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**A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS  
OF LIFE-CAREER NARRATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN STUDENTS  
FROM TURKEY**

A Dissertation in

Counselor Education

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on the lived experiences of ten international women students from Turkey, who pursued their graduate studies in the United States (U.S.). Its purpose is to confront the silence and lack of individual voices in the literature about the generalized and categorized experiences of international students. Transnational feminist perspectives and postmodern approaches to career development influence the narrative construction in this study. The narratives are explored through a thematic analysis of ten individual interview transcripts, and in collaboration with the participants by discussing the emerging themes in a creative group-debriefing meeting. Four main themes emerged in this study: (1) Belonging and freedom; (2) challenging the systems; (3) adjustment versus change; and (4) staying in the U.S. versus going back to Turkey. The metanarrative is centralized by the participants' relationship to home (i.e., home country, family, national and political context) and place (i.e., place of residence in the U.S., new multicultural groups, academia as a space with its own culture and demands). Findings are discussed with implications for culturally competent counseling practices, counselor education, national and international higher education policies, and future research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
International Students in the United States .....	2
International Student Women from Turkey .....	4
<i>Historical and Social-Political Context</i> .....	5
<i>Turkey Today: Where Participants Come From</i> .....	11
Rationale of the Study .....	15
Exploratory Questions that Guide the Story .....	17
Significance of the Study .....	17
<b>Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Discussion of the Theoretical Frameworks .....	20
<i>Feminisms</i> .....	20
<i>Transnational Feminist Perspectives</i> .....	23
<i>Understanding the ‘Trans’ and ‘National’ for Research Participants</i> .....	25
<i>Postmodern Approaches to Career Development</i> .....	27
International Student Experiences: Themes from the Literature .....	32
<i>Acculturation and Adjustment</i> .....	32
<i>Mental Health Issues and Help-Seeking</i> .....	34
<i>Diversity Experiences of International Students</i> .....	36
<i>Research about the International Students’ Career Development</i> .....	41
Summary: Reframing International Student Experience .....	43
<b>Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>46</b>
Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks .....	47
Research Paradigm .....	49
Research Design .....	50
<i>Implications from the Pilot Study Projects</i> .....	52
The story of my research .....	52
Practicing methods .....	53
<i>The Decision for Research Design: Why Narrative?</i> .....	57
Participants .....	58
<i>Sampling Plan</i> .....	59
<i>Methods of Recruitment</i> .....	61
Procedures and Methods .....	63
<i>In-Depth Interviews</i> .....	63
<i>The Creative Group-Debriefing Meeting</i> .....	64
<i>Participant-check and Follow-up</i> .....	67
Data Analysis .....	68
Trustworthiness .....	72

<b>Chapter 4: NARRATIVES AND FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>75</b>
An Overview of The Participants.....	75
Belonging and Freedom .....	77
<i>Selin's Story</i> .....	77
<i>Hazar's Story</i> .....	82
Challenging the Systems .....	87
<i>Gamze's Story</i> .....	87
<i>Emel's Story</i> .....	90
Adjustment versus Change.....	94
<i>Derin's Story</i> .....	94
Transition and early crises .....	95
Help-seeking .....	97
Changing sense of self and life vision .....	98
<i>Filiz's Story</i> .....	100
Transition and early crises .....	100
Help-seeking .....	105
Changing sense of self and life vision .....	107
<i>Ebru's Story</i> .....	109
Transition and early crises .....	109
Help-seeking .....	114
Changing sense of self and life vision .....	116
Staying in the United States versus Going Back to Turkey .....	117
<i>Bade's Story</i> .....	117
<i>Selcen's Story</i> .....	122
<i>Alya's Story</i> .....	130
<b>Chapter 5: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>138</b>
Summary and Discussion of Findings.....	138
<i>Belonging and Freedom</i> .....	139
<i>Challenging the Systems</i> .....	143
<i>Adjustment versus Change</i> .....	145
<i>Staying in the United States versus Going Back to Turkey</i> .....	150
Implications .....	153
<i>National and International Higher Education</i> .....	153
<i>Career Counseling and Student Affairs</i> .....	158
<i>Mental Health Counseling and Community Support</i> .....	162
<i>Counselor Education Programs</i> .....	164
<i>Future Research</i> .....	166
Strengths and Limitations .....	167
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>171</b>

<b>APPENDIX A: Recruitment Letter .....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form .....</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: Idea Map .....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: Collage Example .....</b>	<b>191</b>

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to give voice to the experiences and strengths of a sample of international women graduate students from Turkey who study on a large university campus and live in a relatively small college town in the northeastern United States (U.S.). I aimed to develop collaboration with research participants to gather personal experience stories in order to explore and re-story them from a transnational feminist perspective. Through deconstructing stories by learning about the hidden details, situations and relationships, as well as by making the hierarchies of power visible, I strove to apply a feminist analysis of their lived experiences (gathered in forms of narratives) to offer insights about the transnational individual and social contexts and themes that shape their life career development in the U.S. and beyond.

In this chapter I first introduce the research participants and their backgrounds with a glimpse of the diverse cultural and political contexts from which they come. Next I state the research problem and the exploratory research questions that guided my study, which are followed by the rationale and significance of the study. The major terminology of the study (e.g., international student, transnational feminism, life career development) is defined in the next sections and under the discussion of the theoretical frameworks in the second chapter. I use the term *transnational* (e.g., transnational experience) rather than *cross-cultural* or *international*. Transnational, as a dynamic and political term, encompasses the fluidity, complexity and intersectionality of identity and cultural experiences negotiated and navigated across national borders with the increasing impact of globalization. It also stresses the importance of inquiring into the social, political and economic conditions that influence international education and international student experiences. I also use the term *life-career* (e.g., life-career planning) instead of *career* to emphasize the intersection of personal and career experiences, as well as various life and work roles, as further described in the next chapter.

It is my goal to put the research participants and questions, as well as my position as a researcher, into perspective in this chapter. This perspective is indeed inevitably subjective, yet diverse due to a small (yet carefully chosen) set of resources in this section because the purpose of this study is not to explore the historical and current socio-

political context. Instead, this study explores the personal experience stories that are embedded in a variety of social, political, and cultural systems. Moreover, intersectionality of diverse personal, familial, religious and other institutional influences within the above-mentioned systems (which are also experiencing fast and unpredictable changes) makes it hard and questionable to have a define-able context. Rather, it is realistic to present a glimpse of various contexts in this introduction and then learn the rest from research participants, as they perceive, experience, and make meaning of those contexts in their individual stories.

### **International Students in the United States**

There are more than four million international students who have crossed a national border to study or are enrolled in a distance-learning program abroad, not including those who are under short-term, for-credit study, and exchange programs that last less than one academic year (UNESCO UIS, 2014). Within the context of this study, I define international student (which is also referred to as sojourner, overseas student, foreign student, and globally mobile student in the literature) as an individual, who decides to study and live in another country for an indeterminate period of time on a nonimmigrant/temporary visa, and with unpredictable resources that remain available depending on academic achievement, financial status, and legal conditions (e.g., availability of work authorization options) depending on particular visa status.

More than half (57%) of international students choose to live and study in the U.S. (UNESCO UIS, 2014). The U.S. sees a significant increase in the number of international students every academic year (7.2% increase in 2012-2013 with a total number of 819,644 international students), and women students comprise the 44% of the overall international student population in the U.S. (IIE Open Doors Report, 2013). Although the so-called Asian countries (e.g., China, India, South Korea) are still the top places of origin, recent years saw important growth in the enrollment of students from Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait (IIE Open Doors Report, 2013). Turkey (which is categorized as an Asian country in some UNESCO data sets, while being listed under Central and Eastern Europe in other UNESCO reports) is considered a Middle Eastern country by the Institute of International Education (IIE), and was the tenth leading place of origin for students who chose to come to the U.S. in the

2012-2013 academic year. Of the 11, 278 students from Turkey who studied in the U.S. in 2012-2013 academic year, the majority study at the graduate level.

International students in the U.S. are a significantly growing and diverse population. They bring more than \$24 billion to the U.S. economy (Open Doors Report, 2013), and they now represent an important portion of diversity by globalizing campuses, communities, and institutions (Montgomery, 2010). Distinct from permanent residents or documented immigrants and refugees, who can obtain rights and permission for residency and employment prior to, or immediately after, their arrival to the U.S., international students negotiate the limitations of a temporary legal status that shape and control the nature and duration of their educational and professional experiences. They also face heightened challenges in career and life planning, regardless of the ongoing and even intensifying personal and social changes and influences of their cross-cultural experience and/or unexpected life events, which are not adequately addressed in the literature.

A significant number of research studies explored and described experiences of international students, and mostly attended to their learning styles, academic engagement, and English proficiency in the higher education field, while there is also an increasing emphasis on the adjustment issues, psychological well-being, and discrimination (e.g., Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Le & Gardner, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Mori, 2000; Popp, Love, Kim, & Hums, 2010; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Wilton & Constantine, 2003). On the other hand, recent reviews of the literature show that there are few studies that explore direct and individually voiced perspectives and experiences of international students, particularly within a holistic framework (Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

Furthermore, studies that explore the social, psychological, and academic variables describe and generalize the lists of problems and issues by approaching international students as a homogenous group, regardless of sample size (Arthur, 2004), for example by including individuals from different countries, or using the phrase 'Asian international students' to refer to a very diverse group of international students with multiple identities based on race, class, ethnicity, and so forth, as well as personal and social circumstances. Although many international students might share a similar context and collaboratively-construct evolving cultures and identities among and around

themselves, each brings a unique individual background and identity depending on how their class, gender, race, country of origin, ethnicity, sexual identity, disability, etc., as well as personal and social circumstances intersect. Thus, the literature highlights the need to learn more individual stories as they shape and as they are shaped and reshaped by various home and host contexts for international students and their role in a rapidly changing and globalizing world.

### **International Student Women from Turkey**

There are over 6000 international students on the particular campus where I conducted this study, and the students from Turkey created the sixth biggest international student group in 2011, when my planning began. Based on the reviewed literature and my personal and professional observations of the experiences, challenges, and help-seeking behaviors of many international students, I decided that women from Turkey composed a convenient sample that I purposefully chose to engage.

My primary motive to focus on these women is the recognition of rapid socio-political changes in Turkey during the last six years that I have been in the U.S., coinciding with a significantly increasing number of students who study in the U.S. with government scholarships from Turkey. This heightened the diversity of students from Turkey, and their presence and influences on the dynamics and reformation of many student groups (e.g., Turkish Student Association, European Student Association, Muslim Student Association, Graduate Student Association) exposed me to various individual stories of challenge, resistance, confusion, adjustment, change, conflict, resilience, growth, and so forth. Having interactions and relationships with international students from many other countries besides Turkey, I observed that women from Turkey (re)learn and negotiate diversity in a new context of first time encounters with not only people from other countries, but also many from Turkey. In other words, they meet and experience various aspects of their country and its people by being together and exposed to a big-small community that does not only include members of their choice/preference, but also a very diverse group of others that they have first time encounters with. For example, a woman from a secular and nationalist family may never spend time with someone from a conservative, religious family background until she comes to the U.S.

and finds herself in a very small community of people from Turkey with not many options of friends.

Another observation that enhanced my interest in women students from Turkey was learning about and seeing many who seek help from a wide range of resources depending on their issues and concerns, especially counseling and therapy. I also witnessed that they reconsidered their career and life planning according to the influences of their very diverse personal and professional transformations in a new context, as well as rapid and contradictory socio-political changes in Turkey.

My secondary motive to work with women from Turkey was the shared language, Turkish. Being able to express and understand one's ideas and concerns in her native language strengthens narratives and their analyses. Moreover, this language is not only a tool, because it is no longer a 'pure' Turkish or simple language. Rather, it is another dynamic and changing subject for analysis with a certain discourse that gives important clues about the changes, confusions, and fluidity of one's performance of identities in a transnational world.

In the next section, I provide background information about Turkey and women from Turkey, with historical perspectives and issues of the socio-political context. As mentioned before, the following background description, which is based on a small number of resources, aims to solidify the statement of the research agenda, rationale and significance of my study, as well as the limitations in the last chapter, which are discussed in light of the inevitably subjective yet diverse contexts that are summarized next.

### **Historical and Social-Political Context**

After the end of the Ottoman Empire and since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, women's emancipation has been a major goal in Turkey, as well as a symbol for the modernization and Westernization of the society (Altınay, 2004). From the change in dress codes to the educational reforms, the state policies assigned to women the task of becoming a modern and equal citizen (Altınay, 2004). Thus, as Kandiyoti (1987) argues explicitly, the emancipation of women in Turkey did not start or evolve from any women's movement that included "women's own capacity to organize and struggle for their own rights" (p. 323). The emancipation has been mostly limited to

middle and high-class women in the urban areas, who can go to school and work. Moreover, the legal structure and changes have had limited influences on remaining cultural practices. For example, economic development (and higher educational and professional opportunities) created more diversity rather than uniformity of women's intrafamily role(s), which is a significant determinant of women's status in both private and public/social domains (Kagıtcıbası, 1986). Reflecting Middle Eastern and Eastern Mediterranean family cultures, the autonomy and faith of women have been controlled by a patriarchal system ordering and offering modernization in its male terms (Kagıtcıbası, 1986). In this sense, the history and status of women in Turkey have unique characteristics with significant improvements and challenging limitations.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that increased opportunities of education in the early Turkey opened up possibilities for many more girls and women as time passed. Having more women who are educated and employed created more role models, women leaders, and social advocacy projects for the next generations. Moreover, there is not a clear-cut distinction between the women in Turkey, who are educated and modernized with the privileges of their regional and class status, and other women, who are left uneducated with premodern, oppressive, and local continuities. Indeed, there are things beyond such black-and-white distinction, and most women fall between the spectra of any categories.

Sinha (2006) highlighted that feminist scholarship increasingly demonstrates that “nations are produced by the repeated performances of certain gendered norms and behaviors such as militarism and sacrifice, honor and shame, sexual purity and impurity, and so on...[which] construct gender and sexuality” (p.7). The new-born and young Turkish Republic, similarly, chose such preexisting performances and reshaped them according to its imagination as an emerging nation-state. Especially women, as “the symbolic bodyguards of a culture”, were assigned to new roles, which did not replace the older, traditional ones but accumulated in fashioning “modern-yet-modest woman”, who defended the nation against colonialism while the nation protected them within “the limits of desirable modernity” (Sinha, 2006, p. 22). Accordingly, like many other projects of the nineteenth century around the world, and more importantly through being inspired by this globally occurring change, Turkish nationalism modernized and empowered

women as the new models of modern Turkish nation, and continuously reminded them of the duties of their imagined womanhood in an imagined community. In achieving this historiographic mission, militarism has been continuously criticized as a powerful actor in this assimilation-into-the new-citizenship project (Altınay, 2004). The society was believed to be changed and managed with military discipline by imposing orders to reconstruct a strong national identity. Although this project sought the emancipation of women as a way to prove its choice of and commitment to modernization and westernization, it did not liberate women from patriarchy and the masculine ways of maintaining male-made, dominant or traditional social orders (Altınay, 2004). The new secular state defined and redesigned the modern Turkish woman and provided a free, educated, and autonomous identity to the ones that it could reach or empower with opportunities. The strict imposition of this change and the disproportionate distribution of opportunity segregated women and racial and ethnic minorities as they resisted (or as they were used to resist) to the new regime (Kandiyoti, 1987).

On the other hand, many social practices and rules, which are deeply rooted in various combinations of cultural, religious, traditional and socio-economic dynamics, continued to produce and reinforce similar experiences for most women, including but not limited to: the corporate control of female sexuality (i.e., relatives and neighbors feel responsible for and control the sexuality of post-pubescent girl by intervening in the choice of a marriage partner, or pressuring her to preserve her virginity until marriage); the connection between female sexual purity and family or lineage honor (i.e., society and individuals rationalize their need to control and punish the uncontrollable and socially disruptive sexual desire women are assumed to possess innately); the sex-segregated socialization (i.e., many woman's socialization is constrained and does not allow creation of a wider social and support network other than immediate family, relative, neighbors, and colleagues), and the nature of the female life cycle (i.e., the hierarchy and power struggles between women in or around a male-headed household according to their bridal ranking, seniority in the family, and successful birth of a son) (Kandiyoti, 1987). However, these features are not unique to Middle-Eastern or Islamic societies, and they are present in many cultures at different levels and manifest themselves in various patriarchal ways. Regardless of this fact, these gendering

processes, which subordinate many women, have not disappeared or improved with the constitution of a new secular republic or Turkish Civil Code, especially in rural Turkey. Since Islam, or the Islamic law, was not responsible alone for the oppression and subordination of women, the elimination of Islamic symbols (e.g., veils, black chadors, fez) and rituals (e.g., religious marriage, polygamy) did not really liberate women either. Such a state-led feminism did not allow women to create unity and collaboration through a progressive movement for themselves, but reinforced polarities among them (Kandiyoti, 1987). The militaristic imposition and application of the new modern gendering project sharpened differences, hierarchy, status quo, and conflicts among women at various racial, ethnic, social, and class levels (Altinay, 2004). In this regard, the military in Turkey have received many critiques as if it is the protector of an emerging secular elite, who used to be perceived as the rule maker or designer of such impositions.

For example, in her thought-provoking book, *The Myth of the Military-Nation*, Altinay (2004) unveils the mandatory military service and the ways that it genders both military and nationalism. She proposes that mandatory military service is defined as a “cultural/national/racial characteristic of Turkishness” (p. 34). By emphasizing the historization and naturalization of military service, which is only for male citizens, she suggests that the state promotes the political differentiation between genders as cultural differentiation and reinforces the segregation of female citizens. She asserts that Turkish state-led feminism restructured the duties of womanhood as firstly motherhood and yet also presented some exceptional cases of “warrior heroines” (p. 34) such as Sabiha Gokcen, who is Turkey’s and the world’s first woman combat pilot. Altinay (2004) supports her arguments and the contradictions about the empowerment of women with examples such as Gokcen’s own proposals to the government and military for women’s right to attend military schools, which were denied until 1956 and were accepted only between 1956 and 1961. Women could not gain their right to attend military schools until 1990s following a legal victory. They entered the army but their invisibilities have become more notable as they only appear in the funeral news of the media while they are standing near the mothers of martyrs to console and cry with them.



Another example is Halide Edip Adivar, a journalist, soldier, and nurse who accompanied Atatürk (the founder of Turkish Republic) during the Independence War. Adivar, who explained her volunteerism at the battlefield as the highest and strongest identification with the nation, was later identified as a traitor due to her criticisms on how some Western authorities described the emancipation of women in Turkey: “The prevalent journalistic stuff published in the West about Turkish women, declaring that they were freed from harems in thousands, their veils lifted, and they themselves thrown into public life by a decree in 1926, is both absurd and false” (Edip, 1930, as cited in Altınay, 2004, p. 53). She emphasized the role of women’s movements in the late Ottoman Empire, during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), and before the Independence War (1920-1923), and noted that women were not the invited-unwanted guests but rather were the ones, who volunteered by the thousands to fight for independence. However, her arguments ran afoul of the new republic’s efforts to control transformations, and her denial of nationalist and state-feminism teachings led to her voluntary exile (Altınay, 2004).

After early examples and models of feminism, by the late 1980s, feminist scholars revisited the emancipation of women and started to criticize the ways in which the new nation-state both gendered and race-d the citizenship more overtly (Altınay, 2004). They analyzed the extent to which the military used its power to suppress Islamic and conservative movements, anti-secular hidden-agendas, and extreme political movements (such as the bloody street and campus fights between the youth of leftist and rightist parties), especially during the three big military coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980 when the military temporarily took over the government and executed many people, including some ministers, politicians, and many students, due to their political activity.

Although the abovementioned summary of historical context is important to address, it is no longer the image of the government and power in Turkey. For example, Dağı (2008) posited that the Kemalism, which allies militarism and nationalism, is no longer in favor of Westernization because it perceives the European Union’s membership conditions and impositions, and the Americanization and globalization impacts through privatization of the national economy, as major threats to the independence and integrity of the country, or nation-state. Moreover, the increasing impact of the moderate Islam

(“ılımlı İslam”) movement is believed to be supported by these Western powers in the post-9/11 world, which is supposedly evident in their close relations with the current government in Turkey (Dağı, 2008), at least for the common neoliberal economic goals.

Intersectionality of many personal, familial, social, regional, class, religious, and other identity dimensions create a variety of women images that serve to their prospective political agendas in a society and government that is still mostly patriarchic. Although the recent government brought in new faces and promised democracy since 2002, there are increasing debates about changing the definition and role of secularism in Turkey, bringing restrictions to freedom of speech, very fast and one-sided changes in the judiciary and education system, and so forth. For example, Turkey today has the distinction of being “World’s biggest prison for media”, having the highest number of imprisoned journalists (Kestler-D’Amours, 2013).

In summary, there seems to be no clear stereotypical difference anymore between seculars and non-seculars based on Westernization and modernity. On the other hand, one should be aware of the dynamics between secularism, Islamism, and increasing democracy debates in Turkey, which Göle (1997) summarized in her early propositions:

“... first, that secularism, as a non-Muslim way of life, has contributed to the making of the politically dominant Kemalist elites; second, that since secularism is often implemented by authoritarian elites in Muslim countries, there is a potential conflict of interest between democracy and secularism; third, that although Islamism as a political movement challenges the secular state, secularization has shaped the identities and practices of the new Islamist actors; and fourth, that it is in the widening of the public sphere of debate between Islamists and secularists that the basic principles of democracy are defined. Disputes over life-styles, exposure of the self, expressions of art-in short body-politics-have become central to the political debate between the two groups.” (p. 57)

Thus, it was previously the nationalist, militarist, and secular powers (or so-called elite ‘White Turks’), and now it is an increasingly strong conservative (and Islamic) government, which is still very elitist, patriarchal and authoritarian in a militarized way, imprisoning and silencing those with opposing views and alternative perspectives.

Although this government was elected with promises of free speech and democracy, it now inverts the debate and feeds the polarizations.

The details and analyses of these political polarizations between secularism and Islamism, as well as the increasing debates around race and ethnicity such as Kurdish-Turkish conflict and Sunni Islam-Shia Islam separation can be found in further readings among the references. In this study, it is important for readers and for me (as the researcher) to consider the potential implications of current sociopolitical movements and debates on gender issues. Likewise, the very current debates about reviving the Islamic lifestyle and even its social and institutional practices follow the abovementioned history and increasing secularism versus conservatism conflicts in Turkey. In the last 5-6 years, from the judiciary system to the higher education council, the government has followed an agenda of centralization that make these institutions less diverse and representative, as they increasingly have their leaders chosen and placed by a singular political government authority, based in ideology. It was expected to see some impacts of these changes on the educational and career planning of some participants in this study, which are discussed in light of the participants' voices in the chapters four and five.

### **Turkey Today: Where Participants Come From**

Turkey's population is 74 million, of which 50.2 percent are men and 49.8 percent are women (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2011). 76.8 percent of the population lives in the urban areas, in city and town centers, whereas 23.2 percent live in the rural areas (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2011). The most densely populated city is Istanbul, where more than 12 million people live. The least densely populated cities are in the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia regions of Turkey, where the socio-economic development is weakest. The average age is 28 in the country and more than half of the population is below this age (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2011).

Although there has been an increasing acknowledgement of, and policy changes about, ethnic minority issues in the last decade (in working toward the international and especially European Union standards), Turkey still does not have formal statistics for the distribution of people according to race, ethnicity, and religion (Minority Rights Group International, 2007). Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Alevi, Ezidi, Assyrian, Laz, Chechen, Roma, Rum (Greek Orthodox), Caucasian, and Jews are among the many groups that

create a diversity of shared and non-shared cultural traditions and practices (Minority Rights Group International, 2007). However, only Armenians, Jews and Rum Christians have been formally acknowledged as non-Muslim minorities (“Gayri-muslim”) and their rights were protected according to 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (Minority Rights Group International, 2007). General consensus about the dominant religion in the population points to Islam, and yet it is a discussion for later why a secular state recognizes minority groups based on a religious affiliation.

Education is a constantly changing and politically manipulated phenomenon in Turkey (Finkel, 2012). There are big discrepancies between the schooling rates of children in different regions. For example, the percentage of children in school is lowest in the rural and eastern regions of Turkey. Many children work on the family gardens and farms, and especially girls’ education has been neglected (UNICEF Turkey, 2012). On the other hand, country-wide campaigns for the promotion of girls’ education, which are supported by various social foundations and non-profit organizations, contributed to an important decrease in the gender gap in both primary and secondary education.

Another important gap in education is based on the ranking of schools and admission to them based on standardized national exams. Students take their first exams at the end of the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, and their average scores determine which high school and university they attend. The ability to attend a good primary school and prepare for these exams outside the school hours (e.g., test preparation centers, tutors) helps students from middle and high socio-economic classes overcome this competitive educational system. These students go to high schools that send more students to higher education, whereas other students have to choose regular high schools or vocational schools. In high schools, students choose their particular fields of study (e.g., social sciences, math-science field, languages) as early as the second year and their fields limit their choices of major to certain programs in the university entrance exam that they take after 3 more years of high school experience. If students make choices outside of their permitted list of programs, the system decreases their school-success points in calculation of their final scores, which makes their entrance to other programs almost impossible. This was a discussion topic particularly for the students from vocational and technical high schools, who were not able to choose different fields and enter higher

education. In 2009, The Council of Higher Education changed this rule and they now have equal opportunities to choose a university program. However, the problems of quality in the vocational and technical schools compared to privileged and higher-status high schools still generate important barriers to students' access to higher education.

During the course of my doctoral studies in the last 6 years, the government changed the education system again – the third change in the last decade. The education system now has the so-called “4 + 4 + 4” years formula, which is decreasing the primary education (the only mandatory education level) from eight to four years. According to education specialists, Finkel (2012) reports, “the new measures would undermine educational standards and deepen social inequalities. The fifth grade, they argue, is just too early for children to be steered away from a basic curriculum and be asked to make vocational choices about how to spend the rest of their life” (p. 3). Furthermore, this 4+4+4 system is expected to decrease the length and quality of girls' participation in education because many families might pull out their girls from the school after the mandatory primary school of 4 years (Cameron-Moore, 2012).

In Turkey, about 49% of the working-age population (aged 15 to 64) has a paid job, and only 29% of women have jobs, which is much less than the OECD average of 57% and 69% employment rate of men (OECD, 2014). In other words, Turkey has the lowest percentage of female labor participation when compared to the European Union (EU) member states and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and adopted a national action plan for gender equality for 2008-2013 that did not include any information on human or financial resources (Turkey 2009 Progress Report, 2009, p. 65). The employment policies and analysis of demands in the labor market are still weak and making only slow progress in spite of the fact that approximately 16 percent of the population live below the poverty level (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2014). Poverty is a greater risk for the people who live in rural areas, although it is also very high for the working people, especially casual-seasonal workers, unpaid family workers, the self-employed and those in subsistence agriculture.

The major reasons behind the decline in female employment (and why fewer women actually seek and apply for jobs in Turkey) are reported as urbanization and the decline in agricultural work (State Planning Organization, 2009). The shift from ‘unpaid

agriculture work' to 'low-participation urban environment women staying at home', as well as the work conditions women encounter, are the major issues contributing to (un)employment, especially the low-wages (State Planning Organization, 2009). For example, a young woman without a college education, who was interviewed during a focus group research in the study of the State Planning Organization (2009b), exemplified the importance of these conditions: "I didn't like the working conditions and decided to quit. I was working from 8 am to 9 pm and was earning 650 Turkish Liras (TL) per month (roughly 400 dollars). I thought it would be better and more comfortable to stay at home." (State Planning Organization, 2009b, p.1) Most of the other unemployed women also mentioned the difficulty of affording child-care, as well as family pressure and cultural barriers (e.g., not having permission from husband and extended family members to work, being expected to meet the caregiver roles).

On the other hand, some education statistics have also improved in Turkey. For example, the number of illiterate women has decreased since late 80s (from 33.9 percent to 19.6 percent), the percentage of women with more than primary school education has doubled, the percentage of women with college education rose (from 1.8 percent in 1988 to 5.8 percent in 2006), and the number of women joining and leading fields like science and engineering has increased (State Planning Organization, 2009). However, it is important to note that such statistics are based on limited women samples, which are not diverse in terms of socio-economic background, family education, geographical region, and so on. Many girls from low-class families still do not make it to the high school level. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, it is promising for educational statistics in the near future that there are increasing numbers of social media and educational projects of various foundations in Turkey, as well as local and international non-governmental organizations, which successfully work to raise awareness about the importance of girls' education and provide financial support to families.

Based on the above summary of historical context and current education and employment circumstances, the discrepancy between the emancipation of different groups of women, which is mainly based on their class and socio-cultural context (i.e., a more liberal and urban context and family versus more conservative and rural context and family), has been a threat to all kinds of actions toward gender justice. More recently, the

debates of urban versus rural have shifted toward modern versus traditional (or conservative) that seems to go beyond class and educational level. For example, there are no data collected about women who wear veil (or headscarves) and consequently cannot work in the government sector (although this law changed to a degree very recently and women can now wear veil in some government offices/jobs), as well as about women who are dismissed from their jobs for not being and behaving modestly enough, especially if their institutions favor the recent conservative trend.

In summary, women in Turkey experience oppression and exploitation in various forms and contexts not only as a result of local cultural habits, social expectations, and militarized role assignments of the nation-state for its citizens through state-led feminism, but also through banal forms of neoliberalization, modernization and westernization that still categorize women in order to reinforce the status quo, which is set by the changing politics and patriotic hegemonies in both Turkey and the world at large.

### **Rationale of the Study**

As stated earlier, there are 819, 644 international students in the U.S. (IIE Open Doors Report, 2013), and that population is growing and diversifying. Bringing more than \$24 billion to the U.S. economy (IIE Open Doors Report, 2013), they now represent an important portion of diversity, globalizing campuses, communities, and institutions (Montgomery, 2010). Within this diverse population, I chose women students from Turkey with a critical awareness of my subjective experiences and standpoint as one myself, because I observed a higher number of international student women seeking help from a variety of sources, taking advantage of long term counseling and therapy processes with mental health diagnoses, physical health issues, personal and social challenges, and academic and career concerns. I also observed how a majority resiliently succeed in their academic careers, and plan their lives through the strengths and growth hidden in the details of their stories, not only in the U.S. but also in their home countries where life continues and changes occur in their absence.

Thus, as a counselor and beginning researcher, I wanted to understand and learn from the personal experiences of such women as they navigate their worlds and reconstruct their senses of self and worldviews. This process occurred outside the boundaries of the methodologies of investigating and categorizing their problems, issues,

and diagnoses. Beyond some frequently spotlighted and snapshot situations of their ‘coming’, ‘adapting’, ‘adjusting’, ‘struggling’, ‘coping’, and so forth from the framework of acculturation or stress-and-coping models, I wanted to scrutinize the stories of specific international student women with a more holistic and critical perspective. Such a situation-versus-process oriented investigation challenges and illuminates the body of knowledge regarding their diverse, constantly changing, borderless, and fluid experiences of ‘travelling’ between multiple worlds and cultures.

Narrative inquiry methodology has many advocates in both counseling (e.g., Hoshmand, 2005) and Women’s Studies (e.g., Ludvig, 2006), which are the two main interdisciplinary fields that reconstructed my identity as a person, woman, and counselor. Feminist theory and methodology, on the other hand, which haven’t yet reached an explicit representation in the higher education literature (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011), is an academic, professional, and personal framework for me to ask questions at the important times and within significant critical socio-political contexts. In this study, the worldviews of feminist and transnational feminist research were applied to a narrative exploration of life career development with inspiration from postmodern approaches to career development, particularly the career construction theory. However, following the emerging process of research and the participant voices, my focus did not remain on the career stories and themes. The thematic analysis and narrative findings pointed to a metanarrative, which was centralized by the participants’ connection to home and place, and had clear implications for life career development, as it is discussed in the final chapter.

This study was inevitably, yet consciously and critically, framed not only by the particular theoretical perspectives chosen, but also by my professional philosophy and experiences as a counseling practitioner who daily engages in the diverse stories of international students, in addition to my personal experiences as an international graduate student from Turkey. I have my own stories where diverse identities and influences intersect. I narrate them in specific yet also different ways, and the readers may notice these stories, as they become bridges between various steps, resources, and challenges in this research process. Thus, my primary analytical tool was self-reflexivity, which developed as I uncovered connections between my research questions, participants, and



myself, and as I navigated the proposed research plan and its inevitable changes during the process of developing the idea and designing the research. Self-reflexivity enhances the validity and reliability (or trustworthiness, in qualitative terms) of the study, and produces multidimensional research outcomes with gains for both researcher and research participants, and also for the contexts that they share, experience, and reconstruct together. By recalling, uncovering, and retelling my own stories while listening to those of the other women, I gained significantly more insight and awareness on them as a crucial and evolving outcome of this research process for a professional counselor and beginning researcher.

### **Exploratory Questions that Guide the Study**

The initial question that guided this study was “what are the lived career experiences of international women students from Turkey who live and pursue graduate studies in the U.S.?” Although I referred to ‘career experiences’ as a conceptual framework and narrowed focus in my research, I did not set it as a major construct in this study. Furthermore, I did not focus on the questions but the stories and voices of the participants in the emerging design and exploratory nature of this study. Therefore, besides my initial question, I developed some other questions for the participants to openly express or frame the meaning of their life career stories from their own perspectives:

- What are the lived experiences of international women students from Turkey?
- What does ‘career’ mean to the respondents/participants in this study?
- What are the influences and/or connections between one’s transnational experiences and (re)construction of life and career planning?

I expected to hear some answers to these questions as I listened to the stories. However, I also avoided directing or guiding the participants with these questions. The only question I asked them was “tell me your story”, and I added other questions for clarification and encouragement during the interviews, which are further described in the methodology chapter.

### **Significance of the Study**

Montgomery (2010) stresses the competition between universities and within countries in terms of the marketing international higher education, and criticizes the

“customer service philosophy” that motivates research towards an alignment with recruitment and retention goals. This fact overshadows the discussions and importance of personal, social, and individual purposes, as well as processes and outcomes, of international study and student experience. The repetitive similar themes and quantitative nature of questions asked in the literature (which are discussed in the second chapter) reflect this focus and hinder the consideration and use of more theoretical ideas or methodologies. Thus, the primary significance of this study is its goal of contributing to the literature with a study that attends to overall experiences of specific students in a specific context, especially from their individual perspectives. As stated by Beard, Clegg and Smith (2007), “it is important to understand the lifeworld of students” (p. 235). Beyond the numbers and statistics, story telling helps to make “meaning of internationalization” with questions such as “why internationalize” and “what should internationalization mean” (Stone, 2006, p. 334).

Furthermore, this study acknowledges the role of transnational understanding and actions that change the nature and definition of immigration(s) and challenge the boundaries of multiculturalism and globalism as generalizing and totalitarian constructs. In other words, it aims to shed light on experiences and identities in their transient and fluid contexts and contextualization, which define transnationalism. Such emphasis in narrative research also confronts the overgeneralizations about the issues and problems of international students in the empirical literature by systematically telling the stories of international students: “individual stories of international students are crucial to developing a positive image that counteracts a deficit mode that may sometimes be applied to international students” (Montgomery, 2010, p. xvi). Furthermore, the academic, social and personal needs of international students require a more holistic understanding for the student support services and practices (e.g., academic advising, career counseling, mental health counseling, mentoring) to gain more cross-cultural competency.

This study is also important to inform educational and counseling practices. For example, there is little or no training about counseling international students in the counselor education programs (Fouad, 1991). In most multicultural counseling textbooks, we don’t see this group visible with their transient characteristics and unpredictable

issues. Furthermore, even immigrants and refugees are quite compartmentalized into certain definers that tell little about the importance of intersectionality and diversity within individual stories. It is crucial for counselors and counselor educators to understand what is transnational, and to study fluid contexts and life stories that encourage them to practice the complexity beyond the steps and guidelines of multiculturalism or multicultural counseling skills.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this literature review chapter, I first discuss the theoretical perspectives I have selected to frame my questions and to guide me in this study: (1) Feminisms (2) Transnational Feminism and (3) Postmodern Approaches to Career Development. I provide a summary of the histories and methodological functions of these perspectives, and unpack their significance, connection, role, and guidance throughout my research process. This theoretical section also details the definitions and descriptions of the major terms and concepts of the study that rationalize and provide transition into a better understanding of the review of studies in the literature, which is the second part of this chapter, as well as the structure and choices of the methodology chapter.

#### **Discussion of the Theoretical Frameworks**

##### **Feminisms**

Having its roots in the eighteenth century with the beginning of industrialization in Europe, feminism changed the nature, context, and roles of work for many women. The first liberal feminists were mostly middle-class ladies who demanded more educational rights, personhood, freedom, and self-determination beyond the perceived restrictive roles of being an indoor wife (Tong, 2009). The following equal liberty thought of the nineteenth century emphasized women's intellectual abilities and capacity to work outside of (yet besides) home, especially if they had rights for more education and were given privileged positions like men had (Tong, 2009). By the second half of the nineteenth century, women's movements began to associate with the slaves' rights movement, yet remained suppressed and silenced behind the scenes even after the end of Civil War (Tong, 2009). The Nineteenth Amendment securing the right to vote did not fulfill the liberation agenda of many women, and some twentieth-century actions seek further equal rights in economic opportunities and sexual freedoms beyond civil liberties, which raised "the first explicit feminist" voices against sex discrimination (Tong, 2009). The debates about the inclusion of different women voices (e.g., lesbianism) at this time started a process by which feminists recognize and address differences among women. Yet, liberal feminists mostly remained criticized due to their excessive and culturally insensitive emphasis on male-self and individualist values of freedom, reason and

autonomy, the needs of white, middle-class, heterosexual women, and a western, liberated woman image that has the privileges to self-improvement (Tong, 2009).

