/him anymore. (April 1977, p. 17)

A woman from Kazlicesme factory:

I have two children. One is one and half year old and the other is three months. I give 700 lira to my sister-in-law and she looks after them. But I am always worried about them. I get worried thinking if they are hungry or crying. Motherly love... No one can take care of children, like their mother. (April 1977, p. 17)

The interviews with workers revealed that in the absence of free childcare services, women used alternative strategies to deal with the childcare problem. A considerable part of women workers sent their children to the villages where their mothers or mothers-in-law lived and they had to cope with the guilt and longing stemming from being so far away from their children. Some others paid for these services to other women (including their relatives) and went through the economic hardships. Another group of women left their children at home without any guardian and constantly worried about their well-being. It is also worthwhile to consider two women who stated that they shared the childcare responsibilities with their

husbands due to their different shifts at the same factory. It would be very fruitful to know how common it was to have such a particular arrangement among working-class households and if we could consider it as an equal division of labor at home. Unfortunately, we do not have any further information regarding which of these strategies, or others, or some combination(s) of them were more frequently used by working-class households. However, even such a limited sample shows the varieties among workers being employed in similar jobs, as well as the major role that *other* women have played in the working women's and men's lives.

It is hard to assess the prevalence of the different practices women chose to solve childcare related problems. However, we can observe alternative solutions manifested in *Tekstil*, and always expressed by women. Moreover, women's concern for their children's well-being, often together with a strong feeling of guilt, was another important issue. Even in the situations when women paid for receiving childcare services, they still expressed their concerns about their children's well-being. Therefore, they wanted to be able to keep their children with themselves in the same city and at the workplace, so that they would not compromise being workers and *good mothers* at the same time. The significance of the childcare issue was always and only discussed with women workers. Neither union officials nor women workers questioned, for instance, the division of labor at home and so-called fatherly duties. Rather, childcare was considered as a solely women's issue.

It is also significant to establish the links between the interviews published in *Tekstil*, in 1977 and "the campaign for childcare center" raised by IKD in 1976. According to the IKD documents, within the scope of the campaign, more than 58,000 signatures were collected from different cities in Turkey, demanding free childcare centers in factories and workplaces having more than 500 employees provided by employers. For workplaces having less than

500 workers, the IKD suggested the establishment of local childcare centers by state institutions and municipal authorities. Furthermore, the IKD members sent letters to trade unions in which they asked for the support of unions and asked union officials to put pressure on employers in order to establish free childcare centers (as cited from Pervan, 2013, p. 369-375). Akal suggests that since IKD believed that women's emancipation would be achieved through women's participation to social production, they considered childcare as the biggest obstacle for women's emancipation. As the result of campaign, Akal suggests, trade unions associated with DISK took the issue of childcare centers and breastfeeding rooms into the collective agreements and one local government in Istanbul opened a childcare facility (2008, p. 172, 173). Therefore, we should consider the attempts of *Tekstil* to bring the childcare problems into view along with the campaign organized by IKD for increasing women's participation in the workforce. It is hard to assess the impact of these attempts on female labor participation rate. However, the interviews with women in *Tekstil* reveal that women workers naturalized their roles as mothers and they felt bad about not being able to fulfill their motherly duties satisfactorily. While discussing the American working-class women's perspective regarding this issue, Cobble makes a similar observation:

Working-class women expressed a strong allegiance to their family roles as wives, mothers, and daughters in the post-depression decades, but their familial commitment did not preclude the development of a strong identity as a wage earner, nor did it necessarily inhibit them from engaging workplace reform. Indeed, working-class women tended to see themselves as worker *and* mother, breadwinner *and* homemaker, and in many instances, the desire to fulfill one's family role often fueled the desire to transform one's job. Put another way, raising one's pay and increasing family income could be seen as fulfilling motherly or daughterly duties. (Cobble, 2004, p. 12-13)

Based on Cobble's analysis, I believe it is possible to argue that women in *Tekstil*, similar to American women Cobble analyzed, constructed their identities as "workers and mothers" in the 1970s. Even for a short period, the interviews with women workers, along with several articles about the childcare problem, *Tekstil* showed that it paid attention the needs and demands of women workers. Furthermore, among many demands raised by IKD, having childcare centers was the most recurring theme in the journal, *Tekstil*. I believe this was due to the impact of female rank-and-file activism on the articulation of this demand. I will further discuss this issue in Chapter 5.

