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**Pedagogy of Liminality?  
The Case of Turkish Teachers' Union Egitim-Sen**

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***Prelude***

***Questions From a Worker Who Reads***

*Who built Thebes of the 7 gates ?  
In the books you will read the names of kings.  
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock ?  
And Babylon, many times demolished,  
Who raised it up so many times ?  
In what houses of gold glittering Lima did its builders live ?  
Where, the evening that the Great Wall of China was finished, did the masons go?  
Great Rome is full of triumphal arches.  
Who erected them ?  
Over whom did the Caesars triumph ?  
Had Byzantium, much praised in song, only palaces for its inhabitants ?  
Even in fabled Atlantis, the night that the ocean engulfed it,  
The drowning still cried out for their slaves.  
The young Alexander conquered India.  
Was he alone ?  
Caesar defeated the Gauls.  
Did he not even have a cook with him ?  
Philip of Spain wept when his armada went down.  
Was he the only one to weep ?  
Frederick the 2nd won the 7 Years War.  
Who else won it ?  
Every page a victory.  
Who cooked the feast for the victors ?  
Every 10 years a great man.  
Who paid the bill ?  
So many reports.  
So many questions.*

***Bertolt Brecht -1935<sup>1</sup>***

## **Introduction**

In this article, I examine the impacts of neoliberal restructuring of national education and its infiltration into teacher unions. Throughout the article, the arguments are posited by applying the concept of liminality/liminal space, which is defined, according to cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, as a site of transformation and a space where different networks come into conflict (Turner, 2004). In this way, the pedagogy of liminality as an encompassing frame is discussed within the policy context of global neo-liberal capitalism in order to situate the socio-political and pedagogical *revolts* of teacher unions in Turkey. The article critically examines the case of Egitim-Sen, a trade union of teachers and academicians and one of the largest workers' institutions of Turkey. First, the notion of liminality is examined. Second, a brief explanation of the historical agenda of the 1980s is presented as a starting point for the Turkish neo-liberal experience. In the methodology, information gathered from informal interviews with union members is presented to capture the shared codes that undergird the current political and economic agenda of Turkey. These interviews, in the first place, help to address the borders within and around the teacher unions, and in the second place, enlighten the liminal spaces in which union members situate themselves sites of transformation.

I conclude the article by articulating the liminal passages within the teacher unions where struggle takes place “to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and ...inner relationship of it” (Anzaldúa, 2002, pp. 548-549).

## **The Notion of Liminality**

The notion of “liminality” was first introduced to the field of anthropology by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 with his study of “the rites of passage”. In the first place, Gennep (2004) identifies the “liminal phase” while describing the rites of passages and indicates “all rites of passage or ‘transition’ are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen* signifying ‘threshold’ in Latin), and aggregation”(Turner, 2004, p. 79; Gennep, 2004, p. 11). Turner (2004, p. 79) explains these phases as follows;

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a ‘state’), or from both. During the intervening ‘liminal’ period the characteristic of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger’) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and ‘structural’ type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions.

Through this explanation, Turner’s liminality implies an ambiguous phase in which “threshold people” are outside of the society who elude “the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space”. In other words “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed

by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner, 2004, p. 79). That particular kind of being “betwixt and between” in social structures provides a nexus that carves out the interstructural and ambiguous liminal subjects.” Therefore, within the liminal phase, liminal subjects may be seen as a seedbed of new possibilities and structural changes where “old perspectives on work and subjectivity are contested and new ones are created”(Garsten, 1999, p. 1).

The liminal phase, with its unique structural formation, provides a plethora of opportunities to conceptualize and analyse the dynamics of labor unions. Throughout this article the teacher union movement in Turkey will be examined through deciphering pre and post-structural boundaries in Turkish society, starting with 1980 coup d'état. These begin to carve out possible oppositions and subjectivities and will challenge traditional articulation of “resistance”.