Radical feminists defended the necessity of systemic reforms and even revolutions beyond individual-liberation movements (Tong, 2009). Although they were criticized for seeming to universalize their polarization about the male-female sexual relationship in terms of its dangers versus empowerment, their conversations opened an avenue of discussion for the diversity of sexualities. The added dynamic of class differences in the sexuality debates of prostitution and an economically dependent housewife's freedom of consent is another bridge to feminists' consideration of differences among women. Having class as their common concern, Marxist and socialist feminists looked at other cultural systems that feed women's oppression. Particularly, socialist feminists stressed the roles of capitalism and patriarchy in women's oppression. Some find one perspective more fundamental than the other while other socialist feminists focus on the interactive relation between capitalism and patriarchy, especially in terms of women's labor issues and gender pay gap in an increasingly global market that is managed by multinational corporations in many under-developed or developing countries.

Psychoanalytic feminism contributed to the discussion of differences among women with its highly critiqued separations between the results of mother-identification versus father-identification throughout psychosexual development, as well as polarizations between masculine versus feminine gender (roles) or female sexuality versus male sexuality. The implications of such critiques, as Tong (2009) synthesizes based on the work of Kristeva, Leland, and many others, point to the diversified recognition of multiple genders and sexualities. Care-focused feminists, on the other hand, go further into the debates of feminine versus masculine traits, virtues, values, and so forth. Whether they explain it with "women's separate biology", psychosexual development or systemic role of societies in shaping women's identities and behaviors, care-focused feminists regard women's capacities for care as a human strength rather than a human weakness" (Tong, 2009, p. 163). Their comprehensive work in developing an ethics of care and their strong emphasis on the role of education in cultivating capacities of care in both male and female students opened dialogues of "how to be

globally aware” and how to educate citizens, who “care about economic and social justice, protecting the earth, social and cultural diversity and maintaining world peace” (p. 195). Furthermore, some other views highlighted the lack of care-values in the market-driven world over which economies and corporations impose and reinforce market norms like efficiency and productivity (Tong, 2009).

Multicultural, global and postcolonial feminisms all confront the excessive presence and control of privileged white women, who, the 1980s, debated sameness-versus-difference between men and women. Particularly, U.S multicultural feminism raised awareness about differences among women, as well as marginalized women who could not have their voices heard because of the domination of white, middle-class, heterosexual, and well-educated feminist agendas. Also known as ‘woman of color feminism’, multicultural feminists (e.g., bell hooks, Lorde, Collins) identified other sources of women’s oppression beyond sexism such as racism, classism, homophobia, and ableism (Tong, 2009). The discussion about multiple layers and systems of oppression has been crucial throughout the development of contemporary feminist approaches, as well as in many other fields such as multicultural counseling and multicultural education for which this study has important potential implications.

In the U.S., recognition of differences among women, and how feminism dealt with it, moved beyond borders and many women of color themselves changed this term due to its oppressive potential to ‘otherize’ them while white women can ‘just be’ as if selfhood was exclusive to them (Tong, 2009). Maria Lugones, for example, who has lived in the U.S. as an Argentinean woman challenged the term, women of color, by asserting that a Hispanic woman does not see herself as a woman of color in her own home, but only as herself (Lugones & Spelman, 1992). She further suggests how women’s differences can be recognized without *othering* each other as they all “travel between and in each other’s worlds” in the spirit of friendship and genuine interest (Tong, 2009, p. 209). Parallel to this emphasis on friendship and with further critiques of a global sisterhood notion (especially, one that is based on the labeling assumption of homogeneity of women as a group and also as different homogeneous groups), Mohanty (2003) brought the attention of many to the construction of Third World women as a category regarded as “powerless, exploited, sexually harassed and so on by feminist

scientific, economic, legal, and sociological discourses” (p. 23), which she also calls discursive colonialism. Moreover, she deconstructed universality and cross-cultural validity (imposed by certain scientific methodologies and analytical strategies) that produce an “average Third World Women...based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being Third World (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)”(p. 22). This powerful shift beyond the borders empowered not only most women, who fall into and remain marginalized in binary divisions and terms, but also contemporary feminist theories dealing with an increasingly global world that oppress women, who travel to survive and carry their differences between North and South and West and East. I am particularly interested in this shift in feminist thought, which gave birth to transnational feminist perspectives.

### **Transnational Feminist Perspectives**

Transnational feminist perspectives have emerged and evolved through the inspirational influences of multicultural feminists and black feminist standpoint theory (particularly, critical and reflexive thinking about the interdependence between experiences of discrimination and oppression based on race, class, and gender), as well as the critiques of some threats of overgeneralization and universalization of the black women experience (Collins, 1990). Both postcolonial and transnational feminist theories strive to respond to the limitations of such critiques. They approach the issue of how to explore, understand, and make meaning of questions of difference and (de- or neo-) colonization across histories and cultures through a “flexible and mobile border crossing” and without a U.S. based knowledge production hegemony (Kim, 2007). Postcolonial feminist analyses highlight a critical avoidance of the representation of women and cultures in binary or dichotomous terms through discourse primarily, whereas transnational feminist perspectives focus on “making linkages across social relations and places on multiple scales-such as neighborhood, community, city, region, nation.” (Kim, 2007, p. 115). This shift from the discourse analysis to the praxis of applying subjectivity and identity as situated in particular places provides a borderless comparison of both differences and similarities of social processes and unequal exchange.

Similarly, I strove to find ways to benefit from the complexity of the multiple identities and narratives within my research subjects and questions, which was essential

for my theoretical framing, because I needed multiple epistemologies and a globally expanded acknowledgment of intersectionality from a transnational feminist perspective. Considering the very broad, diverse interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of the intersectionality, it was important to specify, challenge, and then to highlight how it might serve the current, proposed research context in this study.

The very subjective definition(s) and understanding(s) of intersectionality is not its problem but a constructive challenge to the weaknesses and needs of methodology in identifying what are those that intersect and at what different ways and levels. In an effort to dis-identify from the labeling and generalizing aspects of hegemonic, positive science research methodologies (that might confuse us about the distinction between measurement errors and outliers versus marginalized and under-represented voices), the social positions must be treated relationally and analyzed through multiple positioning in an applied effort to deconstruct “identity politics for its additive, politically fragmentary and essentializing tendencies” (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006, p. 187). Thus, a question strives to develop a strategy to this applied intersectional effort.

“The endlessness of differences seems to be a weak point in intersectional theory. The approach starts to get blurred with questions that are often avoided in published work: Who defines when, where, which and why particular differences are given recognition while others are not?” (Ludvig, 2006, p. 235).

Ludvig suggests personal narratives or single group-studies as an alternative to the binary dilemma between the categorical approach and anti-categorical approach. According to her, what makes narratives effective is their strength on providing an “intra-categorical approach,...[which] does not intend to address the complexity of a full range of dimensions in a full range of categories...[and] can be literary, historical, discursive or autobiographical” (p. 248). Ludvig demonstrates a more subjective and self-reflexive methodology of exploring intersectionality with which she interviews for explicit or implicit unprompted associations relevant to intersectionality. She also takes identity from the perspective of relationships between structure and agency, and uses Bourdieu’s theory of agency that point an individual’s freedom of defining identity within the limits of the resources his/her identity has, or its social, cultural and economic capital.



“Individuals act within ‘fields’, and within these fields they can shape the structures and are mutually shaped by them. The ability to act is dependent on the resources available, which determine their status within the field and in relation to the other individuals” (p.250).

Understanding self in relation to others and vice versa seems to be a developing and specializing methodology of comparative feminist theory, and expanding and enriching the methodologies of intersectionality can carry us beyond the dilemmas of multicultural and global feminist theories such as cultural relativism, agency, cultural and intellectual colonialism. Accordingly, I choose feminist narrative analyses methodology to voice the complexity of transnational issues in a cross-cultural local context through the subjectivities and experiences of international student women from Turkey. Before strategizing ways whereby we can ameliorate the experiences, we must return to narratives for their validation (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The nature and dynamic dialogical power of narratives can illustrate the lived experiences in their particular social and contextual environments. Moreover, narrative inquiry develops a naturally evolving collaboration between researcher and research subjects, which does not start with the telling of the story, but at the very moment of imagining the inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Thus, it takes the story, as well as its understanding and meaning-making, into consideration through a dynamic, evolving process of research when and where the researcher lives the story or stories with her participants. So, determining how I can develop and learn from such a research process or praxis was an important step for me toward striving for a transnational and also activist methodology.

### **Understanding the ‘Trans’ and ‘National’ for Research Participants**

The participants in this study, a group of international student women from Turkey, represent different social classes, ethnic groups, regions, religious levels, family contexts, relationships, sexualities, and so forth both before and after their arrival to the U.S. What made me interested in these particular (group of) women’s life stories and ongoing experiences was my observation of intersecting similarities and differences in the cultures and reasons that bring them to the U.S. I strove to understand this by imagining an invisible circle that surrounds them as a group. After reading Fatima Mernissi (1995)’s *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, the notion of harem

helped me to metaphorically articulate the group or circled experience of these international student women. They experience the same context as they travel from the harems of their own nation, family, class, religion, and so on to the western ones, which have certain “hudud”s (frontiers) for them whether they name, label, accept, or cross them. They represent and also have been marginalized by certain institutions as a result of their ignored and silenced need to act for themselves, as well as a lack of awareness of the fact that we are the women of the same harem regardless of our positions, statuses, controlled freedom, and rebellions in it.

In Turkey, the influences of nationalism and militarism in failing to develop an acknowledgment of diverse cultures and a more democratic negotiation of their autonomies, and the impact of an ongoing, current identity crises due to the polarizations and teaming up in between secularism and Islamism all prevent people from realizing the patriarchic hegemonies of the state elites, which take actions in favor of their both local and global allies. This dichotomous or binary perspective fragments the women and causes lack of a civil society that can adequately address the shared concerns. As hegemonic patriarchies politicize the national and traditional meaning of women and their bodies (e.g., turban or headscarf debate), they also fracture the common ground that they struggle to survive together on. This is also why it looks like a harem to me where there are set frontiers (“hudud”) between the compartmentalized sections that group and separate women.

These translocal and also transnational processes of social harems resemble a lost capacity of dialogues and mutual respect among women, and can be improved with a perspective of multiple critique of the global system, which is similar to the notion of double agent critique that critiques the colonizer and colonized at once (Mohanty, 2003). In this study, I wanted to apply such multiple critiques to the silence and lost dialogue between the women and their experiences in my own research context. It was an important transnational project for me to challenge the generalized and categorized notions of *women in Turkey*, *third world women*, *women from developing countries*, *Muslim women* and so forth, and therefore to give voice to their diverse experiences in shared and non-shared cultural and historical contexts. I believe that an important step toward this goal was for women themselves become more aware of their experiences. I

hoped they would hear each other and critique not only the hegemony of ‘other’ (political or systemic) group or party’s patriarchy but also their own, which all reciprocally intervene within the global system in an act of not allowing them to gain equal opportunities in unbiased, non-exploitative institutions of education and employment. Only in a non-selectively democratic and meritocratic society, they can learn, compare, decide, and speak for themselves regardless of their ultimate choices on secularism, Islamism, conservative modernity or whatever way truly fulfills their sense of self, identity, socializations, and lifestyle.

### **Postmodern Approaches to Career Development**

The field of career development and counseling, and indeed counseling as a profession emerged as a response to the needs of rapid industrialization, urbanization and immigration of early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Savickas & Baker, 2005). In its early phase, the field focused on vocational guidance and education through tests and assessments that matched individuals’ abilities and interests with occupations’ requirements and rewards in a world that offered stable/long-term employment and secure organizations (Savickas, 2005). The matching model continued and evolved with Holland’s congruence theory of vocational guidance, which brought more emphasis onto a process of exploration to enhance self-knowledge and to increase occupational information before making a vocational decision for the best fit (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2008). This and later matching oriented theories and models are also referred to as trait (e.g., characteristics of the individual) and factor (e.g., requirements of the work place) theories (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2008).

On the other hand, the term *career* and the construct *career development* emerged within the increasing emphasis on vocational development, or the development of vocational choice as/in a *process*; in other words, a process approach to career education with an increase in the number of professional and hierarchical positions (Savickas, 2011). For example, Super’s model of vocational development introduced the career stages with related developmental tasks and required attitudes, beliefs and competencies for each task (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2008). Exploring and emphasizing one’s multiple and developmental life roles and their impact on work, Super presented a life-long view of career development, which has been followed by other developmental

theories, learning theories and socioeconomic theories (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2008). Most, if not all, of these earlier theories, which provided a solid foundation for the study of vocational behavior and career development, were based on traditional positivistic scientific perspective. They had limitations in terms of their applicability to a diverse range of individuals and contexts (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009).

Having a stronger interest in more recent theories that “tend to be more explicitly attuned to diverse populations and to the complexity involved in career decision making” (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009, p. 95), I considered several newer theories and models in designing this study. Indeed, there are many both older and newer career development theories and models that provide helpful frameworks to explore the experience and needs of international students. For example, Schlossberg’s Adult Career Development Transition Model highlights the increasing frequency of transitional experiences that bring change, frustration, and other associated feelings (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2008). This model carefully looks at the structure of transition to understand the self, support resources, and strategies to navigate transition and cope with feelings of change (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Another recent model, Race Gender Ecological Model of Career Development is based on the belief of individuals’ dynamic and complex relation to the context (Cook, Heppner, & O’Brian, 2002). This model has been useful in research with diverse women (e.g., career development of lesbian women), and its strength comes from an emphasis on hope in changing the interactions of individuals within their environmental contexts, in addition to ideas of advocacy and social change that challenges individual, systemic, and institutional career myths and stereotypes.

Another approach that I studied in relation to international students is Integrative Life Planning, which addresses many aspects of people’s lives in ways that help them to see their lives, their communities, and the larger society as a whole (Hansen, 1997). It attends to individuals’ life patterns as fluid, integrative processes that create a whole, as well as the need for reflection on one’s developmental priorities for mind, body, and spirit. There are six main tenets of Integrative Life Planning:

- (1) it is a way of seeing the world that takes into account both personal development and the contexts within which we live, (2) it focuses on the value of

diversity and inclusivity, (3) it involves the examination of the relationship goals and achievement goals relative to society, the organization, the family, and the individual, (4) it explores connections and links between work and family, (5) it introduces spirituality, meaning, and purpose as key aspects of life planning, and (6) it emphasizes helping people manage change and understand their life choices, decisions, and transitions in a societal context” (Hansen, 1997, pp. 11–18).

Integrative Life Planning is a model that brings insight and guidance to my counseling work with international students who deal with changes in work, education, family and society during their transnational experience. It enhanced my interest in narrative research methods because I encountered and worked through its concepts like connectedness, pluralism, spirituality, subjectivity, wholeness and community in listening to international student stories in counseling and helping them make meaning of their life story and career connectivity for further decision making and planning.

The abovementioned examples of career development approaches share the significance of addressing diversity and change, and they had insight and value as potential guides for this study. They challenge the traditional assumptions of earlier career development theories coming from the European-American perspective (e.g., the value of individualism and autonomy, the assumption of open opportunities for all, and the belief that work is central in ‘everyone’s’ life) (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). On the other hand, I felt the need for a more comprehensive and philosophical framework that listened to the connection and meaning between personal and career matters more directly and explicitly. Additionally, I attended to the themes of internationalization in the field of career development, and encountered the three main characteristics evident in the international career literature: emphasis on context and cultural diversities; self-construction or developmental emphasis; and constructivist perspective (Richard & Lenz, 2003). These themes enhanced my interest in postmodern approaches, which are constituted by terms such as constructivist, constructivism, social constructionism, and narrative (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2008). Postmodern approaches to career development “emphasize the importance of understanding our careers as they are lived...and embrace multicultural perspectives...[with] the belief that there is no one

fixed truth but, rather, we each construct our own realities and truths (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009, p. 108).

I was inspired by a couple of postmodern approaches to career development in designing this study. For example, the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of Patton and McMahon (2006) characterizes the complex interactivity of influences on one's construction of his/her career, along with the experiences of both content and process in the unpredictable nature of the career development. The STF also supports the role of holism, personal meaning, and subjectivity as a reflection of its constructivist worldview (Patton, 2007). Schultheiss (2003), on the other hand, suggested an integration of relational theory and career theory with the goal of providing "a more holistic integrative conceptual framework, or meta- perspective, that recognizes the value of relational connection, and quite simply the realities of people's lives" (p. 304), which are embedded in career narratives. This emphasis on connectedness and relationships (in addition to a greater focus on *individual*) supports and reinforces their role in "positive developmental progression" (Patton, 2007, p. 7), which is a suggested direction in the reviewed literature of studies about the international students, shifting from a theory to individually focused conceptualizations (Patton, 2008).

The postmodern approach that most inspired the narrative and analytical framework of this study was the Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2011). The Career Construction Theory is not only a theory of explaining career behavior and development but also a model of career counseling that has an activist agenda for empowering individuals through a process of raising consciousness on life themes. It sees individuals as capable authors who actively engage in the projects of constructing their careers through stories, themes, and reflexivity. Furthermore, the Career Construction Theory acknowledges and responds to the new world of work that is rapidly changing and transforming itself due to the impacts of globalization, information technology, digital revolution, and so forth (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2012). The term *insecure worker*, for example, calls attention to short-term careers, project based work assignments, and frequent transitions between jobs, which mirror the uncertain and rapidly changing occupational structure, as well as the need/requirement for flexibility, mobility, and life-long learning (Savickas, 2011). Addressing such changes in the world

of works, the Career Construction Theory highlights a more dynamic and adaptive definition of career that also suits well to the transnational lifestyle and negotiations of international students: “Rather than developing a career by making plans in a stable medium, they [individuals] must manage a career by noticing possibilities in a changing environment” (Savickas, 2011, p. 326). Within the ebb and flow of the globalized education and world of works, international student experiences can be understood and reframed by deconstructing discontinuous change (i.e., unpredictability and sudden changes), the patterns of story, and recursiveness (i.e., the multiplicity of influences and dynamics of non linearity or multi-causality in individuals’ lives), which are important tenets of the Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2012). In a new context and through diverse experiences and implications of acculturation (which are discussed in the second part of this chapter), international students actively (and sometimes passively) re-construct their educational and life planning. Also, unpredictability and chance factors are embedded in such planning, as they encounter various unexpected events that become sources of naturally occurring chaos (Bright & Pryor, 2005). Chance and unpredictability in the post-industrial world are especially crucial for the self-in-transition experiences of international students, who are striving to produce meaningful stories and negotiate sense of self and identities besides working on degrees and career goals.

As Herr, Cramer and Niles (2004) mentioned, our self-identity and self-concepts change within political, economic and social conditions from which we develop new actions, and so do the careers of many international students including the ones in this study. It is important that this (and any) theoretical framework recognizes the individuals living in a more complex world, and the shift from theory to individual focus conceptualization align with the call of Savickas that advocates for a career counseling model which is less expert dominated, less focused on fit, and more focused on stories than scores (Savickas, 2011). My goal was to transform this call into a research vision and practice from a transnational feminist perspective by asking new questions about international students. With the guide of the Career Construction Theory framework, I approached international students as individuals within complex and constantly changing, unpredictable contexts. I attended to how they construct their careers as they experience

changes, transitions, and transformation in their transnational, fluid, unstable worlds, and how they talk about it as a part of their life and career narratives.

### **International Student Experiences: Themes from the Literature**

In this second part of the literature review I will evaluate the research about international students to promote understanding about their diversity and experiences, and to summarize the extent to which their experiences are studied in the literature. Although my aim is to reach and discuss research pertinent to the experiences of international graduate student women from Turkey, due to the scarcity of research on this specific topic and group, I will first start broadly and discuss general research that focuses on international students. I will then narrow the focus to research that has specifically examined the experiences of international graduate students, including a small number of studies that attend to the gendered experiences and other identity roles together. I will then review the studies on career development of international graduate students that point to the need and meaning of bringing a career narrative framework in this study. Yet, due to the lack of research about international graduate student women and the experiences of international students from Turkey overall, the studies presented in this literature review include students from other countries besides Turkey, and from students from both undergraduate and graduate levels with a wide range of backgrounds.

### **Acculturation and Adjustment**

There has been a significantly increasing emphasis on the issues, concerns and needs of international students (e.g., Church, 1982; Pedersen, 1991; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), particularly issues of cultural transition, adjustment, socialization, and academic achievement. Most of the studies use the theory and framework of acculturation. Within the scope of this study, it is important to understand the previously explored experiences of acculturation, most of which are explored and categorized according to the outcomes (e.g., adjustment problems or diagnoses) regardless of their intention. On the other hand, parallel to the rationale of this study, it is important to emphasize that not all acculturation experiences or adjustment outcomes entail the same levels of challenges, conflicts, acculturative stress, marginality feelings or psychological distress. Thus, although it is included here for only the literature review purposes, an emphasis on any



generalized categorization or labeling of adjustment problems is to be critically avoided in this study.

Acculturation is the process of change in values, beliefs, and behaviors due to exposure and contact with a second culture (Berry, 2003). It also refers to group-level encounters and general changes, whereas psychological acculturation corresponds to psychological changes occurring at the individual level in areas such as language, cognitive style, attitudes, style of relating, and identity (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). Neither acculturation nor psychological acculturation indicates negativity or problems. Acculturative stress is a normal and inevitable consequence of any significant transition, and different levels and symptoms of acculturative stress might evolve from different intensity levels of stressors in one's environment. Accordingly, it may impact international students psychologically and socially. Furthermore, recent research and changing understanding of acculturation emphasize its mutual or reciprocal nature: "everyone is involved, and everyone is doing it" (Berry, 2005, p. 710). This sentiment stems from recent scholarship that proposes a bilinear model of acculturation, suggesting "an individual can develop and maintain competence to a new culture while still retaining ties and competence in their culture of origin" (Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009, p. 355). This model also indicates that the definition of acculturation has new characteristics such as "change that is indirect (not cultural but 'ecological') and delayed (internal adjustments, presumably of both a cultural and psychological character take time)" (p. 355), which will be detailed in later parts. This new understanding of acculturation (which has similarities to the non-linear and fluid transnational experience) is not yet applied to any study of international student experiences.

In the acculturation literature, the commonly identified stressors of international students are financial difficulties, the fear of failing others, academic challenge, homesickness, perceived hate and rejection, fear, culture shock and stress due to change, guilt related to being away from home, and perceived discrimination (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007), in addition to identity gaps as an outcome (Jung, Hecht, & Chapman-Wadsworth, 2007). A variety of other research studies also implicate sense of loss (e.g., Sandhu, 1995), loneliness and social isolation (e.g., Mori, 2000), identity and values confusion (e.g., Hayes and Lin, 1994), discrimination and prejudice (e.g., Sandhu & Asrabadi,

1994, 1998; Jung, Hecht, & Chapman-Wadsworth, 2007), uncertainty, fear and anxiety (e.g., Sandhu, 1995), somatic complaints (e.g., Lin & Yi, 1997), cognitive distress (e.g., Mori, 2000; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998), and sadness and depression (e.g., Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Jung, Hecht, & Chapman-Wadsworth, 2007).

More recently, some comprehensive reviews of the studies about international students provide more understanding to the big picture. For example, in their systematic review of sixty-four studies, Zhang and Goodson (2011) examined the predictors of psychosocial adjustment of undergraduate and graduate international students in the U.S. by grouping them under two categories, psychological symptoms and socio-cultural adjustment. They reported that the most common predictors are stress, social support, English language proficiency, region/country of origin, length of residence in the United States, acculturation, social interaction with Americans, self-efficacy, gender, and personality. They included studies that overcame some research limitations, which were mentioned in major past critiques (e.g., Church, 1982), such as the lack of any baseline data or sufficient control groups and longitudinal designs, as well as the scarcity of theories and concepts that were applied to international students in the earlier studies (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). On the other hand, their review also highlighted that most of the theories used in the recent studies still had either an intrapersonal or interpersonal focus without sufficient consideration of macro-level factors such as university setting, cultural and institutional patterns of the host environment, and ethnic community. Moreover, they addressed the emerging yet still under-investigated variables such as coping and support resources of international students, which they suggest for future studies.

### **Mental Health Issues and Help-Seeking**

The second set of themes that come up frequently in the literature are found in studies that explore not only acculturation and adjustment experiences, but also cultural conflict, discrimination, prejudice, isolation, loneliness, and related psychological issues. Depression, particularly, has been reported as the most common reason of help seeking among international students (Pedersen, 1991). Based on the earlier studies in the literature that show a significant influence of gender, age, race/ethnicity, social support, pattern of social contact, English proficiency, length of stay, and so forth on acculturation

and adjustment experiences, Sumer, Poyrazli, and Grahame (2008) explored the influence of these demographic and interpersonal variables on the anxiety and depression levels of international students. Their study supported the influence of less social support, low English language proficiency, and older age on the increased anxiety and depression levels. On the other hand, neither gender nor length of stay was a significant predictor of anxiety or depression, which is different from the previous studies. Sumer et al. addressed the limitations of their study and other methodologically similar studies very carefully, particularly the uncertainty and unpredictability of environmental, time-specific, contextual, and relational influences, in addition to the complexity of comparing students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in the same study.

Considering the lower tendencies to seek professional help among international students (Peterson, 1991; Mori, 2000), several studies and reviews (e.g., Gorsuch, 2011; Gresham & Clayton, 2011) attended to the unique psychological, social, and educational issues and needs of international students by presenting and offering specific interventions and prevention programs. Among such work, the study of Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero, and Anderson (2012) explored the connection between self-critical perfectionism, acculturative stress, and depression in international students from China and India. In both groups, self-critical perfectionism was a predictor of depression, but its effect on depression was weaker for the Chinese students compared to the Indian students. The discussion on the potential reason of these between-group differences addressed the culturally sanctioned adaptive value of self-criticism among Chinese students compared to the attribution of difficulties to internal deficiencies, as a high risk potential for depressive feelings among Indian students. This difference is an important rationale and one of the many different potential ways of considering cultural and historical contexts of specific countries. More research on specific groups of students can provide more understanding of the diversity within international student groups. Rice et al. discuss the implications of this need for both counseling and research, as they suggest a systemic and institutional framework that highlights the importance of social integration programs that involve not only international students, but also local students together.

Besides the necessity of challenging the homogeneity assumptions and generalizations about different international students, academic, social, and counseling programs should also have awareness and acknowledgment of both between-group and within-group differences. However, an emphasis on the cultural formulation of each individual (who is unique with her/his intersecting identities, social roles, and life contexts) within the fluid macro systems of both home and host country is still not voiced in the literature, especially for specific subgroups of students such as women, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities. This conclusion from the review of studies that are summarized so far touches on another important rationale of this study: beyond the suggested methodological strategies in the literature (e.g., comparison groups, longitudinal studies, equal/even number of students from every racial and ethnic background), my study aims to voice the experiences of intersectional selves that live and travel between transnational contexts. Accordingly, the next section will summarize the review of studies that asked qualitative questions from the perspectives of both micro and macro level systems and influences.

### **Diversity Experiences of International Students**

Many studies mentioned in the previous parts were from numerically dominant quantitative studies in the literature that explored correlations between intrapersonal and interpersonal variables within relatively large samples of students from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds and different countries. Although some included critical influences of gender, age, race, ethnicity, isolation, discrimination, and prejudice (e.g., Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Karuppan & Barari, 2011), they did not embrace particular yet diverse identities, backgrounds, and issues of students, especially from their own direct perspectives and individual experiences. There are a limited number of studies that explored gender as a major variable. For example, Fatima (2001) reported that international student women had higher levels of stress and anxiety than men consistent with the results of Dao, Lee, and Chang (2007) that showed Taiwanese international student women at greater risk of depressive feelings. Kwon (2009) addressed the need to look at the gender, ethnicity, and graduate status of international students from the perspectives of staff members at a university office for international students, and their results indicated that international student women were

perceived to have more homesickness compared to men. However, homesickness was not the most significant result, but the fear of financial pressures followed by fear of failing others, not making friends, and then homesickness. There is also evidence for some significantly more challenging adjustment issues of graduate students (e.g., Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006) and particularly women graduate students (Fatima, 2001) due to the more difficult and stressful nature of graduate study in a new context, in addition to higher academic achievement expectations.

Besides this small number of studies that addressed the differences and intensity of the experiences of international women and graduate students from a numerical (statistical) perspective, it is important to discuss the studies that applied qualitative methodologies that directly or indirectly gave voice to participants in their studies. Research of such nature is important for multiple reasons. First of all, regardless of the intention, the studies reviewed and summarized so far bring and reinforce perceived frameworks of negativity, difficulty, diagnoses, inferiority, incapability, conflict, shock, and so forth, in addition to marginalization and alienation of international student groups. The overemphasis of their adjustment problems and implied vulnerability is criticized due to its potential to create an unbalanced view of international students (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). This can also cause an image of burden, and obstacle to develop and provide effective counseling services (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Thus, I next review and discuss a few recent studies that pay attention to under-researched aspects of international student experiences, and parts of their lives that are not solely based on academic contexts or implications of cross-cultural transition and adjustment.

In their study of positive aspects of international student transition, Moores and Popadiuk (2011) analyzed critical incidents by interviewing seven international students (six women and one man) from China, Honduras, and Denmark, who study in Western Canada. Their results identified eight categories. The first category, growth and/or change, included positive and helpful incidents of personal development, change in goals, change in perspective (about one's home country and becoming more open-minded), and academic growth. Specifically, developing independence and learning to make their own life decisions were important themes of their experiences, which they frequently

conceptualized with a shift in focus from outcome to process. The second category, social support/building relationships with peers, showed the importance of a supportive living environment and peer support, which provided family-like connections away from home and helped them feel valued, respected, and cared for. Learning to navigate the host culture highlighted the help of having a guide (frequently, a more experienced international student), cultural learning, and recognizing academic differences. The other categories of incidents of positive transition included enjoyable activities outside of schoolwork, pre-arrival preparations, supportive faculty and staff, persevering through hard times with persistence and tenacity, and a sense of belonging in both host and home culture. These results overall “defy the conceptualization of culture shock as harmful and maladaptive”, and support the significance of voicing one’s own perspectives in “discovering strengths within”, as the students worded: “I realized my potential; [the study abroad experience was] very important for shaping the person that you’re going to be” (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011; p. 302). In spite of the limitations of their study (e.g., potential impact of conducting the interviews in English only, having participants from different countries and ethnic backgrounds, voluntary participation of students who knew about the study’s focus on positive aspects), this study has provided a major baseline for my research study. The strong presence of growth, transformation, change, strengths, and resiliency made me curious about further implications of these positive aspects of cross-cultural transition and experience for the ongoing life career planning.

In another study, which investigated the experiences and identity development of Chinese international women students, Qin (2009) conducted interviews, called “conversations with a purpose”, with eleven women from different disciplines and universities in the U.S. The analyzed expressions of experiences suggested “a series of processes by which these Chinese women graduate students developed a critical understanding of culture and self within the context of cultural mobility” (Qin, 2009, p. 149). By using a postmodern deconstruction approach, Qin identified a 3-step process to self-understanding and transformation that she referred to as “reweaving a fragmented web of self” in her theorization: weaving self, fragmenting self, and reweaving self. This process starts with weaving self, or one’s construction of herself through the integration and experience of her “family traditions, education, and cultural values into their ways of

being and becoming when they grew up in the web of social relations situated in Chinese socio-cultural context” (p. 66). It continues with fragmenting self through questioning “the social injustice and the depressing personal life embedded in contemporary Chinese society” (p. 76) that challenge and “deconstruct the imposed traditional ways of being into multi-faceted senses of self” (p. 76) before and after the encounter and psychological challenges within a new country and the host culture. In the third phase, reweaving self, women “re-examine and re-put together the previously fragmented facets of self to create a new and expanded web of self in the host culture” (116).

Qin’s study is an important example that reveals the need for further research about identity and value changes and renegotiations among the rapidly increasing number of women from China, as well as many other women from other under-studied countries and specific subgroups. On the other hand, as Iverson and Chou (2010) criticized very constructively, Qin’s study had potential to achieve, yet lacked, a stronger postmodern feminist focus by failing to describe and discuss the changing and different socio-cultural contexts that surround women in both home and host countries. Furthermore, Qin’s interpretation of race situated personal transformation into the dichotomy of Chinese versus U.S. women, because she argued that students’ sense of race became salient with increased cultural awareness and sense of cultural pride through encountering many different others on the diverse U.S. campuses (Iverson & Chou, 2010). Thus, in my research, I will consider suggestions such as looking at the “plurality in each person” (Lugones), “interlocking categories of experience” (Anderson and Collins), and “living at the intersection of identity” (West and Fenstermaker; Crenshaw), together with the need for “specificity” to understand “the interlocking or simultaneous grids of oppression and hierarchies” experienced by individuals as members of multiple groups (Phelan; as cited in Iverson & Chou, 2011, p. 204). For a stronger feminist lens in my research, I will use the framework of a transnational feminist approach that was introduced in the previous part.

Although only a limited number of qualitative studies (mentioned above) overtly embrace feminism in their questions and rationales to explore the experiences of international women students, their participants do not actively define or create a feminist act in research. Thus, a truly feminist methodology should close this gap with

transparency. For example, I should not assume that the participants identify as feminists or impose my (the researcher's) definition and application of feminism onto the participants through questions and design. For many women in my study, feminism might sound like a marginal construct, so I should hear and understand their words and ways of defining it.

As a support to this argument, the interviews of Crossley (2010) with thirteen young women international students (from twelve different countries), who study in a college in London, included expressions of evidence for the impact of transnational stereotypes of U.S. feminists in creating resistance to feminist identities. In contrast to some prior research that found the women, who are in higher education and specifically had classes of gender or women's studies, open to identify as 'feminist' (e.g., Hercus, 2005; Aronson, 2003), the majority of women in Crossley's sample were resistant to and ambivalent about feminist identities, and also the meaning of feminism. These women had shared beliefs and perceptions of misconceptions and negative images about feminism, and only one participant addressed the cause and role of media in creating such images, misrepresentation and false portrayal of feminists (e.g., bra burners, lesbians, man hating). Moreover, the women in this sample perceived feminism as a western concept, referring to cultural differences in feminism. For example, a woman student from Singapore described herself: "[I am] Not a bra burning one. I would describe myself as a feminist in terms of attitude and philosophy, but there's not a strong women's movement in Singapore" (Crossley, 2010, p. 129). On the other hand, while they believed they are not hindered and they have the freedom to do what they like in both career and personal life, they still gave examples of sexism (e.g., discrimination at the work place). They directly and indirectly stated that they are feminist when they encounter with sexism, especially in an individual level. Although this study's findings have many important implications for the future of feminism and feminist research, I specifically attended to these findings in terms of the ambivalence about and variety of feminisms expressed by the participants.

As a researcher, I needed a clear definition of feminism, which I developed through a transnational feminist lens in this study. However, I also strove to be conscious of not imposing a collective feminist agenda for the participants and procedures of this



study in spite of the fact that the literature reviewed provides a significant rationale to explore and voice the issues of international women students from diverse backgrounds.

### **Research about the International Students' Career Development**

In this study, I embrace the definition of career as a subjective experience and construct, which is not the sum of all experiences but rather a mosaic of themes that build into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story (Savickas, 2005). This definition is consistent with the importance of understanding the term career and career development as a culturally constructed phenomena (Arthur, 2007), especially for international students for whom the career may have different meanings. Accordingly, I aimed to look for and catch career themes in the literature about international students in order to incorporate them (and what these themes tell and what they don't tell) into my research questions. On the other hand, as it is reviewed in the previous parts, most of the studies focused on adjustment and acculturation issues (e.g., Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005; Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993; Mori, 2000; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), and cross cultural transition (e.g., Arthur, 2004; Pedersen, 1991) with discussions of academic success and language competency. Although these themes relate to the career development of international students in significant ways, they do not directly address it with implications for a broader yet subjective career development and planning process, especially in relation to cross-cultural experience.

The significant portion of the international student career development literature focuses on issues of job search and placement, and show that students are most concerned with work experience, job search skills, and interviewing skills (Arthur, 2007). These studies inform us about the important practical challenges of pursuing and maintaining opportunities, but the reasons and/or causes of such challenges are not explicitly researched and discussed beyond the categorized and sometimes generalized characteristics of 'international student culture' (e.g., lack of assertiveness, language problems, isolation). Moreover, the current rumors of economic hardship and lack of opportunities in the job market provide further excuses to neglect the need to explore the diversity of issues and unique challenges of international students.

In their study Shih and Brown (2000) explored the relationship between acculturation level and vocational identity within a sample of 112 Taiwanese

international undergraduate students. Although, their sample had participants with low scores on acculturation (as a limitation), their overall results indicated that stronger identification as an Asian predicted greater vocational identity. Accordingly, they suggested that cultural assimilation may not be a necessary measurement/assessment or process to clarify and set career goals for this international student group. However, earlier reviews of research shows that identity, acculturation and cross-cultural transition compose a theme that has important implications for research and career counseling with international students. Even though most studies address this within statistical measures of groups of students, some work in the literature provide important insight on how much we need to understand the cultural identity, transition, and cross cultural experiences in order to understand the change in values and worldview that may impact one's meaning-making and career goals.