#### ***4.2.3. The perspective of Tekstil regarding the "woman question"***

In 1909, famous Soviet diplomat Alexandra Kollontai defined the perspective of "historical materialists" about "woman question" as such:

Specific economic factors were behind the subordination of women; natural qualities have been a secondary factor in this process. Only the complete disappearance of these factors, only the evolution of those forces which at some point in the past gave rise to the subjection of women, is able in a fundamental way to influence and change their social position. In other words, women can become truly free and equal only in a world organised along new social and productive lines. (Kollontai, 1909)

Throughout the 1970s, the term "woman question" was quite popular among the leftist and socialist groups in Turkey. The arguments presented by those groups were basically same with Kollontai's above definition.

*Tekstil*, as a left-wing trade union, pursued the same approach arguing that women and men should fight together against class exploitation and expressing the alleged dangers of feminism. In April 1976, *Tekstil* published one of the very first articles regarding the perspective of *Tekstil* about the "woman question". The title of the article was "Women! Protest the second-class status" and it outlined the "material historical facts" behind the

problem and also implied that feminism was a bourgeois movement which diminished the power of left-wing politics by dividing the working class. For instance, it suggested that "to blur the fact that women should look at the socio-political context for their problems, capitalists lead women in the wrong way in which they struggle against patriarchy. So that they can use half of the society, that otherwise would be struggling against them" (1976 April, p. 22).

While emphasizing the importance of collective struggle, Tekstil was calling women into the unions and (leftist) organizations:

Given the importance of organizing, women should participate in the trade unions, associations and political organizations [...] There is no difference between women and men in this struggle. Therefore, you should participate in the meetings of your unions, follow the trainings, and take responsibilities as conscious members of the unions. When you do these things, the way goes to your emancipation as well as social emancipation will be enlightened (1976 April, p. 22).

Furthermore, this perspective attached a particular vulnerability to women against capital. According to that, women were viewed as special targets of advertisers and thus, capitalism. The article states:

They [Capitalists] work for women to remain as slaves through their novelas, movies, books, radios, televisions and with the associations they found. To prevent women's development of ideas towards their emancipation, they try to put unnecessary things into women's heads. Here as well, they profit in two ways. First, they provide the continuation of the exploitation regime by preventing women to think about their real problems. Second, they make women the prime consumers of the consumption society by selling them products like lipstick, powder, fashion and mini/ long length skirts (1976 April, p. 22).

This view as seeing women as targets of consumption society was not only related to their genuine concern regarding consumption. Rather, it is clear from the examples given that, the leftist groups in Turkey were very concerned about their woman comrades, who "have a greater tendency to 'go bourgeois'; it was therefore considered legitimate to exercise daily jurisdiction over their dress and behaviour" (Berktaş, 1995, p. 252). In that regard, the way Tekstil viewed women was closely related to a broader masculine pattern which was prevalent in the Left.



#### ***4.2.4. The unaddressed issues***

As I noted earlier, in Tekstil domestic responsibilities including childcare were acknowledged as burdens of women. However, except the demand for day care centers which would allow women to work in a guilt-free fashion, these responsibilities were not challenged by women or the union. Furthermore, women's engagement with domestic and care work was not acknowledged as the primary reason for women's relatively limited participation in the union. "The barriers to women's leadership- male hostility, the labor movement's masculine culture, the socialization of women for supportive roles, the often temporary attachment of women to the workplace, and the patriarchal institution of the family (Cobble, 1990, p. 540)," again remained unaddressed.

