

Reframing the Concepts of Identity and Difference Through the Lens of Dialogical Transversal Politics¹

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Pelin Dincer*

*¹Arř. Gör. Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fak., Beytepe/Ankara/Türkiye
E-Mail: pelindincer@gmail.com ORCID: [0000-0002-8999-0535](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8999-0535)

Abstract

In this study, it is argued that identity politics produces a misrecognition of differences. Even though identity politics purports to support diversity, it actually tends to incarcerate groups within simplified categories and reified identities, while assuming an illusionary homogeneity within groups. Therefore, it has the tendency to ignore intra-group differences and contributes to the perpetuation of existing stereotypes related to the groups, which minimise the potential for interaction among those with different identities. This paper aims to present a political and conceptual tool, transversal politics, in which the emphasis is on the "message", not the "messenger", as a form of dialogical politics and an alternative to the limitations of identity politics. Transversal politics emphasises that it is not the identity of the messenger that is important, but the message and the communication. Establishing transversal dialogue among groups requires respecting groups' multiple positionings and it allows us to examine those entangled issues individually and collectively, which transcends one of the central drawbacks of both identity politics and universalist ideologies. With a focus on dialogical transversal politics, this study provides an alternative approach to understand differences to some degree.

Keywords: *Identity, identity politics, transversal politics, dialogical politics.*

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Kimlik ve Farklılık Kavramlarının Diyaloğ Temelli Çapraz Politika Üzerinden Yeniden Değerlendirilmesi

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Öz

Bu çalışmada, kimlik politikalarının farklılıkların yanlış tanımlamasını ürettiği tartışılmıştır. Kimlik politikaları tartışmalarında çeşitliliğin desteklendiği savunulsa dahi, gruplar içerisinde yanlıcı bir homojenlik varsayılmakla birlikte, grupların basitleştirilmiş kategoriler ve maddeleştirilmiş kimlikler içinde hapsedilmesi eğilimi mevcuttur. Bu nedenle, kimlik politikalarının grup içi farklılıkları görmezden gelme eğilimi bulunmakta, gruplarla ilgili var olan kalıp yarguların sürekliliğine katkıda bulunmakta ve farklı kimlikleri olan kişiler ve gruplar arasındaki etkileşim potansiyelini en aza indirmektedir. Bu çalışma, vurgunun “mesajı ileten kişi” den ziyade “mesaj” da olduğu politik ve kavramsal bir araç olan çapraz politikayı, bir diyalog politikası biçimi ve kimlik politikalarının sınırlamalarına bir alternatif olarak sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çapraz politika, önemli olanın mesajı iletenin kimliğinden ziyade mesajın kendisinde ve iletişimde olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Gruplar arasında çapraz diyalog kurmak grupların çoklu konumlarına saygı duymayı gerektirmekte ve bu, birbirine geçişken sorunları hem ayrı ayrı hem de birlikte incelememize imkân vererek hem kimlik politikalarının hem de evrensel ideolojilerin temel sakıncalarının ötesine geçiş imkânı sağlamaktadır. Diyalog temelli çapraz politikaya dayanan bu çalışma, farklılıkları anlamak için bir ölçüde alternatif bir yaklaşım sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kimlik, kimlik politikaları, çapraz politika, diyalog politikası.*

Introduction

The emphasis on differences based on diverse identities has increased swiftly since 1990s across the globe due to identity-based movements, which demand particular rights and recognition. However, the same emphasis has also given rise to neglecting power relations within the identity-based movements and fixating boundaries between groups and homogenising groups' memberships and belongings (Yuval-Davis, 2017, pp.157). Transversal politics constitutes an alternative to both universalistic politics and identity politics, where the former has been seen as assimilationist and ethnocentric – “assuming a Westocentric commonality of and viewpoint” – and the latter as relativist, which initially occurred as a result of those universalistic and monolithic approaches. However, as Yuval-Davis argues, contrary to its critiques of universalism, identity-based politics reified and essentialised boundaries between groups, homogenised individuals into collective identities and ignored intra-group differences. Unlike identity politics and universalistic approaches, transversal politics is dialogical politics based on cooperation. It emphasises a continuous communication between parties, “both horizontally and vertically”, as it is indicated in the name of “transversalism” (Yuval-Davis, 2012, pp.50). Drawing on a standpoint epistemology, transversal politics argues that “any knowledge based on just one positioning is ‘unfinished’”, rather than “invalid”. Thus, the truth can merely be reached when a wide dialogue can be established among people from different locations (Yuval-Davis, 2012, pp.51). Main aim of this study is to present an alternative reading on how to approach differences by discussing the limitations of identity politics and suggesting transversal values as an alternative based on the existing scholarly work on related subjects. Thus, this study first examines the conceptualisation of identity, collective identity and identity politics whilst discussing the essentialist nature and the limitations of