In their strong case discussion, Arthur and Popadiuk (2009) offer a cultural formulation approach to assess cultural identity of international students. They emphasize the shifting cultural identities, which represent changes to the worldview and sense of self, as a result of "learning to see themselves, others, and the world around them in new ways" (p. 436). The combination of stress on process experience, change, and the fact that international students are not a homogenous group (which also challenges the outdated dualism of individualism versus collectivism), Arthur and Popadiuk addressed an important gap in the literature: there is need for more research to understand the influence of cross-cultural transition on career issues, especially by incorporating more individual based assessments and constructive strategies.

Although many studies have the goal of improving the educational, and therefore career experiences of international students, most research questions and implications do not directly and openly look at the understanding and meaning of the career from the perspectives of international students. The scarcity of qualitative research and individual career narratives, which can portray the life career experience in relation to past, present, and future within multiple and fluid contexts that shape and reshape those career narratives, is the main rationale of my study. Furthermore, as suggested by Arthur (2014), there is need for research that will explore the career development of international students and later stages of cultural transition and learning (not just the early phase). The

predominantly quantitative stories in the literature. Thus, I next discuss the literature that brings a more systemic and contextualized perspective to the international student experiences, as it also relates to career development in the literature. I researched and decided to include this perspective to challenge and avoid any over-emphasis on culture or related stereotypes and assumptions that may imply generalizations. Reconsidering the meaning and role of culture, I believe, might be one critical and analytical way to approach and explore international student experiences through individualized and contextualized career narratives.

### **Summary: Reframing International Student Experience as a Transnational Feminist Life-Career Narrative**

From a global systemic perspective, Montgomery (2010) stresses the competition between universities and countries in terms of the marketization of higher education, and criticizes the “customer service philosophy” that creates a research agenda that is motivated by desired improvement of recruitment and retention of international students. This focus overshadows the discussions and importance of personal, social, and individual purposes, as well as processes and outcomes, of international study/student experience. The highly similar (themes) and quantitative nature of questions asked in the literature reflects this to some extent and hinders the consideration and use of more theoretical ideas or longitudinal research.

International students are portrayed as culturally different and many studies include these diverse students from various countries in the same sample, which may reinforce a homogeneity assumption: international student culture. Thus, it is important to understand and challenge ‘the culture’ as a construct. With this goal, Montgomery (2010) suggests educators and researchers to disassociate the idea of nationality from culture, and to include ideas other than culture: “a nation is not a culture and variations within national states can be as wide as across them...socially constructed link between nationality and culture is a dangerous bias in higher education as it is in politics” (p. 14). Positive international education cannot become possible if we do not deconstruct such links. In order to overcome the stereotypes and essentialist view of culture, and to disassociate it from ethnicity and nationalism, Holliday (1999; as cited in Montgomery, 2010) offered two paradigms: large and small cultures. Large cultures represent ethnic,

national, and international groupings, whereas the concept of small culture involves members of an identifiable and cohesive social group. Viewing international students as a small group, as suggested by Holliday and Montgomery, challenges the culturist reduction and homogeneity assumptions that stereotype international students. Another idea, which is called community of practice by Wenger, McDermott, and Synder (2002, as cited in Montgomery, 2010) along with the concept of situated learning (Montgomery, 2010) also provides non-essentialist lenses to conceptualize international students from a more positive framework: individuals that “develop a particular group identity that evolves over time as students learn about each other, about their new context, and about the nature of higher education, and share goals and values” (p. 18). Montgomery suggests the use of small group and community of practice paradigms in order to develop a new and more positive understanding of international students, who belong to small diverse groups rather than large cultural groups associated with stereotypes and stigmatizing characteristics. Furthermore, she introduces this framework with regard to its further role in developing positive peer support and effective student learning.

Abovementioned paradigms are also parallel to the new research and changing understanding of acculturation, as mentioned earlier (e.g., Berry, 2005). Furthermore, scholars have recently introduced a bilinear model of acculturation that suggest that “an individual can develop and maintain competence to a new culture while still retaining ties and competence in their culture of origin” (Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009, p. 355). Thus, this increased emphasis on the individual experience, or in other words, attending to the contextual and relational dimensions from the individual perspectives, is also parallel to the recent reconceptualization, reintegration, and application of theories of career development and counseling such as the proposed/suggested connection of relational theory and systems theory framework, based on the individual, which is “an open system recursively interacting with and within multiple systems” (Patton, 2007, p. 2). The parallel between the significance of both context (i.e., environment) and relationships in one’s construction of her/his career narrative was discussed further under the theoretical frameworks part.

In the present study, I approached international students from the same individual perspective and systemic framework, making it even more important to learn about

individual stories within small groups of students. Similar to Montgomery's qualitative ethnographically inflected research study, I too develop a body of research that contrast and complement the other research methodologies that investigated the common issues and needs of international students through large-scale quantitative studies. I apply the small group and community of practice frameworks within a group of women international students from Turkey, who may initially seem to be from the same ethnicity, nation, and culture. Based on the historical and current contexts of Turkey discussed in the introduction, I assume that experiences (in transient forms of negotiation and changes in sense of self) of the small groups and community of practices are embedded in diverse individual stories of these women, who create and share new cultures in a transnational world.

Thus, rather than the term cross-cultural transition, I use the term 'transnational experience' in this study. Although the prior studies and discussions of 'transition' do not posit a static and specific period of time from entry to adjustment, the term transition may create an overemphasis on the frequently mentioned, stage based descriptions and categorizations of international student issues such as pre-entry issues, entry and culture shock, acculturation, preparing for the re-entry to the home country, and so on. Furthermore, as a contribution to the literature, I aim to build on this first set of themes (e.g., acculturation, cross-cultural transition, change in sense of self and cultural identity) by incorporating the voices of international students and their personal experience stories. I suggest that stories, which can portray wider scenes, multiple characters, and personal plots, can help researchers and counselors to better understand the fluid, unpredictable, and constantly changing nature of experiences, because not only the international students, but also their contexts, circumstances and resources (both in home and host countries) change. This understanding can inform us about the within-group and between-group differences, which are unique and diverse intersections of multiple identities in personal, psychological, socioeconomic, and political terms.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

As a doctor of philosophy candidate, I acknowledge the philosophical emphasis in my journey of becoming a researcher within the framework of Zizek (2010): “the task of philosophy is not to provide answers but to show how the way we perceive a problem can be itself part of a problem”. Thus, I agree with him that “there are not only wrong answers; there are also wrong questions, which we call ideology”.

I asked many questions before I arrived at this methodology and my specific research questions. The story of the questions that I asked and how my questions changed has much value for the validity (i.e., trustworthiness) of my study. Accordingly, I strove to narrate and frame this methodology as an ongoing, emerging outcome of the historical/lived, ideological, philosophical, and theoretical influences on my research questions and rationale.

I strongly believe that a clear and strong methodology is crucial for every research design and endeavor, but satisfying that, a study might still lack practical, activist, and transformative contributions without a critical awareness of its philosophical and ideological position, as well as the role(s) of researcher identities in both. Discussing my philosophical and ideological position also helps me to practice reflexivity, which is a major strength of feminist methodology. Reflexivity, or “taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one’s own lived reality and experiences”, which is also a “self-reflection or journey”, can become a very effective tool for the researcher and the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 129). Accordingly, before describing my research design and methodology strategies, I first explained my philosophical assumptions through ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological lenses in this chapter. To follow and suggest a clear way to such awareness in this particular study, I borrowed Creswell (2007)’s list of five steps or philosophical assumptions as a framed beginning route in reaching the implication of research practice.

Then, I strove to build a bridge between my research paradigm and my theoretical orientation as a researcher, which are not and cannot be separated from my personal experiences or experiential knowledge that I reflect on and actively integrate into my research. I believe that such an open and explanatory process supports my decision to use

a qualitative research design, particularly a narrative methodology from a transnational feminist perspective. Furthermore, narrating the process of developing and designing this research study helps me reveal my *starting point and standpoint*, which can help readers “place the narrative into perspective and delineate the boundaries of generalizations within it” (Charmaz, 2007, p. 445).

### **Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks**

My choice of a qualitative research methodology stems from certain philosophical assumptions representing a constant challenge to Western philosophy and (of) science that is preoccupied with *what it is that exists* and *what is the nature of reality*. Motivated by a Heideggerian perspective of ontology, I align with the question of *what is the meaning of the being* rather than the problem of being (SEP, 2011). I believe that *meaning of the being* is what constitutes experience, and this focus on *experience of being* relies on the emphasis of existence and phenomenology in Heidegger’s method of ontology, which have multiple ways and forms of presentations, and therefore interpretations. Thus, I begin with a more specific ontological question: Can we know the experience? We know it but only as they are presented to us and as much as they are shared. This is where the significance of looking into personal experience and thus narratives lies for me. Therefore, I see research as a process of reflexivity on why and how I reach and gather stories of lived experience through narratives, as well as how I interpret and present them myself through my own ideological and personal lenses.

I next want to describe my ideological position in choosing my epistemological questions: *Who can know* and *what can be known?* (Hesse-Biber, 2007) These questions are based on feminist standpoint epistemology, which suggest that “it is a woman’s oppressed location within society that provides fuller insights into a society as a whole; women have access to an enhanced and more nuanced understanding of social reality than men precisely because of their structurally oppressed location vis-à-vis the dominant group or men” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 10). Accordingly, this ideology of epistemology advocates for a deeper look at the lives of women and their everyday experiences “through paying particular attention to and finding and analyzing the gaps that occur when women try to fit their lives into the dominant culture’s way of conceptualizing women’s situation” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 10). Furthermore, the contribution of multiple

standpoints through intersecting and interconnected identities and relationships between racism, sexism, heterosexism, class oppression, ableism, and so forth, strengthened the importance of researching differences of the *other* (Harding, 2007). To me, *other* also refers to previously discarded outliers or what was left out, which did not fit into the categorical perspective or binary categories constructed by positivism serving the orders of patriarchy and Western or empirical hegemony of knowledge.

The discussion of feminist standpoint is also the way of answering my axiological position in this study, which refers to the researcher's acknowledgment of the value-laden nature of research where biases are present (Creswell, 2007; Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). More important, however, is the method of such acknowledgment. Specifically, an open discussion on values (i.e., how the interpretation is maneuvered by both researcher and participants through the narratives) should be an ongoing, concurrent process of dealing with values and feelings, as also part of the practice of reflexivity. The tool of this process, which is reflective and interactive expression (e.g., narrating, writing, conversation, observation, arts) brings us to the next philosophical position, the rhetorical question: What is the language of research? (Creswell, 2007)

I used a literary, informal language and made my voice personal throughout the writing process. I engaged in the style of narrative to narrate not only the stories and experiences of participants but also the research process. This rhetorical aspect was an emerging tool of my research design. For example, although I worked with participants, who speak my native language, Turkish, I gave them the options of speaking and writing in both Turkish and English, allowing them to be able to choose and use the phrases of experiences according to the respective, contextual language. Expression and meanings of certain experiences, thoughts and feelings deserved rhetorical attention from this bilingual process as I define, use, and then interpret them with the language of qualitative research. Certainly, this is also another strong advocacy for the active participation of research participants. Cautions and strategies about this point are discussed in the last chapter. Additionally, I acknowledge multiple ways and meaning-making experiences of language. I did not assume and impose that the spoken and written language (which is limited to words, regardless of the language - Turkish versus English) can narrate experiences alone. I rather offered alternative languages of expression to the participants



such as using art, collages, and photographs, and encouraged participants to use these methods with examples from the arts-informed research practice and literature (e.g., Sullivan, 2006; Eisner, 2003; Cole & Knowles, 2001).

### **Research Paradigm**

In light of philosophical assumptions, I next want to share the step of exploration and recognition of the beliefs that guided my methodology: my research paradigm or worldview (Guba, 1990; Creswell, 2007). I personally and professionally identify with feminist, constructivist, and advocacy/participatory worldviews that I strove to use in this study.

The feminist research paradigm refers to using feminist theories and approaches with transformative themes and developments to explore and understand the experiences of specific groups of women (Olesen, 2011). According to Olesen (2011), a dominant theme in feminist qualitative research might be the issue of *knowledges*: “whose knowledges? where and how obtained, by whom, from whom, and for what purposes?” (p. 129). She further emphasizes the recognition of differences among women and within the same groups of women whose multiple identities and subjectivities are constructed in particular historical and social contexts. Olesen reviews the feminist research discourses under several groups: transformative developments, critical trends, continuing issues, enduring concerns, influences on feminist work, and into the future. I am influenced by the first framework, transformative developments, which include and emerge from approaches such as postcolonial, globalization, transnational feminism, and standpoint theory. This framework also addresses the work by and about specific groups of women (e.g., women with disabilities, lesbians, women of color). Postcolonial feminist critiques helped me to question myself and to position my role as a researcher, outside of the dominant club of Western, white and elite feminist researchers. They also required me to acknowledge both my insider and outsider statuses, the risks of othering my research participants, and challenging the dominant and traditional concepts of research methods.

Globalization and transnational feminism, on the other hand, enhanced my interest in and perspectives about women’s work and life conditions in diverse settings. I started to understand globalization as “the relentless, neoliberal flow of capitalism across national borders” that “destabilizes labor markets, induces movements of workers, and

creates new sites of inquiry beyond the nation-state and new interpretations of power as multisited and shifted (Olesen, 2011, p. 130). I also learned to question female agency in a transnational world and among shifting powers beyond the frequently researched conditions of sex trafficking, violence against women, the role of non-profit government organizations, immigration and migrant labor, and so forth. I approached the lives and working conditions of graduate women students, who negotiate subtle forms of mobilization, immigration, transformation, and planning, with a fluid/shifting insider-outsider status in insufficiently organized and supported systems.

Constructivism aligns with my early descriptions of ontological position: reality is constructed in our mind through the meaning making and interpretation of experiences. An advocacy/participatory worldview, in conjunction with constructivism, help deconstruct the power dynamics in our understanding and use of reality and knowledge. Furthermore, it includes the voice of research participants as they engage in the research process with the researcher. In other words, they together work toward an agenda of change about the co-constructed interpretations of lived experiences.

### **Research Design**

International student experiences and needs are studied and shared in the literature to a limited extent as discussed in the literature review. A larger number of quantitative studies, and some fewer qualitative studies (e.g., Popadiuk, 2004; Arthur, 2006; Hsieh, 2007) attended to international student issues, offering implications for mostly higher education and academic advising, and secondarily for mental health and career counseling practices. Acknowledging the significant work and present knowledge about this population, I didn't challenge the efforts and results of any previous work. On the other hand, offering a relatively new and activist transnational feminist perspective to my field, I looked for what's left out in the previous research regardless of their use of traditional scientific methods. Unlike previous research, I asked the question of *what's left out?* not from a Western academic position of talking for the *other* or by only criticizing such knowledge hegemony, but rather as one of the participants of this fluid, multi/cross/trans-cultural context of experiences, who wants to tell the story of, and create a dialogue between, many without othering myself, my research participants, or any women from any part of our world.

I do not see the mission of research as only a contribution to the accumulation of knowledge on one particular field, topic, or group/population. My research mission is constructivist, feminist and participatory, and aims to tell stories that have transformative and transferrable implications and influences for others and a globalizing world. Such stories and voices can fill the holes and answer the contradictions in writing the larger story of how a field approaches a particular topic, problem, or need for understanding. Before describing the research design that I chose and used, I next address the other potential designs that I considered, and explain why I did not prefer them yet what (strategies and tools) I borrowed from them.

I would use a phenomenology if I needed to understand the essence of the international student experience or to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). However, I was not at a stage in my exploration where I had enough understanding of diverse stories and individual voices. Likewise, my aim was not to study individuals who share or shared the same experiences (i.e., being an international woman student at a particular university in the U.S.). Without the stories of various experiences that can be analyzed through restorying, discovering themes, and a chronology (Creswell, 2007), I would not be able to go to the essence. Additionally, it was not my primary aim to analyze experiences or themes in order to generate an explanation and to develop a theory to reach a discourse of ‘the experience’ of international students. I was not interested in reaching large numbers of students sharing a process, action, or interaction (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Thus, I did not use a grounded theory design either.

On other hand, I was aware of and considering some other research designs that I did not ignore or avoid because they had closer characteristics and potential ways to meet my research goals and to answer my research questions. These were ethnography and case study approaches. I will next discuss some reflections and implications from the story of my research, as well as my pilot study projects in order to explain the methods I tried before this study and why I did not choose to design ethnography or case study, but a narrative methodology.

## **Implications from the Pilot and Exploratory Study Projects**

Pilot and exploratory studies aim to test ideas or methods in a qualitative research to “develop an understanding of the concepts and theories held by people you are studying” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 58). I believe that this process of understanding cannot be separated from the whole context of a narrative research study, especially a feminist, transnational, and narrative one that is a constantly living, evolving, and changing process with no clear beginning or ending points. Thus, I framed my pilot study in two main ways. The first one is the story of my research where the nature of data, lived and living narratives are complicatedly rooted in my personal story/experiences (e.g., studying in the U.S. as an international student), professional training and practices (e.g., my prior research, academic courses and projects, my increasing knowledge of existing theory and research), and the ways of which these interact and impact each other, using by thought experiments (Maxwell, 2005). The second one is Practicing Methods that does not only aim to reach early data but also meaningful ways of gathering and processing data through pilot studies. I next describe these two interrelated processes of pilot and exploratory study projects.

**The story of my research.** I believe that recognizing research as a story and narrating its whole process can empower the trustworthiness of a narrative inquiry. This concern is especially crucial for researching across cultures lest a researcher underestimates or ignores cross-cultural dimensions, or becomes colonial, due to his or her cultural lens (Trahar, 2011), as I discussed in relation to my feminist research paradigm earlier. Thus, I do not assume that I am a minority group researcher who can produce knowledge about people from her own country, or other minority groups. I unpacked and discussed the influences of my privileged personal background, as well as my education and professional training in mostly Western and English-medium institutions. However, this was not simply comparing and contrasting myself with research participants. I rather strove to gather, reorganize, and read my personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge (Anderson, 1993), which was an essential part of my pilot and exploratory studies, and entire research process.

I dreamed of being a good storyteller and writer when I was a child. Surviving a the impact of the first Gulf War and chronic health problems in my family, my important

coping mechanisms included keeping diaries, writing stories, and painting about my emotions, and they became strong interest areas for me. Following my expressive and performative career experiments in arts and literature, theatre and dance, teaching drama, and school counseling, my career choices evolved and came together in Counselor Education-Supervision and Women's Studies doctoral programs. As a result of my emerging interest in the intersection of counseling and Women's Studies, I have started to see research as a space for activism where I practice feminist and counseling theories in order to create and develop empowering ways in which people can narrate and learn from stories for personal growth. Thus, as a part of this research process, I first reviewed my diaries, class papers, and other documents to develop a narrative essay of my own experiences as an international student and also as a counselor. I also used this piece as a tool for researcher reflexivity in every stage of my study. For example, as discussed under the data analysis section, there were times that my story and experiences interrupted the process of this research study and caused long breaks from writing. When necessary, I reflected on and shared my own experiences that influenced various stages of this study.

**Practicing methods.** As an integration of and reflection on the projects of my four qualitative research methods and data analyses courses (Qualitative Methods in Educational Research; Feminist Methodologies and Positionality in Research; Feminist Research and Teaching; Multivariate Data Analysis in Qualitative Research), I completed a series of pilot study projects in which I primarily used individual interviews, as well as participant observations and document analysis, to explore the experiences of international students. I conducted several interviews, two of which I transcribed and analyzed to a full extent. The two interviews I focused on were with two women doctoral level students from Turkey. I also gathered and compiled data through ethnographic methods (e.g., conversation, shadowing, and participant observation) about a third woman student and her experiences.

During and after my course projects that focused on women, I also interviewed and had peer debriefing conversations with four male students, one from India and three from Turkey. My goal with these additional exercises was to practice perspective-taking and challenging the evolution of my research agenda. My intense course work and pilot

study projects in the second year supported the significance of exploring the individual stories of international students by exploring several intersecting dimensions of identity and personal experience. Furthermore, my career counseling practice and active career workshop programs with diverse groups of international students have provided opportunity for natural observation, constant learning, and critical thinking on unique individual stories, as well as the shared and non-shared strengths and challenges of being an international student and navigating a career or careers in multiple worlds and fluid circumstances.

The woman interviewees in my course projects shared important commonalities in terms of their background and past experiences prior to coming to the U.S., such as class (middle and high socio-economic class families), having good education in relatively well-known and successful institutions, having clear career interests and passions, being hardworking, perceiving the job market (of their fields) in Turkey as very limited and non-rewarding, deciding on an academic career relatively early in college, not finding the further education/graduate programs' quality adequate in Turkey, and having influential and strong woman role-models around them (who seem to provide support and guidance in planning an academic career abroad).

Two of them had similar early patterns and resources to aid adaptation in the U.S. such as socializing with and getting help from other students from Turkey, who already created a group and community here. They shared similar issues and problems: hesitating to socialize with American students in their first semesters, feeling challenged with the academic demands and especially over-expectations from themselves, reporting both short and long term periods of burden that created certain behaviors and changes such as eating problems, fast weight gain, sleeping problems, homesickness, excessive anxiety, lack of motivation, and their difficulty with speaking the English language (which they addressed in relation to their socialization and also participation in classes and group activities). Their realization and acknowledgment of such difficulties and ways of seeking help (e.g., socializing and connecting with more American friends, exercising, close family relations and support, using Skype communication with their families in Turkey more often) were similar. It was interesting to see that they both detached from the Turkish student groups and communities as time passed (yet chose and stayed connected

to a couple very close Turkish friends), and built a social network out of the big groups such as Turkish Student Association, Muslim Student Association, and European Student Association. They reported that this change was very comforting and it eased the process of their adaptation to the culture in the U.S., while it also envisioned their career interests and planning.

The third woman, on the other hand, was different in terms of her adjustment and adaptation process. I observed her being more introverted. She preferred not to socialize much with students from Turkey, her home country, during the first year. I also observed that she had more direct attempts to connect with students from the U.S. earlier in her first year (some of which resulted in some frustration due to feeling “not fitting into their contexts and activities” such as drinking and football culture/events that she tried). For about a year, I was the only other Turkish person that she spent time with. By the end of the first year, I got to learn more about her challenges beyond adjustment and academic issues, which did impact her studies and life here to a great extent. Many other intersecting issues such as family issues, navigating a long-distance same-sex relationship, financial challenges, and significant health issues intensified her experiences as an international student woman at academic, social, and personal levels. Similar to the other two woman students, she had short and longer-term periods of depressive feelings and academic burden. Unlike the two other women, her primary help-seeking resource was a therapist and a few close friends, until she chose and started to build more relationships and friendships with mostly people from the U.S. The stories that she shared increased my awareness about invisible and silent (and, silenced) experiences of adaptation, resistance, confusion, anger, change/transformation, help-seeking, and so forth that had directly and indirectly influenced her academic development and career thoughts, and vice versa. Her strengths and resilience inspired the planning of this study significantly.

After I reflected on the similarities and differences among these women, as well as many other women and men during my participant observations, peer debriefings, and literature review, I realized that I needed to interview students from a variety of backgrounds who are at different years in their programs. I also evaluated the *time* frame between my questions of life experiences and the nature of answers and stories. These

women and men in my projects talked about experiences they had both prior to and after coming to the U.S. They made connections between not only the past and current stories, but also the current and unpredictable-yet-imagined future stories of the sociopolitical arenas in Turkey, the U.S., and even many other countries that they learn about and consider for working and living. The dynamics and fluidity in their storytelling and complex relations between their perception of changes in Turkey, the U.S., their families, relationships, and health, as well as in their identity and values, urged me to consider theories and models beyond constructivist-narrative career approaches. Thus transnationalism entered into my study and met my need for theoretical plurality and fluidity.

Along with the interviews, my observations (especially of two international student events and a panel, where they shared their experiences with an audience of Penn State staff members) guided me in learning and exercising techniques of participant observation, field note taking, attending culture-sharing dynamics, and other ethnographic methods. With these methods, I encountered more examples featuring similar issues and needs of international students, but I also lost the time and focus in learning about detailed individual experiences with their diversity and uniqueness. I confirmed that my aim was not to study them as a group or culture through ethnography, which would assume they all share a common culture or process. I rather wanted to reach the ones whose voices and stories could challenge the generalized and categorized experiences of international students in the literature. Parallel to the significance of an individual's detailed story, where the emphasis is on (the role and power of) storytelling rather than stories "in a bounded system" (i.e., situated on a single campus) (Creswell, 2007, p. 93), I did not choose a case study either. Although each individual and her story could be taken as a case (or the stories of participants could be re-conceptualized as a case study at the end), it was not my primary goal at the outset. Also, I preferred a less defined data analysis framework than narrative approach offers (Creswell, 2007) because the nature and needs of the data (which are the voices of participants) shaped its own strategy, and process of data analysis, as time passed in this emerging and convergent design.



## **The Decision for the Research Design: Why Narrative?**

Although narrative study is relatively new in the social sciences since its fast rise in the late 1960s as an inter-disciplinary research methodology, “not fitting within the boundaries of any single scholarly field” (Kohler Riessman & Speedy, 2006, p. 426), narrating or narratology is a very old practice through which “we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other’s help in building our lives and communities” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 44). Narratives have much value as historical, cultural, and personal texts and documents for the whole of humanity as a bridge between the past and future. Narrating or narratology, as a method, is a fundamental tool for communication in order to produce knowledge(s) and then to use what we know to survive as we develop more and accumulate the knowledge(s) further. Thus, it is meaningful that narrative comes from the Latin origins of knowing and “to know”. In a journey of research, we seek for knowledge regardless of our philosophical and theoretical assumptions about its nature and utility. As I discussed earlier, I believe/assume that all knowledge is partial, situated, and contextual, as well as fluid with a transnational perspective and mission of creating and continuing dialogue between personal, social, and geographical spaces. Accordingly, my understanding and use of narrative is based on a simple definition of it: knowledge (and expression) of experience as story. In arriving at this definition, I am influenced by Connelly & Clandinin (2006):

“People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study” (p. 479).

This definition and understanding also align with the constructivist perspective that we build reality by narrating or storytelling our experiences in different ways. Furthermore, as researchers, we also construct our research designs in unique personal and scholarly

ways that lead to knowledge, which means and represents different realities in (or according to) different contexts and positions.

“...[Narrative inquiry is] a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social”. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Developing the research activity itself into a story is a fundamental tenet of narrative inquiry (Trahar, 2006; Cortazzi & Jin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and the narrative design helped me step into the transnational worlds of the participants, while collaborating with them to create the current research story.

In summary, the narrative research design of this study was guided by the research questions, reviewed literature, my pilot study projects, theoretical frameworks, and the voices of the participants. The previously discussed overarching research questions that facilitated the storytelling in this study were:

- What are the lived experiences of international women students from Turkey who live and pursue graduate studies in the U.S.?
- What does ‘career’ mean to the respondents/participants in this study?
- What are the connections between one’s transnational experiences and (re)construction of life and career planning?

### **Participants**

Sample size is a relative concern for the narrative inquiry, and varies according to the purpose of a study. It is suggested to have one to six individuals if the researcher wants to collect in-depth data (Patton, 2002). Reviewed qualitative studies, which are close or parallel to my research interest and topic, are based on working with individuals and narratives (or stories) that focused on either one-individual case studies (e.g., Arthur, 2006; Hsieh, 2007) or 3 to 7 individual life stories (e.g., Qin, 2009; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Hinojosa, 2011). In my study I had 10 participants for the interviews and an additional participant who wanted to join the creative participant debriefing meeting. Although this is a big number for a narrative study, it provided a good quantity and

variety of data, given the thematic focus of this narrative study in this under-researched field about international women students.

The participants were international women students enrolled in Master's, combined Master's-PhD or PhD-only programs, and lived close by a large university campus in the northeastern U.S. Although there is a relatively large group of (and increasing numbers) of international students from Turkey, I intentionally chose woman graduate students as a result of my long-term active participation and observations with graduate level women students, as well as my personal experiences and interests, as discussed earlier. The participants had diverse backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability/ableism, geographical origin in Turkey, and education/professional fields. The age of the participants ranged from 26 to 33. Three participants disclosed their racial and ethnic identification during their storytelling: one Circassian (Çerkes), one Kurdish, and one Arab. One participant disclosed her religious/spiritual affiliation as agnosticism, while two participants were questioning their current religious beliefs and the remaining six participants were openly and actively Muslim. There was one lesbian woman in the sample, although she did not directly disclose or discuss sexuality in the interview process. On the other hand, the indirect discussions and *silence* around the implications of sexual orientation created a significant space of diversity. Five participants were in the STEM research fields, while the other five participants were in the fields of social sciences, education, and business management. Moreover, five participants study in the U.S. with a scholarship from the government of Turkey that has implications for their current socio-economic status and future career plans (e.g., visa restrictions, employment authorization limitations in the U.S., paying back costly school loans and penalty fees to the government if they do not return to Turkey afterwards), which is later discussed in greater detail.

### **Sampling Plan**

Narrative studies include one or more individual participants who are “accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive in their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (Creswell, 2007, p. 119). I focused on two questions in my sampling plan:

-What/where are the distinctive stories that are emerging among the potential participants for this research?

-Who are accessible and willing to share (and indeed are already sharing) their stories with courage?

The answers to these questions, especially the distinctive narratives, emerge from my personal experiences or experiential knowledge (Maxwell, 2006), happenstance and relationships as sources of where narratives “come into existence” (Gergen, 1994, p. 280), natural conversations and participant observation field notes (e.g., diary, memos, class projects as pilot data), and professional experience as a career counselor where I encounter many potential participants.

Thus, I used purposeful criterion sampling as the sampling strategy. My major criterion was being an international student (born, raised, and residing outside the U.S. prior to attending a U.S. university) because my purpose was to tell the stories of international student women who experience specific duration and career related cultural transitions in between Turkey and this college town. I also focused on one psychological/emotional criterion: *courage*, defined as “telling the story of who you are with your whole heart” (Brown, 2010, p. 1). This was both a sampling strategy and an ethical consideration for me (especially, as a researcher studying my own cultural group). I observed and reflected on particular women’s pre-existent, parallel interests of using storytelling as an empowering strategy for well-being (Adler & McAdams, 2007), for example, engaging in conversations about some important turning points of their life-stories, revealing (life and career) purposes, sharing experiences/stories of cultural adjustment and transition for meaning-making, and going to therapy and support groups (and talking with friends or in student groups about the meaning and change that comes with help-seeking - to especially encourage others). On the other hand, I did not approach these groups and individuals with a research agenda in my mind, and I did not assume that they would be interested to participate in my study. My research goal and questions, as well as who might be potential storytellers, emerged throughout this process. In other words, I encountered these stories while living my own.

After clarifying my interest and deciding to explore the experiences of international students scholarly, I gave all potential participants this clear statement and

purpose in my pilot study projects: “I am interested in the experiences of international woman students from Turkey because I observe that we are a group of individuals with unique and diverse identities, challenges, and distinctive individual, cultural, social, educational accomplishments. I observe that you are open to share your stories and seek resources with others. If so, would you like to share your story with me in greater detail for me to understand you and your experiences better?” This was an important step in developing ideas for my actual data collection procedures because I wanted the participants to experience and share the meaning and purpose of storytelling as an empowering, transformative dialogue that bridges their personal, cultural and geographical spaces. Furthermore, some other potential participants learned about my research interests and expressed interest to participate after I did my first interviews with their friends, which turned into be a snowball sampling (which I describe as participatory or self-selected sampling).

### **Methods of Recruitment**

Following the sampling plan described above, and a discussion and consultation within my doctoral research committee about the identification and invitation of potential participants, I made an institutional review board (IRB) application that included three major steps of my pilot and preliminary studies that generated the sampling plan, recruitment, and methods for the present study:

(1) The first step was compiling and using my qualitative research class assignments such as interviews, document analyses, participant observations, open conversations, researcher memo and diaries. I didn’t have a research question or agenda in mind before or during the course of these educational exercises, and the class projects didn’t require any IRB permission. As a significant part of the story of my research, they were my lived experiences and they became data after I decided to study the lived experiences of international graduate student women from Turkey. Thus, I organized and synthesized them as sources of knowledge (as described earlier in more detail under the pilot and exploratory studies) with an “ethical attitude” by explaining the narrative research inquiry process to the participants (Josselson, 2007) and sharing the role and use of their contribution to the data through an IRB process. The IRB approved my use of this data set as a secondary data set, obviously without any personal identifiers.

(2) The second step was an integration of the data thus far with the researcher's (my) personal experiences, observations, and the reviewed literature. This integration allowed me to realize and verify not only the common themes, but also the gap in the literature: the lack of specific stories and unique voices that can challenge the homogenization and over generalization of international student groups. Although this second step may not seem to require attention from the IRB, it has a significant role in educating the IRB teams about the history and evolution of particular research projects. In other words, this second step rationalizes the use of the data from the earlier class projects both retrospectively and continuously. It also provides connection to and understanding on current research questions and selection of potential participants, as well as planned and proposed data collection methods for the next steps. Furthermore, this emerging process of integration does not have a certain beginning or an end as a nonlinear, fluid, and continuous process of comparing and contrasting the experimental (class projects) data, personal experiences, and reviewed literature. Grounded on the nature of narrative studies, Josselson (2007) warns both researchers and the IRB members about the risks of assuming that a researcher can predict and talk about everything the narrator needs to know. Thus, this second step was a bridge between the sources of knowledge in the first step and primary data collection in the third step.

(3) The third step was the data collection, particularly the primary and narrative data, for which the procedures are described in the next section.

After the completion of the first two steps described above, I contacted with the women whom I designated, encountered or learned about during my pilot and exploratory studies, which integrated my personal and professional experience, natural conversations, and participant observations as I discussed above. My first contact with the potential participants was through an email that introduced the study and included my recruitment letter (Appendix A). The recruitment letter includes how the research process was presented to the potential research participants for recruitment. In the first emails, I also offered phone calls and in-person meetings to answer questions about the study and process. None of the potential participants requested phone calls or in-person meetings. Out of 14 women that I contacted with, 10 responded back to my first email, and expressed interest in becoming a participant.

## **Procedures and Methods**

Before and during the recruitment, the participants were requested to consider completing all four steps of the study: 1) autobiographical writing, 2) in-depth interview meeting, 3) creative group-debriefing meeting, and 4) participant-check and follow-up emails. All 10 participants completed the second step, which was the major/primary data collection procedure and method for this study, while only one woman participated in autobiographical writing and five women participated in the creative debriefing meeting and activity. Since only one participant was willing to write and sent an autobiography, I eliminated the autobiographical writing step from the methods. I integrated the only autobiography I had into that participant's interview through a discussion during the interview process.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

After the recruitment and confirmation emails, I scheduled individual meetings for the interviews. The first interview meeting was on December 20, 2012 and the last one was on January 21, 2013. The interviews lasted between an hour-and-40 minutes to two hours-and-fifty minutes. They took place at the locations each participant found most comfortable and convenient. According to their preferences, I visited two participants at their apartments. Five participants preferred to meet with me at a public café and two participants at a university/campus café. One of the participants is from outside of town and was planning to visit the area on a specific day. Due to her uncertain schedule with a baby son, she visited me at my house on a weekend day.

In the interview meetings, I first informed participants about the study and their rights. I made it very clear that participants can ask or report any issues or concerns about participation, confidentiality and privacy to my advisor or the IRB office of the university. I explained that the procedures and methods were open to discussion and reconsideration in collaboration with the participants and according to their preferences. I also talked about the potentially emotional and intense process of storytelling and revisiting past experiences, and thus especially emphasized their right to stop participating at any time during the interviews and/or to drop out of the study at any later time (Appendix B). I provided a brief overview of the campus and community support resources that are available to them in case of increased stress, anxiety, or more need to

talk about and work through any topic that may challenge them. I recorded all the interviews and invited participants to ask me to stop the recording when discussing a topic, incident, or person that raises privacy concerns. Only one participant asked me to stop recording at a certain point for a short time in an individual interview.

During my pilot and exploratory studies, I used ethnographic, semi-structured interviews and questions for which I relied on field observation notes and the literature review. This practice helped me to decide using less structured and more open questions in a narrative interview format in which I wanted the participants to be active agents in choosing what and how to narrate. From a feminist perspective, such questions aim to elicit more details, and also address “what is not said, including the unspoken fears and feelings and also unspoken cultural rules and practices” (Grossman & Moore, 1994). Some examples of interview questions in narrative research are “tell me about yourself” or “tell me about your experience with such and such” (Stuhlmiller, 2001, p. 66). The set of questions that I wrote before the interviews and after consulting with research committee members were:

- Tell me about your story.
- What brought you to study in the U.S.?
- Tell me about your goal of pursuing your studies in the U.S.?
- Tell me about your experiences after you arrived to the U.S.
- Tell me about your story in the U.S.

During the interviews, I used these questions, as well as several clarification and follow-up questions. At the end of each interview, I also asked a reflection question: “how was this experience of sharing your stories with me?” This question provided more clarity on the shared stories and themes, as well as the incomplete and silent speeches in the interviews.