Women were expected to fulfill their domestic duties and to be militant in union politics. However, in Tekstil, the positions available to women were very limited, despite its large female membership. As Milkman suggests (1990), "the extent of women's union membership is one relevant factor, by itself it is not a satisfactory predictor of women's participation or leadership" (p. 101). In Tekstil, as well, women were expected to be active participants of the union, however, only very limited opportunities were provided to them. The leadership positions, once fulfilled by male members, remained occupied for many years. For instance, the general president of the union, Rıza Guven, remained in his position from 1965 to 1979. Milkman (1990) also considers this factor as significant for women's limited chances for leading positions. "Positions of leadership, once obtained, are rarely relinquished, especially at the upper levels. Despite the formally democratic electoral machinery within unions, in practice paid officials seldom depart from their posts unless they win promotion to a higher one, retire, or die" (Milkman, 1990, p. 103).

To conclude, in this chapter I have analyzed the gender and working-class politics of Tekstil, to understand the ways in which women could organize, participate and fight for their

rights in mixed-sex organizations. As Cobble (1990) proposes, "to understand the survival of collective action, we must analyze not only the family and work experiences of women but also the nature of the institutions within which they operated and the strategies they employed in negotiating their institutional arrangements" (p. 541). In the 1970s of Turkey, trade unions were "the primary organizational vehicle available to represent the interests of working women [...] and to struggle on their behalf against the twin inequalities of gender and class" (Milkman, 1990, p. 87). Despite the limited representation of women and women's interests, working women continued to join the union until 1980.

## 5. Women's Activism in Tekstil

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the gender and class politics of Tekstil and argued that until 1975, gender-neutral strategies were dominant in the union. After 1975, on the other hand, so I have suggested that the union officials in Tekstil tried to respond to women's demands regarding expanding their rights and included several gender issues in Tekstil's political agenda. I have also explored the possible reasons for the union's changing gender discourse and its attempts for promoting gender policies. I believe that women's active participation in left-wing politics, the foundation of women's organizations or women's committees in some of the socialist parties, along with the radicalization of the society beginning from the 1960s, yet escalating in the latter half of the 1970s and the competition among these groups were all significant and contributed to the change regarding gender issues in Tekstil and DISK.

Women's double burden has always been a barrier for women's activism. As Cobble puts it, "women spent more of their work lives within the family realm than did men and their protest activities historically have reflected this reality" (1993, p.7). As I have noted earlier, the information regarding women's membership in trade unions, which is crucial to discuss the impact of women's family lives on their labor activism, is severely missing. We do not have any information about the extent of female membership in trade unions throughout the 1970s, let alone the distribution of women workers according to age and marital status categories. This lack, obviously, poses a challenge to understand the particular context of women's labor activism during this period.

In this chapter, I would like to explore the ways in which female members of Tekstil pursued their union activism, from 1965 to 1980. In the first part, I focus on women's representation in Tekstil and I look for women's influence in the decision-making bodies of

the union. In the second part, I expand my research and explore the activism of female rank-and-file members in order to reveal women's presence, active engagement with union politics and policies as well as their militancy. I continue the discussion with analyzing how women workers made themselves visible to the union officials and to us by using congresses and the union's journal as a tool. Furthermore, I suggest that among the union officials in Tekstil there were IKD members, which helps me to reveal the intersection between two organizations. Based on the documents analyzed here, I conclude that despite the union's negligence and the historians' ignorance, women in Tekstil were active historical subjects in the labor movements of the 1970s.

