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Transcultural biography work in adult education: A discussion on the findings of a pilot study in Turkey

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Abstract

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of identity-based, ethnic, cultural and social movements as well as the studies done on such issues and immigration, calling for a better understanding of and more research on how adult people perceive and understand differences. This paper firstly presents Transcultural Biography Work (TBW) approach in adult education. The paper also discusses the reasons for the increased use of this approach in adult education, and presents the findings of a research on TBW study at Süleyman Demirel University in Isparta, Turkey. The data were compiled during two separate two-day TBW focus group studies with 15 students from various ethnic, national, cultural etc. backgrounds. This four-day study funded by European Commission and constructed around TBW approach aimed to investigate transculturality in our lives, evaluate transcultural biography methods and advance these methods or explore new techniques.
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1. Introduction

Today, we live in a diverse but interconnected world shaped by such developments as globalization, immigration, the rise of sub-cultures, among others. In fact, one could argue that we live in a transcultural world with blurred borders where we are all migrants in one way or another. For instance; in 2010, there were 32.5 million foreigners in the EU-27 countries, corresponding to 6.5 percent of the total population whereas there were 47.3 million foreign-born residents corresponding to 9.4 percent of the total population (Eurostat, 2011). Similarly, according to a recently published report, around 215.000 students received Erasmus grants to go abroad and complete one or two semesters of their higher education in the academic year 2009/10, up from around 200.000 in the year 2008/09. And, the EU aims to reach its target of supporting a total of 3 million European students by 2012/13 since the program launched in 1987 (EC, 2011). In much the same way, millions of people travel globally with the aims of entertainment, business, education, tourism etc. or move to live in other countries due to many different reasons. All these developments could also be seen as the signs of increased transculturality, calling for a better understanding of ourselves and the others.

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Since we live in a global and mobile world today, education and research have to go beyond its well established borders on the base of nation states. Besides, education ought to go beyond transferring the accumulated cultural, social and technical data, values, attitudes etc. to the new generations and prepare all generations for a more dynamic, diverse and transcultural world. Moreover, living in an increasingly transcultural world requires that adults be included in educational processes as well. In fact, there is a need for more research on how adult people perceive, understand and adapt to new environments and different cultures; and how they learn to respect different identities.

Visiting or immigrating to other countries and entering different societies and cultures call for increased efforts to become more self-conscious and to better understand the other. This is often the case even in the same country where there are minorities, marginal groups, ethnic or religious groups who are not represented in the mainstream public arena and excluded from or cannot access fairly to social and economic opportunities. Such cleavages have adverse social, political and economic consequences. First of all, some people feel foreign to themselves and to their environments and to the others. Second, it means that people do not use or are not encouraged or let to use their full potential for the benefit of the society as well as for the sake of their own personal or familial benefit. Third, from a more general perspective, in such a world, human development in its social, cultural or economic aspects could not be realized to its greatest possible extent. One can list more than three reasons but the point here is that efforts ought to be intensified to find ways to help especially adult people get integrated and involved in all areas of social, economic, political and cultural life. For this purpose, there is a need to know ourselves and others better through interactive methods, and help adults realize and understand differences and different people and cultures.

This paper discusses transculturality, biography work and adult education theoretically, methodologically and empirically. Thus, it firstly presents the foundations of Transcultural Biography Work (TBW approach) and its application in adult education. Secondly, the paper discusses the reasons for the increased utilization of this approach in adult education and other fields such as care, social work, migration and women's studies. Thirdly, it presents the findings of a research about TBW with a group of undergraduate and graduate students at Süleyman Demirel University in Isparta, Turkey. The data were compiled during two separate two-day focus group studies with 15 students with various religious, ethnic, national, gender, cultural etc. backgrounds. This four-day study funded by European Commission and constructed around TBW approach was organized to implement some transcultural biography methods to learn how to apply TBW techniques through self- experience and reflection, to help the participants realize their differences and transculturality in their lives, assess the effectiveness of these techniques and help device new ways to improve their effectiveness or develop new methods and techniques.

2. Adults, adult education and TBW

The term "adult" is defined as "person who has completed or left school or college and no longer full-time student and who has assumed the productive social roles that characterize adult status" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 8). Meanwhile, "adult education", in broadest sense, describes a process of adult learning; technically it describes a set of organized activities carried on by a variety of institutions for the specific objectives (Knowles, 1980). However, "adult education" overlaps with the term "adult learning" although the difference between the two is very clear since all education surely involves learning, but not all learning involves education, and education is a deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to transit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values or skills. Adult learning is also an important part of continuing education or lifelong learning, involving professional development, public or private sector, universities, personal development, research and development.