### **Turkey in the 1980's - coup d'état and neo-liberalism**

The neo-liberal turn of Turkey started its journey with 1980 coup d'état. On the morning of September 12 1980, in Turkey, the armed forces announced that they had taken over political power in response to the nonfunctional state organs threatening the very survival of the state and people. The 1980 coup d'état, as a historical cornerstone, was presented as a panacea against social division, economic breakdown, and the violence in country on those days, and one of the important strategies used by the military forces was to strengthen the state authority stream (Ahmad, 1993).<sup>2</sup> The uprooting project of the existing political regime was denoted by General Kenan Evren over the radio and television;

Dear citizens, it is because of all these reasons...that the Turkish armed forces were forced to take over the state administration with the aim of safeguarding the unity of the country and the nation and the rights and freedoms of the people, ensuring the security of life and property and the happiness and prosperity of the people, ensuring the prevalence of law and order—in other words, restoring the state authority in an impartial manner (Ahmad, 1993, p. 181).

Immediately afterwards, the national parliament was dissolved, the cabinet was deposed, the immunity of the members of the national assembly (the parliament) was lifted, and all political parties and the two radical trade union confederations (the socialist DISK and the ultra-nationalist MİSK—Confederation of Nationalist Trade Unions) were suspended (Zurcher, 2004, p. 278). With the 1980 coup d'état—as a time of momentous change and with its new social vocabulary—Turkish society witnessed the eclipse of state-endorsed social, cultural, and political premises, and military-endorsed democracy indicated that the society is subjected to the significant changes. This, in itself, was setting limits to a medium for the cultivation of the very dialogue across societal divisions. At this point, this reminds us of the quandary of Mark Twain as Ernest Gellner (1997, p. 243) indicates;

Giving up smoking is easy; I have done it many times. The Turkish army could say, 'Reestablishing democracy is easy, we have done it so many times.' And so this cycle appeared as if it were institutionalized.

Following the 1980 coup d'état, the choreography of the project of modernity redeploys the time-frame and the construction of a social memory for its own interest and agenda and creates a void in the cultural realms. With the coup d'état, the profound transformations in the cultural and economic realms constitute the domain of legitimate forms of power that promulgates its "timeless essence" in the form of secular-neoliberal economic policies. The neo-liberal restructuring of society starts to imbue each of the various spheres of life with a regulative sensibility rooted in the new forms of practices of capitalist consumerism and the urban bourgeoisie. Likewise, the precise contours of neoliberal policies are predicated upon the process of globalization that takes its cue from the maintenance of a single capitalist corpus.

The most visible impacts of secular, neo-liberal policies on Turkish society are contained within economic life. The remarks of Keyman and Koyuncu (2005, pp. 111-12) about the Turkish economy at that time are worth quoting;

since the 1980s, and especially in 1990s, the Turkish economy has been; a) exposed to the process of the globalization of capital and trade, and b) organized on the basis of the primacy of the global market over the domestic one, which has led economic actors to realize c) that market relations require rational and long-term strategies, and d) that in order to be secure and successful in (globalized) economic life, it is imperative to gain organizational capabilities to produce or maintain technological improvement and strategic planning for production and investment...we have seen the increasing importance of the discourse of 'free market', the multiplication and dissemination of economic actors, and the pluralization of economic organizations in Turkish society.

Then, under the pressure from international financial organizations, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the government abandoned its early policies that had favored small-scale farmers, import-substitution industries, and parastatal industries; and rather they committed themselves to reducing the role of the state in the economy, eliminating 'inefficient' state enterprises, curbing the strength of trade unions, downsizing public expenditure and social services, attracting foreign investment, and most importantly, promoting industrial exports for foreign currency (Kaplan, 2006, p. 127).