### **5.1. Women's Representation and Underrepresentation**

As I have pointed out in the previous section, some scholars have discussed the relationship between women and trade unions pointing out the lack of women in the leadership positions of trade unions. While talking about female influence on American trade unions during the postwar period, Cobble argues that "the continuing dominance of men in *top* executive positions in the postwar decades should not be taken as the only or even the best indicator of female influence". Rather, she suggests that "to grasp the extent of female influence in the labor movement, we need to expand our definitions of leadership and power" (Cobble, 2004, p. 25, 26). I believe that we can similarly argue that in Tekstil women's absence in the leadership did not necessarily mean that women were completely absent in the union structures. It is true that, based on the information I collected through the issues of the journal, the number of women holding positions in Tekstil's central leadership were quite limited. However, the number of women holding positions on the local and factory level were relatively higher.

For illustrating the central leadership roles, an example would be the General Congress which was held on November 8-9, 1969. Rıza Güven kept his position as the leader of Tekstil and 41 people (20 members and 21 associate members) were elected as members of the board of Tekstil. There was only one woman among the elected members, Elif Hacıoğlu as associate member (November 15, 1969, p. 4). Furthermore, eight members (three members and five associate members) were elected for the board of control and ten members (five members and five associate members) were elected for the honorary board in the congress. There was only one woman among these members, Emine Okanlar, and she was one of the associate members elected for the honorary board (December 15, 1969, p. 2). Tekstil's fourth general congress was held in January 1975 and, among the 22 members elected for the board of members there was no woman. The board of control which was composed of five members had no female members either. Only in the honorary board there was one woman and she was again Emine Okanlar, who had been elected for the same position in the previous elections (February 1975, p. 6). There is no information about her or any activities of her in Tekstil, except the fact that she was among the members pressed charges against within the scope of investigation I mentioned. However, it was noted in the document that she could not be captured. I could not find further information whether she was a fugitive, or could be captured later on. Thus, women in Tekstil often did not find any chance to hold positions in the general management of the union.

On the local level, however, there was a different picture. Many women were elected as the members of the local board or committees. For example in November 15, 1971, the journal's column, "News from our union" was devoted to the elections in five local branches: Eyüp, Mahmutpaşa, Yedikule, Beyoğlu, Topkapı (all of them are districts in Istanbul). Except Mahmutpaşa and Topkapı Branches in which there was no woman, Eyüp, Yedikule and Beyoğlu Branches included at least one woman among the members of the board. For

instance, there was one woman named Nur Ozturk among the eleven members elected for the Eyup Branch. In Yedikule Branch Congress, again one woman, Mediha Plevneli was elected as a member with another ten male members. In Beyoglu Congress, out of eleven members, one was a woman named Nesrin Goktuna and one other member was written with his/her surname as S. Cimlikaya (November, 1971, p. 8). Yet there was no information about whether this member was a man or a woman.

On the factory level, there were many female union representatives at the workplaces organized by Tekstil. Again, we do not have any specific information about the proportion of women in those factories holding shop floor leadership positions, yet many documents proved that there were many women workers holding such positions. For instance, Tekstil organized a training seminar for workers on 2-4 October, 1978. From the Cerkezkoy (a neighborhood in Istanbul) Branch, 34 workers attended the seminars. Among ten female and 24 male workers, there were two female and three male representatives.<sup>25</sup> The decision book of Beyoglu Branch also documented many women's names elected as union representatives in the factories. Therefore, women workers held shop floor leadership positions in Tekstil, although we do not have further details about many of them.

According to this source, a female worker named Zebide Kara was assigned as a representative on September 20, 1974 and as a chief representative on February 6, 1976 in Kazlicesme factory.<sup>26</sup> In 1977, Zebide Kara was elected as a member of the executive board in Tekstil Beyoglu Branch and started to attend the weekly meetings. In the same branch of the union, there was also another woman in the executive board, named Mahmure Karaoglu. From the decision book I examined and based on their signatures under the meeting reports,

<sup>25</sup> *Tekstil Cerkezkoy Diploma Alanlari Listesi* [The list of workers from Cerkezkoy Branch who successfully completed the seminars] (1978). Box: 1/6, TUSTAV, Istanbul.