There are three basic categories of learning activity; formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Longworth, 2003). Formal learning is organized by professional educators with defined curriculum and takes place in education, and training institutions, leading to recognized diplomas and qualifications. Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training with some sorts of systematic instruction. Informal learning is defined as a natural accompaniment to everyday life either conscious or unconscious. According to Foley (2004), informal learning is a "conscious" attempt to learn from experiences in a group or individual base.

Accordingly; adult learning should be framed as the main part of adult education field instead of considering as an apart discipline. Within this context, a new approach named "biographical learning" has come up in the field as a

new adult learning style. In biographical learning, it is important to acknowledge prior knowledge and experiences of learners, including their ability to recognize their own skills as lifelong learners (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). For this reason, using participants' own experience and their own reflection about that experience, rather than lecturing as a method of learning is considered to be more effective than others in adult education. This is especially important in adult education because simply by living, adults bring a wealth of experience to every learning situation they face in their lives. Besides, in such a learner-centered approach, the lessons learned from life experiences might be more memorable. Herein Knowles' (1980) main focus with the development of andragogy becomes more of an issue as being very learner centered and the learner being very self-directed. Two of his five assumptions underlying andragogy describe the adult learner as someone who has an independent self-concept and ability to direct his or her own learning; and who accumulates a reservoir of life experiences as a rich resource for learning.

In this respect, biographical narrating has been the focus of increasing attention in adult education field (Rossiter, 2002). As a clear evidence of the type of an informal adult learning process, biographies assist adults in their learning from their own and the others' lives although many people think that they learn only through formal education. However, focus on biographical learning and informal education shows that learning takes place continuously throughout adult life. While narrating their biography, adults are asked to look back at their lives and reflect on their experiences as the source of learning and development. Then, this kind of a reflection may help adults learn how to understand and learn life more effectively by realizing what motivates and discourages them through their own lives as they are not just individual stories but the story of society as well. They give an insight on how adults learn, what they learn, and what motivates them to learn (O'Hearn, 2002).

3. Biographical learning for adults

Learning continues throughout whole life and thus education can have no endings. However, it is clear that, in formal education system, curricula and teachers constitute the starting-point, learners as students are secondary, so they are required to adjust themselves to an established curriculum. On the other hand, in adult education, the curricula is built around the learners' needs and interests since every adult person finds herself/himself in specific/unique situations that call for adjustments with respect to her/his work, recreation, family-life, community-life etc. The resource of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience and learning consists of vicarious substitution of someone else's experience and knowledge.

The last two decades have seen an explosion of interest in social sciences and humanities in research approaches focusing on life history narratives and using biographical and autobiographical methods. Biographical methods used in educational sciences have led to research on learning processes along the lines of biographical experience (Schulze, 1995). The research subjects of biographical research are biographical stories and biographical material (such as diaries, photos and letters). Biographical research aims to reconstruct the individual's life course, to document her/his interpretations of this life course, and to confront these to document her/his interpretations of one's life course. Thus, biographical learning style involves the active participation of people and the disposition to reflect their experiences in the context of their own biographicity. That is the skill to be able to reflect on one's own biographical experiences as well as being able to construct actively one's future (Alheit, 1994). Education enables adults to share in a common life and a critical understanding and exploration of experience and situations. Adult education specifically aims to train individuals for a more fruitful participation in collective units, which do so much to mold significant experience. Eduard Lindeman's vision for adult education is not one bound by classrooms and formal curricula. It involves a concern for the educational possibilities of everyday life; non-vocational ideals; situations not subjects; and people's experience (Lindeman, 1926).

The significance of biographical learning and the skill to be able to reflect on one's own biographical experiences as well as being able to construct actively one's future is named as "biographicity" (Alheit, 1994). Meanwhile, biographical learning is necessary for a better understanding of each other and enhances the learning atmosphere through experience. Adults prefer learning situations which capitalize on their experience, so an adult educator should not ignore what they already know because it is a resource for her/him. In addition, one should acknowledge

the wealth of experiences that adult learners bring to the learning atmosphere without walls and these adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge, and allowed to voice their opinions freely.

