

Turning Disadvantage into Advantage: Achievement Narratives of Descendants of Migrants from Turkey in the Corporate Business Sector

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Abstract

While researchers have often studied descendants of migrants in terms of their educational and occupational shortcomings, there is a lack of studies on an emerging group of professionals with exceptional achievements. Drawing on data collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews in Frankfurt am Main, Paris and Stockholm with business professionals whose parents migrated from Turkey, this article explores how they present their stories within the framework of struggle and success, while they try to avoid victimization. Their narratives emphasize the benefits of being exceptional and different in the competitive context of the corporate business sector, with its emphasis on innovative performance. In the face of group disadvantage, they differentiate themselves from other descendants of migrants from Turkey (with less successful careers) by stressing the role of personal characteristics and individual achievements. This is a common feature in the respondents' narratives in all three sites.

Keywords: descendants of migrants, corporate business professionals, occupational achievement, narratives, group disadvantage

Introduction

Children of migrants from Turkey are among the most disadvantaged groups across Western Europe in regard to education, access to the labour market, and occupational attainments (Heath, Rothon and Kilpi 2008: 228). However, some manage considerable occupational achievements in spite of their potentially disadvantageous background. Classical approaches in migration research suggest explaining this phenomenon by looking at the decrease of ethnic and socio-economic differences over time in terms of assimilation to boundaries established by the dominant majority (Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba and Nee 1997). According to Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999), individuals can make strategic use of a set of cultural elements usually associated with a minority group in order to accomplish economic mobility in the context of

group disadvantage. The idea of second generation advantage (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters 2004; Kasinitz et al. 2008) emphasizes the drive to become successful among immigrant parents and their children, arguing that the second generation is better equipped to function in a multi-ethnic and diverse environment.

While recent contributions emphasize the importance of considering institutional variations across different national contexts with regard to differing outcomes (Cruel and Schneider 2010; Cruel, Schneider and Lelie 2012), existing approaches to intergenerational social mobility usually do not focus on narratives of personal success or failure. Literature on intergenerational social mobility of children of migrants often theorize integration as a reachable endpoint by putting emphasis on educational and occupational

performances, while there is a lack of studies investigating the consequences of these subjective experiences. Therefore, the central research question of this article is: *How do successful adult children of migrants from Turkey narrate their occupational achievements?* With the heterogeneity of the Turkish¹ second generation in Western Europe in mind, this article addresses exceptional achievement narratives of persons whose lower educated parents migrated from Turkey to Germany, France and Sweden.

As part of the ELITES project that is researching successful² children of migrants from Turkey across four countries (Germany, France, Sweden and the Netherlands), this research in particular examines achievement narratives based on empirical data gathered through 18 qualitative interviews with corporate business professionals³ in the metropolitan areas of Frankfurt (am Main), Paris and Stockholm. The main objective of this paper is to examine how occupationally successful individuals, who allegedly belong to a disadvantaged group in their respective societies, internalize and modify the dominant conception of achievement within the context of international business.

¹ It should be noted that 'Turkish' does not claim to objectify the alleged ethnic belonging of individuals. Therefore, it should also not be perceived as an imposed homogenization of this group's diversity, but as a conceptual simplification to identify the parents' country of origin.

² The often interchangeably employed concepts of success and achievement both include a strong normative element since societal discourses as well as distinct opportunity structures shape their construction. Whereas the notion of achievement indicates the role of performance and agency, success (as well as failure) rather refers to a condition.

³ Professionalism is a concept identifying symbolic resources (re)producing occupational orders based on expertise and craftsmanship (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011). The term 'professionals' as it is used here denotes that most of the persons involved have followed specialized training, although the business sector seems rather open towards newcomers and career changers due to its emphasis on innovation and performance.

Many respondents in this study have to engage in the negotiation of boundaries when trying to explain their achievements. Being in comparable positions to the businesspeople in Lamont's study on the French and American upper-middle class, they could also be regarded as men and women of considerable power who "frame other people's lives in countless ways as they conceive, advise, hire, promote, select and allocate" (Lamont 1992: 13). However, in contrast to professionals with native parentage, be they upper or working class, the migration of their parents provides them with an additional frame of reference for their achievements. Belonging to a disadvantaged group, they have to deal with a majority of peers of a similar background who have encountered more problems throughout their careers.