<sup>26</sup> *Tekstil Beyoglu Karar Defteri* [The Decision Book of Tekstil Beyoglu Branch] (1974-1980). Box: 8/42, TUSTAV, Istanbul

both of them regularly attended the weekly meetings until 1979. Among the routine issues to be discussed in weekly meetings, there were problems in the factories, the election and assignment of union representatives, and to control and record the monthly expenses of the union. After the military coup in September 12, 1980, both Zebide Kara and Mahmure Karaoglu were detained as a result of the lawsuit pressed against Tekstil Head Office and its associates.<sup>27</sup> As of 1980, the former was 25 years old and the latter was 27. Considering Zebide Kara who first entered the union politics in 1974 as union representative, she had pursued union activism beginning from the very young age of 19. Among the 11 women detained within the scope of investigation, one of them was the Accounting Manager of Tekstil and the others were members of the executive boards of the local unions in Istanbul. As of 1980, the age range of women was between 19 and 37. As I mentioned earlier, most of them were not born in Istanbul, even though they worked in Istanbul. Unfortunately, I could not manage to find further information about any of those women except Melek Nurlu who was a member of the honorary board of Tekstil Beyoglu Branch and Zuleyha Serifoglu who was the Account Manager of Tekstil. This information, however, is contained in the archive of Tekstil as the "Testimonies of Tekstil members" documented in 1982 by the martial courts. A circumstance that demands caution in terms of the interpretation of their statements, due to the fact that this information was generated in the situation of a legal trial, which in addition was conducted under the repressive conditions of the period and the absence of fair trials. Melek Nurlu was 24 years old and she was a student in Istanbul University, when she gave her statement in 1982. According to her statement, she was elected as a member of the honorary board in 1977, but she only went to the union's office for a few times, did not take any responsibility and did not see or attend any political activity of the union.<sup>28</sup> In actual reality, however, according to a member of TUSTAV, Melek Nurlu was an IKD member in

<sup>27</sup> *Kovuşturmayla Yer Yoktur Kararı* [The decision for non-prosecution] (1982). Document No: 1980/3971, Docket No: 1982/2480, Decree No: 1982/185, Box 1/5, TUSTAV, Istanbul.

<sup>28</sup> *Melek Nurlu'nun Ifadesi* [The statement of Melek Nurlu] (1982, April 14). Box: 14/71, TUSTAV, Istanbul.

that period (Personal contact, 2015). Furthermore, she is today among the members of TUSTAV and her name exists as a signee in several recent political campaigns.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it is possible that she had a much more active political life also in the 1970s, than she expressed under the very repressive conditions of the period.

All in all, the representation of women members varied according to whether they ran for the Head Office or local branches. Women found relatively a higher chance of representation in the local branches than they had in the Head Office of the union. Women's relatively higher representation in the local branches might indicate the union "glass ceiling", which refers to invisible and unacknowledged barriers preventing women's promotion to top management positions. Although women were often underrepresented in the top executive positions, they managed to reach several senior positions in Tekstil, before 1980. Some of them pursued union activism for long years, beginning from union representative position. Many of them were quite young. What we know for sure is beginning from the end of the 1960s, there were several women who managed to hold a number of positions in trade unions in Turkey.

## 5.2. Towards a Rank-and-File Activism

Following Cobble's argument about the underrepresentation of women in leadership did not necessarily mean the absence of female influence in trade unions (Cobble, 2004, p. 25, 26), here I explore the alternative strategies used by women rank-and-file workers to influence the union's policy and politics.