### **The Creative Group-Debriefing Meeting**

As I described under the philosophical frameworks of my introduction to the methodology, I strove to accomplish a feminist, constructivist, and participatory process in this study. Therefore, I included the participants in the process of organizing and analyzing data from the individual interviews. After the completion of individual interviews, I invited all participants to come together and debrief about the emerging



themes from the transcriptions according to my early analyses and interpretations. I also encouraged alternative languages of narrative expression by including an activity to create a collage poster during this group meeting, which facilitated ways the participants' reflection on and discussion about the themes that they selected.

I offered three different date and time options for the group meeting. Out of the 10 participants I had interviews with, four participants were able to join the group meeting. Two participants were out of the town for every date option, while three others had schedule conflicts with school and work commitments. One participant expressed her concern about privacy and comfort about joining the group meeting due to a potentially challenging dynamic/connection with another participant. There was also a participant, who was new to the group and new participant, another international student from Turkey, in this group meeting. She expressed interest in joining the group meeting after hearing about it from another participant. Although she was not in the original sample and did not have an interview, she participated in the group meeting. The group meeting was on February 26, 2013 and in a private room at the university library. The first part, group conversation, lasted two-and-a-half hour. The second part, which focused on completing and presenting collage posters, lasted two hours and fifteen minutes.

In the first part, I introduced the purpose and goals of the meeting with an emphasis on the value of including participants in the various steps of the research process. I reviewed the participant rights and also highlighted the confidentiality and respectful communication rules for the group conversation. The main goal of this group-debriefing meeting was a collaborative debriefing about the emerging theme, in order to enhance trustworthiness through participant check and data triangulation (e.g., data beyond the individual interview transcripts, creative and alternative data), and thus I explained that they were not expected to share any personal stories or experiences in this meeting (unless they chose to). I next shared my first rough list of themes (derived from my initial data analysis/thematic analysis) and included related examples (strictly detached from personal identifiers) from the stories when clarification was needed. I asked them identify several themes they found most significant, and to share their opinions and perspectives about them. After the first participant shared her opinion and perspectives about one theme, the others started to respond to her and each other, which

created a natural transition to the group conversation. Every participant contributed to the conversation, and the discussions provided collaborative exploration and perspective-taking on the themes they selected and wanted to talk about.

During the group conversation, participants were also scanning the various visual media artifacts and creative materials to choose pictures, quotes, stickers, and so forth to make collages that reflected their response to the question: “Reflecting on the process of sharing your life stories and experiences in the interviews, what is your current life vision?” The group conversation had a focus on ‘life vision’ that participants discussed in relation to themes such as how they decided to pursue graduate studies in the U.S. and the lack of career opportunities in Turkey in their particular academic or professional fields that opened more conversation about expectations before and after their arrival to the U.S. Thus, the creative collage activity became an alternative language and expression for them to process and share their stories. After they completed the collage posters, each participant discussed what the chosen images, quotes, colors, and so forth, as well as the whole visual composition they created, represented and meant to them for about five to ten minutes. This activity enabled a reflection and closure space for participants to put together and share thoughts on who they are, what they want for their lives and what values they want to actualize in constructing a life and career.

Collage inquiry is a visual and art-informed method of qualitative research, and is used to develop a reflective process, a form of elicitation and/or a way of conceptualizing ideas in research projects (Butler-Kisber, 2010). As asserted by Robertson (2002, p. 2; as cited in Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2011), “collage reflects the very way we experience the world with objects given meaning not from something within themselves, but rather through the way we perceive they stand in relationship to one another”. Furthermore, collage making is understood as a way of “listening visually” (Neilsen, 2002, p. 208), and its reflective process helps to reach the experiences at the affective level when language is not enough to express one’s reflections. Therefore, I thought collages could provide a supportive, alternative way of storytelling by helping participants explore and put together visual story themes to see them as a whole for deeper reflection. In other words, collages were a tool that participants related to, as well as used to construct their own way of reflexivity beyond the directives of a written text or set of questions. They seek

the pieces and create their own collage from “heart to the head”, which allow “reseeing, relocating, and connecting anew” (Mullen, 1999, p. 146). In the present study, the collage activity served primarily as a way to create an alternative language to elicit narratives and themes in other ways of collecting data for trustworthiness of the research findings. Secondly, it served as a way to develop collaborative participation in the process, as well as a connection between the participants to listen and get to know each other in a safe way (without the intensity of sharing stories and emotions verbally). At the end of the group activity, I photographed the collage posters with the permission of the participants (Appendix D).

### **Participant-Check and Follow-Up Emails**

After the group meeting, I continued with the transcription and organization of data from the meeting and the photographs of the collage posters. I completed organizing the blind copies of interview transcriptions and sent them for participant verification via follow-up emails. In the follow-up emails, I asked them to read and confirm the interview transcriptions. I reminded them that they could remove any information or detail from the transcription and therefore the study. I also asked them whether they wanted to add anything to their responses and stories, or to their reflections and comments about the interview and/or group meeting experience. Four participants replied to my follow-up emails in my first attempt. Due to the time restriction of my dissertation completion process (related to my own international student status and work authorization permission and application process), I could not send reminders and other follow-up emails to the participants. I rather focused on the transcriptions and analyses that I was trying to finalize in late April and early May. However, I encountered an unexpected obstacle with my work authorization application and had to delay my graduation to protect my student status (and secure the ability to reenter the U.S. after international travel) until the result was proven to be a paperwork mistake on the part of the immigration services.

On the other hand, I also had to travel to my country, Turkey, two times in the past summer and spent a total of two months there due to family health issues. Therefore, I got distanced from the data analyses during my trips and transitions back and forth while also spending so much time on the work authorization and immigration paperwork. This process shifted my focus from my data and the participants to myself, which was a

complex and challenging experience for me. I felt very overwhelmed and alienated as I was stuck with the uncertainties and negotiations of the timelines and legal issues of my trips back and forth. I wanted not to lose my job, which I also needed to be able to support the work authorization application I already submitted and to reenter the U.S. I also wanted to be back and continue making progress with my research study, yet felt paralyzed with the priorities of work authorization process and family health issues. Nevertheless, in the midst of my own struggles a major incident has re-bonded me with the participants and my study again: the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul and the following summer-long demonstrations by the public in all over the country, which became almost the biggest and most inclusively diverse social movement in Turkey.

I visited Gezi Park myself that summer, and participating in demonstrations helped me see my country and the people in Turkey with new lenses. For example, I realized I was not very aware of and connected to the young generation and diverse groups whose presence and impact became very visible in and around that Gezi Park. I also felt more hopeful and motivated overall, remembering why my work matters. I started to re-read and re-listen to my data upon my return from Turkey in mid-September. I then sent another follow-up email to the participants and wanted to complete the participant-check process that I started in April. In this second follow-up email, I repeated my questions from the first email. Additionally, I asked whether any significant changes occurred in the lives of the participants in the last 6 months (since the interview meetings) that they would like to share, and whether the recent incidents, increased tension (e.g., public demonstrations, Syria conflict) and developments (e.g., the new democracy package, negotiating terms of peace with the Kurdish organizations) had any impact on them or their opinions in any way. I heard back from four more participants in this second follow-up process. They did not have any changes for their transcripts, and compared to the earlier follow-up emails and process, they added more comments about the socio-political context in Turkey. I integrated the data from these responses into the narratives.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a much less defined aspect and process for narrative approach (Creswell, 2007), and therefore it is important to define the role of narrative before

deciding how to analyze it. The narratives are the subjects in this study that embrace the lived experiences in forms of stories: the stories of individuals, and ‘the stories of contexts in which the narratives are constructed’ (Polkinghorne, 1995). The narrative approach is consistent with the visions of the transnational feminist and career construction frameworks of this study, which aimed to give voice to participants and to explore the diversity and changes of fluid contexts within the stories of the international graduate student women from Turkey. Thus, the focus was on stories as a unit of analysis. On the other hand, as discussed in the second chapter, there is a scarcity of qualitative research about international students, especially women students. And there are no studies that explore the life career experiences of students from Turkey. Hence, this study primarily explored themes and patterns across narratives by applying a specific model of thematic analyses that is widely used in psychology and education.

There are a number of other reasons to use a thematic analysis method to explore the narrative data and process of this study. First of all, this study took place in a small college town where the students from Turkey knew each other relatively well. Consequently, some participants expressed their concerns about the risk of being identified through a detailed narrative analysis that focused on and presented in-depth content from several stories. Thus, I eliminated some details from the narratives, especially those that participants did not want me to use (e.g., experiences of physical and emotional abuse from parents or partners, a serious conflict with an academic adviser), and focused on the parts of the narratives that reflected the major themes. Second, I had a relatively big sample for a narrative study. As discussed earlier, it is suggested to have one to six individuals if the researcher wants to gain in-depth data in a narrative study (Patton, 2002). I strove to analyze a big data set that required a more structured and manageable analytical method. As a result, I chose the thematic analysis method with the useful and step-by-step approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). The accessibility and flexibility of this approach allowed me to apply my theoretical frameworks consistently. Rather than looking for only themes across interviews, a narrative researcher listens to the voices within each narrative (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, I kept my focus on stories and voices as the units of analysis. Furthermore, I attended to the other tenets of narrative

analyses such as the process of storytelling, my relationship and dynamics with the participants and the chronological organization of the events (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes and patterns in any data, which is not simply descriptive but also often interpretative (Braun & Clarke, 2006) according to the theoretical framework and goals of a study:

“Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. It can also be a ‘contextualist’ method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, and characterized by theories... which acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’” (p. 81).

To be consistent with my theoretical frameworks, I chose to use the thematic analysis at the latent level, which does not only focus on the semantic content of the data. Instead, it strives to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is what makes it also constructionist to take attention to the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions in which themes and patterns develop.

According to the guidelines of the thematic analysis method, I applied the following six steps for the data analysis: (1) I familiarized myself with my data from the very beginning of the study to the end (although there is no true end to such an inquiry). I collected and gathered the data, and also transcribed the interviews and group meeting myself, which helped to immerse myself in the data throughout the whole process. Except one participant, the participants told their stories in Turkish, so the transcriptions and the data extracts that I worked on were also Turkish. After experimenting data analysis on both Turkish and English transcripts, I found that the Turkish transcripts allowed me to hear deeper meaning from the expressions and phrases of the participants. In other words, my transcription and analysis were more effective through a language that is shared between the participants and me. I translated the stories to English while

narrating them after the thematic analysis process.

I used the qualitative research software NVivo while transcribing, organizing and later analyzing the data. Compared to the older version I used in my pilot studies, the latest version, NVivo 10, provided a more practical and time efficient transcription process by slowing down the voices without losing the voice originality and clarity. It also allowed me to highlight texts and paragraphs by adding notes and memos during the transcription process, and connected those notes and memos between/among multiple narratives (e.g., interviews, group meeting transcriptions, collage posters) and the stories.

(2) I started to generate some initial codes using the process of transcription as described above. NVivo has a separate section for creating codes, called 'nodes', by tagging and naming the selected parts of the texts. In this process, it was important to be clear about using a data-driven, versus theory-driven, approach while selecting stories as units of analyses. My first-round coding was more data-driven, focusing on the whole narratives (as cases) and then selecting the critical stories of interest in each one during the transcription, while conversely my second round was more perceptive to the theoretical constructs as I was re-reading the transcriptions. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), I coded as many potential themes as possible and I included the surrounding data to preserve the context when I selected and tagged a part of the text. This was also an essential part of my coding because I was tagging stories. My initial list of nodes had 149 tags with several references (selected story texts) under each.

(3) I started searching for themes by focusing on the details of the initial list of the nodes. I compared the tags and descriptions in the node list, and I also played with them by grouping similar and different ones through color categorizations and rough thematic maps. The codes/nodes in my list addressed relatively clear themes, which were also parallel to some main theoretical constructs and findings from the literature, which helped me to collate relevant coded data extracts. However, I was very cautious about this consistency between my emerging themes and theories and literature because there were also significantly new and unique potential themes based on some very diverse narratives and complex stories. Therefore, I revisited the data also in terms of the frequency of codes and the numbers of references (stories) tagged for each. NVivo was very helpful at this step too, because the node creation section had all the numbers and

connected data extracts listed under each node.

(4) I reviewed the first draft list of themes before the second step of my procedures, the group meeting. The group-debriefing meeting and collage posters facilitated this step of reviewing the themes by highlighting the significance of several themes while also confirming the meaning of several other themes and sub-themes in collaboration with the participants. The pictures, quotes, and colors on the collage posters were very expressive collections of some strong themes which were more explicitly shared and connected than they seemed on a thematic map. (5) After the group meeting and collage poster activity helped re-group and sub-group more themes to arrive at a final list, I started defining and naming the themes by talking about “the essence” of each and highlighting “what aspect of the data each theme captures” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). This step required me go back to the data extracts and choose strong examples of stories/texts to support the definitions of the themes, as well as the sub-themes of each. In this step, I also considered the literature review and my self-reflexive memos. I determined the final list of four major themes by taking into consideration what the participants most frequently emphasized, what is least addressed in the literature, and what is most connected with me and my reflective observations during the research process.

(6) Defining and naming the themes completed the process of analysis I summarized the thematic findings and shared two to three narratives that I re-narrated with a focus on the stories and data extracts that exemplified the themes. Using the Turkish transcripts, themes and data extracts to construct the narratives in English was a constructive challenge that helped me to realize and acknowledge how much is inevitably lost in language.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research designs, trustworthiness represents the validity of research methods and principles, and also the overall quality of the study. There are different criteria recommended to establish and incorporate into a research study in order to ensure its trustworthiness. In my study, I took the suggestions of Patton (2002) and Creswell (2007), and I used the criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability that correspond to quantitative terms of external validity, internal validity, reliability and objectivity.



**Credibility.** For credibility, or in other words the accuracy of information gathered in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I used many rigorous methods and strategies that are integrated to the process of data collection procedures. For example, using participant group debriefing (including the collage activity) and follow-up conversations allowed data triangulation for comparison of the consistency and significance of information as reported at different times during my study (Patton, 2002). Beyond the data triangulation, I collaborated with the participants for their validation of emerging themes and meanings derived from the early content analyses with participant verification and follow-up emails.

**Dependability.** Dependability is a significant condition to control and minimize researcher bias. As a woman and an international student from Turkey living in the same college town and studying on the same campus with the respondents, there is significant room for consideration of researcher bias. It is particularly critical to attend researcher bias for/during the data collection and analyses processes (Patton, 2002). To minimize this potential bias, I have integrated various methods to enhance the trustworthiness and quality of my study, such as opening it up to additional participants and getting feedback after every step of development throughout a variety of courses, final papers, class discussions, conference presentations, doctoral exams, meetings with faculty, etc. Each step and each person/group helped me to realize a variety of motives and boundary issues in my construction of this study. I have also engaged in constant personal reflection through journaling, psychotherapy, peer debriefing (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007).

**Transferability.** Transferability is the extent to which the findings of a research study can be transferable to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My sample included ten women who are born and raised in Turkey and who came to the U.S. for their graduate studies. The participants represent a good variety of regions in Turkey with experiences in both rural and urban areas. Moreover, they study at different academic programs that diversify their education and career backgrounds in the sample. However, I take this level of diversity in such a small group with great caution. The diversity in this group is an alert to unrecognized or insufficiently explored intersections and dynamics of many other dimensions such as ethnicity and religion, family structure and influences,

individualization and change/transformation, health and wellbeing, socioeconomic class and sexual identity. Thus, the goal of my research is not generalizable, but rather descriptive and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, I believe that what is important to transfer is not only the findings but also –especially- the process of having respondents participate, narrate, help to make meaning of and share their stories with others. In this case, my findings might only and partially be transferable to other women students from Turkey on this particular campus or similar campuses in the U.S., yet the process of my research can provide greater transferability to reach and gather other stories in different locations.

**Confirmability.** Finally, confirmability refers to a clear description of every aspect of a research process so that others can confirm the findings (Hoshmand, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using a variety of data collection methods, including not only the interview transcripts but also group meeting, collages, and participant validation made my data accessible and verifiable. Moreover, working through my own personal, cultural, and career biographies along with a detailed story of my research process provide more transparency for readers to follow and challenge the presented evidence to draw their own conclusions (Polkinghorne, 2007).

International students conducting research in their own countries and/or cultural contexts is an emerging ethical concern (Feng & Jament, 2008). Moreover, several researchers caution against the ethical and political act of doing research in one's own social-cultural context (Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, I considered multiple strategies of validation and I developed a presentable/reportable plan for narrative reflexivity: "the awareness of how our self is related to the social context and how we know it; how that self shapes it yet is shaped by it" (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006, p. 41) by continuing to keep memos and logs, as well as with peer debriefing meetings and adding new participants to the research. For example, in the first year of designing this study, my sample was not as diverse in terms of religiosity. I was having a personal struggle to face stories about religion. On the other hand, I continued reflecting on this challenge by talking to my committee members and writing about this challenge in memos. With time and my personal help-seeking and healing processes, I opened myself to more diversity and voices, which contributed to the trustworthiness of this study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **NARRATIVES AND FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to give voice to the experiences and strengths of a sample of international women graduate students from Turkey, by collaborating with them to gather personal experience stories in order to re-tell and re-story them in a transnational and constructivist career development framework. Therefore, I analyzed the stories in each narrative and also across the narratives through a thematic analysis method. As described in the data analysis section, I followed the 6-step thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke (2006).

In this chapter, I introduce and describe the final list of themes that I derived from a ten-month data analysis process: 1) Belonging and Freedom; 2) Challenging the Systems; 3) Adjustment versus Change; and 4) Staying in the U.S. versus Going Back to Turkey. The order of themes is reflective of their emergence in the participants' stories. The themes (which are centralized by the participants' relationship to home and place) also form a metanarrative of the individual stories to create a coherent, narrative flow for presenting the results. The participants' stories questioned early stories at home (i.e., home country, family, national and political context) and stories of transition, change and new decisions as they stepped into new places (e.g., place of residence in the U.S., new multicultural groups, academia as a space with its own culture and demands).

I first provide an overview of the participant characteristics. Then, I introduce the thematic findings with two to three participant narratives under each theme. Because I have a big narrative data set, I distributed the participants and their stories to support the description of each theme, revealing strong and unique voices that are absent in the literature. As mentioned in chapter three, I used fictitious names to protect the anonymity of the participants, and eliminated or changed potential identifiers in some of the cases such as regions/hometowns and academic departments.

#### **An overview of the participants**

Eleven women from Turkey shared their stories in this study; ten of them participated in the whole process and one of them joined only the group activity to add her voice. The participants had diverse backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability/ableism,

geographical origin in Turkey, and education/professional fields. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 33. Three participants disclosed their racial and ethnic identification during their storytelling: one Circassian (Çerkes), one Kurdish, and one Arab-Turkish. One participant disclosed her religious/spiritual affiliation as agnosticism, while three participants were questioning their current religious beliefs and the remaining six participants were practicing Muslim. There was one lesbian woman in the group, who did not directly disclose and talk about her social orientation in the interview process. Three participants were married and each had one young child (ages 1 to 3). They all gave birth in the U.S. Two participants were engaged with plans to get married in one year and one was in a committed relationship, while the remaining five participants were single at the time of the interviews.

Five women were doctoral level students in the social and educational sciences areas, while the other six were in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. Four of them came to the U.S. and their graduate programs with the help of government scholarships in Turkey, which is a collaborative initiative between the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education in Turkey. This program sends students to the U.S. for their graduate studies with the goal and condition of placing them in faculty positions in Turkey upon their return. Students are not able to choose the location and university where they will live and work. Also, they sign a contract and agree to go back to Turkey after their studies. If they cannot finish their programs or do not go back, they have to repay the scholarship. One of the participants had a Fulbright scholarship in her first year in the U.S., which requires her to go back to Turkey and work there for a minimum of two years to be able to come back and work in the U.S. again. The women who have a Ministry of National Education or Fulbright scholarship have J-1 visa status that requires a 2 year home stay period before they can apply for any new visa or permanent residency/greencard to live and work in the U.S. The other five women had graduate assistantship and financial support from the university and departments in the U.S.

All eleven women spent at least 3 years in their academic programs; the length of their experience in the U.S. ranged from 3 to 7 years. One of them graduated with her Master's in Fall 2012 and did not continue her doctoral study, and one quit her program

in Spring 2013 after spending five years at the Master's level without being able to start the doctoral program, which has significant implications due to her government scholarship contract, as well as for future career and life planning as we learn from the themes and stories in the next section. As mentioned earlier, I used fictitious names to protect the anonymity of the participants.

### **Belonging and Freedom**

Storytelling did not always start with childhood memories in the individual interviews. Indeed six participants started their stories from the last years of high school and experiences of university entrance exams or choosing a university and major. On the other hand, all stories of early life experiences emphasized questions and reflections on belonging, as well as freedom. Participants shared several memories of learning about their identities, and reflected on their meaning for their worldview and later life directions. Belonging was an umbrella theme that grasped the feelings of fitting versus not fitting into one's family, community, culture or nation in different ways due to restrictions on her freedom of self-exploration and exploration of other values and worldviews. For example, only four participants chose their universities and majors themselves. The other six women had to agree with their families' choices for them. All participants made connections between their reflections on (problems of) belonging and later experiences with leaving their families, hometowns and eventually Turkey. In this section for the first theme, belonging and freedom, I share parts from the stories of Selin and Hazar. The intersections of identities, as well as social and political issues of belonging and freedom, are notable in their narratives.

#### **Selin's Story**

When I was a very young kid, in elementary school, my biggest dream was to go to Japan. I did not know anything about Japan at that time, but I just remember thinking that it was the furthest from Turkey I could get. I do not exactly remember why, but I remember these feelings of wanting to get away.

Throughout Selin's childhood she moved from one place to another every 3 to 4 years, changing schools and neighborhoods due to her father's career in the government. She did not have many friends and connections outside the home. She also didn't have many opportunities to meet and get to know other children because her parents were very

strict about her time outside school and home. In a way, she was raised in isolation from the outside world. Accordingly, she remembers feeling lonely and indifferent near others. Selin shared her stories of interest in Japan and also her early childhood curiosity and passion about the moon in substantial detail, and in our interview, she reflected on their connections to her early career interest in becoming an ambassador, as well as to her later decision to pursue graduate studies in the U.S. Becoming an ambassador was originally her dad's career dream, which he was not able to accomplish. Thus, she believes that she was influenced by her dad's story and became interested in it, as it also matched with her own dream to go to faraway places. Thus, her plan was to choose the international relations major of a well-known public university.

After she received a very good score from the national university entrance exam, Selin's family offered her more university options. She was able to choose a very prestigious private university with full scholarship. However, that university was in another city, and it was a big decision for her family to let Selin live independently there. They accepted it but with the condition of her choosing a different major, which would justify sending her to a new city. She accepted their demand, but worked hard enough to double-major in both her family's choice and what she wanted.

Actually, Selin began her storytelling with the day she arrived to her university campus, and described the details of leaving her home and settling in the dorm. Transition to a new life through the university was a very important event in her narrative, which she talked about for almost an hour in our interview. She has very strong memories of her move-in day on the campus, which seemed to shape her sense of freedom and autonomy, and raised questions of home and belonging, as a life-changing experience. Selin described her first day on the campus with tears:

After my dad left, I was standing by the dorms, where the campus ended and the forest started. There was a road there and I was standing and looking at that endless group of trees. It was sort of a picture or feeling as if I was hanging from somewhere, completely free, nothing around me, including any kind of ground. As if I was floating. That's how I could define that change in my life.... But somewhere in my inner layers, there was this later of sadness, sort of having left. I

did not even think I left home because even then I did not exactly know where home was, but I guess leaving what I was used to [with tears].

Selin's tears, in her opinion, were about admitting to what the sadness was about: leaving her parents' home. She believed that she was able to reflect on and make meaning of leaving her parents' home and arriving to campus after several years. She especially remembered her sister's tears; it was the only time she saw her sister crying, and worried that they were each 'truly alone' after she left. For Selin, her transition to college (and feeling sad and free at the same time) meant that she must, "not be sad, not cry and never show any sign of weakness" to her parents: "if you seem sad or weak whatever, then your family will feel the need to direct you, or they will think you can't run your life". Selin acted on her decision to stay strong and self-sufficient by finding work-study opportunities while double majoring and living on her scholarship. Yet, she believes it took many years in college to negotiate the "inner layers of sadness" she felt while striving to have more freedom. However, it was still a restricted practice of freedom for her knowing that she was still very accessible to her parents.

In her senior undergraduate year, Selin spent much effort seeking information and resources for applying to graduate schools in the U.S. Yet, she admitted that she could not take as much time to explore the Master's and doctoral programs or to think whether she really wanted further education. She was still seeking more freedom and looking for ways in which she can have more physical space from her family. Moreover, her girlfriend was planning to pursue a doctoral study in her home country - the U.S. Selin thought that similar career plans could make it easier for them. Most importantly, she believed that the prestige of a doctoral study in the U.S. could help her justify her decision to her parents. She describes this decision in the following passage:

I simply did not want to be in Turkey, because after 5 years in the university, I realized that I was still reachable by my parents and was not fully free. After I saw how much that limited sense of freedom helped me explore and contribute to myself, I felt excited about the idea of getting even much further away. I wanted to be able make my own choices. At that time, I was also with Katie and she is from the U.S. If she was from the United Kingdom, then maybe I would go there.

It took a long time for Selin to plan when and how to tell her parents about her further education plans in the U.S. Her parents did not even know about her second major and she was planning on further pursuing this field rather than what her parents originally chose for her. Worrying about the possibility of her parents' opposition to her plans, she did not talk to them until she prepared a final proposal including financial resources for each step of her applications and travel to the U.S. It required a lot of time and effort for her to explore and secure financial resources. She prepared carefully for every potential question or conflict from her parents: "Preparing a proposal to talk to my parents was more difficult than the actual graduate school applications". After applying and gaining admission to her current program, Selin talked to her parents and achieved her goal when she was able to successfully convince them about studying in the U.S.

After arriving in the U.S., Selin finally felt the safe distance from her family to build an independent life and explore what she really wants for herself. On the other hand, she still had to overcome several significant health-related and financial challenges on her own. She intentionally avoided asking help from her family, because she did not want them know much about and intervene in her life here. She emphasized feelings about having to be strong several times throughout our interview: "I had to be, and I still have to be very strong and self-reliant to protect my freedom and autonomy. So, I can keep my boundaries with my family". In spite of the struggles, it was a very important and meaningful challenge for Selin to make decisions and put efforts towards building a life by herself. She reflected on this experience of freedom by emphasizing that even her mistakes were not worrisome because they were the consequences of her own actions. She was able to make new choices and move on without the fear of her parents' judgment or intervention:

"...[here] my mistakes are mine, I make them, I chose them and I can suffer the consequences and learn the lessons. My mistakes, my arguments with friends, special or not so special moments in life here have me in them, instead of part of me, or me physically but nothing else. I do not feel so much, I don't feel at all under the shadow of my parents".

Selin developed this greater sense of fully engaging in life by also building new connections and relationships and not worrying about her parents' opinions or opposition.



This full engagement with life and feeling true to herself were followed by her recognition of starting to feel at home shortly after coming to the U.S.:

I call a place home for the first time in my life. When I got back from my first vacation/trip to Turkey in my first winter break here, I remember arriving to the airport in the U.S. and feeling a deep excitement. Then, when I put my feet on the ground, I said to myself 'I am home'.

Self-exploration in a new place, which Selin called home for the first time, seemed to give Selin enough time and space to question the meaning of her education/degree. Moreover, the break-up with Katie after a seven-year relationship (and a period of long distance relationship during Selin's first two years in the U.S.) led to questions about the purpose of her time in the U.S. She was confused about the meaning and purpose of her studies. It was difficult for Selin to ask but not be able to answer some questions such as "I study for hours and hours, but what do I produce?", "what happens when I get a job with this degree?", "how do I get a job and how do I become successful or how do I prove the different measures of success that my discipline, or academia in general, use?" Selin reflected on not fitting into her academic program and the lack of understanding and support. Besides her confusion about her academic and career interest, several significant health issues and living with the side effects of her medications continued to be significant struggles that led to a period of not performing at the standards of her academic department. Furthermore, she could not get as timely and constructive feedback from her department, but rather late and harsh student evaluation reports at the end of the first academic years that tested her academic self-esteem and motivation. She decided that her program was not an ideal one for her, but she also did not want to go back to Turkey or take the risk of a change: "because for the first time I was feeling home, and I did not feel ready to change that really, and I felt and I still do feel like I need to feel comfortable enough to think that I can replicate that [home] somewhere else".

In spite of these challenges, Selin was able to seek help and support through therapy and her ongoing fight for freedom in a new home that she really wanted to belong to. She was able to build on her strengths and interests such as teaching and her involvement in a new academic program, which allowed a dual doctoral degree, along

with a more feminist and activist research agenda. Affiliation with a new academic department, changing her academic adviser, and seeing different yet more meaningful possibilities of research topics encouraged Selin to continue her studies. Thus, in a way, she also freed herself from the rigid expectations and standards of her program to some extent. Moreover, she started to get involved in some extracurricular activities and pursued her non-academic interests. Increasing wellbeing, enhanced friendships and connections, and a new relationship in the last couple of years seem to support Selin's current academic progress. She is also developing courage to talk to her family about her sexual identity and long-term plans to stay in the U.S.

Selin's story reveals several early and later experiences of striving for freedom through negotiating her sense of belonging and the choices that others made for her. These personal experiences impacted her educational and career decisions not only before or during college, but also in the U.S. She recently got engaged and currently plans to work and live in the U.S. Although she is still not certain about her fit in academia, she is able to explore and consider alternative career options in the U.S. She does not consider going back to Turkey because she believes she would not be herself there or near her family. However, the recent political turmoil in Turkey such as the Gezi Park protests created new feelings and thoughts for her:

The recent events in Turkey caused me feel guilty for the first time about my decision on not going back to Turkey. I could not resolve this issue but I started to think about it more in-depth. I also started to think more about one's attachment to her country or feelings of responsibility toward one's social group.

In a way, Selin continues to explore feelings of belonging and raises an important question: can one ever free herself from feelings such as the guilt Selin describes even after choosing a new home?

### **Hazar's Story**

Hazar identified herself as Kurdish-Turkish, although she was born to Kurdish parents with 6 siblings in a town in southeast Turkey. She was a very successful student compared to her siblings and peers, and her family and teachers expected her to be a medical doctor starting from her elementary school years. She learned more about educational requirements and long career path to become a medical doctor when she was

in high school, and decided that it was “not an attractive option for a girl”. She wanted a family and children, as well as a social life, more than a career that required such time commitment and dedication. However, her family and teachers insisted on their expectations and kept her in the science-math track in high school, which enables one to choose certain related university majors.

After the national exam, she made a list of universities and majors with the direct guidance from her teachers. Her list included many medical schools and a couple of science-math education and computer engineering programs. She described her reaction to the computer engineering major in the following passage:

I told my teacher that I never saw a computer and I did not know what a career with computers would be like. He only told me that it was a financially very rewarding and promising career path, and that I would certainly have a job after graduation. I thought I would not be able to enter that major anyways, so I did not expect it, but it happened: computer engineering! Luckily, it was at the same university with my sister.

Hazar gave many examples to describe her limited sense of freedom in making her own decisions. However, it is important to highlight that she did not call or name it as lack of freedom. She rather described it in the following way:

When I look back now, I see that Hazar [refers to herself] was not able to make her own decisions at that time. I was very influenced by others’ opinions and suggestions. I was following every advice given. Actually, I was raised that way. I was expected to listen and obey, and not to oppose anything.

From the very first day of college, Hazar realized that she was not in the right major. She did not even see a computer before college and did not understand any of the terminology her professors used in the first classes:

It was not Turkish; it was not English; I was listening and but not understanding anything. I thought they would first introduce us to the basics but they assumed everyone had computer classes in their high schools. I was very intimidated and uncomfortable to ask questions. Thus, I could not learn and did not know how to help myself. When other people asked questions, the professors ashamed them in front of everyone by saying that they should know, and if they do not already

know those basic things, then they should rather just go home. Luckily our education system is very memorization-friendly [sarcastic laugh], so I just memorized everything and passed the courses and graduated that way.

After her dissatisfaction with the college experience in Turkey, Hazar was very hopeful about her education in the U.S.: “I was able to graduate but I needed to learn how to be an engineer, so I thought I can learn it here. I did not have any other options in Turkey anyways...I thought I would learn a language at least.” However, the guidance from the scholarship services of the Ministry of National Education was not as effective. Moreover, she was among the first students who were sent to the U.S. on this scholarship in its first year when there was a big conflict between the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education due to bureaucratic and political dynamics. There was a risk the program would be cancelled. Thus, she was sent to the U.S. too fast and to an academic program that she did not know much about.

Hazar enjoyed her first year in the language school very much. She described the joy of “learning how to learn” and “freedom of making mistakes while learning and asking any questions in the classroom without fear”. Although she struggled with the computer engineering courses, the lack of a stable academic advisor, and the inability to change to computer education program due to the restrictions of her scholarship contract, she kept trying for five years. When we met in person, I learned that she was leaving the university and the U.S. in a couple of days following our interview day.

Hazar emphasized that she questioned the ways in which she makes her decisions and believes in many things after she came to the U.S. She reflected on her last five years in the U.S. and leaving without a degree but awareness and lessons about overcoming her fears about learning:

I faced my fears and my inner fight about not being able to learn. The failure was not easy, but I realized that I should try again and again, and harder and harder, rather than giving up quickly. I continued searching for new ways and sources to learn. I learned how to learn.

Hazar said that praying and staying faithful were important support resources for her. As she learned how to learn and transformed her perspectives on “freedom to make

mistakes and not giving up after failure”, she also reflected on how much she knows about her religion, Islam. Religion was a notable theme that she talked about in detail:

Religion was something based on fear for me. I was advised to read the Koran in a certain way for example. When I made little mistakes, I had big punishments. I think, I was very hard on myself when I made mistakes as a result of growing up with fear. I now think that I was very uneducated about my religion in the past due to constant directions from others and fear of what could happen if I did not do what I was told. But I only knew what I heard from others. Here I read and listened about Islam from many different people and also in English allowing me learn more perspectives. I also learned about Sufism and Mevlana [Sufi poet and mystic] when I was at the university. I now know that God is forgiving and wants you to learn your lessons, make progress and move on. God wants you to learn about yourself.

Hazar described other examples such as the stand-up comedy show, *Allah Made me Funny*, and the movie *Arranged*, which helped her question not only differences but also similarities between the religions. In the U.S., she admired that people were “free to live their religions openly and socially in the public and daily life with no judgments from one another”. She had connections with some Amish people and groups, and liked the way they taught and learned about religion openly as a community. She hoped to have a similar sense of freedom in practicing her religion back in Turkey.

Hazar and her sister were the first girls in their family to go to university and leave their town for school. There was a big conflict in their family about the decision to send them to the city where they went to university. Many family members and relatives opposed to the idea:

Except some family members from my mother’s side, almost everyone warned my father about the risks. Our family is very religious, and so they were very worried about the honor of our family and the impact of sending two unmarried girls to an unknown place in the other side of the country. It is not a good thing to generalize but there is a common fear in many families in the east, ‘what would others say about our family?’ or ‘what if they talk badly about our family?’ However, they did not know that one could be both very religious and also

educated and doing good things for her career. They were not able to imagine these possibilities coexisting at that time, I think. I am happy that my sister and I were able to get our university education and we did not bring any shame to our family. Thanks to God that my sister and I became good models for the other family members, and after us, they started to send their daughters to university too. This makes me very happy.

There is also a surrounding, systemic narrative in Hazar's story that tells more about belonging and possibly Hazar's family's ideals for her. Growing up in a Kurdish family and town, she experienced identity politics and security conflicts throughout her childhood. Her family members expected her to speak Kurdish, but she could not speak and learn as much Kurdish. She remembers that some elderly relatives visiting from Iran sometimes teased her about her limited use and poor accent of Kurdish. She also remembers that her family had to hide their Kurdish music cassettes (because of the prohibition of Kurdish language), which were more historical poetry than music since there was not much written history. People were sharing their history through such music. She used humor and laughed often describing those years:

Actually, I realized that I was Kurdish much later. I spoke Kurdish only with my mother, and I expressed myself better in Turkish. Both of my parents are Kurdish and their traditions were in our house, but I did not identify as Kurdish. This was not a big problem for me, but may be, I started to think about all these things differently here [in the U.S.]. May be, I was not aware of the enrichment of having different cultures at that time. There were many government inhibitions and security measures; it was around 1995. Especially in our town, the soldiers were always looking for some terrorists. Half of the town was a military garrison and it was very usual to hear the guns and missiles. Thus, people did not talk much about the politics and we were advised not to ask about anything as children. Things changed for my younger siblings though. When I started the university, the politics in Turkey was also changing and people were talking about these issues more openly. They started to seek their right to their own identity. I missed that better period [she laughed and made jokes here]... I believe I started to realize my confusion about this Kurdish-Turkish thing when I came to the U.S.

and heard people talking about the term assimilation in one of my language classes. I suddenly realized that I was assimilated but actually not fully assimilated! As if an operation was ended half way. I first thought it was something worse, because then I did not belong to either side. However, I later reframed this as an advantage. I think I am ethnically Kurdish, and my nationality is Turkish. Culturally, I am both Kurdish and Turkish. I believe I can be a bridge between the two sides and show others that we do not have to choose one or the other. And, I now have another situation in the current politics. I am both Kurdish and Muslim; a Muslim, who wants to live her religion fully.