The transformation of the economy from a state-oriented protectionist model to a market-oriented one manifested itself with a palpable presence in the national education system. The rise and subsequent consolidation of neo-liberal policies exposed contradictions and conflicts between and within the different spheres of the society and posed a "neo" dilemma for the national education system. When the focus on locating schools' agency in the society first emerged, the economic autonomy—industrialists—located it within the operations that "correspond to what they consider to be the economic needs of the

society” (Kaplan, 2006, p. 127). Then, the industrial complexes increased their control over the education system in order to promulgate their respective worldviews in schooling. On September 18, 1990, the release of a report on state education was the descriptive sign of a structural change in the Turkish economy, and it encapsulated education as the key element in securing wider neo-liberal change. The report was titled “Education in Turkey: Proposals for Structuring Adaptations to Problems and Changes (Turkiye’de Egitim: Sorunlar ve Degisime Yapisal Uyum Onerileri), and it was sponsored by the most influential Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessman’s Association (Turk Sanayicileri ve Isadamlari Dernegi, abbreviated as TUSIAD). Sam Kaplan’s (2006, p. 126) insightful comments for the content of the report are worth mentioning here,

[the] report makes frequent reference to Turkish high school students losing ground compared with their peers abroad and, thus, Turkish industry’s inability to compete successfully with industrialized nations, particularly in the field of computer technology and biotechnology. Loss of a ‘competitive advantage’ (rekabet ustunlugu) in the global market is pinned to the ‘rapid progress in science and technology,’ to the ‘extraordinary speed with which the accumulation of knowledge and technology increases and goes out of date.’...the report advocated that the Ministry of Education increase technical and vocational programs that are responsive to global market forces

Thus, the neoliberal movement gained a momentum within the educational realm by considering education as an investment and consolidated its rise dramatically through reproducing the new forms of iteration. This occupation and infiltration of every aspect of the educational realm, on the other hand, created new forms of resistance that reflects “the complex innerworkings of historically changing structures of power” (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 53). The teacher union Egitim-Sen, as one of the resistant obstacles to neo-liberal restructuring in Turkey, will be the site for us to explore the forms of resistance, who the resisters are, and understanding the workings of power structures (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Mahmood, 2005). All these interpretations will be guided by the concept of *liminality* which is defined as a site of transformation, a space for different networks to come into conflict (Turner, 2004).

### **Egitim-Sen: dialogues with union members**

The history of Turkish teacher unions goes back to *Encumen-I Muallimin*, which was established on July 1908, before the Republican Era in Turkey, at the time of Ottoman Empire. The majority of its members came from the Ministry of Education (Maarif Nezareti) at that time and therefore had no democratic representation. Egitim-Sen (Union of Education and Science Workers) was founded on January 23, 1995 as a result of the unification of Egitim-Is and Egit-Sen, two other teachers’ unions with a membership over 120,000 made up of teachers and education workers. It is also a member of [KESK \(Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions\)](#), Education International (EI), and also a constituent of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In order to understand the impact of neoliberal economics and the globalization of capital, it is meaningful to utilize personal narratives as oral representations of experiences and as representations of organizational symbols. These narratives have the

potential of externalizing “insider’s” perceptions and have the potential of creating a space to understand the reactions, interpretations, and actions of union members. Drawing on semiotic analysis can be helpful to capture the shared codes that undergird the current political, economic agenda. This small study involves interviews with two female and two male union members of Egitim-Sen, and all the interviews took place at one of the EGITIM-SEN branches in Istanbul in January. The sample is small, and make no claims for generalisability. However, the interviews were detailed and the rich data generated makes it possible to shed some light on the complex issues presented here.

Interviews were conducted over a period of several weeks with using a tape recorder. During the process, interviewees were asked to provide their experiences and points of views in relation to the conceptualization of education and the agency of the teacher; how to become a union member, and the identity formation during this process; the historical agenda of EGITIM-SEN and its role in Turkish democracy. All interviewees were only contacted once, and the comments have been summarized and organized by the author. In the following part, the flow of the article is maintained within the question-and-answer format.

### **Interviews with Union Members**

The first interview was conducted with a female teacher who has 30 years of experience in the field and also works as an administrator in EGITIM-SEN. The second interview was conducted with a male teacher who has an experience of 30 years, and after 30 years of experience he had retired. And now he is an active member of Egitim-Sen. The third interview was conducted with two teachers. One is a female literacy teacher who has an experience of 9 years and graduated from Istanbul University and also has a role in Egitim-Sen as an administrator. The other one is a male teacher who has an experience of 10 years and is also an active teacher in Egitim-Sen.