A detailed examination of the union's journal *Tekstil* revealed that women workers expressed their problems, concerns, and needs in several ways. A recurring theme in the journal, as I discussed some aspects of it in the previous chapter, was the problems related

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<sup>29</sup> [http://tustav.com/dosya/tustav/uye\\_2015\\_kasim.pdf](http://tustav.com/dosya/tustav/uye_2015_kasim.pdf) Last access, May 21, 2016.



with the childcare issue. For instance, in *Tekstil* published in December 15, 1970, in a column called "Workers say...!" the press team gave the chance to workers to hold the stage and talk about whatever topic they would like to discuss. Each worker touched upon different issues, yet one way or the other, all workers talked about poverty and complained about low wages and high cost of living. Out of 16 workers who were interviewed, one was a woman named Saime Caliskan and she stated that:

Two of us work [her husband and herself] yet we barely pay our debt to grocery store. Winter has come, but we couldn't buy any wood or coal. It's very hard to survive with 1000 lira. I have one child. Because workers' children don't have nurseries, my mother-in-law takes care of my child. I want to have one more child. But I can't, because of poverty. (December 15, 1970, p. 1)

In August 1975, a woman worker from Antalya Aksu factory sent a poem she wrote to be published in the journal's column in which the press team published letters, stories and poems written by its readers. The woman's name was not given in the journal. The title of the poem was "today is the STRIKE day" and it reveals a high level of class consciousness and militancy.

Our duty to support each other  
 Let's unite so they think we are a giant  
 This STRIKE is our constitutional right  
 Go comrades<sup>30</sup>, today is the STRIKE day

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<sup>30</sup> The word she uses here is actually "gardas" which means sibling in Turkish and has rural connotations. In Turkish language, sibling is a gender- neutral word. So, in this context, I believe "comrade" is the closest translation for it.

Even if you feel sorry and hesitate  
Remember that employers' hearts are stone cold  
This strike is our constitutional weapon  
Use your rights comrades, today is the STRIKE day

Until now I've slept in the factory  
They called me a worker, so this is who I am  
I let a stranger take care of my only young child  
Do not stop comrades, today is the STRIKE day (1975 August, p. 23)

The enthusiasm and militancy in her lines were striking. More importantly, the last stanza of the poem, pointed out her sacrifice and her guilt as a worker and a mother, by letting a stranger take care of her child, yet keeping the enthusiasm for struggle. At this point, it is important to emphasize that IKD started its campaign for free childcare centers in 1976, and Tekstil included this issue into its agenda in 1977. As I have shown two examples above, women workers expressed the problems stemming from the absence of nursery rooms, long before the foundation of IKD. I believe it is crucial to consider the contribution of female rank-and-file workers within the articulation of such demands by IKD and Tekstil. Therefore, women workers expressed their problems related childcare issue in the journal, and then, they enthusiastically supported the IKD and Tekstil for the realization of those demands. Considering the interviews with women workers that I analyzed in the previous chapter, women's desire to perform their motherly duties in a satisfactory way can be considered as one important motivation driving women's engagement with union politics and support the demands articulated by their organizations such as IKD, Tekstil and DISK. I argue that although the IKD campaign for free childcare centers was originally designed for increasing

women's participation in the workforce, on the rank-and-file level women workers supported the campaign as part of their self-identification as mothers and workers.

Throughout the 1970s, women in Tekstil used alternative ways to influence the union's policy. For example, in each local congress, the procedure was that a union official would read the annual working report and then rank-and-file members were asked if they would like to hold the floor to share their views, opinions, or problems regarding the union's policies. While talking about the congress of Tekstil Mahmutpasa Branch in which no woman took a seat in the board of members, *Tekstil* stated that "out of ten members who held the floor, three of them were women and this situation was welcomed warmly". It continued as "members who held the floor complained about high costs of living and bad foods distributed at the workplace" (November, 1971, p. 8). Based on the way in which the journal depicted women's holding the floor, it is clear that women's active participation in the congresses was not very common. Regarding the congress of Tekstil Topkapi Branch, *Tekstil* published the names of the members who held the floor. According to this, seventeen members held the stage and six of them were women. In the journal, there was no detailed information about the topics members talked about and it only said that workers talked about their problems at their workplaces and brought interesting solutions (November, 1971, p. 8, 9).