As Hazar mentioned before, her understanding and practice of religion also changed in the U.S. Still, she was worried about not being able to work in a government agency because of her veil. However, ‘the headscarf ban’ was recently lifted in Turkey (in October 2013) after she went back to Turkey following our interview.

As exemplified within the abovementioned narratives, questioning the sense of belonging and freedom have direct and indirect connections to participants’ early interests, choices and later decisions in life. All participants questioned their fit within their families, communities and country in some ways, and framed their courage to get away and explore a new world as continuing efforts in their early battles of belonging and freedom.

### **Challenging the Systems**

While the participants negotiated the sense of belonging and freedom in relation to personal, familial and cultural restrictions, they also struggled with some systemic issues that limited their education or career options, or conflicted with their professional values and ideals. These experiences seemed to have notable influence on the participants’ decision to get further education abroad and to consider employment in a different *system*. In this section, I share parts from the narratives of Gamze and Emel to exemplify such systems and their impact on stories.

#### **Gamze’s Story**

Gamze is from a small town in central Anatolia (the Asian part of Turkey) to which her family migrated from a small village nearby. It was important for her family to see Gamze be successful and reach a higher educational and socioeconomic status.

Gamze originally wanted to choose the Marine Engineering major, which she first heard about and learned from a newspaper that had a special section with information about university majors and programs. However, her family was told that “a marine engineering career path would involve long periods of time at sea away from her family and children, and therefore was not suitable for a girl.” Furthermore, there was a new and growing food industry nearby their town and it was seen as the most prestigious field to choose among the families at that time. Thus, Gamze’s father chose the Food Engineering major for her. She said, “I think Marine Engineering represented my dream to be independent and to get away to explore new worlds”, while her father’s choice of food engineering (and a life planned in the town) represented efforts to increase family prestige. It is a common phenomenon in families with collectivistic and/or conservative values in Turkey that a child’s choices and achievements become the whole family’s existential project.

After graduating from college with a Food Engineering degree, Gamze found a job in the city where she studied, in spite of her family’s insistence on her employment back home. At the first factory that she worked for, Gamze witnessed significant problems in the food production system. For example, she observed that the company artificially produced honey, advertised as natural. There were also several quality control deficits. The company was presenting unrepresentative food samples to the quality control inspectors with false reports. Gamze raised these issues in several meetings, but her boss and other engineers and technicians warned her to stay silent not to lose her job. She offered many options as safer food engineering practices, and also recommended consultancy with some of her university professors, as her own subtle way to warn the company. However, as a young woman engineer, she felt very invisible in that system and thought nobody took her seriously.

Gamze had eating and health problems during the time she worked at this company. Although she struggled physically and psychologically, she also did not want to give up. After several attempts, she convinced her boss to improve the reporting system and renew the reports for the next quality control inspection. This created a big conflict among the directors and other engineers: “they did not trust me, but I had to prove myself before I left that place and to change something, to improve something a little at least”. Gamze successfully updated the reporting system and passed the next



inspections. However, she was aware that she could not change the whole system. Right after the inspections, she quit her job.

Gamze got a second job and experienced very similar issues. The second facility she worked at had severe hygiene problems. Furthermore, the only other woman engineer in the facility saw Gamze as a threat to her position, and did not want Gamze to be active in the same departments and projects that she worked for. While trying to cope with these problems, Gamze learned about the government's scholarship program and the possibility of getting a doctoral degree in the U.S. Although she never thought about academic career before, she got very excited about the idea:

I was expecting a career in the industry to be more productive and rewarding, but I had really big disappointments and I did not want to be a part of that system. I thought my personality was not a good fit for a career in the industry. I think it is all about self-awareness, knowing who you are. I am afraid I did not spend as much time getting to know myself before those choices. When I thought about doctoral study in the U.S., may be, I got excited about the title, a PhD in the U.S. I thought I had a new, big opportunity. I think I was also in a period of confusion. I did not know what to do after my disappointments and discouragement about the industry careers. The other option was a career in government, but my internships in some government organizations were very discouraging too. The women there were knitting and making jewelry all day... I tried to convince several people to start and finish some research samples, which were waiting there for years, but they did not want the interns interrupt their routine. So, I did not really want to have a government job... When I learned about the scholarship to come to the U.S., I think I believed it was just faith; it was meant to be that way. It was also the best option, may be the only option for me.

Gamze learned about academic careers and had her first research lab experience in the U.S. She appreciates the opportunities and work environment in the U.S. However, she thinks she did not choose the right field for further education. She got married and had a child in the U.S., which made her more aware of her life values. She experienced significant conflicts with her advisor when she wanted to change her program or add a minor program that fulfilled her changing interests better. Making a change was also

difficult due to the government scholarship contract. She has to go back and teach in a certain field. She could change her research field, but this would make her and her family stay here longer. Her husband is from another country as well, and he wants them to go back to Turkey sooner than later to “be able to settle down in their real home”.

Gamze challenged the system in Turkey in other ways. Religion and praying were important resources for her during her difficult times before coming to the U.S. and also during her difficult pregnancy and postpartum depression period. She believes that she coped with many difficulties with the help of God, and decided to wear hijab to express her gratitude to God. When she decided to wear hijab, her family and many people warned against it due to the headscarf ban in Turkey, which did not allow women with headscarves work in public institutions. She has a faculty position contract and has to go back to Turkey due to her scholarship. This was a concern for Gamze when we had our interview, yet she was nonetheless resolved to challenge the system and seemed to have some hope for a change in that law. As mentioned earlier, the ban was lifted in late 2013.

### **Emel's Story**

Emel was born and raised in a small village in the southeast Turkey, which was very close to the border with Syria. Her village, and her family, is of Arab descent and also Alevi, a religious group within Shia Islam that has heterodox beliefs and practices. Her family did not send Emel's mother to school, and her father could hardly finish elementary school. They worked long hours at difficult jobs and supported Emel and her sister's education. Emel remembers that her parents talked about higher education degrees and wished she would become a professor. She thinks that she internalized those messages when she was a child, and she wanted to compensate for the lack of education in her family, as well as to actualize her parents' unfulfilled dreams.

Emel and her sister spent a lot of time with their five aunts, who had big influences on them growing up. Her aunts were single and lived together with strict, conservative rules. They controlled Emel and her sister's life as they controlled each other's lives via very close and attached relationship dynamics. Emel believes that her aunts' overly dominant and controlling attitudes led to long-term struggles about trusting others, relationships and intimacy. She shared and reflected on her early observations of gender

structure and questions about inequality and lack of freedom in the very beginning of our interview:

I want to start telling my story from my arrival to the U.S. but my process of coming here is also my process of becoming Emel. The story of my soul. I look at this from a feminist perspective and often analyze it, because I believe what brought me to the U.S. is the fact that my mother never went to school and the gender structure I observed in my family and village. I always felt upset about what I observed and thought that there was something wrong about that system. Even when I was a little child, I thought that life was not supposed to be like that for women. I think I always wanted to get away from that village to a place where women had more freedom. I think this was at the center of my decision to come to the U.S.

Emel worked very hard preparing for the university entrance exams with the motivation of attaining the better education and life that her family and she strove for. She always wanted to study philosophy: “Because I always had questions in my mind. As I said before, questions about the system, about women, all philosophical questions”. However, she went to a law major at the age of 16 because everyone around her insisted that her score was too high to waste for a philosophy major: “If you are a good student, if your math is good and you get a high score, you choose majors like law. But I knew that I was going to quit at some point, but I still went there. I thought nobody would respect me if I study philosophy”.

As she expected, Emel did not enjoy the law school classes in her first year and decided to change her major. However, it is very difficult and rare to change academic majors in the university education system of Turkey. Students have to take the national exam again if they want to change their academic major and university. Furthermore, the university entrance exam system does not allow a student to take the exam for a second time without a penalty by decreasing the score with a different calculation formula. Emel also encountered discouragement from her family and many other people around her. She felt a lot of pressure from people and the system that reinforced the message, “if you start something, you have to finish it”, a very common phrase in Turkey. Like many (if not most) students in a similar situation, Emel could give up in the presence of all these

challenges. Yet, she rather successfully challenged the system and entered the best philosophy program in the country after two years.

Emel enjoyed her major and was a successful student during her college years, but she also continued struggling psychologically. She was living with her sister and started to experience controlling and pressuring relationship patterns between herself and her sister similar to those between her aunts. She did not feel as free when she tried to build a more independent life. After college, when she started her Master's program, she also started therapy to work harder on detaching herself from her aunts and their value system that did not allow her to build relationships and have a *mentally healthy life* in her own words. Emel's therapy also helped her to resolve the conflicts with her parents to rebuild a relationship with them, which she lacked throughout her childhood. Beyond the therapy, Emel also decided to study in the U.S. as a result of ongoing conflicts with her sister and with the goal of reaching a true separation and individuation:

I thought my sister and I had to separate and be physically distant to be able to build other relationships and build our own individuality. This has a big impact on my decision to come to the U.S. because I cried very much and I was first very scared when I learned I was accepted to the doctoral program here. However, I convinced myself that there was no other way to save myself from that situation. I would not be able to feel as brave to come here in other circumstances. But in my situation, I had to get away and come here.

Emel showed the courage to come to the U.S. to build a more independent and free life, and enjoyed having her own room and privacy, being able to travel by herself and make new friends. However, she also had to overcome the emotional turmoil of yearning and searching for love and intimacy, which were suppressed by the value system she grew up with. Emel's transformation through therapy seems to be an important part of her process of challenging the systems that limited her in the past. She described it as a very long and painful operation, which continued until after she worked through her last relationship and break-up at the end of her second year in the U.S. She reflected on the "destructive healing" as the power and impact of her therapy, which helped her through an eight-month depression period during which she also had minimal academic performance and worries about her career. On the other hand, when she was

able to overcome that period, she also felt stronger and more dedicated with an empowered vision on her future and career.

When it finally stopped bleeding and hurting, I also stopped searching for love. I realized that I no longer wanted to put myself at risk. I understood that I did not know myself enough to be in a relationship with someone else. I realized that I never had the chance to learn and practice those things, and I took some risks here too fast. I accepted that I did not need someone in my life to be happy. I especially transformed my ideas about sexuality and learned to protect myself. This helped me to make better friendships and get support from them. I am now very motivated for my studies and I have many exciting projects in my mind. For example, I would really want to involve in a project about empowering women's sexuality.

Emel was able to channel her resiliency, energy and the new meaning-making to her academic and activist projects. For example, one of her writing projects was about the mysterious women suicides in eastern Turkey that, in reality, are honor killings. If a woman is not a virgin or if she runs away with a man, and even when she is raped in some cases, the family forces her to commit suicide by leaving her with a gun or poison in a locked room. Emel explores these suicides as also an act of seeking freedom. In other words, she questions whether some women choose to commit suicide as a way to stop oppression and violence, because it gives them the power to choose not to remain in a life with no other option. She reflects on these questions and finds these cases critical and sensitive in relation to cultural and political dynamics.

In a way, Emel continues to challenge the value systems in Turkey in multiple ways, not only for her personal journey but also as a passion for her academic career. She goes after the questions that she started to ask when she was a little girl. On the other hand, she believes that she cannot pursue this passion and write about these topics that challenge the system if she goes back to work in Turkey. Moreover, Emel is now very committed to maintain and enhance her mental and psychological wellbeing, and wants to stay away from the current social and political turmoil in Turkey. Thus, she currently plans to live in the U.S. after completing her doctoral studies.

### **Adjustment versus Change**

Adaptation and adjustment issues are among the most studied topics in the international student literature. As discussed earlier in the literature review chapter, acculturation models and problems tend to categorize and stigmatize student experiences. The emphasis on adjustment and acculturation issues also overshadows the individual and unique experiences of being empowered by transition, challenge and change in a new culture. While adjustment or acculturation experiences are generally contextualized within a certain time frame and location, and based on the binary of home and/or host culture, *change* as a continuous and fluid concept grasped the unique complexity and personalized meaning of the experiences of women in this study. They all shared stories of change, which started with descriptions of transition to the U.S., as well as some early crises due to several unexpected events and challenges throughout their early years in the U.S.

Accompanying and enriching the change were stories of help-seeking and their meaning-making of cross-cultural experience. Reflection on and negotiation of change seemed to be a notable theme, which also led to a more aware and free sense of self and life vision for many women in this study. They emphasized various changes that occurred in their personal, social, familial, and career circumstances. The intersection and power of changes pointed an experience of transformation, because the participants not only adjusted to or changed within new social, cultural and academic spaces but also got transformed as a result of a more complex, fluid and ongoing process of cross-cultural negotiation and life planning. I strive to describe this process through its three sub-themes of 1) transition and early crises, 2) help-seeking, and 3) changing sense of self and life vision with the stories of Derin, Filiz, and Ebru.

#### **Derin's Story**

**Transition and early crises.** Derin came to the U.S. on a F-2 visa as a newly married wife of an international student with an F-1 visa, which makes her story very different from the other women in this study. An F-2 visa does not allow an individual to work or study in the U.S. unless she can justify changing the visa category, for example by becoming a student. Derin had already graduated from a prestigious university in Turkey where she continued to work full-time and also earned her Master's degree. She

enjoyed her job very much and felt successful and self-sufficient, which were important life goals for her.

As she emphasized at the very beginning of her story-telling, her family always advised her to strive for the best education and career path, and this goal was at the center of her life since her childhood. Especially her mother was very ambitious about Derin's and her sister's education and future career success. Because her mother could not have a university education herself, it was her biggest dream for her daughters: "my mother always told us to be self-sufficient and stand on our own feet". This emphasis on career success and self-sufficiency had a significant impact on Derin during her transition to the U.S. and married life.

Derin and her husband came to the U.S. after her husband was admitted to a doctoral program. He said he would not leave Turkey without Derin, and so Derin had to compromise by leaving her job and make the momentous decision to come to the U.S. with no guaranteed career plans for herself. She had a doctoral program in mind that attracted her interest, and to which she applied, but it did not work out. She realized that the exams, preparation and application process were much harder than she expected. Although she tried twice, she suffered the feeling of (perceived) failure for the first time in her life. She avoided her parents and family, and minimized her communication with them to avoid their questions about her career plans. Her distress and frustration also reflected onto her relationship with her husband. She felt as if she failed at every part of her life during those two years. While she had many experiences such as tutoring, volunteering in book and cooking clubs within an international community and taking a couple of classes as a guest student with the special permission from professors, she still felt lost and worthless:

My vision shifted after I moved to the U.S.; what I want from life and a very different self emerged. There was a different Derin in Turkey before moving here, and there is a different Derin now. I am still trying to reconcile them. Derin in Turkey used to be self-confident and enjoy her life and stayed strong on her own feet. She did not have the fears, self-doubts or issues trusting others. I had a more solid life...I made a big sacrifice by coming to here for my husband. And it is always the women who make such sacrifices, but then you get hurt so much. I

don't know if I would feel as much hurt or regret if I would come on my own or fail if it was my own decision...I thought I can go back to school or eventually work, but when I failed, I felt very worthless and very lost. It was a very painful time for me with a deep emptiness...I wish I could see those two years as a vacation or break and could give permission to myself to not do anything and enjoy those activities. However, my mum's voice was always in my head and those questions: 'you studied so many years and received two degrees, but are you self-sufficient now? What are you doing for yourself? Don't waste your time.'

Derin struggled with these problems that led to more crises in her personal and family life, and after the second rejection from the doctoral program she wanted to join, she decided to pursue a second Master's degree instead of doing nothing: "I gave up those things that I really wanted and had a tendency toward, as well as skills and potential. I had to think what was more doable and reachable for me." She was accepted into a management Master's program by the end of her second year. She believes she was admitted to that program thanks to a relevant undergraduate degree. However, she knew that it was not what she wanted, and it was not relevant to her most recent job in Turkey, or to the doctoral program that she preferred but could not enter. Her decision caused a deeper inner crisis:

I had to push myself to focus on an area in which I did not feel like myself or true to myself. So I was broken into pieces. I was not myself like in the past. I was walking in a new path that required new rules, qualifications and skills. I am not sure which transition and change was more difficult. Being in a new country, a different culture, and coming here with broken arms and wings [a Turkish phrase that is used when one does not have the people and resources that used to help and support her, as well as the lack of courage] or a new education path that was very difficult to pursue without motivation. I tried to be like those other people, who had more management/manager personalities; they were more outgoing, extroverted and assertive. They had many common interests based on this culture and country. For example, American football, bars and drinking, and politics, which is kind of national. Many other international students were like me too. I joined their activities and tried to learn about this culture. I tried to adapt but it



was limited, because I was not able to understand everything, for example, their jokes were very much about this culture. I believe I still tried. In order to succeed at that career, I tried to be someone else.

**Help-seeking.** Derin remained in the Master's program and successfully completed it in two years. She was aware that she got that degree to be able to say that she accomplished something, while she had similar feelings of emptiness and lack of purpose after finishing the Master's program. On the other hand, feeling very different and burnt out in the Master's program made her more aware of her needs for further self-exploration. The challenges she experienced encouraged her to question her decisions and life-career direction. She started thinking about how she can integrate the skills she gained from a management program with her real self, who is more introverted and needs more time on her own to recharge herself. One of her close friends, who had similar experiences as an international student, used to talk about and encourage her to seek help from a mental health professional for a long time. Derin was not aware of her need to seek help and she did not like talking about herself:

“I did not like talking about my problems with other people. Maybe, I did not want other people to know, because it would make me feel weaker. I tried to get out of this pothole on my own and did not reach out to anyone or let anyone offer a hand.”

When Derin finally went to individual therapy after completing her Master's program, she realized that she was lost and she no longer knew who she was and what she wanted for her life. She describes her help-seeking experience in the following passage:

My therapist asked me why I talked about an old Derin and a new Derin all the time. We tried to understand what I missed from my old life and how I can make my current life more fulfilling. We talked about the changes that happened, and that I did not have to do everything that a management career lifestyle required. My therapist reinforced the question of ‘what do you want?’ I explored the things that made me happy rather than the things that the management career implied. I slowly accepted myself with those needs that were important for me to be happy and that they were not bad things. For example, having enough time on my own,

reading a book for hours and saying no to people when they invite me to a social event.

Therapy seemed to help Derin set boundaries between her self-actualization needs and perceived career expectations and direction. Furthermore, she reflected on a much delayed self-exploration process, which was blocked with foreclosed educational decisions in the U.S. and in Turkey since her childhood:

I started to ask new questions in the U.S. ‘Why is my life like this? Where am I? What do I really want?’ I thought I needed to listen to myself more. I did not encounter such questions in Turkey. My whole life since elementary school was always conditioned to be successful in the national exams in order to enter the best possible schools. There was always a goal, but I did not know what I wanted. I chose a major and university based on my exam score like many other people do.

Derin was happy at her job and also enjoyed her Master’s program in Turkey. However, her experience in the U.S., which included feelings of lack of purpose and perceived failure, as well as a changing sense of self and pressures from an alienating career culture (in the management Master’s program), changed the way she questioned her family, cultural and systemic expectations.

**Changing sense of self and life vision.** Derin believes that what helped her most to get out of the pothole she described was her therapy. She thinks that she changed very much in the last six years that she has been in the U.S. Although she still feels some pain when she remembers her first two years in the U.S., she is also happy that she gained new perspectives in a new culture after comparing it with her own culture, as well as values and family norms that were imposed to her:

If I stayed in Turkey, I would continue the same dead-end path and continue running and running in life. Yes, I liked my job, and maybe I could get a similar but better job at some point. However, I was able to stop here. Stop for some time and question myself, my family, and my culture. May be, this was a necessary process for me to become a better Derin, and I am still trying to become a better Derin. It was painful, yes. I lost my self-confidence and felt the failure. But then, the Master’s program here gave me some confidence, I believe. It was difficult,

but I also added new ingredients to myself. I slowly added new inner circles and became a wider circle, like a universe, able to include everything that made me who I was... Earlier I said that I used to stand on my feet and used to be stronger back in Turkey, but actually, maybe, I started to really stay on my feet and be self-reliant here.

In the second part of our interview, Derin was able to reflect on many positive aspects of her process of transition and change in the U.S. For example, she was able to work on a project-based job with her Optional Practical Training (post-graduation work authorization for international students that lasts for one year) after getting her Master's degree. She enjoyed the job's flexibility and online work structure, and hoped to continue working after her husband graduated and found a job in another city. However, the company did not want to get involved in her H-1B visa application process. She had to leave her job and go back to her F-2 visa. Currently, her husband is working with his OPT and his work authorization is longer (up to 29 months) because of his STEM degree. Derin is not able to work until her husband receives a green card. She is now spending time with her newborn daughter and focusing on the hobbies and activities that make her happy such as reading and creative writing, which she explored during her therapy. She reminds herself about the first two years and handles the current uncertainty about her career plans more effectively. She does not feel as stressed and she does not let others question why she sits at home with three degrees now. She values the times that she spent with no big career goals or achievements. Indeed, career means more than a university degree and a job to her now: "Talking about all my experiences now make me think about career in a different way. It is not something independent. I had to change and grow in many ways. For example, I strive for more life-work balance and also consider my family [my baby and husband] when I now think of what career means."

She also has more hope for her future by integrating her interests from her last job in Turkey with the new skills that she built during her Master's program in the U.S. She believes that she will eventually find a job in the U.S. after her husband receives a greencard. On the other hand, she now has more courage to tell her husband that they should go back to Turkey if she cannot find a job in the U.S., because they stayed in the U.S. long enough for her husband's education and career. However, Derin has other

worries about going back to Turkey. She appreciates having more freedom and less worry in the U.S. compared to Turkey:

I am not sure whether I would like to raise my child in Turkey. Things are very unstable and very worrisome there. For example, I am a religious person, I believe in God, but I still feel like I no longer have a place in Turkey. If you are a believer, for example, you cannot fast and then also be a person who drinks alcohol at the same time. I am very afraid that such a worldview will be centralized in Turkey. Many people are imprisoned or harshly judged for sharing their opinions only...I do not know whether I can work in Turkey one day. Maybe in private sector, but not public or government. I became even more aware of and sensitive to the changes in Turkey since I started living in the U.S. Now we consider Europe too, as well as Canada since it is easier to get residency.

When Derin replied to my follow-up email in the aftermath of the eventful summer 2013 (e.g., the Gezi Park protests), she was even more worried about the political situation and felt more discouraged about going back. Thus, she continues to negotiate changes, not only in her sense of self and life vision, but also in Turkey.

### **Filiz's Story**

**Transition and early crises.** After earning her education degree from a well-known university in a big city in Turkey, Filiz worked as a school counselor in the public school of a rural area nearby her hometown. She originally wanted to live far from her family and was able to choose any school she wanted after she earned an excellent score on the civil service personnel selection exam (a nationwide exam that everyone seeking employment with public and government organizations must pass). However, her father put a lot of pressure on her to select a school in her hometown. She thought she could tolerate his plan for a short period of time to save some money and build some experience. On the other hand, her family quickly intensified the control and pressures on her life, by limiting the time that she spent outside home and work and pressuring her to enter an arranged marriage.

Filiz also struggled with problems that stemmed from the education system. She was responsible for 2000 kids as the only counselor in her school, while she was also expected to complete many other irrelevant administrative tasks at the same time.

Furthermore, as a single woman, she was always under the judgmental gaze of her colleagues and the community, and was a source of gossip when she, for example, met and worked with a male colleague at a café. She also had to tolerate the match-maker (görücü) women, who used to come to the school, as well as home, to see and evaluate Filiz as a potential wife for various single men in the community.

Filiz thought she had two options to get away from her hometown and leave her parents' home. One was getting married, and the other was an academic career abroad through a scholarship program that she heard about from her friends. Filiz had pressure from her boyfriend whose impatience for marriage felt similar to the way her father and family tried to control her. Thus, she decided to apply for the scholarship program of the Ministry of National Education:

All these pressures made me want to run away as soon as possible. On the other hand, I always had an interest in an academic career, but I was planning to get my doctoral degree in Turkey. With that in mind, I thought I could get a much better education by going to the best possible school/program in the U.S. before returning to Turkey when I can stand stronger on my own feet. When I think about it now, coming to the U.S. looks like a very independent decision that I made, but even that decision is a result of the impact that multiple people had on me.

When Filiz came to the U.S., she spent her first year in a language school in another university and city. Her transition was very difficult in the first several months: she could not eat much, cried frequently, and suffered depression after also hearing that her ex-boyfriend got married. Learning a new language under these circumstances was a big challenge for her. She questioned her decision and seriously considered going back to Turkey, but she also could not handle the potential feeling of failure. There was a relatively large group of students from Turkey in the city where she lived, and she relied on them a little too much in her opinion. She did not like the fact that they had controlling and conservative attitudes, which reflected tension, pressures and control onto her in similar fashion to what she faced in Turkey. She also had a relationship with someone from Turkey, another international student, during her time of adaptation. She hoped that

the relationship would be a source of support for her, but it was instead an additional source of distress and pressure.

After her first year, Filiz was admitted to a Master's program in another city, which was a good change for her. However, she continued to face similar challenges. There was another Turkish student group, which was smaller and much less conservative. Among this new group of people, Filiz became more self-conscious, and thought that she was a "rural girl who is able to adopt the traditional roles quicker as a result of coming from a conservative family", while the new Turkish people she met were coming from more urban, modern and higher socio-economic backgrounds. She still got involved in the group and spent time with them very often in her first year. However, she questioned her fit in this group. She later realized that she did not like the idea of belonging to one group only, as she was also making friends and spending time with people from another group.

I was close to everyone. I was coming from a background with conservative family members and people around me, and so the other group found me to be similar to them and invited me to dinners and events... This is how religion appears to me, in my heart. I think everyone has the right to be the way they want. I just consider how they treat me.

Filiz described how students from Turkey were in two major groups. One group seemed to have more religious and conservative members, while the people in the other group looked more open-minded and modern. Filiz did not seem to fit into either group completely, but there was something in both groups that she connected to. For example, she was able to connect with the conservative group of friends because she always had such friends in her past schools, given her background. She liked coming together with them and talking about common significant topics. On the other hand, she also wanted to get involved in the more urban and modern group because she enjoyed going to bars, dancing and feeling free.

While she was trying to negotiate her self-image (as a conservative, rural girl in her own words) and transition to a life-style with more freedom, she was able to observe and experience close relationships with men. However, men's attitudes were somewhat confusing and disappointing for her:

I saw that this happened to many other girls too. When you first come here, men from the Turkish group show a lot of interest. They help you and they want to spend time with you. But it is very confusing what they really want... Even those men who look very educated, modern and intellectual have the core macho essence in them. They see women in two groups: those they can have fun with, and those they can get married with. If you are a girl who goes to bars or parties, they look at you in a disrespectful way. I don't understand what kind of modernity this is.

After these experiences, Filiz decided that spending much time with Turkish people was a source of stress for her. She was also very overwhelmed and frustrated with the attitudes of Turkish men. Thus, she decided to limit her time with the Turkish student groups. What helped her to make this decision was also getting closer to her American friends from her department and feeling more support from them. She started to spend more time with them.

I spent more time with my American friends for better adaptation. It was very good for me to a certain extent, but there was something missing. I think it was about the language. I was not able to make jokes like them or understand everything. It becomes a barrier for getting really close in your friendships with them. It is a strange place to be. You are just hovering. I am just feeling like I am hovering.

Besides making more American friends, Filiz also had an American boy friend. Although she still felt the limitations of self-expression in English ("He could not get to know real me when I was not able to express myself to him in my own language"), she felt more valued in this relationship. She was also able to explore her changing values and expectations about relationships without the pressures and restrictions of her cultural background. On the other hand, being in a relationship with someone and even talking about a future in the U.S. versus Turkey led to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety for her. Especially her scholarship and career concerns were difficult to handle. She did not find herself as competitive to plan a career in the U.S. and started to compare herself with her American friends in her program.

At the very beginning, I thought I should compete with my American friends, but then I saw that they have very different career trajectories. There are publication pressures on them, for example, to be marketable for jobs after their doctoral studies. It is true: they will remain here, but I will go. My audience is Turkish. The publications in Turkey are not high quality; they always adapt scales and there are not many qualitative studies at all. I could do more than what's being done, but I lost that competitiveness here. I saw that Americans start 15 steps further than I did. When I was dating my American boyfriend, I suddenly worried about all these things again and especially my scholarship. I would owe so much money to the Turkish government if I stayed in the U.S. And I thought he would not come to Turkey with me, as if Turkey was a hell. I thought I would need to change my plans about my studies, even my dissertation proposal. All these worries stressed me very much.

Despite these worries and challenges, Filiz seems to be very knowledgeable about her field and she is a very hardworking student. She also appreciates the education system here very much, especially the more egalitarian relations between the faculty and students:

The professors value and encourage students' opinions in the classroom here, and they even take notes when their students talk. In Turkey, we used to feel intimidated to ask questions. Professors would talk and behave as if they are the only source of knowledge. As if they would be ashamed if they did not know something we asked.

Filiz enjoys it very much that students and professors all share multiple and different opinions freely, and everyone values each other's perspectives and collaborates with each other. What academically challenges her the most is the language. The first couple of years were very difficult due to her hesitation to speak in class. She was not very comfortable with using English in small group discussions. Yet, she worked hard to improve her English and participate more in the classes with the hope of 'tasting the cream/icing' she describes:

I always liked talking, and in our field, it is very much about talking and sharing. Thus, I wish this education system, this structure, these professor mentality and



styles, and the open-mindedness of people, like the cream (icing) on top of the cake, were in Turkish. All these make a wonderful cake, but the cream is Turkish and it is missing. So you don't get to eat as much...After some time and experience in my Master's program, I am now talking more in my doctoral classes. I get positive feedback from my adviser and professors.

Although the language has continued to limit her experience, Filiz believes that engaging in her classes and building more experience through internships broadened her worldview and perspectives on diversity, freedom and education. After the emotional turmoil of her adjustment and struggles with Turkish student groups and relationships in the first couple of years, Filiz shifted her attention to her academic studies and felt more motivation to be successful to make improvements in her field and education system in Turkey.

Immersing herself in her professional field and building a more confident professional identity seem to help Filiz develop a sense of purpose:

All the negative things that happened motivated my academic studies and future work. I should find even more, and the most meaningful, parts of my work and embrace them. My work will give me my life purpose and motivation. My work is what I will be married to all my life.

**Help-seeking.** Filiz's story highlighted significant challenges and periods of crises in her transition and adjustment to a life in the U.S. Particularly the first two years seem to be the most challenging. While her increasing connection to the academic studies and her professional field has become important ways of help-seeking through developing meaning and purpose after the first couple of years, she seemed to lack help and support resources during the time that she needed it most. Our follow-up conversations with Filiz provided more understanding and deeper meaning about the ways in which she searched for help.

I think I needed psychological help very much in my first year while I was trying to adapt here and also because of the relationship problems. But I did not get any help. I think there are two reasons. First, I did not know I could use psychological services for free. I was still in the language school at that time. Second, and the most important one, was that I was not able to express myself comfortably in

English. If there were psychological counseling services in Turkish, I would certainly benefit from that.

Filiz believes that she utilized other support resources that helped her to cope with the struggles she faced. The major one that she identified is focusing on her academic studies: “I visualized and imagined the academic place that I wanted to reach out, and channeled my energy to that purpose”. In a way, she developed hope about the future, and wants to get even greater strength from her professional development. She also reflected on the benefit of making friends, both Turkish and American, as well as enjoying her freedom here:

Having both Turkish and American friends also helped me. Because after I was raised in a pressuring and controlling environment in Turkey, experiencing fun and entertainment here, being able to go to bars and parties, being away from family and community/neighborhood pressure, taking actions as a free person, and so just having fun were among my coping mechanisms. So, about my freedom, I kinda pushed the boundaries.

As stated before, Filiz was not pleased with the tensions and pressures within and between the Turkish student groups. Thus, the friends she mentions in the above passage are the friends that she made and found supportive after her early, intensive experiences in the Turkish student groups. On the other hand, she still stayed connected to those groups finding them an important support resource to keep, but avoided to spend too much time in: “[Turkish groups and friends] are like fire. If you get too close, you burn yourself. If you stay too far, you get cold. We say this for any human relation in Turkey, but it is more true here connecting Turkish people”. Filiz was able to balance her connections to Turkish groups by making American friends that also allowed more exploration of independence, different values and freedom.

Another way in which Filiz sought help was relationships. She searched for support and connection through a partner: “I was feeling very lonely and I needed to hold on to a branch [a phrase that means ‘I needed support’]. If I could go back to my first semester, I would not start a relationship for only these reasons”. On the other hand, exploring relationships seems to be a constructive challenge in Filiz’s journey toward change and empowerment. She was able to learn about herself through the relationships

she had the courage to build, to end, and to process, especially by comparing the cultural differences.

**Changing sense of self and life vision.** The increasing sense of freedom and comparing her life in Turkey and the U.S. have transformative influences on Filiz. Her story may be interpreted as persistence and dedication for change when we look at her continuing exploration of different values and worldviews (e.g., making new friends, relationships, exploring interest areas in her field, building more practical experience to meet different people and learn about cultures in relation to her professional development) despite her early negative experiences and struggles. Filiz describes the extent to which she perceives changes in her worldview and values in the following passage:

I am now a completely different person after living in the U.S. For example, when I went to Turkey last summer, my mother told me about a 12-year old girl from the neighborhood, who ran away with an older boy to get married. In the old days, I would listen to my mother's judgmental way of talking about it and might even join her in criticizing the girl's action. But now, I first think about feminism, the pressures on girls and women, the community/neighborhood pressure. On the other hand, if I talk about these with my mother, she cannot understand them, because she does not have the life experience and context to understand. She has spent all her life in a small, rural place. So, I now feel very different. The only thing we can talk about now is cooking.

When I asked Filiz how she gets along with her family members in general, her response reflected more perspectives on change in comparison to her family members and her identity before coming to the U.S.:

We seem to get along well, but as long as they do not see. I mean they do not know my real identity. I am now a more Westernized girl, right? But they still know me or think about me as their traditional Filiz, who obeys everything they want and say. Yet, my identity now is much more liberal and feminist.

Filiz mentioned feminism multiple times during our interview and it seems to be an important part of her transformation process. She defines feminism as "an acknowledgment of the fact that religion and many other institutions oppress and

disadvantage women”. She particularly emphasized the way in which she thinks about religion differently regarding her identification with feminism. She explained that religion used to restrict how she lived her life before coming to the U.S.:

Religion used to be more oppressive and had a central role in my life. I used to suppress what I wanted, my dreams, my mind, my brain, my heart. But, it is no longer the case...Religion is now compassion and goodness in my heart and behaviors toward others. It is no longer about what a woman does with a man, living with a partner, or homosexuality. It is not an institution that needs to control or organize these things. Religion is now something that makes me more accepting to every human and to be good. However, I now realize how much it is misused to restrict women’s lives.

After Filiz highlighted the transformation of her religious worldview, she also reflected on the increasing conservativeness and religious lifestyle in Turkey. She worries that she will find the conditions more restrictive on her freedom when she goes back to Turkey. She is preoccupied about how she will live independently under the gaze of her family and a conservative neighborhood. Furthermore, Filiz has concerns about the separation of females and males in public and classrooms. As a future professor in education, she has doubts about the effectiveness of her future students, who avoid communication and interaction with a person of an opposite gender, in becoming unconditionally accepting and nonjudgmental teachers and counselors. She also worries that she might get negative reactions from others if she makes publications about marginalized topics such as sexuality and LGBTQ issues.

Due to her scholarship and faculty appointment in Turkey, Filiz currently plans to go back to Turkey. Her goal is to build a free and independent life there similar to her experience in the U.S. In spite of her worries about the conservativeness and family pressure, she seems to be positive about and committed to advancing her career in Turkey. Her academic career is a source of empowerment for her, which gives her courage and motivation for the future. She wants to use her professional growth and ideas to make improvements in the education system and the institution where she will work in Turkey. In a way, she will continue her transformation in Turkey by also trying to transform the system there.

## **Ebru's Story**

**Transition and early crises.** Growing up, Ebru was a rebellious child, who resisted going to school, doing her homework and performing well at the national school entrance exams. She had two older siblings, who were successful and went to good schools. Her family wanted Ebru follow their path. However, Ebru was a curious child, who followed her own passion in observing plants, animals, the sky and the stars. She made several scrapbooks of her research about well-known scientists. Although her family tried hard to make her study according to the requirements of the education and central exam system, Ebru spent the majority of her time with her microscope, astronomy books, and telescope.

One of Ebru's earliest childhood memories, which she remembers with great pleasure, is the time that her family agreed to host a child from Thailand for a month and half. She was in the second grade of elementary school, and Ebru enjoyed spending time with her and learning about her culture. She believes that this experience made her very curious about different countries and cultures, and she made new scrapbooks of pictures, maps and information about several countries. Besides her daily science experiments in the outdoors, she spent a lot of time learning about different parts of the world.

