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A Transnational History of Left Feminism in Turkey (1974–1979): Relations and Exchanges between the IKD and the WIDF

Abstract

This article presents a transnational history of left feminism in Turkey between 1974–1979 when international women’s movements gained momentum on a global scale with the designation of 1975 as International Women’s Year (IWY). With this article, my aim is to go beyond methodological nationalism in the established historiography on women’s movements in Turkey. I study in particular the local and international activities of the international activities of the Progressive Women’s Association (*İlerici Kadınlar Derneği*, IKD), the mass left-feminist organisation between 1975 and 1980 that engaged in left-wing women’s activism all around Turkey. I explore the bilateral relations, connections, exchange, interaction, and collaboration between the IKD and international women’s movements, particularly the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), which was a global coalition of women of the anti-fascist, pro-communist left. I use the term left feminism that, in my opinion, expands the definition of feminism by going beyond the liberal political goal of individual emancipation. Against the overarching premise that women’s agency cannot be actualised under state-socialism or within communist-socialist women’s organisations, my article shows the overlapping issues between communism and feminism as well as the diverse agendas that constitute history of feminism in twentieth-century Turkey from a transnational perspective.

Keywords: Left feminism, communist women, transnational history, Turkey

1. Introduction

This article takes two significant omissions in feminist historiography on women’s movements in Turkey as its point of departure. The first significant omission in the scholarship is that left feminism remains an under-articulated concept in historiography, since socialist women’s initiatives have been largely neglected. Feminist historians have been, in fact, oblivious to communist women’s activism in Turkey as they are doubtful of communist women’s political agency. Their negligence is based on the assumption that these women shared the overarching anti-feminist views of the male communists of the era. Moreover, feminist scholars treated left feminism of the 1970s as a political site that was occupied by ‘the woman question’ rather than feminism. This assumption stems from a dominant framework imposing a definition of the term feminism as ‘gender-only,’ thus again reproducing a homogenous understanding of feminism. Left feminism is excluded in this definition because left feminism of the era was principally attached to progressive labour politics in which it did not single

out gender as a category of oppression but combined it with class.¹ Secondly, previous studies on the history of feminisms in Turkey were partially limited regarding their emphasis on the social and political process in the national borders of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. As part of the attempts to make feminist scholarship less-western centric, the term transnationalism has included the development of scholarship on the history of ‘Third World Women,’ as it was called earlier, and on the history of feminisms in non-Western contexts. These attempts identify the connections between women and feminisms in different parts of the world that came across through both conflict and cooperation. To some extent, these contributions have allowed us to see that feminism in non-western world was not a western import. Instead, the emergence of non-western feminisms and broader social-political processes such as colonialism and anti-colonial struggles should be interpreted as entangled histories.² There is a sizeable body of feminist historical research on women’s activism in Turkey from a transnational perspective. The works of historians like Aslı Davaz, Nicole A.N.M. van Os, Efi Kanner, Umut Azak and Henk de Smaele, and Elife Biçer-Deveci show the local and international setting and the transnational dimension of the making of Ottoman and Turkish women’s activism.³

Based on these new approaches in recent studies, I reconstruct the history of left feminism in Turkey between 1974–1979 from a transnational perspective. With this study, I aim to go beyond the dominant vein in the historiography of feminism in Turkey and the limitations of methodological nationalism. I focus on the history of the Progressive Women’s Association (*İlerici Kadınlar Derneği*, IKD), the largest left-feminist organisation between 1975 and 1980 that engaged in left-wing women’s activism all around Turkey with its fifteen thousand members in thirty-three regional and thirty-five local branches.⁴ With this research, I situate the history of IKD within the context of global left feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. The rationale behind choosing the period 1974–1979 as the focus of my research is to revisit the paradigm that places the feminist revival only in the 1980s, and to highlight the contribution of left-feminist women of the 1970s to this revival.

For a better understanding of the trajectories of left-feminist women’s political agency during the late Cold War era in Turkey, I follow a contemporary – historiographical and theoretical – debate initiated by scholars who challenge the conventional views on the lack of political agency of socialist women during the Cold War from a historical and transnational perspective. Sharing a similar ground with

1 de Haan 2013, 175; Zimmermann 2019, 212.

2 See, for example Badran 1996; Basu and Ray 1990; Guy, Sinha and Woollacott 1996; Hahner 1990; Jayawardena 1986; Johnson-Odim 1991.

3 Azak and de Smaele 2016; Biçer-Deveci 2016, 2017; Davaz 2014; Kanner 2016; Van Os 2016.

4 Unfortunately, neither declared individual membership figures nor the official membership data of the IKD is available. However, based on the former IKD executives’ accounts, the IKD had an estimate fifteen thousand members at the time of its closure in April 1979. Talu 2013; Arıkan et al. 1996, 11.

the post-colonial feminist critique of western feminist scholarship on ‘Third World’ women regarding the reductive analysis of agency based on the liberal conception of individual emancipation, scholars such as Francisca de Haan, Kristen Ghodsee, Alexandra Ghit, Raluca Popa, Krassimira Daskalova, Wang Zheng, and Chiara Bonfiglioli rethink the political organising and agency of socialist women in the state-socialist Second World, arguing that our knowledge of these women and their organisations has been negatively influenced by Cold War paradigms.^{5,6} One of the core features of these paradigms is that communist women’s activism during the Cold War cannot be classified as ‘feminist’ based on the assumption that communist women were not ‘genuinely interested in women’s problems; rather, they were (...) just following ‘Party orders.’⁷ Further, communist women have been framed as a homogenous category located in ‘the Second World,’ ‘the Soviet bloc’ or an ‘oppressed Eastern Bloc.’ Against the overarching premise that women’s agency cannot be actualised under state-socialism or within communist-socialist organisations, I use the term left feminism first introduced by Ellen C. DuBois that articulates an agency, acting to promote a specific vision of equality based on communist ideals.⁸ This term, in my opinion, expands the definition of feminism by going beyond the liberal political goal of individual emancipation as it was formulated by western historiography of inter/transnational women’s organisations. It allows us to capture diverse and complex histories of women’s movements during the Cold War. In that regard, my article can be seen as an attempt to incorporate the multiple sites of women’s rights activism and to identify the overlapping issues between communism and feminism as well as the diverse agendas, political priorities and intellectual currents that constitute the history of feminism in twentieth-century Turkey.

In my research, I largely benefit from two lines of feminist historical research on women’s movements. Namely, one line focuses on women’s transnational activism whereas the other one discusses communist women’s activism during the Cold War. Inspired by these two lines of research in conceptual and methodological terms, I incorporate a decentralised, relational, and multipolar approach that takes into account spaces of vivid interaction, which allowed the left-feminist actors of the Cold War era to step ‘outside of bloc regulations (...) where dealings with others were deter-

5 The terms Second and Third World were created during the Cold War, as this terminology was used to classify countries into three general categories according to their ideological and geopolitical alignment (capitalist, socialist and non-aligned) and level of development (developed, developing and underdeveloped countries). Here, the term Second World refers to state-socialist countries during the Cold War. The term Third World has been used by feminist scholars of 1970s and 1980s, but today there are attempts to use other categories such as ‘global south’ which are again problematic in my opinion. Instead, in the rest of the article, I use the term non-Western as I refer to global power relations unlike the state-centred, binary understanding of the international system.