Biography work has been developed and is applied in various professional fields like adult education, care and elderly care, social work, support of adopted or foster children, psychology, psychotherapy, migration and women's studies. It aims at developing a beneficial self concept and broadening the horizon of possible choices for persons in present and future. Biography work also encourages beneficial behavior and decision-making processes as well as empowering visions. Moreover, it invites people to narrate their life stories and to open up biographical potentials for shaping one's life in present and future.

4. Transcultural biography work

The term "transculturality" has mainly been defined by philosopher Wolfgang Welsch. Transculturality points to the fact that cultures are always changing, mixing, and influencing mutually. Culture is not a thing but an ongoing activity and practice. People learn, do, transform and share living. As soon as people with different ("cultural") background meet, they influence each other and something starts changing. Acknowledging this means also taking over responsibility to observe and reflect what happens during cultural encounters, to play an active role in it and in the creation of new ways of living which may emerge.

Welsch states that cultures nowadays are not any more homogeneous and separate. They have never really been so, but been rather hybrid. Every 'culture' in the past and present can only be defined as something fixed if it is stabled as a picture of one single moment within this endless changing, merging, mixing, integrating, and adapting. Every encounter leads at least to confusion, re-evaluation and reflection. Change and amalgamations are inevitable.

As Welsch points out, especially during the 2nd half of the 20th century a new quality of transculturalisation appeared: "The new forms of entanglement are a consequence of migratory processes, as well as of worldwide material and immaterial communication systems and economic interdependencies and dependencies" (Welsch, 1999). The concept of transculturality as described by Welsch goes along with post-modern de/constructivist thinking of cultural studies. Modern cultures are characterized by a variety of different ways of life and lifestyles and they are border crossing. According to Welsch (1999), "In substance everything is transculturally defined. The concept of transculturality aims for a multi-meshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive understanding of culture. It intends a culture and society whose pragmatic feats exist not in delimitation, but in the ability to link and undergo transition. In meeting with other life forms there are always not only divergences but opportunities to link up, and these can be developed and extended so that a common life form is fashioned which includes even reserves which hadn't earlier seemed capable of being linked in." The task of TBW is not only to find out ways to interconnect people of different cultural background but also to cope with the irreducible reality of transcultural existence and to make people aware of it. Welsch (1999) states that cultures once regarded as totally different nowadays are handling the same problems. There is no concept of absolute own and absolute foreign any more. "Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other. Lifestyles no longer end at the borders of national cultures, but go beyond these, are found in the same way in other cultures" (Welsch, 1999).

Biography work becomes transcultural by exploring through memory what feels foreign inside oneself – to understand better what one experiences as foreign outside; by exploring talents and capabilities learned through living in different cultural contexts. Transcultural contexts may overwhelm with contradictory demands. Transcultural life practice challenges individuals to develop a stable psychic and mental base of decision making – to find out selection criteria and dynamic modes to interpret perceptions and experiences, to find ways to balance varieties, differences and contradictions. TBW further focuses on migration experience and how it shapes one's life or the life of people one works with. Maybe the most important mission of TBW is to stimulate processes of mutual understanding and transcultural communication via biographical exchange among people who regard themselves as members of different cultures.

Transcultural biographical self-exploration leads to a qualitative exchange which has the potential to change mind sets. An important stimulus for such change is the recognition that human beings – regardless of their cultural background, gender, age – are similar in terms of basic needs and emotional patterns and reactions. Through

biography work people experience how instructive and educative it is to talk to each other biographically, compare and learn from each other, and inspire each other. Biographical narration shows how people have become what they are now; why they express certain opinions or emotions; how they put their opinions forward and why they react in a certain way under different circumstances. Biography work helps mutual understanding to grow. This concrete practice enlarges the horizon of people, their reservoir of imaginations to perceive unfamiliar as well as familiar.

A transcultural mind set and related practice do not eradicate differences but extend possibilities of mutual understanding. Approaching other people as "basically similar" creates a different perception and reflection on one selves' and others' behavior, a different decision making and comportment than approaching other people as "basically foreign". The TBW approach to adult education emphasizes a holistic, learner centered, self-responsible, non-hierarchical and democratizing learning process. It supports learners to create a basis for further targeted formation and vocational training. Equally it accompanies lifelong learning and working through evaluating experience and supervising further steps and decisions. TBW stresses the value of previous knowledge and abilities versus the attention to the "lack" of knowledge and capacity. It backs up learners' self-responsibility and active role in creating one's own learning path.