According to Mills (1959), the sociological imagination should take into account both individual lives as well as societal histories while trying to understand how they relate to each other. The ability to shift one's perspective is essential in order to elucidate the links between the 'personal troubles' of individuals and 'structural issues'. The importance of an approach that focuses on individual narratives lies in its ability to provide insights to the complex and sometimes contradictory subjectivities on the interweaving of identities, educational pathways and occupational achievements. Findings that are based on individuals' own representations and understandings of these relations could shed light on the wider implications of these narratives.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand how corporate business professionals whose parents migrated from Turkey frame their achievement narratives, a theoretical framework is presented in three interrelated sections: The first section briefly describes how group disadvantage can affect life chances of individuals; the subsequent section briefly discusses how (perceived) individual difference can be beneficial within the context of interna-

tional business; the final section conceptualizes achievement ideology as a meritocratic perspective that might downplay structural inequalities by explaining success and failure as an outcome determined by individual agency.

Exceptional Individuals from a Disadvantaged Group

The construction of identities is a contingent process of assignment and assertion, which in turn leads to social dispositions and agendas. The categorization of individuals into groups often influences their trajectories, and while one can occupy different positions in a variety of groups at the same time, both individual and collective identities are defined by making use of external 'others'. 'Construction sites' such as politics, labour markets, residential space, social institutions, culture, and daily experience can affect the salience of identities (Cornell and Hartmann 2007). The co-occurrence of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination leads to the stigmatization of groups, which affects life chances of individuals. That is to say, when people construct categories and link them to stereotypical beliefs, individuals might have to deal with a devalued, or 'spoiled' social identity (Link and Phelan 2001: 363-365; Goffman 1963).

Recent comparative research confirms that children of migrants from Turkey are facing higher risks of unemployment, often report unfavourable treatment experiences while job-seeking, and they have a lower proportion among professionals and executives (Lessard-Phillips, Fibbi and Wanner 2012: 170, 190, 192). More specifically, in Germany, there is a widespread perception of sociocultural 'integration deficits' of the Turkish second generation which is disadvantaged in terms of employment, income levels and returns from education concerning occupational attainment (Worbs 2003; Kalter and Granato 2007). In France, there are persistent difficulties for the Turkish second generation to enter the job market in general and, more precisely, in acquiring high-status occupations (Simon 2003; Silberman, Alba and Fournier 2007). In Sweden, unemploy-

ment rates are consistently higher for children of migrants than for their native parentage peers. Again, the Turkish second-generation has lower probabilities of employment and lower levels of earnings (Westin 2003; Behrenz, Hammarstedt and Månsson 2007).

Salient labels are dependent on the context and not everyone has to cope with the same consequences of an ascribed group identity. Nevertheless, it can be argued that when entering into professional careers and climbing up the social ladder, the so-called second generation is embracing new roles while simultaneously challenging their marginalization based on ascribed group identity. Therefore, achievements of individuals who allegedly belong to subordinate groups can be subject to a 'politics of exceptionality' (Cuádriz 2006). Instead of considering their achievement in relation to institutional processes and structural opportunities, they are seen as individual exceptions to the usual pathways of group members. The following section discusses to what extent perceived difference can help individuals to advance in spite of group disadvantage.

Diversity within the Context of International Business

The notion of diversity within the context of international business is twofold: The entrance of minority group members into leading positions implies equal opportunity for individuals regardless of their background. However, there is also the potential for individuals to make use of their perceived difference by presenting themselves or being perceived as having an inherent competence within the context of international business, due to their immigrant background. Their perceived difference is not only to be tolerated by employers, clients and colleagues alike, but this 'cultural background' has the potential to enhance their individual careers.

In contemporary neoliberal 'knowledge economies', information is the essential commodity (Castells 2000). This allows for both competitiveness and achievement to be presented as

resulting from individual competences. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) identify that the new spirit of contemporary capitalism justifies occurring transformations in the labour market with a new value system, highly influenced by multinational companies that emphasize the need for individual agency in post-industrial economies. The project-based nature of occupational positions makes career development dependent on individual characteristics which define one's 'employability' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 185).