6 Bonfiglioli 2014; Daskalova 2007; de Haan 2010; Ghit 2012; Ghodsee 2012; Popa 2009; Zheng 2005.

7 De Haan 2010, 564.

8 DuBois 1991.

mined only by the rules set by the parties involved themselves.⁹ I provide interpretations of the relations and exchanges between the IKD and international women's movements, particularly the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The WIDF was founded in 1945 as a global coalition of women of the anti-fascist, pro-communist left supported by the Soviet Union. Starting in December 1972, when the United Nations (UN) General Assembly designated 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY) on the initiative of the WIDF, international women's movements gained momentum on a global scale. The historical developments that bound the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985), the Cold War, and international women's movements together shaped the IKD in Turkey. The IKD became involved in a transnational network of left-feminists and interacted with other left-feminist women's organisations by following the political agenda offered by WIDF, while actively supporting the campaigns and attending international meetings organised by the WIDF. At the same time, the relationship between the IKD and the WIDF was an uneven one as the WIDF seemed uninterested in what the IKD was doing in Turkey and did not mention the IKD in its magazine *Women of the Whole World* until 1978, despite the IKD's efforts to be acknowledged as a member of the WIDF and forge alliances with its sister organisations. Focusing on the IKD's engagement in the global left feminism of the 1970s, I identify particular moments and stages of the development of leftist women's activism *vis-à-vis* global Cold War politics and its influences on international women's movements.

To arrive at my findings, I use archival documents, and printed primary and secondary sources. My main archival sources are digitised copies of *Kadınların Sesi* magazine in the Periodical Collections at the Social History Foundation of Turkey (TÜSTAV) in Istanbul, WIDF-related materials available at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and Papers of Connie Seifert including papers of National Assembly of Women at the Women's Library, London School of Economics in London. Furthermore, I use printed primary sources that are available in a volume edited by Muazzez Pervan, consisting of the documents from the organisational archive of the IKD.¹⁰

In light of my findings, I reconstruct the history of the IKD from a transnational perspective while elaborating on the IKD's agenda and political work around women's rights and peace, and explore the WIDF's role and influence in the making of left feminism in Turkey in the 1970s. Any historical narrative of the IKD remains incomplete if it were to overlook the IKD's engagement in transnational processes of communication and exchange, especially its relations with the WIDF. Therefore, the IKD's contribution to the history of feminisms in Turkey should also be understood in conjunction with the rise of global left feminism in the 1960s and the 1970s. This article contributes to expanding the focus of feminist historiography on women's movements in Turkey by not only looking at transnational processes but also bringing

9 Autio-Sarasma and Miklóssy 2013, 4.

10 Pervan 2013.

discussions from different regions of the world that might help us to examine socialist women's activism in the 1970s from different angles.

2. Debates on Communism and Feminism: Recovering the Histories of Socialist Women's Activism in the Cold War

As the US historian Karen Offen mentions, 'movements of socio-political change are deeply embedded in and responsive to their surrounding cultures.'¹¹ Similar to the attempts of identifying global power dynamics and processes, such as colonialism and imperialism in the development of feminisms in various contexts, the post-1945 period deserves special attention regarding the dominant political frame of that period, which is the global Cold War.¹² The debates initiated in the 2000s by scholars challenged the conventional views on the lack of political agency of socialist women during the Cold War from historical and transnational perspectives and enabled an understanding of the trajectories of left-wing women movements and communist women's political agency.¹³

In a provocative 2014 article, 'A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organisations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism,' US philosopher Nanette Funk calls nine scholars 'Revisionist Feminists' because their work on state-socialist mass women's organisations, including the WIDF, is 'too positive' in terms of defining these organisations as feminist.¹⁴ Funk's argument is based on the overarching premise that women's agency cannot be actualised under state-socialism, assuming that women who were committed to the goals of these organisations are 'by necessity 'reactive agents,' acting 'because of the will of another,' namely the will of the Communist Party and the state.'¹⁵

US feminist scholar Kristen Ghodsee, who is one of the nine feminist-revisionist scholars named in Funk's article, engages critically with Funk's arguments and the definition of women's agency which, according to her, 'makes manifest a particular philosophical bias, according to which the only meaningful agency for women is agency directed specifically at the liberal political goal of individual emancipation.'¹⁶ According to Ghodsee, such a philosophical bias exposes 'the lingering effects of Cold War thinking' in Funk's argument that leads to excluding self-described communist women from the history of feminism(s) due to the fact that they were 'concerned more with improving the material conditions of women's lives than with a specifically liberal conception of political freedoms.'¹⁷

11 Cited in de Haan 2010, 550.

12 De Haan, 550.

13 Miroiu et al. 2007; de Haan et al. 2016.

14 Funk 2014.

15 Quoted in Ghodsee 2015, 249–50.

16 Ghodsee, 251.

17 Ghodsee, 252.

These debates focused on the influences of Cold War paradigms on western feminist historiography and challenged major assumptions of western feminist scholarship in which members of left-wing women's organisations were depicted as 'gullible, manipulated women' who were tools or dupes of states or communist parties, without individual agency.¹⁸ Because of that dominant view, left-feminist women's activism has been largely excluded from the history of feminisms in Western Europe. Francisca de Haan argues that there was 'a state of 'not knowing' about the WIDF' within the western historiography of transnational women's organisations, which was the biggest post-1945 international women's organisation.¹⁹ According to her, this state of not knowing was based on Cold War assumptions on communist women who have been framed as a homogenous category located in the Second World, "the Soviet bloc' or 'an oppressed Eastern Bloc,' characterised by everything it supposedly lacked (Christian civilization, freedom, civil society, feminism...)."²⁰

Going beyond such a geographical 'east-west' binarism and homogenisation of all women who were part of left-wing women's movements, some feminist scholars proposed a different perspective on left-wing women's movements and to see the relationship between communism and feminism as not necessarily 'a contradiction in terms.'²¹ Revisiting the assumptions on state-socialist women's organisations and left-wing women activists in the capitalist world as 'manipulated,' 'gullible,' and 'oppressed' women, they represent a challenge to the historiography of women's movements that broadens the definition of feminisms within the historical scholarship, similarly to scholars who use the term left feminism by including black, migrant, socialist and working-class women into feminisms.²²

Drawing on this new phase of research on the state socialist women's organisations in the Second World that recovers the omission of socialist women's activism from the west-centric feminist historiography on women's movements, we see the same paradigm dominant in the feminist scholarship on Turkey, as organisations such as the IKD has been neglected in the history of feminism on the grounds that communist women's activism was principally dependent on the male-dominant communist parties. This attitude is particularly manifest in retrospective accounts of the leftist women's movements of the 1970s. In the historical memory of women who took an active part in women's political organising within the socialist movement in the 1970s, and then became the pioneers of 'second-wave feminism' of the 1980s, the radical political scene between 1960 and 1980 was dominated by the orthodox versions of Marxism-Leninism in which the proletarian struggle is defined as the primary field of politics. Therefore, the momentum of what is known as second-wave feminism was hindered by leftist women's activism in Turkey as it conformed to the hegemony of the Leninist perspective within the radical leftist scene of the 1960s and the 1970s.