The questions that were raised during the interview, on the one hand, reflect the reality of many teachers’ daily lives, and on the other hand, portray the increased centralization, standardization, and rationalization tendencies that are more closely linked to the needs of business and industry. According to union member’s explanations, there is an immense pressure on the education system which is not only to reconceptualize what education is, but “what education is actually for” (Apple & Jungck, 1990, p. 229). It is meaningful to quote here union members’ words to understand what is happening to teaching as an occupation and as skilled actions and how the struggles are shaped,

*QUESTION: Could you please share your thoughts on how you conceptualize education and the role of the teacher and student within this conceptualization?*

*Union Member 1:* I am one of the first founders of Egitim-Sen. I have been a member of the union since 1990s. Why am I a member? We are trying to educate people within classrooms who can create, think and question; a person who struggles for his/her rights; who is able to articulate himself/herself. I believe that such a society is more able to express itself and thus become happier, while the individual would also be more able to contribute to the society. This is what we

are trying to achieve in the classrooms, not just teaching them literacy and four basic mathematical operations, because most of the people have the capability to do this. What matters is to be able to educate people who question things and are able to sustain themselves. These also apply to the profession because you already build the profession on these. To become an individual means to question, struggle and to be able to express himself/herself and thus to be able to intervene in social affairs with people alike. I became a union member to be able to intervene in social affairs that are wrong and to be able to struggle for rights that have been taken from us. Many of my rights have been taken away from me. I personally think that people individually cannot retain their rights. Nevertheless, the union movement has demonstrated that it is only when people within the same occupation come together along their rights and become a force that they are able to realize their demands. Otherwise, they won't be able to do it. That is what unions are for. I struggle with people for my social and economic demands... I think that being a part of the struggle will enable us to move into a better process. That is why I became a union member and keep struggling.

*QUESTION: Teachers have some economic and social demands related to employee personal rights. Why aren't they realized, and why is their voice not heard?*

*Union Member 1:* The first obstacle is that unions of people in this occupation do not have collective bargaining rights. A meeting called a 'collective job meeting' is organized with the employee – Minister of Education – but the minister has the final word. Thus, this is a serious obstacle. The second is the 1980 coup d'état. It had serious consequences. People are still afraid of being organized and even using the word "organization." It captivated a live society, the society was pushed to silence, and such a situation was created that nobody was able to express their views. We are trying to transcend this nowadays. There is a sect of society which is absolutely apolitical; they do not want to deal with anything. This is the youth that was born during the 1980 coup d'état. They were pushed to silence by their families. They still fear being organized and stay away from being organized. We drew a model in this sect of the society, a model that has judgments about the world and questions it. Then, they would be able to struggle for their rights. Yet, our teachers are deprived of this; teachers are not being trained in this manner during their education on their departments at college. The new graduates are those who are integrated with the values of the system. It is indeed hard for them to get organized. We go to schools and ask them whether they are union members and they answer in the affirmative. When we asked 'which union?' they say that they do not know and state that they signed the paper given by the principal. And these are all young people.

*QUESTION: What are the changes after 1980s in terms of union movement, their demands, and their organization?*