A neoliberal market framework promotes a drive of individual success in order to benefit from the possibilities of a global economy. In such an environment, profit is the main criterion for evaluating products and services (Bourdieu 1998: 128), whereas cultural competence can become a strategic device for individual benefits. So that, for instance, people who are supposedly able to operate in different cultural worlds because they are aware of relevant differences while doing business, can make use of diversity for competitive advantage in the global marketplace (Mitchell 2003). This is in line with Boli and Elliott (2008) who argue that the contemporary emphasis on diversity masks the individualization of cultural differences, which turns the self-directed, egalitarian, empowered individual into the most meaningful and valued social entity.

Achievement Ideology: Justifying the Status Quo
While Bourdieu (1977) thinks there is a strong reproductive bias built into structures, Giddens (1979) claims that structures are both medium and outcome of practices that constitute social systems. Following these conceptions, Sewell Jr. (1992: 19) came up with a theory of structure, defining it as "sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action". This implies a concept of agency as a constituent of structure, while an agent is capable of exerting some degree of control over social relations. However, individuals can access different kinds and amounts of

resources for transformative action, depending on their social positions (Sewell Jr. 1992: 20-21).

Neoliberal thought normatively associates achievement with exemplary individuals (Ong 2006; Demerath 2009). When corporate business professionals regard the principles of the market as the legitimate regulatory mechanism of their activities, structural inequalities become part of the meritocratic system, in which individuals are accountable for different outcomes. Individual achievements of subordinate group members can also be conceptualized as the result of a resistance with subversive potential (Carter 2009). However, a system justification perspective seems applicable in order to understand why members of disadvantaged groups accommodate and rationalize the status quo, thereby both internalizing and perpetuating inherent inequalities (Jost and Banaji 1994; Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004).

A system justification perspective enables one to perceive individual differences as determinants of inequalities. The mechanism at work is comparable to the 'American Dream' narrative; it is available for everyone, but the very fact that it exists is only due to the obliteration of the impossibility that everyone can simultaneously live the dream (Žižek 2002: 64). As a result, "the gratification of the upwardly mobile" can be complemented by "the pacification of the deeply poor", who might then believe that they have to turn things around themselves or remain accountable for their own failures (Hochschild 1996: 87). There is a general consensus among psychological literature stating that individuals tend to assume more personal responsibility for success than for failure. They also interpret and explain outcomes in ways that have favourable implications for the self (Mezulis et al. 2004). Whereas social science literature rarely theorizes the implications of presenting someone as an achiever, social psychological literature enables a more thorough understanding of the how and why people present themselves strategically, depending on the context and the social posi-

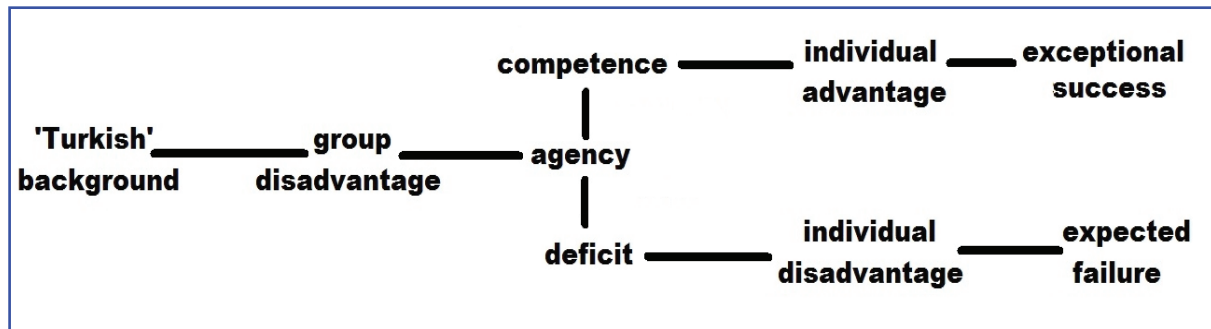


Figure 1: Turning disadvantage into advantage according to achievement ideology.
Source: The Author © The Author.

tion they occupy (see Jones and Pittman 1982; Goffman 1959).

Individuals usually interpret achievement against the backdrop of previous experience. Indeed, according to system justification theory, people tend to justify the way things are, especially if their experiences tell them that change is hardly possible. One way to do this is by using stereotypes to differentiate between themselves and others while taking their own achievements as an evaluative standard. This naturalizes and appropriates inequality by emphasizing the role of individual characteristics (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004: 889).