18 Bonfiglioli 2014, 1; Ghodsee 2012, 49.

19 De Haan 2010, 547.

20 De Haan 2010, 556.

21 Miroiu et al. 2007.

22 DuBois 1991 ; McDuffie 2011.

The analysis I provide below is an attempt to overcome this omission in the scholarship in Turkey and extend the focus of feminist-revisionist research beyond state socialist context by looking into socialist women's organising in a non-western but capitalist context. Further, in light of scholarly attempts to expand the focus of feminist historiography on women's movements from dominant western feminism to non-western feminisms, more recently, a growing body of feminist historical research has emerged, reconstructing the history of feminisms in Turkey from a decentralised and relational perspective that recognises local dynamics and meanings in the making of feminist politics in a non-Western context, as in Turkey, in relation to Western context in lieu of an antagonistic manner.²³

3. The Making of Left Feminism in Turkey

3.1. Founding Pillars of Left Feminism in Modern Turkey

Although Şirin Tekeli referred to the period from 1935, when the Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*, TKB est. 1924) was dissolved, until the 1980s as 'the barren years' in the history of women's movements in Turkey, left-wing politics and socialism during these years remained an ideological and political space for women to raise their voices about women's oppression.²⁴ From the early 1920s, socialism provided an ideological ground for a group of women to develop a feminist position that differed from the republican feminism the TKB represented. Those women from Anatolia and Istanbul joined the fledged local communist groups on the eve of the foundation of Turkish Republic, which would soon form the Communist Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*, TKP est. 1920–1925). Leman Sadreddin and Saadet Hanım wrote articles for the Marxist weekly Enlightenment (*Aydınlık*) that criticised 'bourgeois feminism' from a Marxist point of view by calling attention to the material burdens of working-class women and declaring that true liberation of women could only be achieved through a 'social revolution (that) is impossible without the participation of women.'²⁵ One of the most prominent woman journalists and left-feminist activists of her generation, Sabiha Sertel (1895–1968), advocated equal rights for women in the magazine Big Review (*Büyük Mecmua*) in 1919.²⁶ Another notable communist woman of the time was Naciye Hanım, who was one of the few women that attended the Congress of the People of the East in 1920 in Baku.²⁷ In March 1921, a group of communist women led by two sisters, Rahime Selimova and Cemile Nuşirvanova,

23 Adak 2020 ; Azak and de Smaele 2016; Çağatay 2017; Çağatay 2020; Davaz 2014; Şahin and Sarıtaş 2017; Şahin and Sarıtaş 2019.

24 Tekeli 1998, 337.

25 Toprak 2017, 94.

26 Libal 2012; Sertel 2019.

27 Prashad 2019, 93.

celebrated the International Women's Day in a private gathering in Ankara for the first time in the history of Turkey.²⁸

In the 1930s and 1940s, a new generation of leftist women activists and intellectuals entered the political scene in Turkey represented by Suat Derviş (1905–1972), Fatma Nudiye Yalçı (1904–1969), and Behice Boran (1910–1987). These prominent women were affiliated with the socialist movement and the TKP, which remained outlawed in Turkey throughout its existence, and they contributed to the development of left feminism in Turkey. Besides their stimulating influence on the political socialisation of women within the TKP, these women determinedly participated in political discussions and debates in the intellectual scene in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, in her articles published in the left-liberal daily Dawn (*Tan*) in the 1930s, Sabiha Sertel focused on the problems that working women were facing due to their gender and class position. She was one of the leading anti-fascist voices of the time, criticising the rise of racism in Turkey.²⁹ As a leftist academic and activist, Behice Boran was at the forefront of the peace movement against the US led-UN intervention in the Korean War and Turkey's entry into that war.³⁰

Right at the outset of the Cold War, Turkey witnessed intensifying repression against leftist movements together with the rise of anti-communism, which also affected the trajectory of women's movement. Suat Derviş, as a novelist and like Sabiha Sertel a journalist who contributed to the development of left feminism in Turkey with her intellectual activities, had to flee Turkey in 1953 due to heightened political repression and persecution of leftists.³¹ Similar to what Derviş had gone through, the 1950s brought about a period of silence for Behice Boran after a series of arrests and trials against socialists. In the same era, by contrast, the TKB was re-established in 1949 in alignment with the anti-Soviet stand of Turkish foreign policy and anti-communism as it joined the Union of National Cooperation (*Millî Tesanüt Birliği*), which was a coalition formed against 'threats of communism and religious reactionism.'³²

The political climate in the aftermath of the 1960 military coup generated a fertile ground for left-wing politics and led to a time of unprecedented radicalization among workers and students, and mass revival of the socialist movement. Joined by younger generations, larger groups of women took part in working class and students' movements, and the Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TIP), which was founded in 1961, became the first socialist party in Turkey to win seats in the parliament and played a major role in women's political socialisation by facilitating collective dissent among women. This new political climate ignited an ideological and organisational diversification within the women's movement that was promoted by the growing influence of labour movement and left-wing politics.³³ Sharing a Kemal-

28 Tunçay 2009, 646–7.

29 Bora 2017; Özkan Kerestecioğlu 2006.

30 Atılğan 2007, 146.

31 Berktaş 2006, 111.

32 Şahin and Sarıtaş 2019, 663.

33 Şahin and Sarıtaş 2017, 733–4.

ist/left-Kemalist position, a group of women led by Bakiye Beria Önger (1921–2015), who would later become the leader of the IKD, founded the Association of Progressive Women of Turkey (*Türkiye İleri Kadınlar Derneği*) in 1965.³⁴ Suat Derviş, who spent ten years abroad and returned to Turkey, was among the founders of the short-lived left-feminist organisation the Association of Revolutionary Women of Turkey (*Türkiye Devrimci Kadınlar Derneği*) that was established in 1970, but shut down right after the military coup by memorandum of 12 March 1971.³⁵ The 1960s was a time of upheaval for the working class movement and socialist politics with participation of women workers extending beyond the decade. This period was a catalyst for women to raise their demands and paved the way to a larger mass mobilisation of women in the 1970s focusing on gender and class issues. Further, at the transnational level, the 1960s was a decade of pivotal importance for global left feminism, when the WIDF held its Fifth World Congress of Women in Moscow in 1963 that ‘significantly boosted the global struggle for women’s rights, and may have provided the key impetus and networking for the subsequent DEDAW initiative.’³⁶ This process extended into the 1970s when it reached its culmination in the 1975 UN-proclaimed International Women’s Year (IWY) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 that were the key moments in the emergence of a global gender equality agenda.