5. Research method and data

Realize project, funded by the European Union Lifelong Learning Program as a Grundtvig Multilateral Project and carried out from 2010 to 2012, is dedicated to elaborate Transcultural Biography Work (TBW) approach – to contribute to biography work from a transcultural perspective. Realize project partnership consists of eight partner organizations in five countries: Speha Fresia and Griot from Rome/Italy; Süleyman Demirel University (SDÜ) from Isparta/Turkey; Haus der Begegnung and Centre of Social Scientific Research, Education and Information (FBI) from Innsbruck/Austria; Mikolas Romeris University from Vilnius/Lithuania; and the Suisse Federation for Adult Learning (SFAL) in Lugano and Labor Transfer SA in Camorina, both from Switzerland.

In Realize project, TBW approach is applied in different contexts with different participants with various needs and backgrounds. "Launched in 2000, Grundtvig aims to provide adults with more ways to improve their knowledge and skills, facilitate their personal development and boost their employment prospects. It also helps to tackle problems associated with Europe's ageing population." TBW is in line with the essential target of Grundtvig program by inspiring individuals to develop self-awareness for learning and continuous personal development and self-esteem for acquiring new skills for social and work life. In the pilot studies in the partner countries, the techniques of TBW were implemented, their effectiveness was assessed and some new techniques were explored.

The data used in this study come from the pilot study carried out for Realize project in Turkey. As a part of this project, two separate two-day biographical learning sessions or workshops were organized and carried out with 15 participants at Süleyman Demirel University (SDÜ) in Isparta, Turkey in October, 2011. There was a three-week time lap in between the two two-day sessions. A diverse body of 15 volunteer students from different grades and programs at Süleyman Demirel University in Isparta, Turkey, took part in the study. The selection of the 15 students among around 600 applicants was based on their ethnic, national, gender, cultural etc. backgrounds. Besides, they all had different life styles and all of them had either national or international migration stories personally or in their family past. In order to gather data from the applicant students, a biographical information questionnaire was developed and used. The biographical information questionnaire included questions on "demographic traits", "university affiliation", "place where you currently live or stay", "migration story", and "any kind of discrimination experienced". Such questions were included in the questionnaire in order to make informed selection among the applicants in accordance with the purpose of the pilot study. Working with TBW methods and techniques or testing them in group studies, we needed to select participants with relevant family and personal backgrounds.

5 of the students were undergraduate students in the Department of Public Administration whereas 8 were undergraduate students and 2 were graduate students in the Department of Sociology at Süleyman Demirel University. This four-day study was constructed around TBW approach with the basic goals of implementing some transcultural biography methods to learn how to apply TBW techniques through self- experience and reflection and of helping the participants to realize their differences and transculturality in their lives, to discuss them in groups,

and to develop empathy, respect and tolerance. Besides, the pilot study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of these techniques, and device ways to improve their effectiveness or develop new methods and techniques.

The participants were asked to fill in questionnaires at the beginning of the first session, at the end of the first session and at the end of the second session. Thus, the analysis of the paper depends on the data compiled by these questionnaires. Since the questionnaires filled in at the end of both sessions, they also included such questions as "how they experienced TBW techniques", or "what they have learned?" The main TBW techniques used included genogram, biographical interview, writing feelings on board, drawing, biography mapping, biographical city mapping, meaning of name game, biographical narration on migration, biographical writing, memory work and using photos and objects to activate memory. The comparison and contrast of the family backgrounds, the cultural characteristics of the hometowns of the participants etc. for transculturality were studied as well. The participants shared their reflections and their ideas about how effective the techniques were in group discussions.

6. Data analysis

6.1. Exposure to diversity and biographical learning

The data indicate that only 3 of the 15 participants have heard of biographical learning and that none of them has participated in any biographical learning activity before. These findings reflect the fact that biographical learning and research techniques are not widely utilized or known in Turkey. Biographical work has been applied in Turkey to some extend in such fields as oral history, literature, sociological and anthropological studies. However, 9 of the 15 participants declare that they have worked or studied in a multicultural environment. Similarly, 14 of them think that they expect to work in a multicultural environment in their future jobs. Overall, these findings suggest that they work or hope to work in a relatively multicultural environment but do not pay so much attention to what such an environment would require and to how one could prepare oneself for such an environment.