Figure 1 shows how, according to achievement ideology, even potentially disadvantageous background characteristics, such as having parents who migrated from Turkey, can be transformed into perceived competence and individual advantage subsequently. As agency paves the way for both success and failure, those who fail to turn things around are responsible for the fact that they have to cope with constant disadvantages caused by their background.

Methodology

Data Collection

Professionals whose lower educated parents migrated from Turkey are the primary sample of this research project. Data was collected by conducting qualitative in-depth interviews in the metropolitan areas of Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm. Whereas Paris and Stockholm are the capital cities as well as the economic and finan-

cial centres of France and Sweden, respectively, Frankfurt can be considered the financial capital of Germany, accommodating several major financial institutions and commercial banks. According to Sassen (2000), Paris and Frankfurt are two central nodes in a network of global cities binding international finance and business centres. The 2012 classification of the GaWC (13 January 2014) inventory of world cities places Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm in the 'alpha' category of global cities.

Data collection started with a mapping of professionals in leading positions of the corporate business sector in each setting to make sure we would be able to talk to people in comparable positions. The final selection of respondents was based on at least one of the following criteria: (1) persons having organizational and managerial or employee responsibilities within a company; (2) persons who are working in a senior position in a smaller service firm (including owners and self-employed professionals); (3) persons who are in a specialist or expert position within a company. These criteria account for the diversity of professions in financial and professional services that are interrelated, as professionals can switch between (sub-) sectors and positions.

The initial aim was to talk to professionals with at least three years of relevant work experience, which resulted in differences within the sample, as some professionals were more experienced or in more senior positions than others. Since snowballing was employed, this fieldwork might leave out some professionals who fit the crite-

ria but who were either not as 'visible' or whose social networks were not accessible. Respondents across these three sites work in knowledge and capital-intensive service positions with an emphasis on financial and professional services. There are three typical characteristics for the professions in the sample: First, they have an inherent international character. Second, there is quite some diversity concerning educational and professional pathways. Third, they are relatively prestigious, although they are not so much based on high educational credentials (as compared to traditional professions such as law and medicine).

Interviewers collected information on their career trajectories, asking questions about their family background, social networks, their sense of belonging, as well as their work ethic and career goals. They were loosely structured; in other words, semi-standardized. Each interviewee helped structure the conversation with answers and comments, although the same set of key questions was used for each interview (Fielding and Thomas 2008: 247). In addition, respondents could raise their own issues so that, on average, the interviews took around 1 ½ hours. The interviews were conducted in German or Turkish (Frankfurt), French or Turkish (Paris) and English or Turkish (Stockholm). While the author of this article conducted all interviews in Frankfurt and Stockholm, two trained researchers collected data in Paris. Anonymity of all respondents was guaranteed beforehand, so that delicate information could also be accessed in an atmosphere of a frank discussion.

Overview of Sample

The core empirical material in this paper consists of 18 corporate business professionals (12 male, 6 female) in Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm (4 males and 2 females in each setting). Turkey concluded labour recruitment agreements with Germany in 1961 (revised in 1964), with France in 1965, and with Sweden in 1967 (Akgündüz 2007: 96). Respondents' birth years and their parents' year of migration roughly reflect the post-World War II labour recruitment patterns from Turkey to Germany, Sweden and France (see Figure 2). The fact that the oldest average sample is based

	Frankfurt	Paris	Stockholm
Respondents' year of birth	1968-1976	1971-1986	1962-1973
Parents' year of migration	1962-1973	1971-1988	1963-1971

Figure 2: Overview of respondents' year of birth and their parents' year of migration.⁴

in Stockholm, in contrast to the youngest sample in Paris, can be explained by the following reasons: First of all, the sample includes respondents who migrated with their parents at a young age (sometimes referred to as the 1.5 generation) as well as some whose parents reached their destination country as refugees. Secondly, Turkish labour migration to Sweden mainly consisted of independently arranged migration which also occurred before the recruitment agreement. Finally, it was only after 1970 that France started recruiting migrants from Turkey on larger scale (Akgündüz 2007: 94-111).

In most cases, both parents of the respondents were born in Turkey and migrated to Germany, France or Sweden between the late 60s and early 80s. The majority of them conducted low-skilled manual labour upon migration, while only a few managed to set up their own businesses. Generally raised in their parents' destination country, some respondents also spent (parts of) their early childhood in Turkey before they were reunited with their migrant parents.