3.2. Founding of the IKD

On 12 March 1971 Turkish Army staged a military coup that suppressed leftist opposition through violence and extra-constitutional measures. During the martial law under the military regime, security forces mounted a brutal campaign against the leftist organisations and their supporters, most of whom were imprisoned while some of them were executed. Although the left-wing opposition suffered a major blow during this broad suppression campaign, the socialist movement rebuilt itself with the growing participation of younger generations, including women in greater numbers following the lift of martial law in 1973 and the declaration of general amnesty in 1974.

Since the 1920s, when the Comintern launched its Bolshevisation campaign instructing its member organisations to re-organise themselves as the single-centralised communist party in their countries, the outlawed TKP had been recognised by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as the only true Marxist-Leninist party in Turkey.³⁷ In 1973, some of the younger members of the TIP pursued a new route in their attempts to rebuild the socialist movement by joining the TKP. This move marked the beginning of the Breakthrough (*Atılım*) era for the TKP in which it regained an active membership network in Turkey thanks to the joining of

34 Kılıç 1998, 351.

35 Berktay 2006, 111.

36 de Haan 2018, 231.

37 Akbulut and Ülker 2021; Wolikow 2017, 248–51.

the younger generation of communist activists. Gönül Dinçer and Şeyda Talu were among those who made their way from the TIP to the TKP, and they initiated the founding of the left-feminist IKD on June 3, 1975, which would later become the Turkish member organisation of the WIDF. For this purpose, first, Şeyda Talu established a contact with the WIDF's headquarter in East Berlin in 1974.³⁸ As mentioned earlier, the WIDF was the major actor in shaping the global left-feminist movement of the 1970s. But this movement can be better understood from 'a long-term perspective that goes back to the 1940s and 1950s and extends into the 1970s.'³⁹ Starting from the post-World War II years, the WIDF promoted a vision of global cooperation between 'women's organisations in what came to be called first-, second- and third-world countries' with its consistent support for women in the decolonization movement.⁴⁰ The cumulative efforts of the WIDF in fighting for women's rights, children's well-being and peace with its support for women in the anti-colonial movements over three decades enabled it to become a mass women's organisation with a global appeal in the broader context of the Cold War competition between the US and the Soviet Union toward the championing of women's rights. In this context, the founders of the IKD sought to join the WIDF, especially with the proclamation of 1975 as IWY.⁴¹ Şeyda Talu, one of the founding members of the IKD, a member of the communist party as well, reflects on the relationship between the political orientation of the TKP, IWY and the establishment of the IKD as follows:

I was involved in the work from the moment when the idea of setting up a women's organisation appeared. The TKP was in advance. The decision to set up a women's organisation was taken in 1974. The TKP Bureau in East Berlin did not have time to think about 'the woman question' or to work towards the establishment of a women's organisation. We as female party members took the responsibility of setting up a women's organisation.⁴²

Besides the obvious influence of the TKP through assigning its female members to initiate forming a left-feminist organisation in Turkey, there were some other women who were invited to take part in the establishment of the IKD even though they were members of other socialist groups such as the TIP and the Socialist Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Sosyalist İşçi Partisi*, TSIP).⁴³ TSIP women responded negatively to the proposal by arguing that a women's organisation would eventually 'divide and diminish the working class movement.' After this response, women of the TKP and the TIP combined their efforts to establish a leftist women's organisation in Turkey, energised by the global appeal of IWY, which was a culmination point for global

38 Akal 2011, 129.

39 de Haan 2018, 231.

40 de Haan 2022, 56.

41 de Haan 2018, 231.

42 Talu quoted in Akal 1996, 92.

43 Pervan 2013, 2.

left feminism.⁴⁴ Another significant impact of IWY was evident in their efforts to organise International Women's Day celebrations to be held in Ankara and Istanbul on 8 March 1975, fifty-four years after it had first been celebrated in 1921 in a private gathering in Ankara, as mentioned above.⁴⁵

Yet, in the final preparatory meeting, the women of the TIP expressed their concerns about the rumours that the TKP was behind this initiative after a commentary made on TKP's clandestine Voice of the TKP Radio (*TKP'nin Sesi Radyosu*) in which the IKD was presented as 'an organisation in the making under the leadership of communist women' meaning TKP women.⁴⁶ Although TKP women also expressed frustration about the radio statement, TIP women withdrew from the initiative as they were convinced that the radio statement had revealed the TKP's 'real intentions behind creating a women's organisation.'⁴⁷ In the end, the IKD was founded on June 3, 1975, without TIP women. Therefore, the original idea of establishing a women's organisation through collaborative efforts of socialist women from different factions failed because the TKP's male leadership disregarded women's will, based on a narrow-minded rivalry between the TIP and the TKP. In the long run, this tension between different socialist factions resulted in eventual fragmentation of the collective action of left-feminist women in the late 1970s in Turkey. In this fragmented scene, organised socialist women from different parties and groups failed to support each other in their struggle for women's rights, nor did they successfully form coalitions for their cause.

In various accounts, the TKP's interest in the woman question resulting from the global appeal of IWY is regarded as the decisive factor in the founding of the IKD. The first UN Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975, and it was the biggest gathering until then in which participants, representatives of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focused on women's rights.⁴⁸ The participants adopted a World Plan of Action and recommended the UN to designate 1976–1985 as the Decade for Women, which it did.⁴⁹ During the Decade, there were two more UN World Conferences on Women, in Copenhagen (1980) and in Nairobi (1985), at which women from 'the First, Second and Third Worlds' came together, and opened up 'an unexpected new front in the ongoing Cold War.'⁵⁰ These conferences and the ongoing debates on women's issues within transnational bodies during the UN Decade for Women reflected persistent effects of Cold War politics and struggles between different power blocs that informed the formation of political agendas and transnational women's movements.⁵¹ Siding with the Western-capitalist bloc during

44 Arıkan et al. 1996, 17.

45 Akal 2011, 132; Tunçay 2009, 645–6.

46 Arıkan et al. 1996, 18–9.

47 Akal 2011, 133.

48 Ghodsee 2010, 5.

49 Chen 1995, 479.

50 Ghodsee 2012, 49.

51 Bonfiglioli 2016, 524.

the Cold War, Turkey was steadfast in its role to eliminate the spread of Soviet influence in the region as anti-communism and anti-Sovietism became dominant in both official and public discourses. Therefore, the Cold War created profound tension between different political groups of women in Turkey where Kemalist women's political work, especially the TKB, was perceived as elite and state-sponsored by socialist women.