In the general congress held in 1969, a female member called Hamdiye Cakirli held the stage and talked about some of the problems that sick workers experienced due to insufficient health services provided by *Sosyal Sigortalar Kurumu* (the Social Insurance Institution, SSK) and she suggested that trade unions should fight along with workers for more advanced benefits for workers (November 15, 1969, p. 4). In the General Congress held on December 11, 1971, a woman member named Muserref Ersoy asked the union's members and leaders to respect women's rights and to be attentive for the problems that women

workers experienced (1972 January, p.6). All of these examples indicate that even though women were not equally represented in the leadership structures, many of them attended these congresses and took actively part in union life. Women used the stages at the congresses as a tool to raise their voices and express their concerns and in order to influence the union's political agenda and policies. The issues they touched upon varied from mundane problems to broader issues like women's rights and women workers' problems. I believe that we should not underestimate the courage and self-esteem required to talk in these meetings and we should consider women's active participation to the congresses, at least, as an attempt to be heard by union officials.

Although we do not have reliable information about the extent of women's membership in Tekstil throughout the 1970s, the journal frequently and in diverse contexts published the pictures of women workers for different reasons. While in most of the news published in the journal, the editors talked about the workers as "workers", not as men or women. There was a strong visual presence of female workers. For instance, Figure 2 shows all female workers of Nylon Corap Factory; however, in the news they were mentioned only as workers who rejected Teksif officials who tried to organize them.



**Figure 2: Workers from Naylon Corap Factory**

Source: *Tekstil*, 32, April 1, 1970, p. 1.

The pictures published in *Tekstil* are of particular importance in terms of revealing women's union activism in terms not only of formal representation and active involvement in union life, but also in terms of labor struggle. Because of the masculine language used by editors and union officials in general, we could easily assume that those particular workers were mostly male. Yet the pictures published in the journal help us to differentiate the workers and they proved women's activism in the union. For instance, on June 1976, *Tekstil* published news concerning 600 workers being employed in Altinyildiz factory who resigned from Teksif and were organized in the Eyup Branch of *Tekstil*. The title of the news was "One fist, one heart with Altinyildiz workers" and workers were glorified due to their organization in *Tekstil*. Although the news did not mention the gender of the workers, the pictures used for this news (Figure 3, 4) proved that a considerable number of workers were female and there was a female speaker (yet we do not know if she was a worker or a union official). The cheerful, enthusiastic, and celebratory representation of women workers was important to emphasize the collective union action. Furthermore, these pictures representing workers as

activist women were no exception, rather it was routine to publish such pictures in the journal which help us to grasp the fact that women's union activism was not uncommon.



**Figure 3: Female speaker**

Source: *Tekstil*, 96, June 1976, p. 8.



**Figure 4: Women workers from Altinyıldız factory**

Source: *Tekstil*, 96, June 1976, p. 9.

In some other cases, the editors of the journal while again using the neutral term worker [isci], did give the female names of the workers. For instance, in February 1975, in the column "news from our union", news concerning 38 "workers" from Pamuk Serif Collective Company was published. After these workers had joined Tekstil, the employer who was hostile to trade unions fired six of them, all women. According to the news, after four days of resistance by other workers, six workers got their jobs back and eventually a collective agreement was signed between the company and Tekstil (1975 February, p. 21). In another issue published in April 1971, *Tekstil* published a letter written by Enboy Factory workers and the letter was in the form of a greeting. The letter was addressed to "textile workers, working-class brothers, and sisters" and workers stated that there were 1200 workers in the factory, most of whom were "young girls in the spring of their lives" and full of enthusiasm for labor struggle (April 1971, p.1).