*Union member 2:*

When I first started working as a teacher, I became a member of TOB-DER. After the 1980 coup d'état, we had to live without an organization for eight years. Unions had to struggle with the political atmosphere of the time and were unable to focus on occupational organization and their internal development. People and teachers were murdered in an environment where your life security was of higher priority. To improve an anti-fascist organization was naturally foregrounded, then. For instance, a considerable amount of teachers within TOB-DER participated in anti-fascist demonstrations. If you design an organization with political aims like anti-fascist or anti-chauvinist, nobody will go to those organizations and they actually wouldn't be unions. Principals and teachers were targeted; there were also trials. Some had to go abroad while some were imprisoned. That is, teachers and organized teachers constitute an important place among the people targeted by the coup d'état. In those years, we kept an eye on the social agenda regarding what was going on but we mostly played bric. During those years, around 1985s, there was work being done in the university, on the constitution produced by the army soon after the coup d'état. Then, academicians found a gap in the constitution regarding establishing unions. So, unions are founded based on that gap and on a legal basis. At that time, due to some conflicts within TOB-DER, some of the laborers organized under EGIT-DER. When I look at our way of organization, it lags way behind most of the unionization movements across the world. While many countries have solved this problem around 1930s and 1940s, we were still discussing whether we should found a union or not. Our organization has historically been really late. This is the first important point. Secondly, ours is a 'from above' type of organization. That is, it is not founded by teachers, workers or other public workers who feel the lack of such an institution. It has not been founded by masses. Masses were rather included later on... I think it was 1991 that we did it and since then, the seals have been off. They could not control it but had control unions established. There were murders too, and our members had their share especially in regions where the Kurdish problem prevailed. Administrators and members of Egitim-Sen were imprisoned or killed. Upon seeing that they were not able to prevent it, a *unión* – *Turkiye Kamu-Sen* – was founded with the support of MHP (Nationalist Movement Party). Later on, the religious conservative wing established another union with the name of *Memur-Sen*, a kind of modified version of *Turk-Is*. In 1995, three confederations had emerged, and this was such a movement that aimed to integrate the workers in a system of back up.

There were ups and downs during those years. Due to some policies, acts of misgovernance or the wish to become vanguard, some of our members left our union and registered in other unions. Therefore, the mass we were trying to organize gathered within three different unions. Now, our membership has receded to 224,000, while it was around 400,000 at some point. Some others founded other unions claiming that we did not defend nationalist ideals. In time, unions became like political parties even though they were originally formed as



mass movements. This did not happen in Egitim-Sen. Trade unions represent the oppressed classes. It is not natural for unions actually supporting the system to defend the rights of public laborers. They are there to actually prevent it.

Union members' words point out the proletarianization of teaching as an occupation with its association to the large effects in the many realms of the education system. According to Apple (1982, p. 53) the occupational restructuring of teaching,

had important implications given the contradictory class location of teachers...I am not implying they are by definition within the middle classes, or they are in an ambiguous position somehow 'between' classes...it is wise to think of them as located simultaneously in two classes...they share the interest of both petty bourgeoisie and the working class.

Thus, socially, economically and psychologically constructed betwixt and between positions of teachers, "which are assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial"(Turner, 2004, p. 79), recapitulate the importance of unionization and the forms of "resistance". Victor Turner (2004), in discussing the characteristics of the liminal spaces, indicates its collective and egalitarian character that eliminates (minimizes) the differences in rank and status with involving a sense of community, and sharing. In other words liminal spaces involve a challenge of structure whereas structures entail systems of standardized, rationalized, centralized models in the society. Thus, how is a sense of community formed within the liminal spaces? According to union members,

*QUESTION: Let's talk more about the benefits of being a union member. How would you define that process? Did it benefit you? If there were no benefits, would you still remain within the struggle?*

Egitim-Sen is not just a rights-based organization, and that differentiates it from other teacher unions in Turkey. Moreover, it defends a kind of education that is scientific, democratic, free and based on people's mother tongue. I always describe Egitim-Sen through an analogy of weighing scales. On one side is what I have just mentioned and on the other side is the concept of struggling for rights. They both need to be equal. Neither of them should be prioritized over the other. Both are equally important. Today, public schools are at the edge of being sold. This is a process in which all the resources are canalized into private schools and private education corporations (Dershane) and the rights of the children of laborers are being robbed of them. We have to defend these, and today, millions of children are deprived of their right to use their mother tongue. There is no equality between them and others and still are subject to equal criteria for assessment. They take the same classes and answer the same questions. There is injustice here and under these circumstances, even if the literacy rate is 100 %, this does not mean anything for me. Our problem is not whether religion courses are electives or not. The problem is that these courses are taught in line with creation theory. That is where my problem lies. So when these courses are taught

not from a scientific perspective but based on creationist theory which leads to the construction of conservative thoughts in children's minds, and at this point my personal rights stop being meaningful. This might be negative for some but nothing can be isolated from social life and when you isolate them, then you become part of the system.