The IKD has been indicating that the organisation adopts the agenda that has been promoted by the WIDF which had a peculiar influence on the formation of left-feminist women's political organising in Turkey in the 1970s. In accordance with the IKD's claim as a member of the international progressive women's movement in general and the WIDF in particular, two members of the IKD attended the World Congress for International Women's Year (20–24 October 1975, in Berlin, GDR), which was the first official encounter between the IKD and WIDF.⁵² The IKD magazine, the monthly Women's Voice (*Kadınların Sesi*), which was launched in August 1975 and ran for sixty-one uninterrupted issues until August 1980, always included a section dedicated to news about the WIDF, its campaigns and congresses, and informed their audience about the WIDF national member organisations in various countries including Afghanistan, Angola, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Iran, Iraq, South Yemen and the US.⁵³ The IKD consistently kept its audience informed on left-feminist women's organising in different parts of the world which was fundamental in demonstrating and solidifying the sense of being part of a global movement.

In January 1976, the IKD launched its first campaign for collecting donations and medical aid for the women of Lebanon and Palestine who were under attack by Israeli military forces.⁵⁴ Following this campaign, the IKD set up its transnational agenda in accordance with the WIDF's position on women's issues by addressing the centrality of 'peace' in that time. In relation to the IKD's anti-imperialist stance in which Turkey was considered as a puppet-state of the US and a colony of imperialism and NATO, the organisation adopted a peace agenda. This agenda helped the IKD to bridge domestic and international issues. For instance, the IKD launched two campaigns against the US military bases in Turkey and missiles that NATO planned to install in Turkey and other European countries. Through these campaigns, while supporting the peace agenda of the WIDF, the IKD targeted the Turkish government's financial policies and argued that increasing military expenditures led to women's poverty in Turkey.⁵⁵ Although the IKD persistently opposed militarist and interventionist US foreign policy and advocated for lasting peace in the Middle East and Mediterranean region, especially in Cyprus, at the turn of Détente period, the IKD was largely attached to the pro-Soviet 'peace agenda' as it did not express any peaceful concern over the 1979 Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. On the contrary, the IKD supported the

52 *Kadınların Sesi* December 1975, 1; Arıkan et al. 1996, 247.

53 See *Kadınların Sesi* June 1976, 4; July 1976, 4; May 1977, 7; February 1978, 4; February 1979, 8; May 1979, 8; May 1979, 14–5.

54 *Kadınların Sesi* January 1976, 3.

55 Pervan 2013, 391–6.

Soviet intervention in Afghanistan while calling it ‘a Soviet support to the people of Afghanistan in their fight to protect their revolution at all costs.’⁵⁶

3.3. *The IKD’s Membership of the WIDF*

From the very beginning of its existence, the IKD was very clear about its intention to become a WIDF national member organisation in Turkey, as it was seeking to be part of international left-wing women’s movements. However, in Zülal Kılıç’s words, who was a founding member and General Secretary of the IKD between 1978–1979, the Bureau of the WIDF ‘seemed quite dismissive towards the IKD until 1976’ when the IKD launched a petition in Turkey for the second Stockholm Appeal of the World Peace Council (WPC).⁵⁷ At the end of that campaign, the IKD sent the petition with signatures to East Berlin where the WIDF headquarters was located. Only then, they got an official invitation from the WPC to attend the *World Conference to End the Arms Race, for Disarmament and Détente* which took place on 23–26 September 1976 in Helsinki. Zülal Kılıç attended the conference as the IKD representative.⁵⁸ At this conference Kılıç met WIDF members in person for the first time and her presence as the representative of the IKD was met ‘with cheers as well as with surprise’ from the conference participants. They were energised by hearing about the IKD, its growing influence and efforts to engage with the international peace movement and its foremost constituent the WIDF as well. The World Forum of Peace-Loving Forces gathered in Moscow on 13–15 January 1977 was the next international event attended by Zülal Kılıç, which was a meeting of 500 delegates of progressive, pro-peace organisations from over 110 countries in support of the Helsinki Accords and détente policies in the Cold War.⁵⁹ The IKD became increasingly involved in the transnational networks through participating in international forums. Reciprocally, the IKD’s active participation in international pro-women’s rights and pro-peace activism also had a constitutive impact on the re-making of a peace movement in Turkey. IKD members had an active role in the establishment of the Peace Association (*Barış Derneği*) in April 1977 to promote nuclear disarmament, compliance with the Helsinki Accords, and the peaceful settlement of international disputes, and they called for Turkey’s withdrawal from NATO. The Peace Association was established as the successor of the Turkish Association of Peace-Lovers (*Türk Barışseverler Cemiyeti*, TBC), which was founded on 14 July 1950 by a group of leftist intellectuals and activists including Behice Boran, Adnan Cemgil and created a short-lived mobilisation against the US-led UN interven-

56 *Kadınların Sesi* February 1980, 15.

57 Interview with Zülal Kılıç. The World Peace Council (WPC) was founded in 1949. Eugénie Cotton, the first president of the WIDF, was one of its co-founders. The WIDF remained an active member organisation joining the campaigns organised by the WPC and mobilising its transnational network to provide support to the international peace movement led by the WPC. de Haan 2012.

58 *Kadınların Sesi* November 1976, 3; Interview with Zülal Kılıç.

59 *Kadınların Sesi* February 1977, 1.

tion in the Korean War and Turkey's military involvement in that war. Almost thirty years after the closure of the TBC and persecution of the peace movement in Turkey, the Peace Association played a key role in the revival of the peace movement with the support of prominent intellectuals such as Reha İsvan and Mahmut Dikerdem. The IKD's contribution to the revival of the peace movement in Turkey in the 1970s was very significant thanks to its transnational relations, especially with the WIDF and the WPC.

As the IKD was gradually recognised in the transnational left-feminist network, it submitted an official application for admission to the WIDF on 13 May 1977 to become the national branch of the WIDF in Turkey.⁶⁰ The IKD's official application for admission to the WIDF was submitted by Şeyda Talu, the Secretary General of the IKD, and included a brief description of its agenda and a statement of interest in becoming a member of the WIDF. In this application letter, the IKD defined its main objectives as 'struggle for the emancipation of women in all spheres of life in accordance with the struggle waged by our people and working class against imperialism, oppression and fascism; for the rights of women and children for a better world and future; for a world without war and exploitation; for international solidarity with the women of the whole world.' Four months after the IKD submitted official application, Rita Seth, the chairperson of the Asian Section of the WIDF, paid an official visit to Istanbul in September 1977 at the invitation of the IKD's chair Bakiye Beria Önger – the first of its kind by a WIDF representative in the history.⁶¹ During her visit to Istanbul, Rita Seth attended the meeting the IKD had organised to celebrate World Day of Peace on 1 September, and visited the IKD's local branch in the Fatih district. She delivered a talk there about the achievements of the state-socialist countries in terms of women's rights and the state of women's movement in India, her home country.⁶² Afterward, Rita Seth wrote an article for the WIDF magazine, *Women of the Whole World*, sharing her observations from her visit to Istanbul, a city where 'one is likely to take for granted that the young dynamic women's organisation has been in existence for a long time.'⁶³ However, Seth's visit to Istanbul led to her being surprised that 'it is only a couple of years ago that it burst upon the scene under the name of IKD' initiated by 'a small group of determined women (...) who showed great concern about peace, and who were active along with other democratic organisations in their work for peace.'⁶⁴ As evident in Rita Seth's comments on the IKD, it was the moment when the Bureau of the WIDF acknowledged that 'the progressive women in Turkey, who are gathering together in great numbers in IKD from all parts of the country,'

60 'Application for Admission to the WIDF,' Papers of Connie Seifert including papers of National Assembly of Women, Coll. Ref. 5/NAW, Fawcett Library Archives (now The Women's Library, LSE), box 22.