identity politics and second it presents transversal politics as an alternative approach to both identity politics and universalistic claims by arguing the advantages of its dialogical standpoint epistemology.

Theoretical Discussions on the Politics of Difference: Problematic Sides of Identity Politics Despite its Advantages

According to Stuart Hall, identity construction is based on an understanding of a common origin and traits shared with other individuals, groups or ideals, which enable to establish solidarity and loyalty (Hall, 1996, pp.2). Therefore, identity construction does not only involve personal identities but also the narratives of collective identity, which ensure collective sense of meaning making process (Yuval-Davis, 2010, pp.267). Although there is no unified definition of collective identity within the literature, it is very often understood as in Snow's definition, where he stresses "a shared sense of 'oneness' or 'we-ness'", as well as "collective agency" in the construction of collective identity along with "shared attributes and experiences" (Snow quoted in Fominaya, 2010, pp.394).

Meanwhile, della Porta and Diani's definition of collective identity is also established on common beliefs, point of views, stances, styles of living and also shared experiences. They argue that, although identities may sometimes be exclusive, most of the time they are inclusive and multiple (della Porta and Diani, 2006, pp.92). Alberto Melucci, who brought the concept of collective identity to the literature on contemporary new social movements, rejects the idea of collective identity as a given but rather defines it as a network of active relationships which is not necessarily based on unified and coherent attributes. In other words, activists do not need to fully agree on ideologies, values, interests or aims to unify, but their emotional involvement is important. He argues that, rather than shared interests, conflict strengthens group identity and solidarity (Melucci in

Fominaya, 2010, pp.394–395). Nevertheless, Fominaya argues that collective identity can stem from many different sources, such as “shared interests, ideologies, subcultures, goals, rituals, practices, values” etc. but warns that it should not be limited to them (Fominaya, 2010, pp.398).

She argues that collective identity is constructed through the interaction between more latent daily activities, such as preparing protests, fundraising, decision-making processes, and mobilisations, such as actual protests, in which activists develop solidarity and commitment and clarify their identity by understanding their own standpoint and the opposition’s (Fominaya, 2010, pp.398). Collective identity is important to feel a sense of belonging and to foster productivity. It may, however, lead to disregarding [intra]group differences and identity politics, in particular, may exacerbate the tendency to stay in small groups with whom you share a collective identity. A differentiation between identity and identity politics is very much needed here. Yuval-Davis argues that identity refers to an analytical dimension where belonging needs to be comprehended, whereas identity politics is a distinguishing sort of a project of the politics of belonging. Identities are, according to her, the narratives and stories that “people tell themselves and others about who they are, and who they are not, as well as who and how they would like to/should be” (Yuval-Davis, 2010, pp.266). In other words, they are “verbal and non-verbal narratives of self” (Yuval-Davis, 2010, pp.267). Therefore, both individual and collective identities establish similarities and differences between one’s identity and others’ while defining those positionings in steady forms. Both identities, thus, include “myths of common destiny”, whether these are historically valid or not (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp.43). She argues that belonging becomes politicised only when there is a threat against it. Another difference related to identity politics is its difference from other elements of belonging, such as social locations and normative values:

Social locations relate to the positioning of people, in particular times and in particular spaces, along intersecting (or, rather, mutually constitutive) grids of social power. Normative values relate to the ways specific belonging/s are evaluated and judged. These three analytical dimensions relate to each other but cannot be reduced to each other. This is important in order to be able to counter some of the analytical problems that tend to emerge when dealing with identity issues. (Yuval-Davis, 2010, pp.267–268)

Identity politics, on the other hand, includes definitive political projects to construct belongings of groups in distinguishing ways, such as recreating the boundaries of belonging and stressing the significance of specific types of belonging simultaneously. She argues that this also involves an approval of a distinct leadership in the role of an authoritative representative and interpreter of the identity category to show the “real” version of that identity (Yuval-Davis, 2010, pp.266).