⁴ These are the years when one of the parents first entered the destination country. Usually the respondents' mothers followed (up to a few years) later, as recruited labour migrants or in terms of family reunification.

While the sample also includes individuals who attended secondary school and followed vocational training, most respondents obtained a university degree, predominantly within the subject areas of economics and finance.

The respondents' work experience in the area of professional and financial services falls within a range of 3 to more than 20 years, with most professionals having more than 10 years of experience. A majority of them were employed at a multinational company at some point in their career. Professional pathways illustrate the intertwined character of corporate business services. Whereas some worked their way up within a single company over many years, others changed their employer as well as their area of expertise more frequently. Likewise, some respondents left their employee position in a multinational company after several years in order to start up or work for a smaller company.

Method of Analysis

Since the aim of this paper is to explore individual achievement narratives, the collected data was analysed according to an issue-focused approach as described by Weiss (1994). This enables a focus on dominant tendencies while also taking into account nuances and alternative perspectives. Moreover, it allows empirical material to challenge theoretical preconceptions and vice versa. These four interrelated analytic processes are involved in this approach: coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration. Coding links the data to theoretical pre-conceptualizations. This was done using the qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti*, which was also employed to sort the interview material subsequently. Once the material was sorted, it was locally integrated by summing up and interpreting relevant sequences. Finally, inclusive integration "knits into a single coherent story the otherwise isolated areas of analysis that result from local integration" (Weiss 1994: 160). That is to say, the researcher created a sociological account of the issue as a whole by connecting analytical sequences.

Analysis

In accordance with the theoretical framework presented above, the first analytical sub-section considers how respondents talk about the role their parents' migration played in their educational pathways. The second aspect focuses on how they narrate their professional position and the way it is connected to having parents who migrated from Turkey. The final section explains to what extent their achievement narratives help them to exclusively differentiate themselves as exceptional individuals from a disadvantaged group.

'I had to make it': Benefit and Burden of an Intergenerational Drive to Achieve

Professionally successful descendants of migrants often present their educational pathways as a continuation of their parents' migration project, which was driven by the desire to improve life prospects. In the narratives, one observes the crucial role that parents played in stressing that education was the key to success in their destination countries:

My dad always told me, always do everything that you want, but study, and if you need to redo your studies, then redo your studies, but study; I think that at that moment I saw the value of studying more. (Mr. Güven, Paris)

And that was actually her greatest wish that what she [his mother] could not achieve, that we do that. That we go to school, that was the most important thing actually, that we are successful, we go our own way, become independent. (Mr. Altay, Frankfurt)

Whereas some parents intervened more actively in critical moments, others simply conveyed the message that education was crucial and a primary reason for the struggle and sacrifices they were enduring upon migration:

Our parents were always triggering us. That is very important. Like 'look, these things are difficult, focus on studying and developing yourselves and work in better jobs'. (Mr. Şahin, Stockholm)

There was a clear demand to strive for educational and subsequently occupational achieve-

ment, and respondents often identified an unequal starting position as a result of their parents' migration. They indicated that the unequal starting position might have been caused by the fact that their parents were not highly educated, since parental support was mostly of an emotional kind. Nevertheless, they emphasized the crucial role of supportive parents as the basis for their subsequent achievements, thereby making explicit the link between their parent's migration project and their individual pathways:

(...) that we study here, study abroad, that we speak multiple languages, that we are internationally trained (...), these are all achievements of my parents at the end of the day. (Mr. Kaya, Frankfurt)

Whereas respondents from Frankfurt mentioned that they experienced difficulties predominantly in the early years of their educational pathways (sometimes due to spending parts of it in Turkey), respondents in Paris stated how they found out about the importance of a *grande école* degree to access a leading position in the corporate business sector. Those who could not attend elite business schools had to take longer routes to meet the requirements in order to advance in the labour market. Respondents in Stockholm who attended university also stated they had difficulties to adapt, especially in the beginning. However, across settings, respondents emphasized that they had the will to become competitive, helping to level the playing field:

We saw everything for the first time. Compared to the others, we were not competitive in the first couple of years of education. But as the years passed, one's own efforts and desire entered the picture and we started to become competitive. Their [referring to his native parentage peers] level of knowledge remained the same, but working hard, we⁵ moved vigorously. A distinction began to be seen during the last year of college, I started to take the lead. (Mr. Toprak, Paris)

⁵ In contrast to his reference to his native parentage peers, the context of the interview does not help clarifying whether the respondent also refers to his peers with a similar parental background, or whether he uses 'we' as a rhetorical means in informal Turkish language to talk about himself.