61 *Kadınların Sesi*, October 1977, 2.

62 *Kadınların Sesi* October 1977, 7–8.

63 Rita Seth, 'A Visit to Turkey: Young Women in the Struggle.' *Women of the Whole World*. January 1978, 34.

64 Seth, 34.

and the WIDF henceforth started to observe the left-feminist women's movement in Turkey more closely.⁶⁵ At its Bureau Meeting on 17–19 February 1978, the WIDF proceeded to consider the IKD's application for admission to the Federation, for the decision to be taken at the WIDF Council Meeting on 15–19 May in Moscow.⁶⁶ The IKD was admitted to the WIDF at the aforementioned Council Meeting in Moscow, which was also attended by two members of the IKD, Zülal Kılıç and Ayşe Erzan.⁶⁷ Yet, this was not an official membership, without the approval of the Turkish cabinet. The IKD's urge to obtain an official status in the transnational left-feminist network was hindered by the coalition government led by the social democratic Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP). This shows that anti-communism was still a governing principle also for a left-leaning social democratic party, and that the transnational relations of political actors were still bound by the national conjuncture.

3.4. IKD's Transnational Engagement at its Peak

The year 1978 was a pivotal time for the IKD regarding the growing extent of mutual recognition and collaboration between the IKD and left-feminist women's initiatives in the international domain. With the UN's designation of 1979 as International Year of the Child (IYC), the IKD jointly with the Turkish Medical Association (*Türk Tabipler Birliği*) convened a meeting on 18 February 1978 in Istanbul with the participation of fifteen NGOs, including the Union of Turkish Bars Associations (*Türkiye Barolar Birliği*) and the Foundation of Turkish Women in the Legal Profession (*Türk Hukukçu Kadınlar Derneği*), and the representative of the Turkish Steering Committee for the IYC.⁶⁸ As a result of the IKD's initiative, a nationwide Working Group of the NGOs for IYC was created in February 1978 to organise preparations and draw up plans for activities in 1979. Besides their efforts at the national level, during the IYC, the IKD members also participated in international meetings, one of which was the World Conference 'For a Peaceful and Secure Future for All Children' took place in Moscow on 7–10 September 1979.⁶⁹ Devoted to IYC, the conference was held on the initiative of several international, regional and national organisations including the All-Arab Women's Organization, the Pan-African Women's Organization, the WIDF, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Soviet Women's

65 Seth, 34.

66 Talu, 'Application for Admission to the WIDF.' Papers of Connie Seifert including papers of National Assembly of Women, Coll. Ref. 5/NAW, Fawcett Library Archives (now The Women's Library, LSE), box 22.

67 *Kadınların Sesi* June 1978, 3; Interview with Zülal Kılıç.

68 *Kadınların Sesi* March 1978, 5.

69 *Kadınların Sesi* November 1979, 26.

Committee as the hosting organisation.⁷⁰ Together with IKD members, the president of the TIP, Behice Boran, also attended the conference.⁷¹ In the weeks following the Moscow Conference, the IKD members travelled to Athens for another international meeting on 28–30 September 1979, titled the European Regional Seminar on the Problems of Migrant Workers' Children, which was jointly organised by the Federation of Greek Women, the WIDF and UNESCO.⁷² The ultimate aim of the Seminar was to raise awareness and pinpoint the needs and problems of migrant children in Europe such as poor housing, racism, and discrimination in education, which were overlooked in the course of IYC.⁷³

As the preparations for the IYC started, the IKD members attended the International Conference for Peace, Security, and Cooperation in the Mediterranean on 9–12 February 1978 in Athens, which was called by the World Peace Council, and brought together women of the WIDF member organisations from the Eastern Mediterranean countries including Cyprus, Greece and Turkey since their governments got into a lasting conflict following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. One of the most significant outcomes of the conference was a joint statement issued by the IKD, the Federation of Greek Women (OGE) and the Cyprus Federation of Women's Organizations in which left-feminist women of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey pledged to work together to maintain peace in the region, and to undertake joint actions in the course of the International Year of the Child.⁷⁴ What made this joint statement even more striking was that of the IKD's position on the Cyprus conflict, a decades-long conflict between the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot communities with the involvement of Turkey and Greece, which had escalated into a new phase with the 1974 Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus and the creation of the de-facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In this statement, the IKD supported a unified independent Cyprus and called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the island. This was a ground-breaking position with regard to the ascent of Turkish nationalism across Turkey's extant political spectrum in the 1970s, with few exceptions in socialist groups. In that respect, through their transnational relations, women of the IKD built solidarity with the women of the 'enemy' nation as this was how the Turkish official discourse referred to Cyprus.

Starting in 1978, a prime year for the IKD to prosper and thrive through its transnational efforts within the global left-feminist movement, the WIDF and its member

70 Letter from Freda Brown to Kurt Waldheim, 'World Conference "For a Peaceful and Secure Future for All Children"'. 14 September 1979, Items in International Year of the Child, United Nations Archives.

71 *Yürüyüş* 17 September 1979, 4.

72 *Kadınların Sesi* November 1979, 27.

73 *Kadınların Sesi* November 1979, 27.

74 *Kadınların Sesi* March 1978, 7. For a brief introduction to the Cyprus Problem, and the 1974 Turkish military invasion and occupation of the northern third of Cyprus, see Ker-Lindsay 2011. For an important contribution to the literature of gendered ethnic conflict in the Cyprus case, also see Hadjipavlou 2010.

organisations in the neighbouring countries of Turkey showed a greater interest in attending events organised by the IKD. For the week-long celebration of International Women's Day, an official delegation from Bulgaria, Greece and the Soviet Union, which consisted of Liliana Angelova on behalf of the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement (CBWM) and the WIDF, Keti Samara representing the Federation of Greek Women (OGE), and Galina Burkova and Tatyana Oskalkova on behalf the Soviet Women's Committee, visited the IKD.⁷⁵ During their time in Istanbul, the members of the delegation visited local branches of the IKD and attended multiple events, including panel discussions and the Women's Day rally in Istanbul that was organised by the IKD on 11 March 1978, when thousands of women marched from Beşiktaş to Taksim Square under the banner 'We Stand for Our Rights, Children and Democracy.'⁷⁶ In the wake of its admission to the WIDF, the IKD convened its second annual congress in Istanbul, on 28–29 May 1978, which was also attended by international guests from the WIDF member organisations including Güllü əbilova, an official of the Soviet Women's Committee from Azerbaijan, Annie Mason on behalf of the Union of French Women (UFF), and Eleni Hatzipetrou representing the Federation of Greek Women.⁷⁷