Susan Hekman argues that identity politics can claim some positive achievements in terms of citizenship, despite its problems. Firstly, it discloses the hypocrisy of the idea of universal citizenship by revealing the resistance to “others” in the political realm. Secondly, identity politics has generated a new subject, a “relational subject constituted by the social/cultural influences of his/her particular situation” as opposed to the “modernist/liberal subject: the rational, autonomous disembodied subject of the Enlightenment tradition” (Hekman, 2010, pp.302–303). However, identity politics has been criticised both in activist and academic circles based on its “overemphasis on difference and identity at the expense of unity” (Alcoff & Mohanty, 2006, pp.3). Scholars who stress the positive features of identity politics, on the other hand, highlight the risk of neglecting differences among groups and prioritising the contextually hegemonic voice. It is argued that identity politics is politically significant (Alcoff & Mohanty, 2006, pp.8) since identities are “salient and ontologically real” entities and they are visible (Alcoff, 2006, pp.5). Alcoff argues that ignoring differences

is the reason for separatism and disconnection, not acknowledging identity differences, and emphasises the importance of listening to each other's differences (Alcoff, 2006). Like Alcoff, Benhabib also highlights the dialogical potential of identity politics and proposes a narrative model of identity through "webs of narratives":

We are born into webs of interlocution or into webs of narrative – from the familial and gender narratives to the linguistic one to the macronarrative of one's collective identity. We become who we are by learning to be a conversation partner in these narratives. Although we do not choose the webs in whose nets we are initially caught or select those with whom we wish to converse, our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for us, as unique individual selves. (Benhabib, 1999, pp.344)

Through this understanding of the narrative model of identity she claims that identity is not constructed based on sameness, but it is a dialogical narrative that has the potential of holding past and present together (Benhabib, 1999, pp.353). Weir also discusses the positive characteristics of both identity and identity-based movements. According to her, identity politics is constructed through transformative identifications. However, she argues that the focus should be on identification-with – "identification with others, identification with values and ideals, identification with ourselves, as individuals and as collectives" – rather than identity as a category, which, she asserts, pushes the liberatory aspect of identity politics into the background (Weir, 2008, 111). When the stress is on identification-with, she explains, then identity is not constructed based on sameness, but it rather is established on people's relationships with each other and their identifications that are formed on what they find meaningful and significant. Thus, it constitutes "an ethical-relational and political model of identity" (Weir, 2008, 116). This process is also dialogical, like Benhabib's account of narrative model of identity, since Weir argues that

identification-with can be achieved through creating meaning in virtue of narratives and practices throughout time (Weir, 2008, 118). Nevertheless, Susan Hekman argues that identity politics creates more problems than it solves: While defining a cluster of identities that individuals can adopt, it reproduces the liberal/modernist mistake which necessitates a specific identity for political participation. Hence, it maintains rather than surpasses that politics (Hekman, 2010, pp.303). While demonstrating the narrative potential of identity politics, Benhabib also warns of the problem related to the “mindless empiricist celebration of all pluralities” and criticises this notion of identity politics and irreconcilable identities, which she calls the “fungibility of identities”: “The clash of multiple identities as well as of the allegiances which surround them have come out into the public; the continuous and inevitable fragmentation of identities has made it almost impossible to develop a common vision of radical transformation” (Benhabib, 1995, pp.24).

Drawing on Young’s terminology, there is also a need to differentiate between two versions of the identity politics: a politics of positional difference and a politics of cultural difference. Young emphasises that the latter has gained more attention in public discourse and from political theorists. She argues that, even though these two versions share the same approach to difference-blind policies, they differ in terms of how they perceive justice and equality (Young, 2007, pp.60). The politics of positional difference deals with structural inequalities when groups’ social positionings limit their circumstances in terms of factors favourable to their well-being. Young refers to the 1980s and gives feminist, anti-racist, and gay liberation movements’ struggles with structural inequalities of gender, race and sexuality as examples of the politics of positional difference. She argues that achieving justice and equality based on a politics of positional difference requires applying the same principles to all people regardless of their particular social positioning. Therefore, to eliminate unjust ine-