*QUESTION: You have mentioned about the other unions, there are several teacher unions in Turkey. Why did you choose Egitim-Sen for organization?*

From the perspective of the teacher, Egitim-Sen is the only union that supports the teachers. Other unions are those founded by the system. They struggled against us; they shut down our unions and sealed the doors but we got rid of them. They attacked us using tear gas bombs and prevented us from being organized. They took us into custody; they isolated us by changing our location, almost it was like sending us to exile. Soon, they understood that they would not be able to overcome our struggle and thus established different unions to attract other teachers. Teachers were attracted to these unions, EGITIM-DIRSEN, TURK-KAMUSEN, all of which are co-opted by the system. On the other hand, we need to be in unity with other unions within this realm and reflect this struggle.

*QUESTION: So, then, what is your definition of union?*

*Union Member 1:* Union members are people who come together around certain demands. We also have some demands. In order for these to be realized – at least the ones with higher priority – there needs to be pressure on the union. All of our rights as of now have been gained through the union. For instance, the issue of wearing trousers in schools was a dream for women 10 years ago. Just think that, you go to school wearing a skirt on a snowy day. There were different reasons also and reasons related to being a woman. So, we had a strike one day, wearing trousers. It looks like a simple act but it was a serious one. Our friends were disciplined for that, some got even punished. Nevertheless, we gained the right to wear trousers, then. I believe that you will not gain rights from above. Granted rights are then taken back. That is why when people fight for their rights that they are permanent. We have rights for which we have struggled. We have some rights that are being attacked, for instance, our extra lesson wages. Because we do not have collective agreement there are problems regarding realizing some of our rights.

Union Member 4: First of all, it has to do with opposition in an organized manner, getting rights back, struggle for rights and class unionism. For me, what matters is one that produces policies for laboring classes, participates in demonstrations, defends their rights and stands on the side of the laborers. When we look at the alternatives, Egitim-Sen is the one union which is involved in these aspects and that's why I chose Egitim-Sen. On the other hand, I think it's wrong to restrict unions into certain categories. For example, we were on strike on November 25, 2009 with Turk Egitim-Sen, and I think that's important in terms of standing

united when it comes to the rights of laborers. Yet, as we look at how Egitim-Birsen was formed, it becomes evident that it was supported by the government. Also, members of Egitim-Birsen who are already supported by the government participate in the organization of government parties just because they are members of Egitim-Birsen. This is quite problematic as far as class unionism is concerned.

*Union Member 2:* I assume that this struggle will be meaningful when it is tuned with the line of the masses. The other way around would be to get into action that is against and despite the class.

*QUESTION:* So, from where and how are the attacks against this occupational group derived from? Where are they gaining their strength from? And how does Egitim-Sen read this picture?

*Union Member 2:* Education is an institution of the superstructure, articulated with social, economic and political forces. This develops through capitalism, here in Turkey. Therefore, the system actually expects us to reproduce it everyday. They want us to legitimize the system. This appears in different time periods, disguised differently, for instance as fascism or in a reactionary manner. Yet, none of those pose a threat to capitalism. We need to grasp imperialist thoughts and reflections.

Deriving from these conversations, with the increasing power of 1980 coup d'état in the larger society, there was considerable pressure not only to redefine the sphere in which education is carried out but to delimit the forms of organized struggle in society. This has had a major impact on teacher's agency, which became subject to deskilling, rationalization, intensification (Apple & Jungck, 1990) and also on the centrality of praxis that activates capacities, ideals and solidarities, which are capable of challenging and reformulating the societal structures. Thus, with the current attempts at rationalizing education with an increasing complexity in the social division of labour, the liminal spaces become the sites for the efforts of creating a sense of community in which the actors (passenger) are capable of transcending institutional boundaries.