Besides the visits to Turkey of the representatives of the WIDF and of its associates from different countries including socialist states, another major component of the IKD's involvement in these transnational processes of communication and political exchange was that the IKD members likewise travelled to state-socialist countries where they observed women's achievements first hand. One of the earliest trips IKD members took was to Sofia, Bulgaria in September 1976 upon the invitation of the CBWM for an international conference called Women in Agriculture.⁷⁸ Organised with the support of the WIDF and UNESCO, twenty-eight national women's organisations, including the IKD, attended this conference. Alongside seminar meetings, participants visited cooperative farms across Bulgaria as part of 'educational excursions,' which were designed to demonstrate socio-economic achievements of socialism, especially for the developing world.⁷⁹ A year later, in September 1977, the CBWM hosted another fifteen women from Turkey, again IKD members, for a field trip in Bulgaria as part of the CBWM's agenda to enhance 'experience exchanges' with

75 *Kadınların Sesi* April 1978, 7.

76 *Kadınların Sesi* April 1978, 4–5.

77 *Kadınların Sesi* July 1978, 4–5. Besides her role within the Soviet Women's Committee, Güllü əbilova was also the Secretary of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

78 Arıkan et al. 1996, 247–8.

79 As noted by Kristen Ghodsee, such international meetings were designed by the CBWM 'to appeal to agricultural economies in the developing world' as 'the perceived similarities in the struggle for economic development often created a common purpose between Bulgarian women's activists and their counterparts abroad.' (Ghodsee 2019, 162).

their counterparts in Turkey.⁸⁰ For the same purpose, in November 1978, two women from the IKD Executive Council took a similar trip to the Soviet Union, where they attended educational excursions to the cities of Moscow, Leningrad and Tallinn as the guests of the Soviet Women's Committee.⁸¹

International conferences held in state-socialist countries were one of those occasions that the IKD members took advantage of opportunities for travel to these countries where they came together with members of left-feminist women's organisations across the world and strengthened their connections and collaborations. The IKD sent an official delegation to Havana, Cuba for the 11th World Festival of Youth and Student that was held between 27 July–3 August 1978.⁸² Moreover, during the UN Decade for Women, IKD members participated in international seminars, such as the International Seminar on the Status of Working Women in Europe held in Budapest on 13–16 November 1978.⁸³ Jointly organised by the WIDF and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and hosted by the National Council of Hungarian Women (MNOT), the seminar brought together fifty-six national women's organisations, trade unions, and youth organisations from twenty-five European countries, as well as representatives of the UN, the ILO, and the WIDF's General Secretary, Mirjam Vire-Tuominen.⁸⁴ In addition to extensive discussions centred on the social, political, economic and cultural situation of working women in Europe, in the course of the seminar, women delegates from Cyprus, Greece and Turkey came together and released a joint statement in which they renewed their shared pledge to attain lasting peace in the Mediterranean region and for a peaceful solution of the Cyprus conflict and the creation of a 'unified, independent and non-aligned Cyprus in accordance with the UN resolutions.'⁸⁵

On 23–25 February 1979, two IKD members visited Berlin, the German Democratic Republic (DDR) to attend an international conference celebrating the centenary of the publication of August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism (Die Frau und der Sozialismus)*.⁸⁶ The conference was organised by the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), bringing together representatives of eighty-four communist parties and organisations from across the world.⁸⁷ Notable communist women activists were present at the conference such as Fanny Edelman (1911–2011), the honorary president of the Communist Party of Argentina and the former General Secretary of the WIDF; Inge Lange, the head of the Women's Department within the Central

80 'Between 1977 and 1978, the CBWM had what it called 'experience exchanges' with women's organisations in all of the socialist countries, as well as with those in France, Greece, Iraq, Syria, Tanzania, and Turkey.' Ghodsee 2019, 162.

81 Arıkan et al. 1996, 248.

82 *Kadınların Sesi* September 1978, 6.

83 *Népszabadság* 10 November 1978, 1; *Kadınların Sesi* December 1978, 7.

84 *Népszabadság* 19 November 1978, 4.

85 *Kadınların Sesi* January 1979, 6.

86 Arıkan et al. 1996, 248.

87 *Neues Deutschland* 24 February 1979, 2; 26 February 1979, 6.

Committee of the SED; Ilse Thiele, a member of the Central Committee of the SED and the chair of the Democratic Women's League (DFD); Lidiya Pavlovna Lykova, a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Deputy Chairwoman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic; Vimla Farooqui, the General Secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India; Barbara Curt-hoys, the secretary of the Union of Australian Women (UAW) and member of the Socialist Party of Australia; Manouri Muttetuwegama, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka and the president of the United Women's Front; and Mavis Thwala, who represented the Women's Section of the African National Congress.⁸⁸ What needs to be noted here in particular is that the conference was confined to representatives of pro-Soviet communist parties of the world, therefore, the two participants from Turkey had a dual mandate, as they were members of the IKD and members of the Women's Bureau of the TKP at the same time.⁸⁹

In 1979, IKD's transnational activities lost momentum when the Turkish state implemented repressive measures after the declaration of martial law on 26 December 1978 over thirteen provinces, comprising the cities of Ankara and Istanbul. As part of the semi-military regime's large-scale campaign to undermine and suppress left-wing mobilisation, as well as the left-feminist women's movement in Turkey, the IKD was shut down by the military governor of Istanbul on 28 April 1979. Interestingly, the IKD was the first organisation that was shut down after the declaration of the Martial Law, which suggests that the military authorities considered this specific women's organisation to be a primary 'threat to public order.'⁹⁰ The last event organised by the IKD before its shutdown was the International Women's Day celebration held at Istanbul Sports and Exhibition Hall on 8 March 1978. Representatives of WIDF member organisations from Bulgaria, Greece and the Soviet Union, Raisa Smirnova from the Soviet Women's Committee, Ivanka Atanasova from the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement, and Katina Athanasiadou from the Federation of Greek Women, also joined the crowd of hundreds of women for this celebration.⁹¹ However, the Women's Day of 1979 in Istanbul was the last event international guests were able to attend before the IKD's closure. Yet, IKD members continued to engage in transnational activities both in Turkey and abroad.

88 *Neues Deutschland* 26 February 1979, 5.

