

Fatma Gök

Education and Science Workers' Trade Union

“We discussed from a woman's perspective”

Hello to everyone. For more than 30 years I've been a faculty member at the Department of Education Sciences at Bosphorus University. I got my degree from the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Ankara University. I worked at the Office of Planning and Research at the Ministry of Education for three years. After that I went to the United States on a scholarship for my doctoral degree. This was interrupted by the 1980 military coup in Turkey so I had to stay a little longer. After that I came back and started at Bosphorus university at the end of the 80s and I've been here ever since.

That's my official biography, we are the 68 generation. As we get older we accumulate more but in my case, shaping my cultural and social wealth is the Anatolian geography and the Alevi Bektaşî culture. My main area of academic study is education policy in general and Turkish educational policies. My academic areas of interest include the social foundations of education, gender and education, the relationship between education and social dynamics, and comparative education.

I've been active within the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies since I was a student at Columbia University in New York City. We organized the World Congress of the Society, 2010 at Bosphorus University. It is still talked about it as a legendary Congress. One of the keynote speakers in 2010 was a woman who was the President of the Teachers Union, Eğitim-Sen. I was the Vice Chairwomen of the World Congress of of Comparative Education Societies. We had already organized ourselves in Istanbul and many other universities under the Union of University Faculty members (ÖES). It has a beautiful story, a nice history. Afterwards when Eğitim-Sen was formed we became officially unionized. I also became a union member. I'm in the Bosphorus University branch, I'm retired but I'm still unionized, officially or unofficially. My relationship with Eğitim-Sen was quite intensive and most of all while we were holding the Democratic Education Conventions. I was the chair person of the Philosophy of Education working group at the first Democratic Education Convention organized in February 1998 and we worked diligently for over a year with unionized teachers from all over Turkey. In fact within this

Philosophy of Education group we worked on certain problems and thought ourselves from working within them. Our women teacher friends contributed a lot. We talked and argued about the multiple dimensions of raising people and the education system, and at that convention our teacher friend Ayşe Panuş read our long declaration. This congress of Eğitim-Sen had a lot of dimensions, I mean under the title of Philosophy of Education we looked at education... the politics, opportunities and equality, the human philosophy aimed by democratic education, we didn't have a section called gender but we did have an emphasis on women. In a way although we didn't bring gender under that name in a commission but the presence of those working in the congress, feminist academics such as myself, feminist teachers and members of Eğitim-Sen who were interested in working with women and saw this as a thread allowed us to interpret things from a women's perspective and discuss it as such. An education perspective and education in Turkey were presented as our sections at the congress. I was in charge of the commission again in the 2004 Democratic Education Congress, I was the coordinator of the Commission on the Right to Education in the face of Global Attacks. We worked quite intensively for more than a year. We met frequently with the representatives of all of the Eğitim-Sen locals, the Democratic Education Congress representatives, all around Turkey. During this process my concern was always trying to understand how schools appeared to young teachers, how it was a fountain of knowledge. If we could understand this we could make strides in transforming it. Because when we talk about a teachers movement, or other movements we always are considering a macro struggle but when we take a look at the micro level at our institutions, especially in a special institution such as a school, how authority, patriarchy, the social class system is transferred to students, how they are shaped in accordance with these systems. My concern was, perhaps being a little older, to learn from our teacher friends, witness it, witness history and analyze history from a transformative perspective. We put forward the right to education and really after the neoliberal 1980s, in the liberal 90s these policies went into effect. By understanding what the education system and the right to education had become, how capitalist mechanisms had entered and shaped it to its own ends and thinking what we could do against it, by getting organized in solidarity. These were things that the 2004 Congress discussed at length and it was a congress that I worked hard on, that all the friends worked hard on.

Apart from this we did Eđitim-Sen Women's Congresses twice, once in June 2003 and once in 2004. The first one was Questioning and Transforming. It was a very important congress. Really for all of those within Eđitim Sen, teachers working in Turkey and other workers. How can we change this patriarchal gender system that we live in within the realm of education. For example I'll never forget we made a decision that every local of the education union was to have a child care, child play room, but afterwards I inquired amongst friends at the different Eđitim Sen locals and it appeared to be one of those decisions that was taken which never materialized.

In 1995 there was the UN World Women's Congress in Beijing. I was amongst 10 women who attended from Turkey in that train. I was in the Beijing Express which went from Moscow to Beijing spending a week with women all around World attending seminars and discussing. This was very important for me. And it was an important moment for the road leading to women's liberation inside Eđitim Sen. The World Women's Congress was being held in Beijing. As civil society we were together with 35 thousand women from all around the world, only an hour away from Beijing. It was an incredible meeting. Official meetings were held in Beijing. We, as civil society participants were in Huairou, trying to figure out how to transform the patriarchal world of women, it was very rich. This is an important moment in my history, I think it's important that I mention it.

After receiving my doctorate degree from Columbia University, and returning from Amerika only a few years later dear řirin Tekeli, dear Ayla Neusel and dear Meral Akkent organized a week long workshop in Kasel, Germany. My dear řirin. It was really her initiative, Women from a Women's perspective in 1980s. For a week there were seminars on women. A book was put together and new editions are still being printed. I think it is in its sixth printing. There were Turkish women, academic women but also activist women, academic and activist women like myself thinking of how to analyze both and how can we change the system. There were women academics from Germany and activist women such as us. This was really important. I do feel terribly sad that we lost řirin in 2017.

I remember vividly as part of the March 8th celebrations there was a special exhibition that opened in Cağoğlu during the 1990's. A part of this exhibition was in an NGO in Cağoğlu. Some friends had made a sculpture from pots and pans, stuff you use in the kitchen. And it was named, the Unknown Woman. This was an important moment for me. It was good to see how our academic lives and women toiling outside of a money-wage relation were connected through this kitchen life in such a concrete way. In fact a know-it-all journalist came up to me and when they learned I was an academic said something like, oh you're wasting your time with this pots and pans stuff. But this was actually a stage on the way to Gezi. When I look back today, I really believe that this was the case. What was important was that the academic production became socialized and the students started to think more creatively and critically. When I look at my life I see this as very important. Our work around women, women in the university and outside of it, feminist women after the 80s, all the positions we wrote up during the feminist women's movement, the commission work, when we look at the history of KESK, when we look at the history of Eđitim Sen, we see a transformation and I can profoundly see the real transformation when I look at the history of Eđitim Sen and the democratic production of academic knowledge. The place we have arrived today, even if drop by drop is an amazing women's movement. I think this is an important reason why women are at the forefront of social opposition, I think the legacy, not only since the 80s but even before that is really important. Thank you very much.