6.2. Skills and traits multicultural/diverse environments require

Regarding the question of "what kind of skills/traits multicultural/diverse environments would require", 14 of the 15 participants declare that they have many of the necessary skills or traits multicultural or diverse environments require. For the participants, self-consciousness is the most important trait one ought to have in order to adapt to or succeed in multicultural or diverse environments. Other critical traits are empathy, speaking a common second language, being social, flexibility or adaptability, curiosity, being open to communication, modesty/tolerance, respectfulness, expressing oneself well, being open to learning/personal development.

6.3. Solutions to problems associated with today's multicultural world

The participants of the workshop note that the most important problems related to transculturality and diversity are intolerance and religious and sect problems. Other important problems are value incompatibility, disrespectfulness, a lack of empathy/understand, being closed to change and judgmental, prejudice and extreme diversity. According to the participants, the most important steps that need to be taken to overcome such problems are to "foster respectfulness", "empathize/enhance understanding", "learn to listen", and "communicate." "Being able to coexist with other cultures", "fostering tolerance for differences", "finding commonalities/similarities", "eliminating discrimination", "creating common public areas / working environments", "getting to know other cultures" and "building self esteem" are the other important actions that could be put into effect in order to diminish cultural conflicts and problems associated with transculturality.

6.4. Contribution of TBW pilot study

All of the participants in the pilot study state that they find biographical learning useful for transcultural dialogue and understanding. This indicates the effectiveness of biography method and techniques as well as the success of the pilot study. Regarding the question of "what the participants leaned from the TBW study and the application of its techniques," the participants say that they have increased self-consciousness and awareness toward and respect for cultural differences. Besides, they declare that they feel less biased towards different others and more inclined to look for similarities and commonalities with others than before. The participant students also point out that they have learned more about tolerance, easier communication, openness to change and learn, inclusiveness, not being judgmental, change in the way of one's looking at life, empathy and learning to listen to others.

The pilot study also helped to discover new methods and techniques, such as "the meaning of the name game" and "biographical city mapping." It was found out during the pilot study that the names of many participants have religious, cultural, historical, ethnic, political etc. meanings, characterizing their familial, cultural and ideological background. Thus, in "the meaning of the names game", each participant was asked to share the story of their names on the base of their own biographies, family past and transculturality with the whole group. The participants also shared other cultural, religious, ethnic, ideological, political etc. aspects to their names. Similarly, in the game of "biographical (city) mapping", the participants were asked to write on the board the names of the cities where they were born, lived, went to university and would live in the future. Then, they talked about their reasons why they moved from one city to another, their likes, dislikes, feelings and expectations about those cities and the important characteristics of those cities etc. During the game, such basic questions as "What is the importance of your birthplace?", "Where else did you live?", "What was the most important thing for you there?", "What other important things do you remember?", "Where will you work in the future?" were asked to lead the game.

6.5. Turkey's differences and adaptations

Since some participants in the group have international immigration stories or have been abroad before, they were asked if they thought that Turkey had some unique aspects regarding transcultural dialogue and communication. 10 of the 15 participants see some unique aspects to Turkey whereas 5 participants do not see anything specific to Turkey. According to the participants, Turkey's unique aspects generally involve negative features, indicating an unfavorable environment for transculturality. The respondents express such issues and problems as "high level of prejudice", "intolerance for differences", "inadequate empathy and understanding", and "a lack of mechanisms to eradicate prejudice and taboos" to be the most distinctive aspects. The remaining issues are negative too, such as "limitations on speech", "difficulty in communication due to differences", "lack of mutual respect", "low level of education", "being closed to change", "trying to make others like you" and "exclusion." These results indicate that there is some ground to cover with regard to fostering dialogue, mutual understanding, respect and tolerance among people of different cultural, socio-economic, ethnic etc. backgrounds through transcultural communication.

However, the study also provides promising results if transcultural biography methods are used successfully through self-experience and reflection in order to help the participants realize their differences and transculturality in their lives. Since the participants of the pilot study had very diverse cultural, social, ethnic, religious etc. backgrounds, the TBW techniques sensitive to cultural contexts were utilized during the pilot study. They proved to be very effective. While the participants were talking about their autobiographies and their traumatic experiences during the flow of the study, their emotions went up. They sometimes could not help crying and shed tears whereas sometimes their voice tones changed. Listening to the others and cordial atmosphere created during the study made them more relaxed and talkative while telling about their own life stories. For example, the participant with head scarf and the participant with Kurdish ethnic origin were reluctant and unwilling to talk at the beginning of the study. But, the more they listened to the others' life stories and experiences, their body languages changed, they got relaxed and seemed more trusting, and they started sharing their personal stories with the group.