89 Zülal Kılıç confirmed that she attended this conference along with Gönül Dinçer, who became the only woman member of the Central Committee of the TKP where she was in charge of the Women's Bureau. Interview with Zülal Kılıç; 'August Bebel'in "Kadın ve Sosyalizm" Yapıtınının 100. Yıldönümü Nedeniyle ASBP MK'nin DAC Başkenti Berlin'de 23–25 Şubat 1979 Günleri Arasında Düzenlenen Uluslararası Konferansta TKP Temsilcisininin Yaptığı Konuşmadan Bir Özet'; Yağcı, *Elele Özgürlüğe: Zarlara Atıldı Geri Dönüş Yok*, 344; Akbulut, *Zülal Kılıç Arşivi Fonu'ndan: TKP Kadın Bürosu 1984–1986*, 6.

90 Arıkan et al. 1996, 63; *Kadınların Sesi* February 1979, 5.

91 *Kadınların Sesi* April 1979, 13.

Prior to its closure in April 1979, the IKD's membership to the WIDF was declined by the government based on the legislation that any national association that would like to join an international organisation was required to submit its request to the government. The request had to be assessed by the government and be approved by the Minister of Interior. The IKD then appealed against this decision before the Council of State and mobilised an international network of left-feminist organisations to diplomatically pressure the Turkish government to withdraw its decision to close the IKD. Left-feminist women of the world such as the WIDF's General Secretary Mirjam Vire-Tuominen, President of the Federation of Democratic Women of Austria Irma Schwager, the National Secretary of the Union of Australian Women (UAW) Audrey McDonald, and Eliane Lacombe, a member of the National Council of the Union of French Women (UFF), Donna Walcavage from the USA based Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE) and Zita Küng from the Swiss Organization for the Cause of Women (OFRA) showed support to the IKD by sending letters of protest to the Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit.⁹² In addition to the letters sent by individuals, WIDF affiliates such as the Dutch Women's Movement, the Left Federation of Swedish Women, and the Federation of Japan Women's Organizations also joined this letter writing campaign.⁹³ The campaign against the closure of the IKD was preceded by mass rallies and demonstrations all over Turkey, one of which was a long march from Istanbul and Izmir to the capital Ankara with hundreds of women. On 20 July 1979, the IKD began the march 'Nothing Can Stop the Progressive Women's Movement March' from two directions, Istanbul and Izmir, and 500 women joined each other in Bursa to proceed to Ankara. And perhaps most significant, the participants all together swore the WIDF oath at every stop of their march towards the capital as following:

We solemnly vow to defend the economic, juridical and social rights of women (...) to fight for the creation of conditions necessary for the happy and harmonious development of our children and future generations (...) to fight untiringly for the complete destruction of fascism in all its manifestations, and for the establishment of a real democracy throughout the World (...) to fight untiringly to secure a lasting peace throughout the world – the only guarantee of the happiness of our hearths and homes and of the well-being of our children.⁹⁴

Besides the symbolic meaning of the WIDF oath that demonstrates the IKD's commitment to the global left-feminist women's movement, the IKD drew on this oath as

92 *Kadınların Sesi* June 1979, 9, 10.

93 *Kadınların Sesi* August 1979, 7.

94 *Kadınların Sesi* August 1979, 15–7. The WIDF's goals, the WIDF oath as it was called by the IKD, were adopted at the founding congress of WIDF that took place in Paris on 26–30 November 1945, and these goals were spelled out in the WIDF 1945 Statutes. *Congrès International Des Femmes; Compte Rendu Des Travaux Du Congrès Qui S'est Tenu à Paris Du 26 Novembre Au 1er Décembre 1945* | *Alexander Street, Part of Clarivate*; Popova, *Women in the Land of Socialism*; de Haan 2012.

a course of legitimacy in the Turkish context as it protested its closure by consistently declaring the IKD's reputation in international domain as a member of the WIDF.⁹⁵

The IKD and its members continued their activities despite the closure of the organisation until the following months of the military coup that took place on 12 September 1980. Perhaps the most momentous event of 1980 was the Second UN World Conference on Women, also known as World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, held on 14–30 July 1980 in Copenhagen, two months before the military coup, where the official signing of CEDAW took place at the opening ceremony. This was the last international event that IKD members attended before the military coup of 12 September 1980. Despite the nationwide martial law imposed by the military regime, the IKD members did not go underground, but sustained its organisational network thanks to the semi-legal structures created by the female members of the TKP members who were active within the IKD. However, two months after the military coup, the executive leadership of the TKP decided to withdraw its members from the IKD activities, which actually dissolved the IKD since the majority of the IKD executive cadres and militants were TKP members.⁹⁶ With this move, the TKP leadership aimed to protect its members who might be the target of an upcoming crackdown on the party. Although the cadres of the IKD went underground, in May 1981, many of them were arrested in operations targeting the TKP. As a part of a large-scale crackdown on leftist activists in Turkey, the May 1981 operation was followed by subsequent waves of arrests of IKD members in 1982 and 1983. Of those women arrested during the military rule, many were tortured, suffered miscarriages and serious illnesses, and spent years in prison. Some IKD members fled Turkey and applied for asylum in European countries, including the IKD president Bakiye Beria Önger. Once there, they engaged in transnational activism through initiating homeland directed practices such as solidarity campaigns and working together with national women's organisations of the host states while taking part in the international women's movement.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, my findings have shown that from the mid-1970s onwards, the IKD was actively involved in the international left-feminist women's movement and became part of the WIDF. The IKD's engagement in transnational processes was not only significant for the making of left feminism in Turkey in the 1970s, but it also played a vital and pioneering role in the revival of the organised peace movement in Turkey in the same era through its transnational network. In compliance with the WIDF's larger political work around peace, the IKD took part in establishing a vibrant network of left-feminist women's organisations in the region together with its counterparts in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece, and initiated campaigns for peace and solidarity in the

95 *Kadınların Sesi* June 1979, 5.

96 Arıkan et al. 1996, 252; Yağcı 2018, 362.

Mediterranean to involve women of Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey, particularly in the efforts of building lasting peace in Cyprus.

The relationship between the IKD and the TKP more or less resembled the one between the WIDF and the pro-Soviet international communist movement as there was a similar pattern in terms of receiving material, organisational and political support from the pro-Soviet communist parties. Yet, my findings show that this relationship, both at the transnational and national levels, was more complex than what is suggested in the feminist historiography on women's movements. Left feminism of the 1970s has been excluded from history as IKD members have been assumed to be characterised by a lack of agency, as 'followers of Party orders,' thus, lacking the possibility to become autonomous subjects. However, the transnational activities of the IKD in the 1970s demonstrate that left feminism of the era was less monolithic than its historiography suggests. My findings also bring some explanation to the content of the relationship between the WIDF and the IKD. Both the WIDF and the IKD were formed as popular front organisations committed to women's rights, anti-fascism and peace that had grown significantly in size, influence, and effectiveness. The relationship between these two organisations was, although asymmetrical, not unidirectional – instead of simply following the directions given by the WIDF, the IKD repeatedly sought recognition by and support from the WIDF – as it turned out to be that the WIDF was uninterested in what the IKD was doing in Turkey.

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