quality, group differences should clearly be acknowledged and disadvantages should be compensated for by taking special steps. However, this approach has been subjected to criticism because of its ignorance of social positioning differences among and within groups and its reductive interpretation of identifying equality only with equal treatment. In the 1990s, however, a new version of the politics of difference, a politics of cultural difference, emerged, which highlighted the differences of ethnicity, religion and nationality. Young argues that majority modern societies include various cultural groups, some of whom unfairly control the state and its institutions, overshadowing minority cultures and preventing them from living fully according to their cultural values, sometimes to the degree that their survival as a culture might be in danger. When they try to survive, they are likely to face serious economic and political costs. Therefore, this form of the politics of difference highlights the importance of cultural distinctness to individuals, and constituents of these cultural groups require particular rights and protections for their culture to prosper (Young, 2007, pp.60–65, 76). As a result, Young argues that both approaches should be affirmed, while being clear on both their conceptual and practical differences:

While they are logically distinct, each approach is important. The politics of cultural difference is important because it offers vision and principle to respond to dominative nationalist or other forms of absolutist impulses. We can live together in common political institutions and still maintain institutions by which we distinguish ourselves as peoples of cultures with distinct practices and traditions. Acting on such a vision can and should reduce ethnic, nationalist, and religious violence. The politics of positional difference is important because it highlights the depth and systematic basis of inequality, and shows that inequality before the law is not sufficient to remedy this inequality. It calls attention to relations and processes of exploitation, marginalization, and normalization that

keep many people in subordinate positions. (Young, 2007, pp.78–79)

Both approaches represent the contemporary debates based on different identities and social locations. However, I argue that identity politics produces a misrecognition of differences. Even though identity politics purports to support diversity, it actually tends to incarcerate groups within simplified categories and reified identities, while assuming an illusionary homogeneity within groups. Therefore, both approaches to the politics of difference have the tendency to ignore intra-group differences and contribute to the perpetuation of existing stereotypes related to the groups, which minimise the potential for interaction among those with different identities. What Hekman offers as a solution to the problems related to identity politics is to move beyond identity, since she argues that identity politics has overmuch identity in it. She argues that political actors should identify with specific political goals and mobilise around those (Hekman, 2010, pp.302–304). However, emphasising one's ethnic or religious identity should not necessarily be an indication of an essentialist view of these identities. As Arendt argues, one can confirm that one is a "Jew" but this does not necessitate an emphasis on some fixed essence of Jewishness that every Jew shares (Allen, 1999, pp.109). Thus, I argue that the problem is the essentialist, exclusive and fixed structure of identity politics instead, and seeing these identities as unalterable and not transitional. This understanding has engendered an essentialist understanding of difference:

Within each of these idealized groups, the assumptions about "discovered" homogenous reality usually continue to operate. "Identity politics" tend not only to homogenize and naturalize social categories and groupings, but also to deny shifting boundaries of identities and internal power differences and conflicts of interest. (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp.119)

As Young notes, activists within the identity-based movements realised its exclusionary and essentialist nature themselves. Working-class women, for example, criticised class partiality in how women's experiences are discussed within feminism. Likewise, African-American gay men questioned the characterisation of manhood within the black movement. This created, as Young argues, an insoluble tension between particularities and generalities of individuals' positionings (Young, 2006, pp.13). In order to move away from the exclusionary nature and the problematic sides of identity politics, I offer to adopt transversal understanding of differences, in which the emphasis is on the "message", not the "messenger".

An Alternative Approach to Identity Politics: Transversal Dialogical Politics

Yuval-Davis took the concept, transversal politics, from Italian feminists, introduced it in English and has used it widely in her works. In the first paragraph of one article (1999), Yuval-Davis writes that, like many other activists, she had been in search of a name to define what they are doing, such as unity in diversity, and finally she found it at a meeting organised by Italian feminists in Bologna with Palestinian and Israeli women in 1993. Later she learnt that transversal politics had been used in left-wing politics in Bologna for a while. She emphasises that transversal politics has been cultivated as an alternative to both the ethnocentric and exclusionary universalistic politics of the left and also essentialist identity politics that homogenise the individual into the collective and concretise boundaries between groups. Another important scholar who consistently uses transversal politics in her works, Cynthia Cockburn, emphasises the importance of transversal politics in her collaboration with Lynette Hunter:

It answers to a need to conceptualise a democratic practice of a particular kind, a process can on the one hand look for commonalities without being arrogantly universalist, and on the

other affirm difference without being transfixed by it. Transversal politics is the practice of creatively crossing (and re-drawing) the borders that mark significant politicised differences. It means empathy without sameness, shifting without tearing up your roots. (Cockburn and Hunter, 1999, pp.88–89)

Transversal politics is formed on the following features. The first is standpoint epistemology. It means that each positioning will create different opinions and worldviews and that all these positions are also unfinished but not invalid. Thus, establishing dialogue between differently located people is the only way to reach the “truth”. Transversal politics’s second feature is the “encompassment of difference by equality”. Although differences are important for transversal politics as indicated in the first principle, the concept of difference should surround the concept of equality, rather than to replace it. This understanding acknowledges that differences are not hierarchical, respects the positionings of others and understands differences in their relation to social, economic and political power. Thirdly, Yuval-Davis states that transversal politics differentiates positioning, identity and values – the components of belonging. Thus, transversal politics assumes that people’s positions, identities and values may vary. People who are in the same group or collectivity can be located in another way based on their class, gender, ability, sexuality or stage in life. Likewise, people with similar positioning might differ based on their social and political values. Consequently, the outer limit of transversal politics are common values, such as “democracy” and “human rights”, rather than common identifications (Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp.94–95; 2010, pp.278; 2011, pp.21).

As Yuval-Davis discusses transversal politics are dialogical politics (Yuval-Davis, 2011, pp.110). However, activists should see themselves as advocates who work to promote their cause, rather than as representatives of their groups, and still have to be conscious of other positionings, both in their own constituencies and others – the multiplicity of one’s particular

positioning. However, as Yuval-Davis warns, even as advocates, activists should be reflexive and conscious about their own positionings in relation to their groups' members and also to other individuals in their encounters. Also, those advocates do not need to be members of the constituencies since it is the message that is important, not the messenger (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp.120; 1999, pp.96; 2012, pp.51; 2016c, pp.345). This representation, which Yuval-Davis sees as the main problem of identity politics, can only be solved, then, with activists' acknowledgement of their positionings: seeing themselves only as advocates. Transversal politics emphasises that it is not the identity of the messenger that is important, but the message and the communication.

Butler argues that the parties involved in a dialogical process may not comprehend the process in same ways – one may consider that the conversation is on whilst the other party may assume it is not happening. Thus, she suggests that the power dynamics within a dialogical process must be primarily examined. She warns about the risk of assuming that the all parties in a dialogue hold equal positions of power (Butler, 1990, pp.14–15). This, as Brandt notes, could be seen as a problematic aspect of transversal politics. She argues that transversal politics does not carefully examine the disputes of power inequality among groups in coalition work regarding their visibility, recognition, social advantages etc. (Brandt, 2015, pp.497–498). It could be said, however, that transversal politics had already anticipated this problem and offered an answer to this issue by emphasising the importance of constructive dialogue. In their early work, Cockburn and Hunter state that transversal politics does not deny differences within groups and is sceptical about an undifferentiated sense of community. It supports constructive dialogue, which is the core of transversal politics: “finding a common tongue and ... taking up the challenge of learning each other's languages” (Cockburn & Hunter, 1999, pp.91). Yuval-Davis explains how to achieve this with the terms “rooting” and “shifting”:

The idea is that each such “messenger”, and each participant in a political dialogue, would bring with them the reflexive knowledge of their own positioning and identity. This is the “rooting”. At the same time, they should also try to “shift” – to put themselves in the situation of those with whom they are in dialogue and who are different. (Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp.96)

Therefore, rooting and shifting call for reflexivity and empathy. In other words, in a dialogical process, “rooting” represents “the reflective self” and “shifting” includes individuals’ empathetical imagination of themselves in the positionings of other participants. Drawing on Alison Assiter’s terminology, Yuval-Davis stresses the importance of “a common value system, being part of the same ‘epistemological community’” in order to achieve shifting (Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler, 2002, pp.341). An “epistemological community” here refers to “political values rather than location along intersecting/intermeshed axes of power or cultural perspectives” and it constitutes a unifying factor (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002, pp.320). Despite her criticism of transversal politics, Brandt also states that transversal politics rejects sole aspirations for unity and homogeneity by stressing “rooting” and “shifting”. It also acknowledges groups’ various positionings and partial knowledges. Transversal politics, then, argues that mobilised groups are not naturally given entities but rather they are politically constructed (Brandt, 2015, pp.497).