All these different examples show that there women workers in Tekstil and they were active social and political agents. Many of them were active in shop-floor leadership positions. Some of them achieved to be elected for higher positions in the local branches and actively attended to the meetings. Others used different practices to influence the union's policy, such as holding the stage in the congresses or writing letters and poems to the journal. Therefore, women rank-and-file workers in Tekstil took an active part in the labor struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. The analysis of the union's journal, of course, has limitations in terms of providing a complete picture of women's union activism. However, the findings of this small research beg for further inquiry to explore working-class women's collective action.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have narrated and analyzed the history of women in Tekstil, from its founding in 1965 until its shutting down after the September 12, 1980 military coup. Although there are plenty of scholarly works focusing on the history of trade unions in the 1970s, the history of working-class women organized in trade unions has remained largely unexplored in Turkey. Many scholars have analyzed several aspects of the problematic relationship between women and trade unions, such as trade unions' patriarchal structures, women's underrepresentation in leadership positions, and the exclusion of women's issues. The aim of my study, however, was to move beyond this diagnosis and to look for women's presence, contributions, and demands within trade unions in the latter half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a period when organized labor was stronger in number and effect than ever. In order to do that, I have focused on two large issues. First, I have analyzed class and gender politics of Tekstil from 1965 to 1980. Second, I have focused on the activities of working-class women in Tekstil. To answer these questions, I examined and analyzed primary sources related to Tekstil and I also used secondary sources on labor history and women's history. Furthermore, I pointed out the scarcity and some of the biases of historical research on unionized women in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In chapter 4, I argued that before 1975 gender-blind strategies were dominant in Tekstil, which aimed at organizing workers along the class lines. After 1975, on the other hand, gender discourse of Tekstil transformed and union officials took several gender issues into the union's agenda as a response to women's demands. This change was, to an extent, related with the increasing socialist women's activism in the latter half of the 1970s. Especially IKD as a mass organization with more than 15,000 members gave a great importance to women workers' problems and it was very efficient in terms of raising the demands for women workers. Acknowledging double burden of women, the demand for day



care centers in the factories was put into the union's political agenda and some factories agreed to provide this service. However, motherhood was naturalized as women's duty and considered as women's social contribution. Raising good children, in this scheme, was also considered as a solely women's responsibility. Women's extreme underrepresentation in union positions had remained unaddressed by union officials and leaders, before and after 1975. Tekstil shared the common and popular perspective regarding the "woman question" and perceived gender inequality as a systemic issue, which could only be fully overcome after the revolution.

In Chapter 5, I tried to explore women's union activism throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The absence of reliable information about the extent of female rank-and-file workers in the union and the role of Tekstil women in labor struggle was a difficult challenge for the purpose of this thesis. Considering the very marginal representation rates of women's representation in central union structures, I looked for alternative ways that women might have used to influence union's policies. Here, I discovered that at many congresses, women workers held the stage and expressed their problems, solutions, ideas about union activism. Other than talking at the congresses, many women rank-and-file workers sent letters and poems to the journal of the union. Although women had very little chance for leadership positions, many rank-and-file workers actively engaged with union politics. All in all, I concluded that women's underrepresentation in the union's leadership positions should not lead historians to neglect women rank-and-file members who played a significant role in the labor movements of the 1960s and the 1970s.

In order to contribute to gendering the labor history of Turkey, I have tried to narrate the history of women workers in Tekstil the period between 1965 and 1980. Throughout this thesis, I tried to present a comprehensive understanding regarding women's labor activism. While doing that I held a double focus; on the one hand, I examined the organizational history

of Tekstil and DISK, in order to see the union structures, as they had a significant impact on women's representation. On the other hand, I examined women rank-and-file workers by focusing on their presence, contributions and challenges through the journal of the union. In that way, I tried to reveal the history of unionist women and locate them in a much broader economic and political context of Turkey throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

A significant contribution of this work might be that it revealed the scarcity of research on women's labor history in Turkey, specifically in the 1960s and 1970s, a problem I frequently had to mention throughout the text whenever I was looking for precise information with regard to many themes belonging to the immediate context of this research. We need to gender the history of "golden ages of labor movements", as this history still has much to offer. Women's collective action for their economic rights in this period has a crucial importance within a historiography written with a masculinist lens.

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