Ms. Suna (Frankfurt) attended a Turkish class within the German school system first; she remembered that the main point of it was to prepare her to return to Turkey. She claimed that her parents did not play a major role in her educational pathway. The fact that she went to the lower level of secondary schools in Germany was never questioned by them: "because the children of the neighbours also went there". Ms. Göksu (Stockholm), who did not attend university, remembered that her parents did not prioritize education either:

They did not know the language, they were working in factories, and they did not spend time with their kids. So the only thing they thought was to earn money to make ends meet. (...) That's why that what the first generation has done, blocked us a bit. They did not tell us that education is very important and therefore, we did not mind.

Ms. Onur (Paris) also had to deal with rather moderate parental support, even though they accepted her career plans. She said that, even as a young child, she had a drive to do something exceptional, but her mother told her: "okay, do, but don't do too much". The following statement seems to summarize the alternative view on the role immigrant parents played in their children's pathway:

Our mother and our father came here and they felt a lot of pain. It is as if that pain, even if they did not want it, maybe they were doing this without knowing, constantly felt like a burden on you. (...). Constantly it is like their story; their pain is on your back.

Although the small sample size does not allow for further generalizations, in contrast to most of the predominantly male respondents, some female respondents' drive to achieve also originates in an individual will to challenge parental expectations: "It was really me and my will to do it more than anything else" (Ms. Altın, Paris). In contrast, most male respondents present themselves as the embodiment of an intergenerational drive to improve life chances. One could argue that 'making it' while having parents who migrated from Turkey means that a general pattern of over-

coming disadvantage is part of the individual achievement narrative across sites. Existing differences in institutional arrangements certainly caused nuances in their narratives, to the extent that they identified different issues as obstacles. However, what the so-called second generation corporate professionals have in common is that they internalized their parents' migration project, which stimulated a drive to climb up the social ladder, in spite of all these obstacles.

'I made it because of who I am': Turning Disadvantage into Advantage

Talking about how they managed to get to their current professional position, some pointed out the importance of turning their potential disadvantage -- that arises out of their alleged belonging to a disadvantaged group -- into an advantage:

Actually, my mentality, my way of thinking is like that. So, no matter what kind of difficulties there are, it is necessary to turn it into an advantage somehow. (Mr. Şahin, Stockholm)

Most respondents emphasized that perceived difference can be considered a valuable attribute that one can make use of professionally. They pointed out that there is an inherent advantage to persons who grew up in two cultures because of the multiple viewpoints they have. Considering themselves as "different people, more open-minded" (Mr. Toprak, Paris), they assert knowing "both cultures" (Mr. Gündoğan, Stockholm), and they reflect on the role their background played in their professional pathway as "an advantage, because it was somehow interesting" (Mr. Altay, Frankfurt). However, it is also important to avoid being stigmatized and not being perceived as an 'average foreigner', Mr. Güçlü (Stockholm) argued. Stating that "not everyone can do this, because this is really people management", Ms. Cengiz (Frankfurt) conceives her abilities in providing services as given since she has a Turkish background.

Others make use of their alleged differences by taking over business responsibilities that are, for instance, related to Turkey, or have to do with their migration background in general. Such as

Ms. Topal (Stockholm), who used to be the diversity manager in her company: "(...) where I work, there is no one like me. So it's a plus. So it literally adds colour (laughs)". Most of the professionals consider using their exceptional attributes to their advantage in near future, if they have not done this already. Mr. Beyazıt (Frankfurt) or Mr. Aydın (Stockholm) especially focused on emphasizing their 'Turkish' background on the labour market in order to get to their positions. It seems that especially professionals with broader managing responsibilities that involve frequent interpersonal encounters can profit from an ascribed cultural competence, as they underline the importance of showing an advanced understanding towards their clients.