Yuval-Davis also reminds us that transversal politics does not expect that all conflict of interests are compatible or that dialogue can be achieved without any boundaries. She adds that it is difficult to define the boundaries of coalition politics. While giving feminist campaigns as an example, she argues that based on specific historical conditions, those campaigns can differ remarkably and there are also various different strands among feminists, which lead to very serious differences of opinion. Moreover, political campaigns vary from – “a tight formal organisation to an informal network, from an ideological alliance to a single-issue-based coalition”

(Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp.96). On the other hand, since transversal politics does not prioritise any identity or positioning, it can simultaneously give privilege to different activities undertaken from diverse viewpoints. Activists, for instance, can prioritise the legalisation of abortion at the same time as prioritising a campaign against forced sterilisation. Yuval-Davis emphasises that both events can take place at the same time, organised by the same groups. She warns, however, about the possibility of lack of human and financial resources, when groups need to choose and there is no transversal way of choosing only one of them (Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp.98). The point where transversal politics stops is where the aims of the project maintain or advocate unequal power relations, which essentialise identity and thus naturalise exclusion (Yuval-Davis, 1999, pp.97).

In her later writings, Yuval-Davis continues to emphasise the importance of common values for transversal politics and argues that the aim of transversal politics is to form a “collective ‘us’”, across borders and boundaries of membership, based on solidarity with regard to common emancipatory values” (Yuval-Davis, 2010, pp.277–278). She also discusses what is necessary for transversal politics to continue, and the importance of understanding that via discussions on feminist movements:

the relationships of the feminists participating in such dialogue are often not symmetrical, that some of them are more critical of their national collectivities than others, but they all share feminist politics, respect each other and look for ways to transcend, if not to transform, their national and ethnic conflicts.
(Yuval-Davis, 2011, pp.110)

In her works, Yuval-Davis offers an intersectional analysis, where gender, race, ethnicity and other social locations are enlaced and constitute the specific practices of groups and individuals. Thus, as Byrne has recently noted, her analysis of transversalism is also “a kind of intersectional praxis which attempts to transcend any single subject position” (Byrne,

2014, pp.113). In her elaborated work on politics of belonging, Yuval-Davis argues that transversal politics should be based on mutual respect and mutual trust. Activists, therefore, should care about each other, as in caring about transversal allies, not the needy (Yuval-Davis, 2011, pp.199). This form of feminist politics of belonging is based on a feminist ethics of care, as Yuval-Davis (2011) argues, which is a normative ideal that surpasses other traditional forms of the politics of belonging, such as citizenship, nationalism, religion or cosmopolitanism. It is the most significant and necessary form of the politics of belonging, which does not “neglect to reflect upon the relations of power not only among the participants in the political dialogue but also between these participants and the global carriers of power who do not share their values who need to be confronted, influenced, and when this is not possible – resisted” (Yuval-Davis, 2016a, pp.378). In this understanding of transversal politics, it is both established as an alternative to identity politics and also as a form of and prerequisite for feminist ethics of care. Respect for differences requires a symmetrical relationship. Thus, activists’ care for each other should not be based on dependence but on political trust: “that others share the value system and that they undertake daily practices that sustain the project. Such a political project of belonging needs to cross borders and boundaries of class, gender, lifecycle stages, ethnicity, nationality, religion and ability” (Yuval-Davis, 2016b, pp.436). This emphasis on trust, according to Yuval-Davis, differentiates transversal politics from other forms of dialogical politics, such as Habermasian deliberative democracy approach. Transversal politics points out the difference between “care and compassion towards the oppressed” and acknowledging them as possible political allies (Yuval-Davis, 2017, pp.164). Yuval-Davis argues that “in order to transform humanity into a more just and equal society, we need to establish solidarity and alliance with those we recognize as sharing our basic political values and social vision although their social locations and identifications can be very different from our own”, which constitutes the

foundation of transversal politics as a form of solidarity politics (Yuval-Davis, 2017, pp.163).