The interviews assembled in this article are the voices of political implications of theory drawn from the experimental frameworks within the EGITIM-SEN teacher union, which characterizes the union movement as an active agent in challenging power structures which "compress critical space and stifles critical thought" (Hill, 2003, p. 1) within the social and political spheres and also in deciphering "the complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power" (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p.53). The concrete realities within the union movement inform us that teachers' unions were disproportionately burdened with the post-1980's economic and political policies. The widespread economic re-structuring of the country, in the post-1980 era, in order to serve to perpetuate the interests of neoliberalism and also situated itself involving in the neoliberal model of education. At the same time, this economic agenda created alternative forms of resistance that have the capability of being a constant foe of the

government. EGITIM-SEN, as a teacher union is one of the special cases during this restructuring period which serves as the conduit that deciphers and challenges the boundaries of the institutional politics within the larger political system and also paves the way for the embodiment of alternative agency forms that fetters the potential dispositions which are already ready to relations of domination. As indicated by some of the union members, EGITIM-SEN is not only positioning itself as a union aiming to guarantee the rights of workers and members but also as the site of praxis that shifts the emphasis from concentrating on just inner dynamics of unions with a one dimensional focus to grasping multi-vocal and heterogeneous structures of the society. As one of the union members stated

We think that a struggle that is also focused on the democratization of the country is the true union struggle with its emphasis on rights and freedoms. In other words, to be satisfied with purely a wage struggle, a struggle to be better officers and teachers would lead us into a vicious circle. Why? Today, an unresolved Kurdish issue is of interest to us, as public laborers. A system that still has not managed to solve the Kurdish issue or other problems within the context of human rights and freedom, will not be able to give anything to its workers, in terms of economics and democracy. These two constitute a whole. I think that the struggle will be meaningful when we take into account that unions occupy a place within the democratization struggle and members of the union are part of the masses. I assume that the unions will be taken seriously. Unions that are formed like parties might make a bunch of leftists happy but because masses lag behind, they will be marginalized. Foregrounding politics above everything is not unions' business; it's the task of political parties and a union movement that is guided by parties and whoever follows these parties is far from being comprehensive.

His words indicate “the distance” rather than “the distant” position of unions to political sphere, and the possibility of bridging the distances is only possible with the representation of the different parties within the society.

Union members' approaches indicate the dichotomy between the democratic rights of each citizen in terms of the democratization of the workplace and the rising power of laissez-faire orthodoxy in the labor market that is essential to understand how state endorsed labor politics encapsulates the institutions. In other words, the union movement is also lodged by the state forces through creating a “neo” language and image for the union movement by invading the spirit of struggle. These interventions are not preordained; they are constructed as the counter-unionist struggles simultaneously in order to implement their respective views in the union movement. Thus, the increasing role of state within the union movement aims to be central to Turkish “industrial democracy” in order to mandate and deal with “other” unions according to a set of rules laid down in their “neo” language.

The conversations provided here and the memories of the union movement in Turkey also provide a lens through which we can illuminate the inner structures and dynamics of teacher unions, the spirit of union members and struggle. It can also capture the

historically changing power structures and the political agenda of the country and its dialectic relationship with the teacher unions. The conversations clearly reflect the impact of 1980 coup d'état and help us to recognize that EGITIM-SEN has developed its own vocabulary for “democracy”, “democratic society”, “education”, and “human rights,” which is beyond the individualistic corpus of liberal policies and its attractive masks.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Derived from <http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/brecht/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> According to Serif Mardin (1997, p.67) “Ottoman officials, at various stages in the development of the empire, seemed uniformly locked into the preservation of a political principle best translated as ‘stateness’ or ‘the priority of the state,’ a principle known in Turkish as *devlet*... Nineteenth-century Ottoman officials... seem to have had the salvation of *devlet* as a uniform goal and bent their minds to this ideal... The centrality of *devlet* in their political ideology promoted a pervasive patriotism... Throughout, the main task as seen by Ottoman Turks was that of improving the administration of the realm and the power of the state rather than promoting democracy.”

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