The university entrance exam was a critical turning point for Ebru. Ebru's family intensified their efforts to prepare her for the national exam during the last few years of high school. They worried about the family's prestige and wanted Ebru to get a good score for the sake of attending a well-known university. Therefore, Ebru expected her family to send her to a well-known private university in case she did not score high enough for an impressive public university. However, Ebru's father's business went bankrupt the year before she took the exam. This crisis had significant financial and psychological impacts on her family, particularly her mother, and made Ebru aware of the importance of going to a good university and becoming a self-sufficient woman in the future. Accordingly, she put more efforts toward preparing for the exam in the last year, and was admitted to a public university with a major in biology. Her family was upset about the result and insisted she take the university entrance exam again to go to a better university: "My family was feeling ashamed to tell their friends which university I was admitted to. After my sisters went to very good schools, my situation was very difficult to

accept for them”. Yet, Ebru preferred to start university anyway, and do an initial preparation year during which she would only study English. She would also use the time to consider whether she wanted to re-take the exam.

After her first year in the university, Ebru’s sister encouraged her to join a work-study trip in the U.S. She spent three months making friends from multiple countries and visiting some beautiful cities, as well as several biotechnology and genetics research facilities. These visits broadened her vision after observing how much more advanced the research was in the U.S. compared to limited opportunities in Turkey. She also met with several students of biology who encouraged Ebru to stay in her biology program and prepare herself for further education in the U.S. Upon her return to Turkey, Ebru decided not to re-take the university entrance exam. With more motivation and a clear vision for future in her mind, she started working harder at the university. At the end of her second year, her grades were good enough to transfer to a better public university, where she found the professors and classes more enjoyable. On the other hand, the faculty and university were not experienced in helping students seeking internships and research activities abroad. Thus, she spent extra efforts to find opportunities to go to Europe for multiple internship and research experiences. She also initiated a study abroad program at her university, which is a European Union education and cultural exchange program called Erasmus. All these efforts were to prepare herself for further education in the U.S., but she felt lonely in the process of walking toward her dream:

I used to talk to my professors and friends about opportunities abroad and my plans about the U.S. However, they generally treated me as if I was living in a dream world. They thought it was too difficult. They also could not give me any ideas or suggestions, because they did not have any experience abroad. I had to work very hard and had to be very ambitious.

Ebru continued building more experiences and connections throughout her college years. After graduating from college, she took a year off to improve her English and prepare for exams such as TOEFL and GRE. She also searched for universities and professors she could work with, and contacted several researchers. Finally, she reached out to her current advisor and they met through a long Skype conversation. Although Ebru had relatively low scores from the admission exams, especially TOEFL, her advisor

recognized her passion in research and supported her in the process of applying to her current university in the U.S. Her advisor also invited Ebru to join a research program in Japan for the summer before she started her studies in the U.S. This experience in Japan allowed Ebru to meet her advisor in person and learn about his research. As a result of these early positive experiences, she was very excited to come to the U.S. and her future plan was to stay and work in the U.S. after her studies.

Based on her experiences at multiple research internship programs abroad, during which Ebru enjoyed non-work activities and made several friends, she expected to have a similar experience in the U.S. However, Ebru's transition to the U.S. was very different than what she expected. She had to start experiments in the lab a couple of days after her arrival, and she realized that her adviser had a very intense research schedule and strict lab time expectations. Although she really enjoyed working in the lab and with her advisor, the increasing workload with classes, research schedule and also teaching assistantship tasks intensified the challenge of her personal and cultural transition to the U.S. and a small college town:

In my first year I was too busy to make friends and develop relationships with the people in my department. Although a couple of my friends were very supportive, we could not spend much time together outside classes and I felt very lonely, which I did not expect at all. I was working all day and coming back home very tired with still unfinished work.

Under the pressure of her classes, research lab tasks, and teaching assistantship responsibility, improving her English has been another significant challenge for Ebru. Feeling limited in using English effectively, she had difficulty to participate in class and needed extra time to complete assignments in her first year. She also had difficulties in facilitating group discussions in the classes that she taught. Furthermore, her advisor worries that she may not be able to pass her comprehensive exams if she cannot improve her English. Thus, this is a big concern for Ebru: "I always feel worried about the comprehensive exams. I have one more year at least, but I always worry whether I will be able to pass them. If I cannot, I will need to leave with a Master's degree only." Ebru was well aware of her decreasing life quality, and noticed important changes in her wellbeing:

I never had a sleeping problem before coming here, but I now have to use medication to sleep. I am always anxious. I think I have an anxiety disease here... I am no longer that joyful girl who could be happy with very small things. Before coming here, I used to have long walks, for example, to relax, but I don't even want to go out and walk now. I do not watch TV or movies. I easily feel bored and everything feels exhausting. I was happy and content in Turkey, but nothing makes me happy here. A friend of mine gave me this [indicating a flower pot] to have something to do, but I even forget to water it. So I can't find joy in anything, and I have lived like this for 3 years now, so I am getting used to it in a way. The only thing that gives me some relief is the hope of graduating early and leaving here sooner than later.

Ebru believed that she could cope with the work stress better if she did not suffer so much loneliness. She was upset that she missed a supportive social life with good friendships that were an important part of her past international experiences. Ebru contacted with some people from the Turkish student group before and after her arrival. She expected to find some comfort in spending time with them. However, she realized that it was too small a group to find like-minded people. She also had a hard time understanding their dynamics including the gossip and the complicated relationships between women and men. Particularly men showed a lot of interest in any new women in the group, but they were not honest and open about their expectations regarding friendship versus close relationship. Moreover, people watched and talked about each other's private lives and relationships to the extent that Ebru always felt under the gaze of a small community. Thus, she preferred to stay away from the group after the first couple of months. She emphasized several times that she was very disappointed with not finding positive and healthy group dynamics among the Turkish students:

Before arriving to the U.S., I made connections and checked the Facebook profiles and groups to see what life was like here. On Facebook everybody looked happy and in harmony. But after I came here, I realized that there are gossiping, pressure, and confusing relationships in reality. I wish someone warned me about this, so I could stay away from the Turkish group from the very beginning. And, I wish I knew how lonely I was going to feel here.



With time, Ebru carefully picked and built friendships with only a couple of students from Turkey. Her unpleasant experience with the Turkish student group also encouraged her to spend more effort building friendships with the American graduate students in her academic department. However, Ebru was aware that friendships were going to be different than the ones in her past international experiences. Many people had partners and even children, so they had different lifestyles and responsibilities. Furthermore, she could see her American friends very rarely after completing her classes in the first two years.

In her second year, Ebru experienced an additional struggle when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Although she was able to see her mother between the academic semesters and talked to her on Skype almost every day, the distance made Ebru more stressed and worried about her mother's health. At the same time, her mother's diagnosis gave Ebru new perspectives about what really mattered in life. Reflecting on the academic stress, workload, and loneliness, she started to think about what happiness meant to her:

I think happiness is having your family and loved ones near you. And, I think I would be happy if I had a boyfriend, for example, and a family one day. I would be happy if I was spending more time with the people I love instead of working too much. I see that the professors are very ambitious here and they have crazy work schedules. I think the professors were more relaxed in Turkey and even in Europe. I realized I need to set my ambitions aside and learn to be happy without the minimum rather than trying to succeed more and more. I learned that all these academic achievements do not bring happiness. What is most important is to be happy with the minimum I have.

As a result of her perspectives about the workload and stress of academia in the U.S., Ebru currently has a stronger inclination to go back to Turkey after graduating instead of remaining to work in the U.S. However, she worries about working in Turkey. For example, she thinks that the academic and research opportunities will be very limited. She is also concerned about the political tension and how it impacts relationships among the academicians. She worries that career advancement in Turkey is too dependent on one's personal connections and political affiliation. As a result of these worries, she

considers the possibility of finding a postdoctoral position in a bigger city, which would create a second chance to experience research and life in the U.S. outside the pressure of her doctoral study. She also wants to explore career opportunities in the industry through a couple of internship experiences in the U.S., which can give her work experience to find alternative careers in the U.S. or Turkey: “I have always engaged in research and academic study, so I do not have any work experience to qualify for industry opportunities here or Turkey”. Thinking about many options, Ebru seemed confused about what she really wants to do, and expressed her worries about going back to Turkey versus living in the U.S.:

Every time I go to Turkey, I observe that my friends and professors are not happy. Many people at my university, who graduated with a biology major, could not even find a job. I am aware that it is a big opportunity to study and have the chance of an academic career in the U.S. On the other hand, I am afraid that I am not able to realize the opportunities I have due to my unhappiness and stress under all this workload. I came here with big ambitions after overcoming many obstacles. I used to feel surprised when people told me they plan to go back to Turkey. Working and living here was my dream. I now question what happened to me in three years and how my thoughts changed this much. I guess it was loneliness and too much work stress. Now the only possibility in my mind is having a postdoc position and trying a different city and work environment. If I still feel unhappy in a new place in the U.S., then I will certainly go back to Turkey. I can also try somewhere in Europe, maybe.

At the time of our interview, Ebru was uncertain about remaining in the U.S. or going back to Turkey. It was also a time that her sleeping problems and anxiety peaked.

**Help-seeking.** Ebru talked about several struggles during our interview. She openly expressed her concerns about anxiety, stress, sleeping issues, and confusion and worries about future career plans. She said that she was not able to use her old strategies of relaxation (e.g., walking, watching movies) and did not have the resources, which used to be most supportive for her in the past (e.g., social life, good friendships). On the other hand, she certainly had resilience and many resources that helped her continue her studies

and overcome challenges. When I asked her what helped her the most, she was able to identify many resources, as well as strengths.

She revealed that she did not consider seeking professional help, because she did not believe that it was something that could help change her circumstances: ‘I did not believe that anyone could do anything about my problems. I thought I just had to leave it to time’. She searched for help for her sleeping problems by going to a doctor when it became an everyday issue. She was able to build a trusting relationship with the doctor and talked to him about her personal struggles. The sleeping medication helped for a while. However, she later preferred to stop using those medications, because they were not effective after a while and did not help her in the long term. Ebru mentioned two things as most helpful: The first was listening to music and reading some self-help books: “I read books that helped me positively reframe and normalize my difficult circumstances, and to be patient to let the time heal my pain. I thought I needed to focus on a hopeful and happy future”. And the second was the support from her family. In spite of the physical distance, she was able to talk to them every day, and they believed in and encouraged her perseverance. She particularly emphasized the support from her older sister who is like a second mother to her. Starting from the time her sister supported her study-abroad experience in the U.S. when Ebru was a first year student, her sister was always available to listen and help her. Her mother’s successful treatment and recovery from cancer helped her tremendously in the last year as well.

Another important support resource emerged in Ebru’s life after our interview. When I followed up with Ebru six months later, she wrote that she was at a better place regarding both life satisfaction and future planning. She was in a relationship for the first time in her life, and was very happy with her boyfriend who was also from Turkey. She emphasized that she changed her plans about going back to Turkey, and she and her boyfriend were planning to stay in the U.S. together:

When we met [she refers to the prior interview], everything was a question mark in my mind. Life used to feel very difficult, and I was constantly thinking and worrying about what to do after getting my degree. And now the best thing in my life is to have some future plans with my boyfriend. This happiness eased my mind and helped with all those worries, or may be, they just do not matter as

much now. As long as I am with my boyfriend, where I live does not matter very much.

This experience seemed to build a strong sense of support and hope for Ebru. It was also parallel to her earlier expressions on what happiness meant to her, and what she expected for her life. She emphasized that a relationship enhanced the change in her life and career vision: “the most important values for me are now health and happiness, not career ambitions any more. With increasing happiness, I started to better cope with the work stress, but I am still not sure about going to a very ambitious and busy research faculty position”.

**Changing sense of self and life vision.** Both personal struggles and happy life events seem to have a transformative impact on Ebru’s changing values and future planning. Although she is still hesitant about remaining in the academic research field due to her ongoing struggle with a very busy research schedule and academic responsibilities, she is more encouraged about the idea of working and living in the U.S. Ebru and her boyfriend’s first preference is to live in the U.S., because they believe that there are more career opportunities here outside academia. Her boyfriend also considers leaving academia, and hopes to get an industry job “for a more normal and healthier life”, they think. Furthermore, they have concerns about the increasing social and political tension in Turkey. My follow up with Ebru was right after the Gezi Park protests in Turkey during which about 2.5 million people took to the streets in 81 provinces of Turkey to protest Prime Minister Erdogan’s illiberalism. There were increasing conflicts and police violence supported by Erdogan’s Justice and Development party (AKP) against the protestors. Ebru made open statements about how these events influenced her:

I am no longer able to watch the news, because all those events make me very sad and hopeless. I think that my mindset is no longer similar to that of many people who live in Turkey. It is now a less attractive option for me to go back to Turkey.

On the other hand, I still feel like it is my country no matter what.

Ebru talked about her observations on the increasing conservatism in Turkey. She heard how political tension and disagreements between people impact collegial relationships and the possibility of career advancements at the universities. She currently finds the near future of her country uncertain and worrisome, which makes her want to give a chance to

live in the U.S. Her courage is enhanced by the support and happiness of a relationship, as well as common goals with her boyfriend. Last time, I followed up with Ebru, she was even happier and more relieved because she passed her comprehensive exams successfully. She also seemed to have an increased academic self-esteem and language competency. However, she was still not sure about continuing her career as an academic or researcher.

### **Staying in the U.S. versus Going Back to Turkey**

Every woman in this study shared her thoughts and feelings about staying or going back to Turkey in substantial detail. This was a theme that revealed the emerging thoughts and feelings about the potential next chapters of the ongoing life-career stories. In a way, the narratives under this theme were yet to be written, but also already under construction. There was one exception: Hazar. As mentioned before, I learned that she was going back to Turkey in a couple of days following our interview. She is one of the women with a Ministry of National Education scholarship. There are four other women in similar situations. However, they are seeking some ways and solutions not to go back, while they still negotiate the decision of staying or going back in their hearts.

This theme gives a deeper meaning to the earlier themes of belonging and freedom, challenging the systems, and adjustment versus change. At this phase of storytelling – staying or going back – the participants were able to reflect on their narratives and what they expect from the future. Thus, they revisited questions such as ‘where do I belong?’, ‘where is home?’, ‘is there freedom at home?’ and ‘can I have career satisfaction and success under social and political pressures?’ They also questioned and compared the circumstances and demands of academic and non-academic career paths in Turkey and the U.S. regarding their post-graduation options and *changing* life-career plans. In this section, I share the stories of Bade, Selcen, and Alya whose narratives seem to include the strongest and most complicated examples of the theme, *staying or going back*, based on their current life and career planning.

#### **Bade’s Story**

Bade started her storytelling from her high school years. She emphasized the challenges of preparing for and taking the national university entrance exam as a vocational high school student. While it is not very common for vocational high school

students to enter a university, Bade was very persistent and did not give up after the first year, when she failed to get a sufficient score on the national exam. She worked much harder in her second year by sacrificing social and sport activities, which were very important to her. After her second attempt, she entered the Pre-School Education program of a very prestigious university.

The first year was devoted to English-only learning at Bade's university and it was very difficult for her to start from scratch. She had to work harder than she worked for the university exam in order to pass the English proficiency exam at the end of her first year. When she passed it and started her major, she felt very self-confident. Since she received solid and practical training about child development in her vocational high school, she was already very knowledgeable and also very passionate about her major. By the end of her undergraduate education, Bade developed an interest in children's physical education in relation to obesity prevention. This interest was also based on her earlier passion in sports and social activities that she quit while she was preparing for the university entrance exam. Accordingly, she completed a Master's program in Physical Education and Sports. After getting her Master's degree, her professors suggested she pursue her doctoral degree abroad, not in Turkey. She also got married after she started her Master's program and her husband was planning an academic career too. Thus, they started exploring schools in the U.S. together. After her husband was admitted to a program, she searched for professors she could work with at the same university and found her current advisor, who had similar interest areas.

Bade's advisor could not guarantee a graduate assistantship to her in the first year, and so her husband and Bade took a big risk by coming to the U.S. on one salary (her husband's graduate assistantship). She could only take a one-credit course and worked a couple of hours per week for her advisor's research project in her first semester. Although it was a difficult transition during which they also considered going back to Turkey, Bade is glad she persisted and stayed, because she was offered a teaching assistantship in her second semester, and following years.

Bade talked about the changes in her (and her husband's) decision about staying or going back to Turkey in substantial detail after emphasizing the difficulties they encountered in their first year. Besides the uncertainty about Bade's graduate

assistantship and financial support, she also struggled with the daily and social use of English (“non-academic English” in her words) and being away from her family. The holidays such as Christmas and Thanksgiving made her very upset when she saw other people getting together with their families while she was far away from her own family: “We had very close and supportive friends and we travelled a lot and enjoyed our life here. But we were still homesick. I was very attached to my family. And, I did not feel that I belonged here. I was always in-between cultures, neither here, nor there.” In her first and second years, Bade’s post-graduation plan was going back to Turkey. However, her thoughts about returning started to change by the end of her second year.

Bade identifies as a Circassian (Çerkes), an ethnic group that was exiled from Russia to the lands of Ottoman Empire and other territories in the Middle East. Being a Çerkes was important to Bade growing up. She was very active in traditions, celebrations and many activities such as folk dance groups. However, this was also something that she had to hide:

When I started elementary school, my dad told me not to tell anyone that I was a Çerkes. There were many bans and taboos at that time. My family spoke our language in our home and we always had big gatherings within the Çerkes community, because people depended on and supported each other despite all those bans, threats and fear. ... This has a big influence on me.

Bade realized the meaning of her Çerkes identity and owned it more strongly and openly after coming to the U.S. She also met some people who told her that she did not quite look like a Turk, which made her say “I am actually a Çerkes. But I am also from Turkey. I have two identities.” She enjoyed being able to talk about her cultural origins openly and proudly here: “It is always at extremes. The cultural groups are always a problem in Turkey. It is black or white; there is no space for gray. The problem about the Kurds is similar.” She also started questioning the ways in which people make religion a taboo and political topic. Bade and her husband are Muslim, but they do not understand the religious extremists who do not tolerate people who are different:

When we go to Turkey and talk to our friends, we see that people have very negative reactions to those who are different. Our university in Turkey was still an open-minded environment. However, I realize that I am now more exposed to

different perspectives and worldviews after being here. For example, I have gay friends and friends from many different races and ethnicities here. It is very uncomfortable to see people in Turkey fighting about different opinions as if they will kill one another. Even among my relatives sometimes. It is always religion and politics that people are fighting about.

Bade worries that religion and politics also influence the dynamics at the universities (e.g., getting a promotion based on one's political and religious affiliation) and hesitates to return to Turkey. Furthermore, religion is something that she still continues to question and understand. After observing people freely practicing their religions in the U.S., she believes that there needs to be more religious freedom in Turkey. On the other hand, she also worries about lack of tolerance and understanding from the religious people toward the others who do not wear a veil or actively practice Islam:

I do not care if people walk around naked or if some cover themselves completely. I just do not want anyone to interfere with how I dress or live. Actually, what I most worry about is my teaching career if I go back to Turkey. For example, I used to teach physical education, play, and things like body awareness and space awareness. There was a student who wore headscarf and long, heavy coats that covered her. She could not move and jump in them...I considered talking to her, but my advisor told me not to. I am not sure how such students can build the physical education habits that they need to carry to their future classrooms. So, my opinion is not about religion, but that girl will be an educator...My friends told me that there are even more students like this now and they get exemptions to attend such classes.

Bade's friends discouraged her from going back to Turkey, citing similar reasons during their conversations. She is concerned about this topic to a great extent. As her stories since high school demonstrate, she is very passionate about her field and wants to educate the best possible future teachers.

Bade shared many other stories from her university years that revealed concerns about going back. For example, at one of the preschool internship sites, she was sent after a group of 6-year old boys with the direction of "make sure they do not start a water fight in the restroom". So, she followed them to the restroom. She believed that the restrooms



for boys and girls should not be separate for that age, and did not hesitate to enter the boys restroom. One of the 6-year olds started yelling at her: “Stop! You are a woman. You cannot enter here. I will complain about this to my dad”. The preschool director had a serious talk with Bade the next day and made it very clear that “females were not allowed to any male restrooms in their school”. Bade tried to explain that the restrooms should not be separated for children at that age, and that she observed some other behaviors in children that should be addressed such as masturbation and how teachers punish this behavior inappropriately. However, the director was not interested in Bade and her friend’s observations and suggestions. In response, they decided to prepare their internship project presentation about this exact topic. The internship project was required to be prepared for and presented to both teachers and parents. Although the director discouraged the topic and told Bade and her friend that no parent would show up, they had about 20 parents in their presentation.

Bade talked about this story very proudly, but she also felt more pessimistic about the current similar situations in Turkey today. She worked very hard to go from a small vocational school in Turkey to a very prestigious doctoral program in the U.S. She worries that she will encounter many challenges if she goes back to Turkey and will have to compromise her professional identity and values:

It is very upsetting to say this, but I now feel alienated in Turkey. My belonging in the U.S. developed more over the years after I had more experience, connections and achievements here, which were recognized. People will not recognize my achievements the same way in Turkey, and there will always be those religious and political tensions.

Bade was getting ready to finish her dissertation and already applying to faculty positions in the U.S. when we had our interview. Although she slowed down with the arrival of their baby, she successfully managed to get her degree. Currently, her husband and Bade actively search for jobs. Bade worries that it is more difficult to find faculty positions in the same location as a couple in the U.S. compared to Turkey. They have stronger connections at their university in Turkey, where they both can work. However, they first want to take more time to search for opportunities in the U.S.

## Selcen's Story

Selcen started her storytelling with an emphasis on the centrality of education, freedom, and her father in her childhood years. She talked about how much her parents valued education for Selcen and her sister, and strove for them to become successful students. Selcen believed her family provided much freedom to choose what she wanted to become, and to learn about life through experience rather than from rules and restrictions. Her father was a police officer, who was very passionate about learning, and he studied computer programming in his own time after work hours. Selcen's comment, "if my father was not born in Turkey, he would be a successful engineer", reflected a common scenario in Turkey: many people from lower socioeconomic status send their children to police or military academies to guarantee a secure government job as an officer. Selcen believed this was one of the most important reasons why her father valued education and his daughters' freedom to choose what to study.

Selcen was very inspired by the long hours her father spent studying at night. She considered a career in engineering during her middle school years. However, learning more about biological sciences and the accomplishments of well-known scientists in her high school years shifted her interest:

If a student is very successful, then she should consider engineering. This was imposed to me by school. But I opened my eyes in high school. I realized that there was a big science world far away that I could only read about. I was not able to see any examples of it, but I read about it and the great life stories and creativity of scientists. I had a very good biology teacher in high school, and he helped me to realize that science world exists.

With a growing interest in science, Selcen made her first career move in the second year of high school by calling a major research institute in Turkey:

I found the phone number of TUBITAK [a research institute in Turkey] and called them. I told the man on the line that I wanted to do science and talk to someone about my interest. I remember his laugh, and he first did not know what to do. Then, he connected me to someone else and that person gave me the name of a professor from the most well-known research university. And that professor became my adviser when I started to college. What changed my life is the

moment I entered the campus of that university. I realized that science was something that I can understand, but they never really teach us about it in school. When you talk about your dreams, they laugh at you, they don't take you serious, and they always say 'it is not possible, be realistic'. However, with this incident, and afterwards going to that university, I realized that I can do anything if I really want to.

Selcen worked very hard for the university entrance exam. Gaining admission to a very good research university was a life-changing experience for her.

On the other hand, the event that shaped who she is been ever since was losing her father in the second semester of college. Selcen's father got sick when she was in the last year of high school. Her family hid his real diagnosis (cancer) and told Selcen that he had only a severe stomach problem. They did not want Selcen get very upset and lose her focus on the university entrance exam. When Selcen learned about the real diagnosis after the exam, her father's status was more critical and he passed away eight months later. Losing her father, who she called her "role model who always talked about a great future and much better life", had a very powerful impact on Selcen. She had a lot of anger toward the hospital and doctors who withheld clear information and options to Selcen's father and family about how much time he had left, as well as the risk and chance of recovery after intense treatments. During his final six months, Selcen could only see her father rarely and from a distance through glass doors. She was in the first year of college, and struggled for so long she even considered quitting college. This experience made Selcen very aware and angry about how much the perceived importance of university entrance exam and achievement expectations caused her lose time with her father and family:

With my increasing passion and love for science, I spent a couple of years isolated with only books and tests. My eyes did not see anything else, except the exam that was going to open the doors for a great future. But my father's loss showed me that I ignored many important things that were more important in life such as my family. It was a major turning point in my life to lose my father. I felt I was about 10 years older in terms of life experience.

Her father's loss also made Selcen question her religion. Her parents were practicing Muslims, and Selcen used to fast with them and study her religion. However, she questioned and eventually lost her faith after losing her father. She became an atheist first, but then felt more like an agnostic. Selcen believes that her father's loss, and the way she subsequently "buried her faith with her father" changed her personality very much: "I focused on science, field work and experiments. I isolated myself from others. Yet, I also became very picky about choosing friends and very protective of my time with family. I became very aware of the significance of time, and how I wanted to spend it".

Selcen spent her college years very dedicated to a science career and future. She believes that she was also very fortunate to have a professor/mentor with whom she worked closely during and after college. Selcen admired and trusted her professor like a family member. This professor had about 20 years of education and research experience in the U.S., so he inspired Selcen to come to the U.S. for further education and research. In her first year of applications, she tried to gain admission to the top universities but could not get a positive result. In her second year, she applied for and gained a Fulbright scholarship, and searched more extensively about professors/researchers to work with. She finally found her current adviser who became another great role model for her. With this new adviser, Selcen got involved in a new expertise area, as well as longer-term fieldwork and experimentations.

Selcen felt very fortunate and excited to start fieldwork with her new adviser and research team in her first year. However, after arriving to the U.S. she realized that her Fulbright scholarship required her to update her student status and visa, as well as work permit, every summer after the school year ends. But the paperwork was being approved in Turkey each June. These procedures and timelines were a huge obstacle for Selcen to travel to other locations and different countries with her research team, which had to leave the U.S. in early May and come back in early September. Selcen contacted the Fulbright office in Turkey, as well as the embassy of the country that the research team was going to work in, but she could not convince them to adjust the paperwork requirements and visa renewal timelines to accommodate her research travel. Luckily, the research team was able to change the plan and chose a new field in an area that is U.S.

territory. This change allowed her to travel with student documentation instead of a renewed visa.

Selcen had several other challenges due to her scholarship and the requirements of J-1 visa status. For example, she could not get a stipend from the university for three months due to delayed work permit paperwork in the process of convincing Fulbright for the legitimacy and importance of her research assistantship position. Selcen put great efforts to prove to the Fulbright office in Turkey her different circumstances compared to most other students. Selcen had stopped using the Fulbright scholarship money after 1 year, but Fulbright still kept her paperwork, which required Selcen to remain in the same visa status. Due to the complexities of renewing her visa and other paperwork, Selcen could not travel to Turkey and see her family for almost four years:

I think my mother and sister and I are very connected due to losing my father. We are like friends. However they have been struggling to be a part of my life through Skype for several years. For example, I have a great relationship here for the last two years that I wish I could share with my family. I would like my boyfriend to meet them... I tried to bring my mother here, but it was not possible financially. This is what makes me most frustrated about the issues I had with Fulbright. I am very worried. I do not know how I will get together with them given the uncertainty of my plans here, and also not wanting to work in Turkey in the long term.

Selcen does not want to go back to Turkey, and the U.S. is the only place where her research area is active. On the other hand, her visa status and scholarship require her to return to Turkey and remain for two years before she can come back and work in the U.S. on a new visa, or on another status such as permanent residency or green card applicant.

About half of the time during our interview, Selcen shared her experiences and thoughts regarding living in the U.S. versus Turkey. Her experiences with the poor medical system at the time of her father's cancer treatment, her critical reflections on the absence of scientific educational opportunities during middle and high school, and the discouragement people gave when she shared her dreams about becoming a scientist reflected her struggles with the system and attitudes in Turkey:

Beginning at the time of the university entrance exam, people told me that I was crazy to pick the biology major and go after my science dreams. They thought that I would not be able to get any good job. Even my father felt the necessity to talk to me about the risk of not reaching a better life if I choose the ‘pure science’. Luckily, he respected my choice after I told him that I was decided to go after my dream. However, most other people did not understand my passion and did not believe in me until I came to the U.S. Once they heard about the U.S., their attitudes changed and they started to praise my career.

Selcen was also aware that she would not be able to gain experience in her interest areas if she stayed in Turkey. After several attempts, she and her adviser were not able to get funding or find any support for her research project in Turkey: “I would not come to the U.S. if I was able to do science in Turkey”.

Another important reason that encouraged Selcen to come to the U.S. was the feeling of “not fitting in Turkey”:

We have a very interesting society in Turkey. Our culture feeds people emotionally very much. For example, our arts and especially music nourished me very much. But other than that, there are many biases, closed-mindedness and increasing conservativeness. Nobody wants to accept a different opinion or perspective... For example, you are either at the leftwing or rightwing. And they call the liberals ‘libos’ [a term that associates the liberals with homosexuality]. They cannot realize and pick the good perspectives from each side and make a combination. You have to choose one side. Also, it is obviously a conservative society, and I have never fit into that. Turkish society does not value what I value, and this bothers me more and more. This hinders your personal development and decreases your productivity.

Selcen stressed that she was comfortable on her college campus, which has one of the most liberal and diverse university cultures. However, she was not truly satisfied with working there after graduation. Although she had a great mentor and built a strong educational foundation in the college and during her Master’s program, she struggled with a toxic environment, as she was able to observe the interactions between students, and also between faculty and staff:

Even at my department, there was no limit to gossiping. Why can't you mind your own business and do your science rather than gossiping about who had a divorce and remarried a very younger woman? People used to spend a lot of time on topics like this. And people were also very jealous of each other, and always had some tension between one another. I never understood why a group of well-educated scientists (half of whom got their doctoral degrees in the U.S.) waste so much time with interpersonal tension. I also realized that you become like them as you stay in that environment. Furthermore, there was always discouragement and pessimism when I expressed my research ideas and goals. They always said 'you can't do that here' or 'it is impossible'. Here [in the U.S.] there is freedom and endless possibilities for science.

Selcen did not expect the U.S. to be what she saw in the American movies before she left Turkey with hope for better education and science experience in the U.S. Accordingly, she valued interacting with the local people and learning the American culture from scratch. Being aware that she did not fit in Turkey, she was eager for a life in the U.S. She highlighted that she never had any issues with the American people and developed relationships fairly quickly. However, she reported some issues with the Turkish people (and student community) as "the only social and interpersonal challenge" she had in her first year in the U.S.:

I was first open to meet and talk to everyone, but my experience with the Turkish people here reminded me of what bothered me in Turkey. I decided to stay away and minimize my interactions with [Turkish students]... They always want to build a very close group and to have constant interaction. They want to learn everything about you and what you do. We do not have an understanding of personal space or privacy in Turkey, and they act the same way here. They also spend hours talking about silly stuff, but as doctoral level students, there are many serious and important things to talk about, for example politics. After I stopped talking to most of them, they gossiped about me. To them, I do not like Turkish people and I always want to make American friends. I am not an American fan as they think, but come on, statistically speaking, how many American people do

you see around compared to Turkish? Of course, I will meet to more Americans. I have no problem with others, be they Indian, Turkish or Chinese.

Her experiences within the Turkish community in the U.S. proved to Selcen that she does not fit into the culture in Turkey, which does not value personal space, freedom and privacy as much. On the other hand, one of Selcen's very close friends and roommates is Turkish. Selcen underlined the importance of this friend who can understand her background and share common experiences. Although they have different opinions and worldviews about several topics, Selcen is very happy that her friend does not judge the differences through bias, and they are open and accepting to one another as close friends who learn many different things from each other. Selcen believes that she has been very fortunate to have her, as well as their third roommate, who is American. She finds home a very peaceful and comfortable place to relax after long hours of school and work. She is also in a committed relationship for two years, which she identifies as another important support in her life despite the uncertainty of her near future and career. Her boyfriend is aware that Selcen has to go back to Turkey and remain there for two years before she can come back and live in the U.S. He supports her for and is willing to move to Turkey or another country with her.

Although it is a very rare case for J-1 students to change their status and waive requirement of returning to Turkey for 2 years, Selcen is determined to try every option to stay in the U.S. People still react to her in the same way, 'it is impossible' and 'you can't do it', yet her story proves that she is good at dismissing discouragements and staying persistent. After overcoming many obstacles to become a scientist, and being recognized with her achievements during long fieldworks and research studies, she has confidence and passion to become a professor and researcher in the U.S. Moreover, continuing to work in the U.S. is very important for her to continue growing her research area. Knowing how her father and several her professors and mentors in the past encouraged her to reach her dreams, she also wants to become an inspiring professor for her future students:

My biggest luck was to encounter great people along my educational steps. I had very supportive mentors that strengthened my belief in the importance of teaching science to students in a way that makes them very curious and excited about it.



Like I did in high school, I still read the biographies of great scientists, and learn how their students also became very successful researchers after them. It is like a family tree for them.

At the same time, Selcen observes increasing competition and challenges in the American academic job market since the 2008 economic crises. She thinks that even her American friends struggle with finding a job without the visa obstacles. She thinks that she must have a postdoc position and several publications before she can apply for a tenure-track faculty position. If she ends up having to return to Turkey for two years, her back-up plan is to develop a joint research agenda with her adviser and friends from the U.S. that might allow her to continue researching and focus more on publications with their data. While she is planning her career between many uncertainties and obstacles, she is also considering the ways in which she can be with her mother and sister in the long term. Keeping the lessons from her early experiences during the university entrance exam and her father's loss, she does not want to be too career-focused and miss her chance to be with her family: "My mother gets older and I do not know how much more time I can spend with her". She feels fortunate that she learned the answer of question, 'why do we exist?', in her early ages. She believes that we exist to be happy. As she was describing a scene from her fieldwork observations, she articulated the meaning of happiness in great detail:

When I'm at the research site for fieldwork...I enjoy the silence and having a lot of time to read, observe, and think. Especially the simplicity of animal life makes me realize why we exist...to be happy. Those animals eat, have sex, and play. Very basic things make them happy. One day I saw a family of bears lying and enjoying the scenery of ocean and islands over a cliff at a place that we call the grand point. These bears make a spot for themselves that we call their day bed. They know how to enjoy themselves. You never see an unhappy bear. They help me reflect on how we are not taught to explore and pursue what makes us happy. There are always expectations and judgments about what we choose to be happy...I want to teach my students to find themselves and go after what makes them happy without missing the basic joys of life.

## **Alya's Story**

Alya grew up in a rural area near a relatively big city in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey. Her father was an engineer, who worked in a factory for some time before deciding it did not make him happy, and that a traditional career path was not a good fit for him. He quit to start his own farm. Alya's mother graduated from high school, but did not go to college due to the social and political turmoil in Turkey in the 1970s: a time of military coups and violent student demonstrations at the universities in Turkey. Alya believes that her parents' backgrounds and experiences had an important impact on their passion and support for Alya's and her sister's education. They did not expect Alya and her sister only to be successful, but also and especially happy: "my parents did not expect us to choose what they wanted, nor did they impose their opinion. They wanted us to be happy". As a result she believes she had the opportunity to explore her interests and freedom to choose and create her career path.

Alya's favorite subject in elementary school was history. However, she later decided that "history is written by those who are the most powerful" and "it is a subjective interpretation and hard to know or prove what is real". For Alya, "if you think something is real, then you should be able to prove that it is real". These perceptions and reflections increased Alya's interest in math and sciences, at which she had also excelled. As she read and learned about well-known scientists, Alya's interest grew: "I thought scientists were like immortal people, and it was invaluable and priceless to make contributions to the world of science". She thought that she would be very happy in any major that allows her engage in science. Yet, she was particularly interested in physics, which was also the area that she had found most difficult. In spite of her struggle, she decided to major in physics engineering in college:

Before the university entrance exam, I listed a couple of science majors as my preferences such as chemistry and physics engineering, but I really wanted the physics. I wanted to prove myself that I can be better at it and enjoy it even more. I chose it as a challenge for myself. My decision was a little childish, maybe. However, I look back now and praise myself for taking that challenge. I never had any regret about it. I made the best decision given the circumstances of that time. Maybe, it was a childish decision, but it is the education and exam system that

expects you to make serious career decisions when you are still a child.

Not long after starting college, Alya realized that physics engineering was not a well-known field and did not lead to many career prospects in Turkey. As a result, she started considering academia and research early in her college years. Furthermore, she wanted to widen her vision, learn about other disciplines for self-growth, and gain diverse skills by taking extra courses such as business and fine arts. However, her advisor did not support her exploration of new areas, arguing that her major and course load were already difficult enough to handle and she did not need to engage in new fields. Alya questioned this attitude and believed that she needed to *explore new worlds*, as she described it. She knew that she had to apply for admission to a Master's program first, but did not have sufficient guidance and support in the process of planning further education:

I now realize that my university was a good public school, but the vision was very narrow. As if they restrict how you see the world. I think my adviser should have guided me better. I wanted to get further education and do science, but I felt very lonely in preparing myself toward my goals.

Alya applied and gained admission to a Master's program at another public university. She was also in a committed relationship with plans to get married after completing her Master's program. Yet, she was not comfortable with her life plan, and thought it was imposed by society:

You graduate from college and join a Master's program, and people wonder why you need anything more or to go any further. You are supposed to find a job after school, make money, get married and then have two children. I call it a toothpaste advertisement family [referring to a long –running advertisement in Turkey that shows a nuclear family of four]. This is what your life is expected to look like. And no matter what you want, you just start thinking this way, restricted, as you stay in that system. I think I always wanted to change this, but I did not know how.