Transversal politics has also been taken up by many others, which shows its utility in variety of contexts and justifies its standing as being of contemporary value. Cole and Philips (2008), for instance, explain the policy of transversalism in gender-mainstreaming practices in Latin America, specifically in Brazil and Ecuador. They argue that both governments follow an explicit policy of transversalism to accommodate gender issues in their programs by initiating dialogue and participatory mechanisms to reach a wider audience and to ensure that women's issues are addressed in policy development, particularly in order to tackle violence against women. Lim (2015) on the other hand addresses transversal politics in the context of transnational feminism in Hong-Kong and how to establish solidarity in a pluralist feminist community. She argues that in such a highly transnational place as Hong Kong, transversal politics provides a productive space for feminist negotiations by keeping universalistic claims and identity politics out. Transversal politics has also been consistently used and developed by a prominent Black feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins, to discuss solidarity within the Black women's movement (Collins, 2009; 2017). In her most recent work, she addresses violence as a social problem, which, she argues, requires a sophisticated account of transversal politics that takes intersecting power relations into consideration to understand its complexity (Collins, 2017).

In her analysis, Collins demonstrates the significance of transversal politics in understanding groups' histories as intersectional. Collins argues that transversal politics conceptualises "intersecting oppressions and group behavior in resisting them" (Collins, 2009, pp.368). She identifies six issues that are significant to the potential effectiveness of transversal politics, which clearly shows its difference from identity politics and why transversal politics is still needed. First, transversal politics opposes binary thinking and instead advocates *both/and* thinking. Therefore, rather

than seeing individuals *either* being an oppressor *or* oppressed, *either* racist *or* antiracist, *either* sexist *or* not, in transversal politics individuals and groups hold multiple positions. In other words, individuals and groups maybe oppressed in some settings and oppressors in others, which can happen simultaneously (Collins, 2009, pp.265). The second subject proposes that in transversal understanding groups are historically constructed. They are perceived as fluid while holding internal differences and overlaps and intersections with other groups, rather than being “fixed, unchanging, and with clear-cut boundaries” (Collins, 2009, pp.265–266). The third issue is related with the critical self-reflection and internal dialogues with the self, which brings us to the fourth point – the acknowledgement of groups’ histories relationality. In other words, in transversal politics groups are interdependent and can be defined in relation with each other (Collins, 2009, pp.266–267). However, as the fifth issue indicates, this interdependency does not mean equivalency. That is to say groups’ access to power and resources and their experiences are not the same. (Collins, 2009, pp.267). Thus, they hold varied positions and intra-group differences are acknowledged, which is neglected by identity politics. The related and final dimension of transversal politics necessitates the acceptance of active quality of coalitions, which “ebb and flow based on the perceived saliency of issues to group members”. Therefore, in a specific circumstance, for instance, one group can view gender as the most salient, while in another one race, class etc. can play an important role (Collins, 2009, pp.267–268).

Yuval-Davis stresses that the strength of transversal politics lies in common values rather than common political action. Hence, she does not categorise coalition building included in transversal politics. She warns that, in rainbow coalitions, different political approaches may be prioritised based on diverse positionings (Yuval-Davis, 2011, pp.197–198). Nevertheless, as Collins argues, in transversal politics groups are not formed around identity classifications. Therefore, they can be established around

an issue or an affinity. Transversal politics, then, involves varied coalition formations (Collins, 2009, pp.317). There are many “truths” in a transversal approach and dialogue is the key to reconcile them. How to handle “identity” whilst constructing a dialogue is important:

A person’s subjective sense of self is not necessarily congruent with the identity or identities with which others inscribe her (Hall 1996). Her ideas, beliefs and desires, therefore, may not be “read off” from her apparent “name” – “Jew” or “Palestinian,” let’s say. Identity is something that calls for questioning, not closure. Thus, transversal politics transcends identity politics. It questions the very notion of identity, setting a clear space between the “name” with which a person is identified, or labeled, by others, and that person’s lived sense of self (Cockburn, 2014, pp.441).

