

Women into Gainful Work in Turkey and Transnationally: Labour Activism and Gendered Education in the Semi-Periphery, 1950s to 1990s

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Short Description

This ZARAH Component Study investigates the educational activities targeting urban and rural women to integrate them and improve their status in the world of gainful work in Turkey and transnationally. These activities included vocational and skills training, literacy training, educational seminars, and programs as well as workers' and trade union education initiatives broadly conceived. Covering the period from the 1950s – when technological, demographic, and economic developments facilitated women's greater involvement in income generating activities – until the 1990s, it analyzes the differential agendas of the actors involved and highlights the different scales of activism and their entanglement.

Educational efforts concerning women in Turkey gained momentum and took a transnational turn in the post-1945 period which was characterized early on by increased interaction between the state and labour activists and the growing influence of international labour and global governance institutions (e.g., ICA/AID, ICFTU, ILO, OECD, UNESCO). In the following decades, more actors entered the field (e.g., AAFLI, AFL-CIO, ETUC, UNICEF, World Bank) and engaged in various forms and scales of collaboration with local labour and women's movements. The actors involved construed working women as rights-seeking subjects whose socio-economic empowerment would be achieved by their advancement in gainful work through education. Their highly diversified approaches and agendas were shaped by Cold War rivalries, Turkey's semi-peripheral positioning in the global world order, and competing visions of gendered social relations.

The Component Study takes educational activities targeting women as a vantage point to understand how gender and labour struggles were co-constituted by the state, national and international trade unions, global governance institutions, women's organizations, and various social movements seeking women's and/or workers' rights. It shows how women labour activists in Turkey and transnationally transformed themselves and the struggles around them through educational activities. Thematic foci of the study include literacy training for women of various disadvantaged groups, vocational and skills training, and education provided by local trade unions (e.g., TÜRK-İŞ, DİSK) in collaboration with international trade unions and women labour activists as well as feminist researchers at home. The study relies on documents related to national and international governance, trade unions, women's activism, and expert discourses available at Turkish and international archives and libraries. Oral history interviews with activists who organized and/or participated in educational activities involving women in Turkey complement this source material.