A couple of months before starting her Master's program, Alya's father saw a newspaper advertisement about the scholarship program of the Ministry of Education, and encouraged her to apply. Alya did not expect to get it, because further education in the U.S. looked like a very distant dream to her: "I think it was the lack of vision and

encouragement at my university. An education in the U.S. was just a dream and a very remote possibility”. Alya was very surprised and happy when she was selected for the scholarship. She did not make a long-term contract with the Ministry of Education, which would include a commitment to both Master’s and doctoral study. She wanted to start with Master’s, and to consider doctoral study later in the U.S. She also picked a research/specialty field rather than a certain program or department, which allowed her more flexibility. Because she did not come to the U.S. through a doctoral study plan, and the field she chose was not active in Turkey, her contract did not specify she attend a certain university or institution. In case of returning to Turkey, there is a high possibility that she would be able to choose the public university or institution that she wants to work for. However, returning to Turkey is the last option for Alya. She is most worried about this topic and she extensively reflected on her experiences in the U.S. in relation to her future options: returning to Turkey versus staying in the U.S.:

When I first learned about and got this scholarship, I thought it was a very good opportunity. Honestly, I saw it as an opportunity to get out of Turkey. That is the bitter truth. But, I shortly realized that this scholarship was not a good option at all. Actually, I saw that I had other options such as getting a research assistantship in the U.S. When I got the scholarship in Turkey, I did not think there was any other way to be able to get a Master’s in the U.S. My grades were not very good due to the difficulty of my major. And now I will have to pay this scholarship back in order to avoid the obligation of returning to Turkey and to waive the requirements of my J-1 visa status. I now feel very restricted and I am not really happy.

Alya currently prefers to stay and work in the U.S. She thinks she will need to find a very good job to pay her scholarship debt and also to secure a H-1B visa to work in the U.S. On the other hand, she has been striving to overcome a number of challenges in trying to plan her future career path in spite of the uncertainty of staying in the U.S. versus going back to Turkey. These challenges included self-doubt about her potential for an academic career, worries about being away from her family, and the difficulty of changing her legal status (e.g., J-1 visa and scholarship requirements).

Among many challenges Alya discussed, an important one was feeling overwhelmed with the research expectations and workload, which led to self-doubt about her potential for a research or academic career. Alya had a very intense research schedule during her first three years. She has felt very overwhelmed with the pressure of research and very high expectations of her advisor. She believes there is always an expectation to do better, and she feels she does not do well enough no matter how hard she works. As a result, she questions her potential for a future research career or faculty position. She is most concerned about self-discipline to plan a schedule and manage timelines on her own, which she believes is very important for a tenure-track position. Thus, although most faculty positions provide support for an H-1B visa and even a green card application, an academic career is no longer Alya's first preference:

I am not sure about the academic career anymore, especially in the U.S. I feel burnt out because of both academic and psychological challenges of doctoral study. It is not about the courses or assignments. I knew how hard the schoolwork was going to be. On top of that, there is the challenge for patience. Doctoral study tests your patience and perseverance. I always think about unfinished work on evenings and weekends. There is always some work waiting for me.

On the other hand, Alya believes she is still in the midst of a process and striving to develop herself further. It is still very important to her to contribute to a field of science, and she hopes to feel more positive about faculty/research positions after getting her doctoral degree. When I asked Alya about what made her continue a doctoral program after her first two years at the Master's level, she responded by reflecting on many positive aspects of her studies and experiences. Knowing what she really wants to do was a major emphasis in Alya's reflection on what has helped her most to persist on her doctoral study. She stressed that not giving up, and reaching success after many projects first failed, led to self-motivation and perseverance in coping with challenges. Moreover, her advisor is supportive and she does not feel alone in the process of research and meeting his advisor's expectations. She appreciates that her advisor teaches and guides her not only about the technical parts of research but also the interpersonal dynamics and professionalism that reinforces her interest and motivation: "Many advisors see their graduate students or research assistants as cheap workers who can help them reach

greater funding and publications. I think this diminishes the beauty of the academic world. I am glad that my advisor is ethical and carefully attends to every aspect of my research”. Her advisor’s support and guidance, as well as the originality and excitement of high quality research are among the most important reasons why Alya values a career in the U.S. She remembers the lack of advising and vision in her college years, and worries about career isolation, discouragement, and not having a supportive work environment if she returns to Turkey.

Although she initially introduced her academic challenges and self-doubt as problems, Alya highlighted many strengths in herself and the quality of her education and American experience. For example, on several occasions she encountered bias toward women in engineering. In her first years, the men in some project teams would ask her to be the presenter for the group: “they asked me to be the presenter, implying I’m only the face of the group while they do the real work”. She thought this was due to her gender. Alya’s strategy to deal with and act against bias about women in engineering was avoiding arguments with group members. She rather engaged in the full project and in every step of the work to prove she was truly capable to do the same job as men. She confidently expressed that she only competes with herself and strives to have a better work performance for every new project, which helped her overcome and act against men’s bias and discrimination: “[women] get stuck with thoughts and worries about what others [men] think about their performance and compete with them. We should rather just do the work and become stronger to eliminate their biases”. On the other hand, Alya emphasized that she observes and encounters less discrimination toward women in STEM fields in the U.S. compared to Turkey, and reflected on the reasons in the following passage:

There are certain roles and expectations for women in Turkey, which are still very dominant. For example, marriage and having a career as a teacher allows more time for home and family care. I see this less here. If you are in science or engineering here, people believe that it is because you really wanted it and chose yourself and they respect it. However, in Turkey you might be in a major or field that you did not really want because of the university entrance exam and how the

system placed you as a result of yearly entrance score changes in majors and universities.

Overall, Alya seemed to have clarity on her ongoing passion for science and research, and communicated persistence and hope for a future research career in the U.S. that would also provide job security and a work visa.

Being away from her family was another issue for Alya in relation to her worries about staying in the U.S. versus going back to Turkey. After being raised by a large extended family (e.g., living together with her grandparents and near other relatives), Alya struggled with loneliness and not *being a part of the life back home*:

I know I have great opportunities for education and research here [in the U.S.]...however, I really value family...I worry that my family and I become distant emotionally as a result of the physical distance...every time I go to Turkey, I come back with questions such as ‘is what I do here really worth it?’ There is life going on back at home and I am not part of it. I know that my parents too are upset about the distance, but they try not to show it to me. They support me, and especially my mom is able to deal with it, thinking this is a temporary time that I am away. My dad, on the other hand, has always wanted me to explore new worlds and other possibilities...this is why a doctoral study is a very psychological challenge and a test for patience and coping. You come here leaving everything behind, and you don’t know what’s next...you should be really honest to yourself about doing what you really want to do and whether you are really happy. Some people do this just because a PhD degree in the U.S. sounds very prestigious. I believe I am good at doing honest self-reflection, so I am able to handle all these challenges.

Living far away from her family is a significant challenge for Alya, and she believes this is the only reason she is not as happy in the U.S. as she could be. She hopes to live and work in the U.S. if she can resolve the complexities of her J-1 visa status. On the other hand, she worries about feeling lonely. She also has concerns about building a family in the U.S. After an early relationship that ended with a discouraging break-up in her first year in the U.S., she had prioritized and focused heavily on her academic work. Since then she thinks she could not find a good balance between her work and life. She

thinks she does not have enough time to be open for a relationship while she also believes that it is a very unlikely to encounter a compatible person she can respect and love. Alya's hope and thoughts on having a family and children after graduating and gaining more economic power were more explicitly reflected in the pictures/images she used in her collage.

Alya gave several reasons/examples for her desire to stay in the U.S. and not go back to Turkey, including the increasing conservativeness in Turkey, collectivism and community pressure that restrict one's freedom, and the lack of sufficiently funded and advanced research facilities. Alya particularly emphasized her worries about religion becoming a political tool that's increasingly visible in education and social life. She believes increasing religiosity and conservatism in Turkey reinforce community and neighborhood pressure. She also observes a worrisome polarization between people who have different perspectives, as well as desensitization against people's reactions to change and impositions:

When you look at Turkey from outside you see and realize what's going on more clearly. In Turkey your awareness is weakened and you become desensitized as a result of being exposed to everything every day and having a very busy life. When I first came to the U.S., I used to feel angry and offended when people call me Middle Eastern and approach me with biases [earlier in the interview, she talked about these experiences in her first year in the U.S. when people used to avoid her after learning she is from Turkey and is Muslim]. My feelings of nationalism and a desire to defend my country against generalizations were triggered. However, now, when I look from outside, I think we should accept that we have a long way to go... in terms of social development and education, for example. With the increasing impact of religion now, education and social pressures are even more problematic, especially the increasing religious content in schools. They say 'elective courses', but it is the only option so it is compulsory elective. Also, social pressures...people believe they have the right to judge others' lifestyles. They always think and live collectively and pressure each other. This happens more now as a result of more religiosity and polarization between people. People who assume they are Muslim are not aware that Islam as a religion



does not value enforcement...I don't understand why religion permeates everyday social life this much. I am surprised that even my friends in Turkey cannot see this and just say 'but our economy is getting better'. They do not see the real problem and this upsets me...I am not sure whether I can raise a child in that education system. I am not happy about what I observe. It is where you lived for more than 20 years. It is your country, your nation, right? Isn't it very scary to feel so scared of going back to Turkey?

Alya has several friends who received the same scholarship she did, and are now back in Turkey. They communicate and she hears about their experiences of readjusting to Turkey. She is very intimidated by her friend's experiences, which reflect unhappiness and lack of belonging:

I did not have a single friend who went back to Turkey and is happy with her life. This is a very painful thing. You do not feel belonging there; you also do not feel belonging here. This gets more intensified when you are back in Turkey. Because when you are here [in the U.S.] you are able to plan the rest of your life. In spite of the visa problems, you have options. But when you are back in Turkey, you are no longer the same person who left Turkey 4-5 years ago. Your thoughts and your life changed. However, you are also no longer here [in the U.S.]. My friends miss the life in the U.S. But they also used to miss Turkey when they were here. It is complicated. I do not exactly understand this situation. I guess they are not really happy in either place.

For Alya, staying in the U.S. versus going back to Turkey is a topic that is beyond her control. She hopes to be successful in finding a good job in the U.S., convincing the Ministry of Education about waiving her visa restrictions, and changing her visa status in the U.S. Despite the uncertainty of the legal process, she is currently maintaining a great sense of hope and motivation, as well as openness to future options of career pathways.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary and Discussion of Findings

The major purpose of this study was to confront the silence and lack of individual voices in the literature about the generalized stories and categorized experiences of international students, particularly women from a specific yet diverse background. I strove to narrow my focus to examine the lived career experiences of these women while analyzing the stories from a transnational feminist framework, in order to challenge the perceptions about *women in Turkey*, *third world women*, *women from developing countries*, *Muslim women* and so forth, and thereby to give voice to their diverse experiences in shared and non-shared cultural and historical contexts. I collaborated with eleven international women graduate students from Turkey, whose narratives emerged from ten individual interviews and were explored through a thematic analysis, as well as in collaboration with the participants during a creative group-debriefing meeting and follow up conversations (in person and via email).

My initial plan was to analyze and report the themes from the stories in this study with a greater focus on the career themes and by using short excerpts from each story. However, my early analysis and writing experiences constructively challenged me to realize the importance of giving more space and voice to each story, to be able to capture and present the essence of stories and the metanarrative they created. The metanarrative was centralized by the participants' relationship to home (i.e., home country, family, national and political context) and place (i.e., place of residence in the U.S., new multicultural groups, academia as a space with its own culture and demands). The themes addressed a coherent, narrative *journey* that included reflections on (1) feelings of belonging to and freedom in Turkey and the U.S., (2) actions of challenging various systems in both Turkey and the U.S., (3) the experiences of transition, early crises, adjustment and change/transformation in the U.S., and (4) thoughts and feelings about staying in the U.S. versus going back to Turkey.

This narrative journey and its themes had clear and strong connections to and implications for the life-career development of the participants. For example, a major observation was that the participants have become active agents of their life career

circumstances and decisions as a result of greater personal and cultural awareness in a new environment and more freedom to practice new worldviews. However, the emergence of a life-career trajectory was not a central theme of the stories; rather it was based on and surrounded by the participants' greater emphasis on personal, social, and cultural experiences and *transformation*, which seem to be enhanced by their changing relationship with home and places that they physically and mentally travel between.

### **Belonging and Freedom**

The participants' descriptions of early life experiences addressed the importance of identity, which has various dimensions such as gender, social class, nationality, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, religiosity/spirituality, and political worldview. In the diverse personal, social and political context of each story, each participant questioned and reflected on the meaning of her identity in relation to perceptions of belonging and freedom in Turkey, which seemed to have direct and indirect influences on the decision to study and live in the U.S. The statements 'I felt different and did not fit in Turkey' and 'I was not free to be myself and to choose for myself' were common among the participants.

In most cases, the women in this study realized or questioned their identities (e.g., gender, sexuality, class, nationality) and related emotions after they moved to the U.S. They also seemed to experience cultural identity transformation (e.g., religiosity and spirituality) through a critical understanding of intersection of their identities and life roles. They shared stories that exemplified the "interlocking or simultaneous grids of oppression and hierarchies" (Iverson & Chou, 2011, p. 204) in the gender socialization system, social-historical context of the nation state, and changing political climate, of which they became more aware as a result of their cross-cultural experience.

For example, Hazar described her childhood years in a town that was predominantly Kurdish, which was subject to greater policing and security measures as a result of government actions against terrorism. As a child, she was discouraged from speaking her native language or learning about her Kurdish culture. Hazar said she thought about the Kurdish-Turkish identity differently after she moved to the U.S. and realized that she did not belong to either side. Later, she considered the ways in which both Kurdish-ness and Turkish-ness can enrich her own bi-culture, and help her become a

bridge between people who have conflicts and assume they must choose one side only. She was at peace with this realization, which she wanted to bring back to Turkey. However, she was still worried about feeling excluded in Turkey as a Muslim woman due to the politics of the veil. Bade, as another example, was advised not to tell anyone that her ethnicity is Çerkes. She spoke her native language and celebrated her cultural traditions behind closed doors. Çerkes culture was very important to her in Turkey, yet she reflected on her identity more deeply after finding the strength to own and talk about it more openly in the U.S. Hazar and Bade felt more free to explore their identities and cultures during their encounter with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in the U.S. and observing others talk proudly about their cultural and national origins. Bade also had an important consideration in her child, whom she preferred to raise in the U.S. rather than Turkey. She was also concerned about the increasing conservatism in Turkey, and not being able to express her own cultural and political worldview as an educator and researcher in the authoritarian structure of State institutions.

In all the stories, social class was another important identity dimension, which shaped the educational experiences and opportunities, especially the emphasis of one's class and family on prestigious university majors and career paths. Except for the cases of Selcen and Alya, the schools and families imposed direct specific career choices on the participants, and restricted their freedom to explore their own interests. For example, Gamze dreamed and wanted to learn about marine engineering, but her father expected her to choose food engineering, which was a popular career in their town and promised a higher social class life in their region, where Gamze and her family felt stigmatized as peasant villagers. This decision also reflected her family's perceptions about the inappropriateness of a marine engineer lifestyle for a woman, who ought, in their opinion, to spend more time at home dedicated to her family. Furthermore, Gamze's family would not allow her to live outside their hometown. Gamze's early efforts in the food industry in Turkey, and her later academic career choice, were outcomes of her persistence to build an independent life.

Under the expectations of families, educational systems and gender socialization norms, the participants seemed to have restricted or delayed self-exploration. Most of them reflected on the development of greater self-awareness and independence from

family's expectations during or after college years. They also developed courage to get further away (i.e., study in the U.S.) in order to have more freedom. As in the cases of Selin and Emel, the physical distance was important to feel sufficiently safe to be and become who they really are, rather than what their family and social norms imposed onto them. The expression of sexual identity and building connection with one's body and sexuality were important practices of freedom in many stories. Not surprisingly, the women in such stories were also the ones who most directly stated that they made a home and felt greater belonging in the U.S. However, it is important to note that the participants, who attained more freedom by living who they are, did not simply choose between Turkey and the U.S. They rather achieved a balance between becoming independent (e.g., focusing on what they want and being in charge of their own life decisions) and keeping the personally meaningful aspects of their social and cultural values. For example, family, close neighborhood relations, interpersonal connections, celebration of traditional holidays, and social gatherings with the Turkish student groups were still very important to many participants, yet they no longer felt pressure about fitting in through strict adherence to their social and cultural norms. This observation was parallel to Qin's (2009) study with eleven international graduate student women from China. As her study suggested, the women in my study also, "developed a critical understanding of culture and self within the context of cultural mobility" (p. 149). However, different from Qin's interpretation that situated personal transformation into the dichotomy of Chinese versus U.S. women, the women in my study seemed to criticize and embrace parts from cultural (and cross-cultural) encounters in both Turkey and the U.S. Living in the intersection of multiple worlds through a transnational experience, they responded to the changing and different socio-cultural contexts that surrounded them in both Turkey and the U.S.

The themes of identity, belonging, and freedom also emerged from the participants' changing perceptions on academic and career goals. In the U.S., they had the time and space to choose for themselves and be more transparent about what they really want for their own lives. The experiences of cross-cultural challenges and perceived failure in the U.S. (e.g., Hazar's withdrawal from her program after five years; Derin's experience with the doctoral program applications in her first two years; Selin's

challenge in meeting the academic standards of her department during the time of her health issues; and Gamze's worries about her research productivity, her advisor's criticisms, and decreasing motivation after pregnancy and giving birth) often led to a sense of freedom from long years of expectations and pressures about having to be a successful student (internalized through a highly competitive, centralized education system and under the pressure of expectations and direction of family), as well as an opportunity to reconsider life career values. Moreover, a new educational system in the U.S. with its benefits (e.g., more emphasis on critical thinking, learning how to learn, and "freedom to make mistakes while learning" in Hazar's and Derin's experience) and its challenges (e.g., a highly demanding and competitive research environment in the experiences of Selin, Gamze and Ebru; the expected socialization level and dynamics of a business management career in a culturally different environment in Derin's case, the lack of sufficiently effective academic advising in the culture of a Research One University) allowed further self-exploration to clarify life career values.

Free from the obligations of the educational system in Turkey and direct family interventions, many women in this study questioned whether they really wanted or belonged to their academic programs and a world of academic/research careers. Most importantly, they started to think outside the box about alternative life career paths that would still let them pursue their interests and goals. This shifting in worldview was comparable to the cultural formulation study of Arthur and Popadiuk (2009). Their assessment of the cultural identity of international students noted changes in worldview and sense of self as an outcome of "learning to see themselves, others, and the world around them in new ways" (p. 436), and suggested further exploration of cross-cultural transition in relation to career issues. In the stories of my study, greater self-exploration and a changing sense of self during cultural transition had strong influences on many participants' reconsideration of values (e.g., wanting better life-work balance for family time, questioning the lifestyle demands of a tenure-track position) and life career plans (e.g., industry jobs versus faculty positions, teaching-focused versus research-focused faculty positions, staying in the U.S. for perceived freedom and opportunities, going back to Turkey to care for family members).

## **Challenging the Systems**

The participants of this study constructively challenged various systems (e.g., family structure, social norms, the educational system, unethical industry practices, the national political system). Their experiences with these systems appeared to be influential in their relationship with home and place, as well as in the process of making a decision to study in the U.S. For example, Ebru challenged her family's expectations about academic standards and obligations, and followed her own passion in science. She also confronted the lack of vision and support, and initiated several first-time experiences at her university when she dreamed of studying abroad. Realizing the greater opportunities of research facilities abroad, she persisted in her goals and gained admission to a doctoral program with a full-scholarship, which is rare for students from universities like hers (a public university where the education was not in English).

Emel's story was another uncommon example. She successfully entered the major and university she originally wanted after her experience in another university's law program. In spite of the social pressures and significant discouragement of the centralized exam system (which lowered her score the second time she took the university entrance exam). As another example, Gamze was interested primarily in an industry career as a food engineer, and she worked in a city to avoid going back to her hometown and following her family's choices and expectations. She successfully found employment, yet had several challenges in unethical industrial practices. As a result, she developed an interest in an academic career and wanted to gain experience in a better system.

The stories of challenging the systems revealed important preoccupations that most participants transformed into life career goals. For example, many participants talked about the problems in the education system in Turkey (e.g., over-emphasis on test preparation, the definition of success as an outcome of exam scores and entering prestigious universities, lack of encouragement for self-exploration, lack of support for life career vision, limited educational opportunities for research and STEM careers, ineffective academic advising and guidance). These issues were obstacles and a significant source of stress, both in Turkey and in the transition to a new education system in the U.S. After reconsidering these observations in light of more self-awareness, many participants appeared to develop passion about the field of education and becoming

more effective and supportive educators and advisors for their future students. It is important to note that they did not make a binary between the education in Turkey and the education in the U.S. They critically compared and contrasted issues in both contexts (e.g., the lack of vision and support for research in Turkey versus the burden of intense research schedules and demands in the U.S., which discouraged some participants from a future research career). It was also notable that the participants did not simply pursue an American dream, but rather strove to challenge and positively impact the systems in Turkey. Like Selcen and Ebru, the participants (especially women in STEM fields) explored ways in which they could develop a research career in Turkey and made great efforts to find opportunities. However, they encountered several challenges such as the lack of funding and limited vision, support, and passion in their academic environments.

Another common preoccupation stemmed from early experiences with family pressure and a limited sense of freedom. As in the cases of Emel, Selin and Filiz, their families and neighborhoods limited or controlled their connections and relationships outside of home and family. The families' perception of prestigious academic opportunities in the U.S. proved a strong motivation for many participants to legitimize their desire to get away and convince their families (especially fathers) about studying and living in the U.S. This experience was particularly discussed in the creative group-debriefing meeting, where the participants shared common opinions about "the limited space to choose for yourself unless you are married". The five participants in the group extensively discussed the importance of challenging the system in which the fathers or the husbands are regarded as the gatekeepers for their daughters' life decisions. Studying in the U.S. after graduating from college (as well the nature of a relatively long academic career path) was a way to challenge the patriarchal collectivism that offered either subservience to family and father, or subservience to a husband. The participants believed that an important reason for families' strictness about their daughters' lifestyle (e.g., prohibiting studying in another city away from home, or living in a separate apartment before marriage, or working in a place that the family does not know) is the pressure from their social circles and neighborhoods whereby families feel threatened to be judged by others. In other words, family honor as a primary social value is relies on, women's obedience to patriarchal rules and protection from sexual impurity. The perceived



prestige of an academic career in the U.S. was helpful for many families, to legitimize their decisions to send their daughters away and let them live on their own.

While discussing the systems of oppression that restrict women's life career choices, it was notable that the group members encouraged each other to "recognize the positive reasons that motivate one to study in the U.S." Ece (who participated only in the group meeting) emphasized that "it is not all about negative things such as family pressure, social expectations like getting married after college, or the limitations of career field for my major...my main reason was a pure desire to become an academician". The participants had diverse family backgrounds and values, and not all experienced similar challenges at the individual or systemic levels. Some felt more autonomous and independent in making their decisions to pursue an academic career and to leave Turkey. Overall, they all had the strengths to challenge many institutions and restrictions of their individual circumstances in Turkey to improve their self-confidence and autonomy, and to make their journey to the U.S.

### **Adjustment versus Change**

Consistent with the reviewed literature, the participants in this study encountered some common issues in their transition to the U.S. such as financial difficulties (Kwon, 2009), limited social support and English proficiency (Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), loneliness and social isolation (Mori, 2000), sense of loss (Sandhu, 1995), guilt related to being away from home (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007), identity and values confusion (Hayes & Lin, 1994). The stories of the participants provided contextual understanding on diverse sources of stress in early transition and adjustment periods. They included a fast transition to a busy graduate study program and heavy workload (e.g., multiple responsibilities of teaching and research assistantship positions besides one's own class schedule), restrictions of visa type on research and other work activities, facing pressure and conflicts in Turkish student groups (where many participants hoped to get early social support), romantic/intimate relationship issues, and problems with academic advisors or other faculty. These challenges, which mostly stemmed from environmental and systemic restrictions, were important to understand in order to de-stigmatize international student issues as intrapersonal problems (e.g., Sandhu, 1994). On the other hand, the purpose of this study was not to

identify or describe the challenges and problems; rather this study listened for diverse voices to understand the lived experience holistically. The findings and themes addressed positive personal and cultural transformation that seemed to influence life career values and planning.

Different from the reviewed literature, which describes common findings of acculturative stress such as discrimination and prejudice, the participants in this study did not report significant problems within the host culture or with people from different cultures. There were cases where some participants did not feel fully engaged with their American friends due to the language difference and not sharing common interests such as American football and tailgating, partying and drinking cultures. But to a greater extent, the participant stories included issues and conflicts with people from Turkey. Although the intensity of sudden loneliness in a new country and expectation to find support from Turkish student groups was a common experience among the participants (especially in the first months), some of them perceived these groups as a source of social pressure. After they spent some time in these groups, they felt uncomfortable with the high level of dependency among the group members, which limited self-growth and interaction with different cultures, and also introduced some controlling behaviors such as gossiping and disrespect of personal boundaries. Several participants reported significant stress as a result of their early experiences in these groups. But despite the stress, these encounters with other people and groups from Turkey also provided a unique understanding of one's identity and culture (e.g., Filiz became more self-conscious about her rural, conservative identity after spending time with a group of Turkish people whom she perceived very different than her). Realizing the cultural plurality both in the American and Turkish student groups led to a change in sense of self and worldview. Although some participants reported stress related to a period of identity confusion (e.g., Filiz's negotiation between her rural, conservative values and her changing perspectives about her right to a lifestyle free from family pressure and religious norms), they seemed to be happy with the outcome: a personalized formulation of cultural identity (e.g., Filiz kept the personally meaningful aspects of her past and evolving selves, and redefined the role of cultural values such as religion in her life).

A common experience of change within themselves and their worldviews dealt with religion – which was Islam in the cases of this study. In the stories of Bade, Hazar, Gamze, and Filiz, distance from family and social expectations seems to be related to a personal re-exploration of the religion. The critical comparison between the ways in which these women, versus others they met in the U.S., learned about and lived their religion led to questions on their connection to the religion. For example, Hazar realized that her knowledge and practice of the religion in Turkey was fed by fear and the influence of family. In the U.S., she discovered the meaning and value of a continuous process of questioning and learning about her religion. Gamze, as another example, said that she always felt a strong inner connection with her religion, but she did not practice it actively until she came to the U.S. An active engagement with God and her religion was an important source of hope and support for her, and when she decided to start wearing a veil, her biggest concern was about the reactions of her family and Turkish friends, but not about the reactions from Americans. In the experience and perception of Filiz, on the other hand, religion was an institution that oppressed women to control their freedom and sexuality. In the U.S., she met people (including both Muslims and non-Muslims), who considered themselves religious and attended church, for example, but were not limited in their lifestyle (e.g., did not feel bad or guilty about going to parties, drinking, and sexuality; did not perceive social pressure or judgment by others). When she deconstructed the cultural and institutional power of religion, she reframed it as a more personal and moral value. Bade's critique on religion as an increasingly political tool included worries about the implications of the changing conservative climate in Turkey. For example, she was anxious about the women students in her classes who resisted engaging in body awareness and movement activities due to their veils and conservative clothing. She also worried about potential restrictions and pressure on her own personal style and clothing.

Most participants in this study shared stories of positive change and transformation as an important outcome of coping with and processing their early challenges and crises in the U.S. They did not simply adjust to a new country; rather they engaged in deep critical reflections on their family and cultural backgrounds, values, life career goals, and future expectations. For example, Derin's perceived failure in applying

to a doctoral program in her first two years in the U.S. led to feelings of emptiness, lack of purpose, loss of self-worth and self-sufficiency, and she minimized her interaction with her family as a result (who communicated judgment and disapproval of her time as a *housewife* after getting two diplomas). However, confronting these feelings in therapy allowed her to stop being so self-critical and explore what she really wanted, how she will be happy, and what career meant to her. This process of self-exploration resulted in greater awareness of her interests, values and strengths, as well as self-acceptance as a woman who has the right to a life-career path that includes her leisure activities and time with her baby daughter. She allowed herself to find a different kind of *success* than the one her family and society imposed on her. Hazar's case, as another example, had the realization of one's right and "freedom to make mistakes and not give up after failure". She had to withdraw from her Master's program after five years of striving to do better. However, she reframed the perceived failure as a transformative experience of becoming more self-aware and learning how to learn. She left the U.S. upset about the challenges she faced (e.g., lack of a stable advisor and support, worries about what to tell her family and how to pay the scholarship back), yet she also expressed a sincere gratitude for having more clarity on her values and needs as a result of her experiences in the U.S. About six months after I finalized the analysis step in this study, she contacted me to request feedback on a statement of purpose that she used for a new graduate school application. She communicated excitement and confidence about pursuing a computer science and education program in the U.S. rather than an engineering program. Her goal was to become an effective educator and advisor, who will not make her students fearful of making mistakes in learning.

Help-seeking seemed to be an important step in the participants' journey from crises to change and transformation. As a subtheme, help-seeking was a valuable finding that needs further exploration in relation to the reviewed literature that reports depression as the common reason of help-seeking (Pedersen, 1991) and found lower tendencies to seek professional help (Mori, 2000) among international students. Five out of ten women in this study shared stories of help seeking from mental health professionals. Their stories shed light on their perceptions, thoughts, and experiences with mental health services. For example, reasons they gave to avoid using mental health services included

assumptions and overestimation of their financial cost (this is probably due to the lack of insurance coverage for counseling and therapy services in Turkey), language difference, and fear of ‘feeling weaker’ while talking about problems with others. The experiences of help-seeking seemed to change the perceptions of the participants, as they found the services they received to be effective. For example, both Gamze and Hazar experienced a period of burnout and hopelessness about their academic progress. With the help of their counselors, both took a semester long academic leave from their programs that provided time to process their experiences in the first few years and to revise their plans and strategies based on their changing values and priorities. Derin’s case, as another example, demonstrated an effective intersection of personal and career issues in counseling and therapy.

The stories in this study also addressed other personally and culturally relevant ways in which the participants coped with life career problems or stayed strong and resilient at times of chaos. Most participants emphasized the importance of connections such as family and friends. Their desire to participate in the Turkish student groups (especially in the first months of their transition in the U.S.) can be interpreted as a need to maintain and develop social and personal connections in a culturally familiar setting. Meeting and talking with others who speak the same language and have similar experiences seems to provide a sense of community support in culturally patterned ways, and ease the stress in adjusting to a new environment. In the case of Gamze, the child-care support she had from a community of people from Turkey (including both international students and immigrants) was critical in managing her busy research lab schedule. This community also helped her husband find a job when Gamze’s scholarship and tuition were delayed during her transition from the Master’s program to the doctoral program. Similar to Derin’s situation in her first two years, Gamze’s husband was in the U.S. as a spouse of an international student, who had the F-2 visa status with no permission to work in the U.S. In both cases, the limitations of visa status and the lack of work authorization caused a significant financial burden and was a source of tension between the couples. The stories in this study, as well as my observations during the pilot study projects, included cases where some spouses had to find informal jobs through their social network.

Other strengths and resources that were particularly present in the lives of the women who expressed more feelings of resiliency and hope at the times of transition and unexpected life events were healthy committed relationships, supportive family connections, effective relationships and regular contact with academic advisors and research teams, religion and spirituality, and engaging in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, arts, student or community groups). Positive reframing, a sense of humor, self-compassion, persistence, and hope were other characteristics that I observed in many women, who shared very difficult stories with great courage and insight. Despite the challenges of early academic adjustment, worries about heavy research schedules and expectations, and the uncertainty of near future career paths (e.g., visa status and restrictions, perceived increase of competition in the academic job market), most cases included signs of academic achievement and professional confidence, particularly when there was also a clear expression of career passion and purpose. For example, many of the women in this study were committed to a science career since their childhood, and others had very early memories of developing an interest in their fields. They seemed to remain positive about what their future career path holds for them.

Overall, the theme about adjustment versus change highlighted the prominent experiences of overcoming personal and academic challenges through enhancing internal strengths and external support resources. Early challenges that stemmed from the differences in busy academic and work environments, followed by unexpected life events, personal goals, and additional life roles, revealed the complexity of individual stories and social environments. The women in this study (regardless of outcomes) navigated change and experienced transformation at personal and cultural levels. They each seemed to redefine their identity, culture and home in positively reframed and empowered ways.

### **Staying in the United States versus Going Back to Turkey**

Thoughts and feelings about staying in the U.S. versus going back to Turkey composed the fourth major theme. This theme emerged when the participants reflected on their stories and the processes of personal and cultural change, as well as their changing connections with home and place. The participants' stories questioned early stories at home (i.e., home country, family, national and political context) and stories of transition,

change and new decisions as they stepped into new places (e.g., place of residence in the U.S., new multicultural groups, academia as a space with its own culture and demands). Most participants expressed a new sense of self and cultural framework, and greater perception of freedom and opportunities (in both personal and professional domains) in the U.S. The personal and cultural change did not mean that they felt greater cultural fit and belonging in the U.S.; rather they perceived the U.S. as a place where they had the freedom to be and become who they are without the fear of family and other institutional pressures. They connected to the U.S. as a place where they became more self-aware in regards to their personal, cultural and professional identities. In other words, they did not idealize the U.S. as a new home, but a place where they were offered more options with less control from others.

Furthermore, maintaining ties with Turkey while utilizing the opportunities in the U.S. seems to be a possibility to many participants. They worry about feeling restricted if they return to Turkey, and believe that the U.S. will no longer be an option once they do. Perceived restrictions in, and worries about, Turkey included lack of research opportunities; not being able to share social and political opinions freely (i.e., lack of freedom of speech); being pressured to silence interests in research, writing and teaching; feeling controlled by family expectations and values; not being able to live and practice religion as freely as in the U.S.; and increasing polarization in the sociocultural and political climate in Turkey that seems to cause more conflicts in personal and professional lives and relationships. Turkey witnessed significant events in the last five years while many of the participants were in the U.S. For example, lifting the headscarf ban in public institutions and universities (2013), and also in middle and high schools (2014) led to diverse responses and reactions. Some of the participants were happy that they can work in the government jobs while wearing their veil, while some other participants were intimidated with the increasing visibility of religion, especially in education, with concerns of pressure on their own non-religious lifestyle, as well as the risk of allowing oppressive families to force their daughters to wear the veil. Many participants perceived the veil as a political tool, and believed that the problem was not the veil or veiling, but the fear of what's known in Turkey as neighborhood pressure: the increasing polarization between people of different political and religious opinions, who

deepen the social pressure on each other, and push the minority groups to become invisible (Toprak et al., 2009). Many women in this study shared experiences of growing up as a member of a minority group (e.g., Kurdish, Çerkes, Alevi, Shia Islam). Thus, there was a common concern about pressure on people who do not agree with the conservative values of the current government and a growing part of the society, to hide their non-religious lifestyle (e.g., drinking, not going to mosque on Friday).

While many participants expressed more advantages about staying in the U.S. and demonstrated increased personal agency in making choices toward a new life career vision, they were also aware that the decision to stay in the U.S. was not completely under their control. Five participants were obliged to go back to Turkey due to their scholarship contracts with the Ministry of National Education and Fulbright Education Commission. Repaying the scholarship is an option only for the Ministry of National Education's scholarship. However, there were additional layers of bureaucracy, and uncertainties such as waiving the J-1 visa restrictions to enable a new visa status in the U.S. and finding a job that provides visa sponsorship. The other six participants had the F-1 visa status with no scholarship ties to Turkey, yet they still had to find jobs at organizations that are open to short-term work authorization options such as Optional Practical Training (which is 12 months for students in non-STEM fields, and up to 29 months for those who graduate from STEM programs) and then to provide H-1B visa sponsorship (which is 3 years with the possibility of an additional 3 years). In most cases, the faculty and research positions have higher chances to provide sponsorship for a work visa or green card application.

On the other hand, some of the women in this study also questioned their fit in academia. The overwhelming research schedules and demands, and occasional periods of burnout, seem to be a concern for some women. As they deconstructed the intersection and power of multiple expectations imposed on them (e.g., families' existential investment in their daughters' education while also expecting them to meet the social gender norms, feeling like race horses in an educational system that categorizes students through the national school entrance exams starting in elementary school, additional life roles with marriage and motherhood), they seem to negotiate how to integrate their



personal values and other life dreams into the picture of a transformed life career vision (Appendix D).

### **Implications**

Some of the findings in this research study align with previous research about international student experiences, particularly adjustment issues such as academic demands, language proficiency, loneliness, seeking new support networks, gender role expectations, and values conflicts (e.g., Pedersen, 1991; Singaravelu & Pope, 2007; Arthur, 2008), as well as positive transition experiences that are addressed by only a few studies (e.g., Moores and Popadiuk, 2011). By featuring voices from various stages of cultural adjustment and cross-cultural learning, this study also sheds light on the multiple stages of international student experiences and life career plans, for example the preparation to transition from university to work, which was an important area of need for further exploration (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013). On the other hand, given the scarcity of research about international women graduate students and international students from Turkey, the implications from this study and discussion should be received with caution. This narrative design with a limited sample size aimed to give voice to a group of women who came from a specific yet diverse background, and the findings are not generalizable to any group (including even other women graduate students from Turkey). On the other hand, the implications from the thematic findings may instead be transferrable to some higher education, counseling, and future research contexts.