Transversal politics was originally developed as an alternative to essentialising identity politics in ethnicised conflict areas. Byrne, however, argues that identity politics can form the basis of resistance for some groups in various ethnonational communities in conflict and post-conflict zones and thus it contributes the emancipatory politics, which should not be irreconcilable with transversal politics. Thus, she disagrees with the exclusion of identity politics from transversal politics (Byrne, 2014, pp.107–109). However, whilst Byrne’s argument on the necessity for identity politics in particular regions and for specific groups may be justifiable in some cases, I still argue that identity politics is very limiting to understand groups’ and individuals’ multiple particularities. It creates the “trap of ‘oppression Olympics’ (Hancock 2011), in which contested unidimensional constructions of oppression compete with each other” (Yuval-Davis, 2012, pp.52). With the help of intersectional analysis, transversal politics, however, “uses dialogical collective knowledge, imagination and judgment” (Yuval-Davis, 2012, pp.52). Transversal politics does recognise groups’ different social locations and identifications. However, when the

emphasis is not on the “message” but the “messenger”, there is a danger of essentialist construction of identities (Yuval-Davis, 2016c, pp.344):

In her most recent elaboration of the idea of transversal politics, Patricia Hill Collins (2017) identifies transversal politics as a mode of political action, which is also significant to understand organised political resistance. She argues that Yuval-Davis’ concept of transversal politics involves elasticity and flexibility. Collins notes that Yuval-Davis focuses more on the “the authority of nation-states in creating and reproducing historically constituted, socially stratified population groups”, rather than the “groups that are based solely on self-chosen identities or identifications”. Therefore, Yuval-Davis’ focus is not in line with the contemporary emphasis on individuals and their rights but more about what historically constituted groups bring to coalition politics in terms of opportunities and constraints. This approach, Collins argues, creates a realm for inter-group politics to be usefully analysed, as in transversal politics (Collins, 2017, pp.1470), which is one of the shortcomings of identity politics. One might argue that transversal politics is an abstract, unrealistic and aspirational construct. However, as Collins argues, the two main features of transversal politics, “rooting” and “shifting”, allows groups to establish coalitions whilst not losing their own historically rooted positionings and what these positionings might generate. Hence transversal politics does not neglect groups’ particularities in order to form unified alliances. It, rather, necessitates “remaining rooted while shifting” (Collins, 2017, pp.1470). Transversal politics require mutual engagement and common action of the parties; thus, it also acknowledges the importance of the “self”. As Collins argues, transversal politics enables individuals to “root” in their own particular group histories, however, they simultaneously realise in order to establish dialogue with other people across their differences, they must “shift” from their centres (Collins, 2009, pp.265).

Concluding Remarks

This study aims to present transversal politics as an alternative approach to understand identity and difference, which has a significant potential to foster dialogue among groups and to move beyond cleavages based on polarised identities. Transversal politics emphasises reflexive dialogue among differently located groups. However, as stated earlier, transversal politics does not assume that each conflict of interest is reconcilable, which shows that transversal politics rejects any essentialist views of differences and working across them. Here, Collins argues that coalition politics should be understood within a context of intersectional power relations and must be seen as under construction and not as ideologically fixed (Collins, 2017, pp.1470–1472).

With these features, transversal politics offers the best possible political strategy to find a space apart from the exclusionary nature of identity politics – which focuses on fixed and reified identities and ignores intra-group differences as well as neglecting inter-group relationality – and universalism – which claims for a homogenised subject. Transversal politics suggests that it is possible to “criticize political ideologies and daily practices of all people, whatever their social, economic and political positionings”, for example, without being called Islamophobic or racist for criticising Islamists. Because, otherwise, it creates the assumption of unity among the members of the same ethnicity, nation, race or religious group and presumes that criticising an ideology or a practice is against all of its members, which Yuval-Davis defines as a racist presumption itself (Yuval-Davis, 2016b, pp.436). Establishing transversal dialogue among groups, then, requires moving beyond both identity politics and universalism and respecting groups’ multiple positionings. Transversal politics allows us to examine those entangled issues individually and collectively, which fulfils one of the central drawbacks of both identity politics and universalist ideologies. This fulfilment necessitates a self-transformative

work for advancement and transversal politics offers practical means of accomplishing this. “Rooting” and “shifting” clarify how to change one’s viewpoint from self-interested to common values. “Shifting” facilitates as a useful tool to comprehend and acknowledge other “rooted” positionings. Hence, transversal politics does not homogenise individuals under any category and it rather establishes respect for their differences. Transversal politics encourages individuals to foster an environment based on dialogical communication, which brings analytical knowledge of groups’ multiple positionings along the transnational matrix of power.

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