7. Conclusion with some further reflections and suggestions

Overall, the findings suggest that the pilot study succeeded in effectively implementing biography methods and techniques, in leading the participants to explore their past experiences and to reflect on them, and in helping the participants to realize their differences and similarities with others and transculturality in their lives. Besides, the pilot study provides some data for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the known TBW techniques, and to discover new methods and techniques. Another interesting findings of the study was that the participants showed a considerable reluctance when they were asked to draw about their education background and experience. For this reason, in applying drawing technique, the participants were asked to "visualize" their education background without resorting to the word "draw." In the discussions, the reason for this negative reaction to the word "draw" was said by many participants to be related to the negative school experience when any drawing which did not match the teacher's expectations received negative evaluation and criticism in front of their classmates.

The main concern regarding the use of TBW methods and techniques surfaced during the pilot study was the possible provocation or recollection of unpleasant or sometimes profoundly painful and traumatic memories, experiences and fears. In such cases, it could be difficult to control and manage the situation. So, precautionary measures were seen to be necessary. One suggestion to avoid such adverse provocation of memories could be the use of exercises that help the participants to remember positive experiences or memories in the past. Besides, a nice and positive environment for TBW study/course could be created for the participants so that they could remember positive events and moments. For this purpose, it is also necessary that participants in TBW studies/courses be voluntary. If painful or even traumatic memories appeared, it might be helpful to focus on the current situation right away and bring the attention of the person to the present and to her/his resources for survival. It could be further essential to recommend seeking advice from a professional consultant or psycho therapist for traumatic cases.

TBW approach involves several techniques demanding the sharing of autobiographic life experiences and very personal data and stories. This necessitates that the information shared should be kept within and shared only among the group. Personal exchange of information in TBW seminars call for trainers to take the needed time to help people feel comfortable with each other and develop a welcoming attitude toward various opinions and differences. Generally spoken, the use of TBW techniques also require that the participants understand these techniques before applying them. Hence, it is generally important to clarify the objectives and content of TBW studies; share them with the participants before the start of the study; and get the participants' voluntary formal or informal agreements. Otherwise, the participants do not feel comfortable and may hesitate to get involved in TBW activities since they feel evaluated and that some of their personal information or experiences are shared with all the participants in the group. Avoiding the entry of new members into the biographical study group may also have critical importance once the training has begun. Moreover, it may be crucial to have appropriate space and time for listening, elaboration, re-elaboration and personal reflection in TBW activities when such activities are planned.

Our experience with the implementation model of the pilot course as two separate two-day sessions with a three-week pause in between suggests that such a module may work in some contexts but may be counterproductive and not work properly in some others. Especially, if the participants are migrants or have immigration background, there could be so many events and developments that could profoundly change the life course and also the possibility of the participation of people in the second part of the pilot. Thus, if there is too much time lapse between the two separate parts of the pilot course, the participants may lose interest or may not have the opportunity in taking part in the second session. Another issue is that a follow-up study was not planned as a part of the pilot study. It would be interesting and valuable to have a follow up meeting with the participants a few months after the pilot study to measure the impact of the TBW experience on them.

Even though the concept of "transculturality" is found to be somehow Eurocentric to some extent by the pilot course participants in Turkey because of its reference to a Western discourse, diversity is a fact of the Turkish society and Turkey as a country. Turkey is at the crossroads of three continents and is one of the most important transit countries in the way of international migration. Thus, there is a clear need for a wide public discussion about the negative situation portrayed as a lack of the processes of dialogue, mutual understanding, respect and tolerance among people in Turkey. In this discussion, one also has to take into account, in addition to the issues touched upon

above, that religion has been left to personal self-consciousness due to secular and modernist values and concerns until recently. Yet, this is so formulated that the state has been assuming a duty in regulating the religion since the establishment of the Republic. Thus, the intervention of the state in the realm of religion and religious issues seems to have created a feeling or environment of limited religious freedoms and activism to some degree, but to have particularly suppressed extremist religious organizations or activities as well as the religious way of living publicly. This could be seen by many as an intervention in their religious freedoms with a consequence of diminishing cultural diversity and the natural evolution of understanding and tolerance toward diverse life styles. The findings of our study indicate that this unique historical trajectory ought to be taken into consideration in studies on transculturality and biography work in Turkey in order to better understand and explain the issue.

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