The participants in this study expressed diverse thoughts and feelings regarding their perception of personal and cultural identity transformation, which did not always start in the U.S. Their narratives were embedded in a fluid context between two countries, and bridged lessons and hope from past, present and future stories. The experiences, visions and voices of the women in this study provided important insight about national and international higher education policies and practices, counseling with international women students, and future research. The implications for each of these areas are discussed next.

### **National and International Higher Education**

Many stories in this study voiced the strengths and weaknesses of the educational systems, particularly higher education in both Turkey and the U.S. The theme,

challenging the systems, emerged from many examples of dysfunctional education practices. In Turkey, the educational system requires the students to choose an interest area after the first year of high school, which limits the list of possible majors that they can request after the college entrance exam. The system is very strict and difficult for those whose educational and career interests shift in the next three years of high school. It is also much more difficult to change one's major in Turkey compared to the U.S. after starting college. As discussed in the first chapter, the education system in Turkey has undergone significant changes in the last decade and the college entrance exam remains as a system that disadvantages students based on school type (e.g., regular versus vocational high schools) and the availability of financial resources for test preparation centers and tutors (Finkel, 2012). After the test preparation centers ("dersane") are closed in June 2015, the discrepancy between the students who come from resourceful schools versus underserved schools may have greater implications on students' readiness to take college entrance exam.

Furthermore, many participants in this study criticized the education system for the lack of experiential learning, especially for science education. The participants who were aware of their early interests demonstrated substantial individual effort and actions to explore opportunities. During their exploration, the life stories of well-known scientists, and some participants' connections with important role-models (e.g., science teachers, supportive university professors), seem to be critical in many women's motivation to pursue their interest in science. On the other hand, many participants were discouraged from choosing colleges and majors based on their own interests. The families and schools in the limited sample of this study directed the participants' choices based on prestige of colleges and majors. Most important, many participants were placed into their colleges and majors not according to their preferences but according to the admission criteria for each major, which changes every year and is hard to predict. The test- and score-based approach of the education system of Turkey should be significantly revised. At least, the students should be given more flexibility to change their majors in college through necessary adjustments in national higher education policies. Some of the participants in this study acknowledged that they were not in an academic field that fits

their interests and values after being challenged by a more demanding education system in their graduate program in the U.S.

This study also provided some insight and implications for the scholarship program of the Ministry of National Education (MONE). The students, who utilize this scholarship program, make their faculty position contracts in advance and are placed at universities in Turkey based on the MONE's needs and choices. Some participants acknowledged that they got this scholarship in order to study abroad and their first preference is not to return to Turkey. Some other participants disclosed that they chose this program and academic career path, because they did not know what else they wanted to do. This scholarship is a very important opportunity for students, especially those who did not get their degree from a well-known college with English-medium programs, and who are less competitive when applying for admission to universities in the U.S. However, the selection criteria and admission process might be improved in a way that provides a better understanding of the program's expectations, so the students can make more informed decisions and feel better prepared to study in the U.S.

The lack of career counseling and guidance was prominent in the stories of the participants in this study. Although several received some help from *guidance teachers* (a common phrase for school counselors and counselors who work at test preparation centers), their career decision-making was mostly based on suggestions from family and teachers, as well as exam scores. The participants in this study were in school and college before 2007, which is the date that school counseling programs in Turkey started to require vocational and career counseling classes for the counselors in training (Yesilyaprak, 2012). Moreover, many participants went to schools that did not have a counselor at all. In Turkey, it is still a significant problem that many school counselors do not feel adequately trained and prepared to provide career counseling and guidance, and they do not include parents and families in providing career guidance services (Korkut-Owen, 2007). The university career services in Turkey, on the other hand, emphasize employer relations and recruitment services for college students rather than career counseling. Like some of the participants in this study, many students might lack support to make important career decisions (e.g., studying in the U.S., deciding on academic programs, choosing government/other scholarship contracts that influence life-career

planning for long years). Therefore, there is a significant area of growth in enriching and extending the career counseling services in Turkey before students' arrival to the U.S.

The participants in this study also identified potential issues about the education system in the U.S. Not having research opportunities and sufficient experience in Turkey, many participants faced with a fast transition to an intense research schedule. Besides the personal and academic challenges of early adjustment (e.g., issues of language proficiency, lack of social support, getting used to new class structures), the research and teaching assistantship tasks led to further social isolation, burnout, and loss of motivation for some participants in the early phases of their graduate programs. Although most departments provide orientation programs to new students, there seems to be a need for more comprehensive orientation and transition programs that make students more familiar with the people and work culture of a department or research lab before they become very busy with projects. Furthermore, in the system of a research university, academic advisors (especially in STEM programs) tend to choose students and advisees based on their research experience and interests. In several cases in this study, the research focus and priority in selecting and working with students yielded a lack of sufficient support in advising students and personalizing students' academic schedule based on their language proficiency, academic background, prerequisite needs, personal circumstances, and so on. As previous research suggested (Lau & Ng, 2011), international students might need effective mentors in adjusting to academic and work culture in the U.S. Additionally, effective advising and mentoring is critical in supporting and enhancing the career passion and development of women in STEM fields. Future research should focus on international women students' early experiences in training programs (e.g., multiple demands on women in relation to academic, research, and other life role responsibilities while navigating cultural learning and transition) and the quality of ongoing support in relation to their persistence in STEM fields (e.g., relationship with advisor/supervisor, the openness and respect of the work culture towards multiple life roles and identities of women).

This study has some implications for the larger systems as well. Increasing numbers of international students in the U.S. and around the world heighten issues of global higher education every new academic year. The competition for international

students between different countries and regions of the world has significant implications on the economic disparities between countries. For example, international students contribute more than \$24 million dollars to the U.S. economy (IIE Open Doors Report, 2013). Furthermore, many international students in STEM graduate programs significantly support the science-research projects and innovative activities (e.g., patenting) at their universities and research centers (Chellaraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2005). Some of these students join the labor force after graduating helping to address skills-shortages in the science-technology fields in the U.S. (Arthur, 2014; Guellec & Cervantes, 2002). On the other hand, the mobility of highly educated and talented youth from developing to advanced countries, where they hope to find better life career opportunities, leads to the phenomenon of brain drain. The cases in this study tackled several main reasons to choose to work and live in the U.S. such as the participants' perception of a lack of research opportunities in Turkey and concerns about the changing socio-political climate. The universities and institutions in Turkey should be better aware of and address the circumstances that result in such loss of human capital.

A major contradiction that influences many international students (especially those who want to stay in the U.S. after graduating) is the unequal opportunities for international students in STEM versus non-STEM majors. As many stories in this study confirmed, students' experiences of job searching varies based on their field of education. Students in STEM majors seem to have an easier time finding a job and processing their work authorization and permanent residency applications. They are allowed to use a longer-period of OPT, during which they might increase their chances of finding permanent employment opportunities. This does not seem to be the case for students who are in non-STEM majors. This difference between the STEM and non-STEM fields is a result of skill shortages in the science and technology industries within the U.S. (Arthur, 2014). Therefore, potential international students who are considering an academic program in the U.S. may need more awareness and information about the work authorization options in relation to immigration policies, as well as the industry profile and needs in the U.S. Institutions of higher education in the U.S. should be more transparent in promoting their academic programs and recruiting students. Moreover, there are many other countries where the work authorization and immigration policies are

more welcoming to international students. Other countries' adjustments to immigration policies to attract more international students and to keep the skilled immigrants might influence trends in the international higher education in the U.S., which may not remain as the top destination country for international students (Altbach, 2004).

### **Career Counseling and Student Affairs**

The above-mentioned implications for the higher education field also inform the practices of student affairs and especially career counselors of international students. The diversity of the participants' backgrounds and broader systems that influence their life-career planning (e.g., the education system and college entrance exam in Turkey, family expectations, conditions of the MONE scholarship program, adjustment to and expectations of a research university culture in the U.S., visa and immigration policies) highlight the importance of understanding various circumstances that shape the experiences of international students, and helping them process life-career transitions.

The significance of individual and cultural diversity, and the role of social and institutional forces in this study, supported the relevance and value of postmodern career development approaches in working with international students, which were discussed in the second chapter. Postmodern career development approaches include constructivist (internal cognitions) and social constructionist (external process) views, which are separated for purposes of research and theory-building (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2009). The stories in this study reflected both internal and external processes, as the participants described "how they see themselves, others, and their worlds as well as [how they] grasp the impact of culture, history and social structures have on their career development" (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2009, p. 40). Even in this study's context of storytelling for research purposes (not counseling), the participants strove to make sense of their experiences by critically reflecting on the contexts of their environment (McMahon & Watson, 2007). The applications of several postmodern theories such as the systems theory framework (Arthur & McMahon, 2005), career construction theory (Savickas, 2011), and narrative approach (Cochran, 1997) seem relevant to career counseling work with international students.

More specifically, a systems theory framework (e.g., Arthur & McMahon, 2005) may help counselors understand the interplay between individuals and larger systems.

Career counselors may familiarize themselves with multiple identities, cultures and realities in the transnational life stories of international students. A systemic perspective can expand counselors' focus from a traditional set of variables (e.g., interests, abilities, values) to contextual variables such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, religiosity/spirituality, social class/socioeconomic status, and health conditions, which were among the important variables that appeared to influence the life career pathways of women in this study.

As discussed in the second chapter, career construction theory aligns with the importance of understanding and processing the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty in the context of an increasingly unstable, unpredictable and chaotic world of careers (Savickas, 2011). Given the changes and challenges in both home and host countries, international students can benefit from further understanding of their past and present career influences, and future possibilities. Career construction theory examines the process of psychosocial adaptation and how individuals cope with vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas (Savickas, 2012). It views the career related traits (e.g., interests, abilities, values) as strategies for adapting to and connecting with the environment (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). Acknowledging the challenges of international student career development that highlight flexibility and mobility rather than commitment and stability, the concept of *career adaptability* can provide a meaningful and useful framework. Career adaptability is defined as “an individual's readiness and resources for handling current and anticipated tasks, transitions, and traumas in his or her occupational roles that to some degree large or small alter his or her social integration” (Savickas, 2012, p. 157). Developing career adaptability can help international students in the midst of various transition experiences and with navigating change and unpredictability.

In light of the critiques on “customer service philosophy” in international higher education and growing competition between universities and companies (Montgomery, 2010), the counseling profession has a critical role in bringing attention to the individual experiences of international students: “individual stories of international students are crucial to developing a positive image that counteracts a deficit model that may sometimes be applied to international students” (p. xvi). The stories in this study

demonstrate a significant understanding of the roles of individual and cultural diversity, resilience, and personal change/transformation on life-career development of ten international women graduate students. As the participants in this study reflected on their stories (and deconstructed multiple social and institutional systems that impact their life-career paths), they expressed greater senses of strength and personal agency in envisioning new life career possibilities. In other words, the participants in this study seemed to benefit from telling their stories and identifying various positive aspects of their experiences in the U.S. Counselors, as well as future researchers, can further explore the narrative approaches in facilitating international student cross-cultural experiences and career development.

An important implication of this study is its emphasis on the potential value of career counseling with international students at different stages of their cross-cultural experience. Although most research and case studies focus on the needs of the initial stages of cultural adjustment (Arthur, 2014), the stories in this study tackled ongoing transition (between countries and cultures) and changes in the life career roles of international students. Given the complexity of individual and cultural diversity and interlocking systems of oppression in the stories of these women, longer term career counseling experience can better allow career counselors to integrate the systemic and narrative perspectives into their work with international students.

Furthermore, the help-seeking experiences of many women in this study demonstrated the inseparable connection between personal and career stories, as well as between work and mental health. Some stories in this study also revealed the tension between paid and unpaid work lives, and increasing challenges to women's wellbeing and mental health, with implications for career counseling theory, practice and future research. There is an ongoing need to better address the shortcomings while considering women's working lives outside the traditional white male middle class careers (Patton, 2013). Recent perspectives of social justice and career counseling can enhance the work of career counselors with international women students. As an example, the psychology-of-working perspective advocates prioritizing an understanding of psychosocial content when analyzing women's working lives. The psychology-of-working perspective emerged from critiques of vocational psychology and from multicultural, feminist, and



expanded epistemological analyses of psychological explorations of working (Blustein, 2008; Blustein, 2006). It advocates for the social and psychological meaning of work in relation to mental health and larger systemic practice (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005). It draws attention to the growing body of research about the connection between work and mental health (Blustein, Perry, Kenna, & Dewine, 2007), and informs policy and practice about issues such as working and recovery from mental illness, as well as working, racism and psychological health (Blustein, 2008).

The understanding of cultural background, meaning-making of one's changing personal and cultural values, examining the contextual variables to develop greater self-awareness and personal agency in visioning future possibilities, and connecting personal and career story were significant aspects of the participants' transformation and help-seeking experiences in this study, and have implications for effective career counseling. A major implication is the importance of career counseling competencies, especially multicultural career counseling, social justice, and advocacy. However, career counselors who work in student affairs do not always hold counseling degrees or have sufficient past experience in the career-counseling field, so might lack education or experience in such competency areas. Unlike mental health counselors, who must hold a licensure and certification to work as a counselor in college counseling centers, career counselors' need for licensure or certifications are not suitably addressed in student affairs and college career services. The understanding of the practice of career counseling (as *counseling not merely advising*) might be overlooked where there is no distinction between the types of services provided by career counselors: those who possess counseling degrees and licensures, and others (who are sometimes called career development specialists, career advisors or career coaches) without counseling degrees or relevant experience. Issues of professional identity and competency may perpetuate the risk of *deprofessionalization* in career counseling, which is addressed by others (e.g., Hansen, 2003; Harris-Bowlsbey, 2003). College career services or career counseling centers are an important space of help-seeking for many international students, where they might perceive less stigma about *counseling* while learning the nature of this helping process and relationship for the first time. Therefore, it is important for students to work with career counselors who will

listen, understand the intersection of individual and cultural contexts, and address the life career planning needs holistically and competently.

No research to date explored the help-seeking rates and experiences of international graduate students in the context of career counseling. During my pilot study fieldwork and daily career counseling practice, I observed an increasing number of international students visiting the career counseling centers. However, many career counseling appointments seem to be short-term with a focus on job search strategies, resume and cover letter writing, interview preparation, and so on. Furthermore, a recent nation wide survey provides some insight about international students' under-utilization of career counseling services, and their very limited knowledge of and experience with career counseling services prior to coming to the U.S. (NCDA, 2014). International students should be better informed about career counseling services, and the career counseling process, which is not limited to career decision-making and internship/job application. The same survey research by NCDA (2014) also reveals important needs of career counselors in working with international students such as guidance for returning students with readjustment and job searches in their home country, finding culturally sensitive career assessment tools, and navigating career planning options and restrictions of international students, such as visa and immigration policies.

Additionally, there are many cases where graduate students assume that they are not eligible to use the campus career services, and they mistakenly believe most services and events are developed for undergraduate students. Career counseling centers and professionals can collaborate with other units such as academic departments, graduate schools, international student services, and university counseling and psychological services to promote their programs and address the needs of graduate students, who might be under greater academic, social and cultural stress due to multiple life career roles and transitions. More prevention and support programs are needed to enhance the career wellness of graduate students, including international students.

### **Mental Health Counseling and Community Support**

Half of the women in this study utilized mental health counseling services at some point during their experience in the U.S. As discussed earlier, the empowering examples of help-seeking experiences seem to help them recognize and process the intersection of

personal and career issues in the unique cultural context of international students. There are many times that international students might perceive their issues as solely intrapersonal, and may not recognize the impact of academic stress, burnout or other contextual variables that impede their wellbeing. Like some cases of this study, students might experience perceived academic failure for the first time in their lives, and might reject or avoid the issues in their academic departments or with their academic advisers/mentors until they become severely depressed and need medical leave. Thus, the college counseling centers should become more visible and proactive in addressing the mental health concerns of international students. For example, personal development workshops and information circulation about preventive resources for wellbeing can be enhanced by counseling and psychological services staff.

Another implication from this study was the importance of taking ‘language’ into consideration, as some participants shared concerns of not speaking the same native language with counselors and therapists. In cases where it is not possible to find a counselor who speaks a specific native language, counseling centers might facilitate the exploration of qualified counselors who speak that language and have distance-counseling certification. With the increasing role of technology in our lives, counselors can familiarize themselves with alternative services. As discussed under the implications for counselor education programs, the counseling and psychological service centers of the universities may also train and collaborate with greater numbers of international counseling students who speak multiple languages and have experience with specific cultures. This would also benefit the international counseling students who might have a hard time competing with native speaker students for a limited number of graduate assistantship and internship opportunities. Another reason that discouraged some participants from help-seeking was the perceived cost of mental health services. Some of them did not know that the services would be covered by health insurance. Such information might be presented more openly and become more accessible for students. When students first arrive to the U.S., they attend orientation programs and sessions that tend to present an overwhelming amount of information at one time. Thus, critical information such as health insurance coverages and mental health and community service

resources may be presented in more concise and clear ways and at different times of an academic year.

Many participants in this study talked about community networks and support as an important source of help seeking. This might have implications for alternative mental health services or community counseling services for international students. For example, counselors may consider providing information sessions or developing support groups or programs in collaboration with student communities, where the practices may look more familiar and similar to those in one's home country or cultural context. Some topics may include healthy community development (in relation to reported issues of interpersonal dynamics and conflicts in the Turkish student groups), understanding the similarities and differences of a work culture in the U.S., helping women gain courage and confidence to advocate for themselves in communication with mostly male advisors/supervisors and research team members (especially in STEM fields), addressing the share of paid and unpaid work responsibilities between spouses, and preparing for return and readjustment in the home country (which was a commonly addressed concern by many women in this study).

Also, the participants in this study enjoyed and provided very good feedback about the experience with the creative collage poster activity in the group-debriefing meeting. They emphasized that it gave them the time and space to creatively reflect on and express their experiences, and hear that others are in the same boat. They said that it allowed them to silence the worries in their minds and focus on 'what they want' in the present and future. Such activities in a group counseling format can provide alternative ways and opportunities of self-expression, stress-management, and togetherness with others who have similar experiences, which can lead to greater community support for international women students.

### **Counselor Education Programs**

The previously mentioned implications for counseling, mental health, and community support resources address the important competency areas for counselors in training (e.g., career counseling, multicultural/cross-cultural competency, social justice and advocacy). Although counselor education programs emphasize the importance of

these areas, the number of courses and the opportunities for experiential learning are somewhat limited in the curriculums and busy schedules of students and faculty.

With the increasing impact of globalization, counselors need a greater understanding of working with globally mobile individuals and groups. Although multicultural counseling classes address several significant identity models and diversity issues, their scope might be insufficient to help counseling trainees gain more understanding of cross-cultural and transnational experiences, during which individuals and groups negotiate fluid and changing identities, multiple homes, and unique work, family and relationship dynamics under uncertainty and systemic discrimination and restrictions, as exemplified in this study. As the forms of border-crossing, mobility and immigration change, counselors and counselor educators should have greater awareness of world cultures and their diversity, as well as the impact of global political and economic powers on the increasing mobility of individuals. One way to foster such awareness and cross-cultural competency is to help more counseling trainees work with clients from around the world, and to encourage longer term cultural immersion and professional development experiences abroad.

Career counseling is another area that should be broadened and enriched in counselor education programs. The limited number and content of career counseling classes should be especially addressed by infusing career counseling competency areas (and awareness of connections between work lives and mental health) throughout the curriculum. Greater awareness of systemic perspectives and narrative models in career counseling may ameliorate counseling trainees' (and counselor educators') awareness of the intersection of personal and career issues, as well as their interest in career counseling. Career counseling is increasingly critical in our contemporary world where counselors need to "help individuals adapt to dramatic changes in the economy and occupational structure" (Savickas, 2003, p. 92). Counselor education programs play an important role in improving the scope of career counseling training for counseling trainees in *any* specialty area, as well as in enhancing the interest of their students in the career counseling field.

Furthermore, the number of international students in counseling and counselor education programs in the U.S. is increasing (Ng, 2006). It is important to understand the

background, academic readiness, and professional development goals of these students. These students are important resources on college campuses and can provide counseling services and community programs to individuals and groups with whom they share common language, customs and cultural variety. Many international students in the counseling programs can also facilitate American counselors' and counselor trainees' understanding of mental health and counseling services/programs in different cultures and countries.

### **Future Research**

It is important for future research to continue studying international students with qualitative methods to elucidate their experiences. One of the benefits of qualitative research is that it could help researchers appreciate diversity within a specific group as well as participants' unique experiences. Another benefit of qualitative research is that it could explore in detail how a person's context impacts his/her personal experiences and decision making (e.g., career choices). Future research can focus on specific experiences in greater detail such as help-seeking experiences, community support, and changing relations with family and cultural values (e.g., religion).

The perceived lack of career opportunities and the socio-political changes in the students' home country seem to be important drivers of the decision to study and live in the U.S. While the current study identified some perceived changes in Turkey and their potential impact on participants' life-career planning, it is important for future research to focus on understanding the impact of changing contexts (e.g., socio-political changes) on life-career planning in greater detail.

While initially my main focus in this study was to explore career-development themes, the data from the interviews led me to a broader exploration of cross-cultural experiences. Future research may explore the career development of international students with greater focus on interview questions more specific to career development. For example, one of the contributions of this study to the literature was that it explored how cross-cultural experiences could affect a person's life-career development and planning. Future studies should continue to explore the experiences of cross-cultural life in relation to career development needs and experiences.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

Historically dominant positivist and empirical frameworks might create discourses or perceptions of superiority against the relatively new, yet rapidly growing, presence of qualitative research methodologies. For example, it is still common to use the term ‘validity limitations’ in many qualitative studies and it is not uncommon to define qualitative research terms such as trustworthiness in relation or comparison to quantitative terms such as reliability and objectivity (e.g., Patton, 2002). I strive to challenge such dichotomies of terminology by including both strengths and limitations in this section.

One of the strengths of this study was a relatively big sample size. It provided a diversity of cultural backgrounds and personal voices that enriched the understanding of perceived sociocultural and political contexts. Although there is no limitation to the sample size in the narrative research designs (Creswell, 2007), it is recommended to have one to six individuals if the researcher wants in-depth data in a narrative study (Patton, 2002). The sample size had an important role in the choice of data analysis and reporting in this study of eleven participants (ten women participated in the individual interviews and five women participated in the creative group-debriefing meeting, with some overlap). I had a minimum of one follow-up conversation with each of the ten interview participants (the first round allowed the participant to verify interview transcripts, and the second was six months after the interview and group meeting transcription).

The unstructured interviews with ten participants, group meeting with creative media (collage posters), and follow up correspondences led to a very big data set, which made it difficult to manage and organize for a narrative analysis. As previously explained in the data analysis section, I had to change the first data analysis path and explore an alternative method to make the process as exploratory and flexible as possible while providing a systematic, step-by-step approach. The thematic analysis model I chose shifted my research question to a broader framework, so I did not focus on career experiences only. I still explored the emergence of career themes in the narratives and used a discussion of postmodern life-career development framework (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2008). These changes in the research design made the process longer, and therefore more difficult to monitor and report. I managed the changes and transitions in

this study by maximizing my transparency in the process, carefully watching the changes in the emerging themes, and logging every step of the research story. In other words, I strove to enhance validity by logging each significant decision and the interpretation of each discovery (Richards, 2005). My detailed methodology chapter and the storytelling about the process of planning this study (including a discussion of my pilot study projects, personal narrative, researcher memos, and the data analysis process) establish a strong baseline of validity in this study. Furthermore, I spent substantial time with the stories, and worked on the lists of themes and idea maps (see Appendix C for a sample idea map) to reflect on the research purpose and questions in a continuous process.

It is a limitation of this study that not all participants engaged in every step of the study. For example, only 4 of the 10 interview participants joined the group-debriefing meeting. Given the fact that this study took place in a small college town where some students from Turkey knew each other relatively well, it was understandable that some participants did not want to be identified by joining the group meeting. Also before the interviews, two participants expressed their concerns about the risk of being identified through a detailed narrative analysis that focused on and presented in-depth content of a couple of stories. Thus, I eliminated some details from their narratives, especially those that participants did not want me to use (e.g., experiences of physical and emotional abuse from parents or partners, serious conflicts with academic advisors, recent relationship break-ups or crises). While writing the narratives for chapter four, I focused on the parts of the interviews and stories that reflected the major themes. Although the elimination of some details might be considered a limitation, my connection and reflections with the participants gave me the impression that it was rather a strength in the feminist participatory nature of the study. Because the participants had the power by using an active voice and role in different stages of this study: when they wanted and in the ways that they chose.

Another limitation of the study was the inclusion of participants who were at different stages of their graduate programs and life in the U.S. One of the participants was no longer an international student because she graduated one year before our interview, while another was withdrawing from her program and going back to Turkey shortly after the interview. On the other hand, the purpose of this study was neither to



compare narratives nor to generalize any findings. Consequently, the different, and indeed unique cases, added more diversity and (de)constructive challenge to the definition of *international students* and their overgeneralized/categorized experiences in the literature, which is a strength attached to this limitation. For example, in Derin's case, there were intersecting stories of an international student with limited work authorization, a spouse of an international student with no work permission, and a new wife and mother with changing life career roles and values.

A limitation commonly discussed is one of objectivity. In feminist research there is close attention to elements such as personal experience, subjectivity, positionality, worldview, and emotion (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). It is not only an ethical commitment but also truly an activist commitment to develop "strong objectivity" in research, which Harding (1995) defines as a process of ensuring inclusiveness of all voices and experiences of marginalized others. As I explored the participants' lived experiences and stories, I carefully watched and reflected on the limitations of objectivity by actively seeking alternative feedback through conversations with the dissertation committee members, peer debriefing, adding new participants to the sample, taking breaks from data analysis, and enhancing my reflective writing about the intersection of my personal experiences and the stories in this research (e.g., the moment I realized my occasional frustration and fears about the increasing religiosity in Turkey, as discussed under the trustworthiness title in the methodology chapter). Therefore, besides informing counseling and higher education practitioners about the diversity of voices in international student experiences, this study had the strength to make me more aware of the importance of doing research with both insider and outsider lenses. I collaborated with women from my home country, and discovered some inner resistance in reaching out and listening to diverse socio-political perspectives in the early stages of this research. As I have immersed myself in the stories and contexts of the women in this study, I gained better self-awareness and a constructive critical standpoint about the diversity politics in Turkey and the U.S., which will enhance my personal and professional development as a counselor and researcher.

To summarize, a unique strength and contribution of this study is the emphasis on bringing the voice of participants, or “bringing the other”, into the research process, which “challenge dominant forms of knowledge building and empower subjected understandings” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 11). Although the theoretical frameworks that I strived to utilize (e.g., career development approaches) remained somewhat vague, the shift to a more general framework was suggested by the nature of the stories and data analysis process. The theories studied in the planning of this study provided an umbrella interpretative community that informed my research questions and methodology.

Additionally, this study’s research design constructively evolved and was positively challenged with several other important qualitative research characteristics: a fluid, natural research field (e.g., the physical and mental spaces of international students, and constant border-crossing as a natural setting of research); a researcher who is a natural participant observer and has both insider and outsider status; multiple data sources to challenge the limitations of language and minimize the lost meaning in translation (e.g., interviews, collage activity, participant debriefing meetings); an inductive and recursive data analysis process in collaboration with research participants; and an emphasis on intersecting social, political, or historical contexts (including a critique of globalization and its impact on international education) to arrive a holistic view of the international student experiences. These characteristics give this narrative research methodology a transnational feminist perspective, which was a new research practice and an original contribution in the field of counseling. Future research should continue exploring life-career narratives with social, economic and political lenses to unpack the influences of globalization, and changing cross-border mobility, with implications on individuals’ personal and career wellbeing.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Recruitment Letter**

Dear ... ,

My name is Elif Balin and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program with a minor in Women's Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. Under the advisement of my dissertation chair, Dr. Jerry Trusty, I am conducting dissertation research that aims to explore experiences of international women students from Turkey. By listening to and analyzing stories in this study, I expect to gain an understanding of the influence of international/cross-cultural experience on the life-career planning. I also hope that findings from this study will inform higher education and counseling professionals to support academic, personal and social transitions and development of international students.

I am seeking participants who are international women students from Turkey, who were born in Turkey, and who came to the U.S. at least 6 months ago to pursue a graduate degree program. The participants will be asked to complete a three-stage process of 1) autobiographical writing, 2) individual interviews, and 3) a creative group-debriefing meeting. The interviews will be audio recorded and last 60-90 minutes. In the group meeting, participants will be asked to collaborate with the researcher by discussing the emerging themes from the autobiographies and individual interviews. The participants will also create collages as an alternative and creative way of expressing and further exploring the themes. This meeting is expected to be scheduled according to the common available days and times of the most participants, and will take two to three hours. The other option will be an individual follow-up meeting with me if you prefer not to join the group meeting. The date and time for every step will be determined in consultation with you and according to your availability and convenience.

The information collected in this study will be kept strictly confidential and will not be attached to any one's identity. I will keep the information from this study in a password-protected computer that is used only for research purposes. Any correspondence about this study will be made from an email address that is used only for communication about this study. Participation is voluntary; participants may end their participation at any time, and participants may choose to not answer specific questions. If you decide to participate, you will also be asked to sign an informed consent form to make sure you know about the steps and process of the research and your rights during the study.

If you would like to learn more about this study and consider participating, you can contact me via email: [transnational.narratives@gmail.com](mailto:transnational.narratives@gmail.com)

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Elif Balin

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

**Title of Project:** Using a Transnational and Feminist Career Narrative Analysis with International Student Women from Turkey

**Principal Investigator:** Elif Balin, Graduate Student  
101 Career Services Building, University Park, PA 16802  
(814) 865-xx-xx; [exb941@psu.edu](mailto:exb941@psu.edu)

**Advisor:** Dr. Jerry Trusty  
311 Cedar Building, University Park, PA 16802  
(814) 865-xx-xx; [jgt3@psu.edu](mailto:jgt3@psu.edu)

- 1- Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived career experiences of international student women from Turkey who live and pursue graduate studies in the U.S.
- 2. Procedures to be followed:** If you decide to participate in my study, you will participate in 3 steps. In the first step, you will be asked to write an autobiography responding to the question “Tell the story of who you are”. You will be given 5 days to write and send this autobiography after the day of your agreement to participate. After I receive your autobiography, you will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview, which will take 60-90 minutes. The third step will have two options. You will be asked to join a participant debriefing meeting where participants will come together and discuss the emerging themes from my data analyses, and will also create collages as an alternative and creative way of expressing and further exploring the themes in the narratives. This meeting is expected to be scheduled according to the common days and times available to the most participants, and will take two to three hours. The other option will be an individual follow-up meeting with me if you prefer not to join the group meeting. The date and time for every step will be determined in consultation with you and according to your availability and convenience.
- 3. Duration:** All three steps described above will take 60-90 minutes in three different days to be chosen by the research participants.
- 4. Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at my home-office in a locked/password protected laptop file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.
- 5. Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Elif Balin at [exb941@psu.edu](mailto:exb941@psu.edu) with questions or concerns about this study.

**6. Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to participate in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

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Participant Signature

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Date

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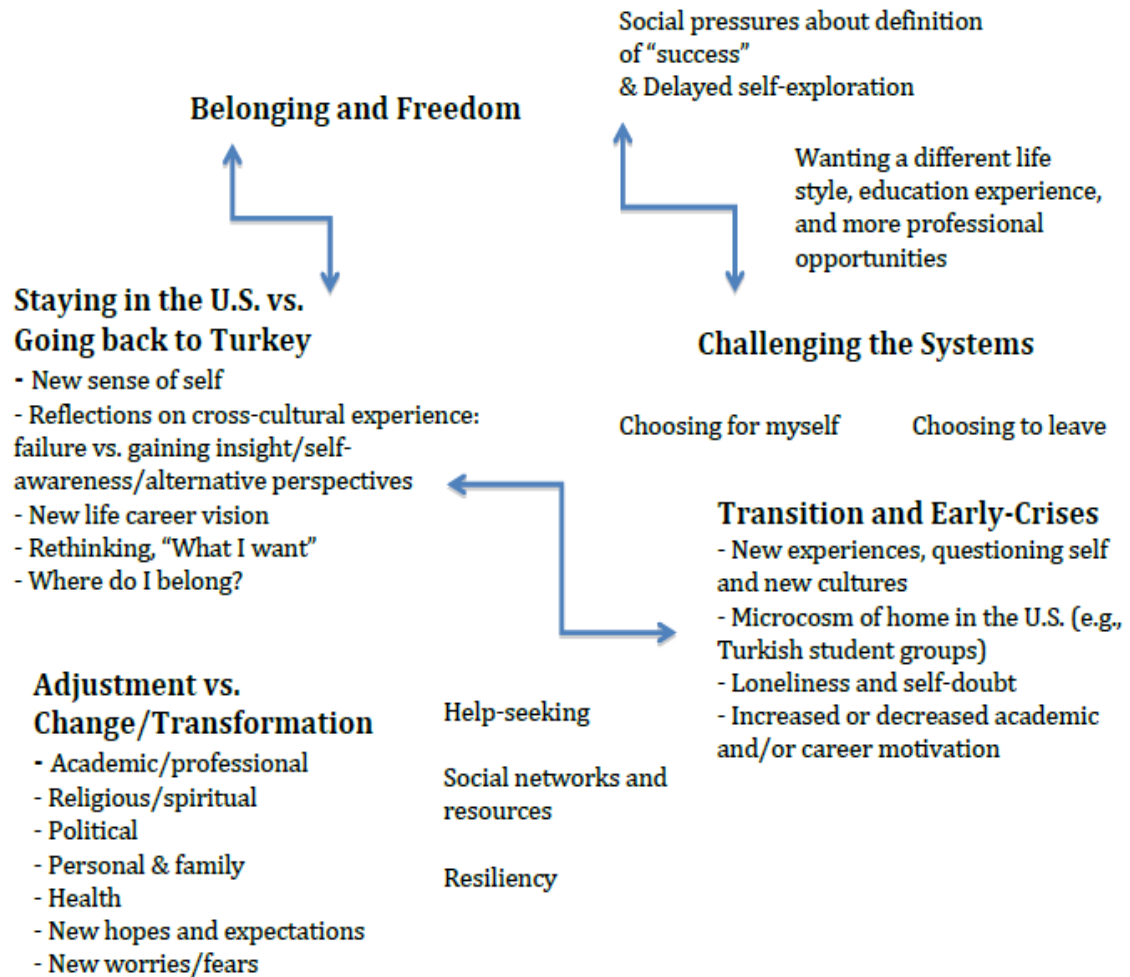
Person Obtaining Consent

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Date

## APPENDIX C

### Idea Map



## APPENDIX D

### Collage Example



## Vita of Elif Balin

### Education

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Ph.D., *Counselor Education & Supervision (Minor in Women's Studies)*, The Pennsylvania State University, December 2014 (anticipated)

M.S., *Psychological Counseling and Guidance*, Middle East Technical University (Turkey), June 2008

B.S., *Psychological Counseling and Guidance*, Boğaziçi University (Turkey), June 2006

### Publications

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Balin, E., & Kang, Z. Y. (In press). Advancing social justice by advocating for decent work. In C. Lee (Ed.), *Counseling for Social Justice* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Niles, S. G., Yoon, H. J., **Balin**, E., & Amundson, N. E. (2011). Using a hope-centered model of career development in challenging times. *Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Journal*, 4, 101-108.

Balin, E., & Hirschi, A. (2010). Who seeks career counselling? A prospective study of personality and career variables among Swiss adolescents. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 10 (3), 161-176. doi: 10.1007/s10775-010-9183-y

### Selected International and National Presentations

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Balin, E., Knapp, E., Sanjay-Raut, P., Zhang, L., & Radman, J. (2014, June). *Best practices for working with international students*. Education session presented at the National Career Development Association Global Conference, Long Beach, California.

Balin, E. (2013, November). *A transnational feminist analysis of life and career narratives of international women students from Turkey*. Paper presented in panel: Politicizing Inclusionary Practices. National Women's Studies Association Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Balin, E. & Nichols, L. (2013, October). *Knowledge and experience of career development in Counselor Education: A hidden value for further growth*. Education session presented at the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, Denver, Colorado.

Balin, E., Nichols, L., Hinojosa, T., & Nguyen, N. (2011, July). *Exploring the comfort zone: An international cultural immersion in Turkey and implications for professional development*. Roundtable presentation at The National Career Development Association Global Conference, San Antonio, Texas.

Balin, E. (2011, June). *A comparative perspective of counselor education and supervision programs in Turkey and the U.S.* Fellowship presentation at International Association for Counselling (IAC) Conference, Montego Bay, Jamaica.

### Teaching Experience: Courses Taught/Co-Taught (at The Pennsylvania State University)

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- Individual Counseling Procedures (Fall 2014)
- Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies (Fall 2013; Fall 2012; Spring 2014)
- Effective Career Decision Making (Spring 2011; Spring 2012)
- Counseling without Borders: Cultural Immersion in Turkey (Cross-cultural counseling course) (Spring & Summer 2010)
- Organization and Administration of Pupil Services (School Counseling course) (Summer 2009)