Interestingly, the tendency of professionals to emphasize difference as something valuable is also mirrored in the way they deal with potentially discriminatory encounters, saying that there is a value in dialogue and constantly explaining oneself to people, instead of being offended right away:

Then suddenly, people understand you. Suddenly persons who were unsympathetic, who were unsympathetic to others and who were perhaps discriminatory for others, suddenly, they are sympathetic (Mr. Beyazıt, Frankfurt).

With time, you also need to understand the other a little bit. You got to be a little relaxed. Not to be aggressive. There's no reason to get into a discussion. (...) but I have a few attributes, my religion, I have Turkish roots, these seem interesting to them, if you market it like this, it is going to be good. (Mr. Toprak, Paris).

Some respondents presented a more cautious picture of the role alleged differences play in people's pathways. For instance, Mr. Eren (Frankfurt), was more reluctant in directly ascribing what he called "a multicultural competence" to persons with a migration background; he makes it also dependent on their educational credentials:

Otherwise the cases of failed integration would not exist, I would say. (...) But in case of an academic with a migration background, I would say that he has that. Yes, prejudging I would suppose that he in any case has that.

Mr. Uzun (Paris) said that for a long time he has omitted the fact that he speaks Turkish on his CV when applying for jobs:

Afterwards when I started at the company, I have never hidden my origins but at the very start, at least, I did not want to be excluded directly because they saw 'Turkish' written down.

There were also some professionals in each city that felt openly discriminated against by certain statements from colleagues or clients at work. Mr. Gündoğan (Stockholm) argues that "sometimes you actually need to speak the local language better than the natives". Mr. Kaya (Frankfurt) could not adapt to the organizational culture within other companies in Germany, which is why he started his own. The female respondents' narratives also seem generally less determined to attribute advantage to their background. Reflecting on her pathway, Ms. Onur (Paris) said that her background in Turkey often seemed interesting to potential employers, but she still sees it as a cause of disadvantage, which requires her to be more driven than others: "you are constantly running behind. The gap is closing but you are still in the back". Even these alternative views implicitly conceptualize achievement as primarily determined by individual agency, which is in line with an achievement ideology present in their stories, as the following section will show.

*'If I can make it, every one of us can make it':
Achievement Ideology*

The achievement narratives present stories that both praise and blame individual actions. They emphasize that in spite of all obstacles, everyone can make it:

I think that people will have to realize that everything is possible. Everything is possible, we have to stop looking at things negatively and start looking at things in an optimistic way (Mr. Güven, Paris).

Admitting there might be some truth to discrimination, most see individual responsibility as the main factor for achievement and underachievement. For instance, stating that she is not typi-

cally Turkish, Ms. Cengiz (Frankfurt) argued that a lot of persons with a migration background fail to make something out of their capabilities:

This is my experience, yes, I've started to deliberate relatively early on about what I want to be. (...) I believe that people don't do this sufficiently and I also think that parents can provide little support, because they themselves have this immigrant background.

When they talk about the reasons for the failure of others with a similar background, they deny virtue to persons whose labour market performance is deemed inferior:

They always look at it from a short-term perspective: 'how can I make money tomorrow?' If you think about the short-term at the age of eighteen, the best thing of course is to work in a restaurant, but what will happen in the long term? If they cannot think about this, their mothers and fathers have to. They also don't. (Mr. Toprak, Paris)

I mean I see this with Turks, which often annoys me. Looking for an easy route, the short cut. It is just not always the short cut, sometimes you simply have to work hard, right? This is how it is. (Mr. Altay, Frankfurt)

Respondents often see themselves as an illustration of how far one can get as long as one is willing and has a goal. In turn, when asked about reasons for higher unemployment among young people with a migration background, they argued that they do not do enough:

[Inequality of chances] is maybe 3% or 5%, let it be 10% of the reasons, but the remaining 90% are provided by other reasons and one of the biggest reasons is, we need to do much more, we have to send thirty instead of three applications. Or we have to send 300 instead of 30 applications. (Mr. Beyazit, Frankfurt)

Whereas they have all elements in their hands, all the things that they could do, they do not even realize this. (...) young people lack a strategic job searching. If you really want to work, you will find it. So I believe. (Ms. Onur, Paris)

Mr. Şahin (Stockholm) points out that there's a need for positive examples that show that it is possible. This was the reason for him to follow

what he calls an ‘idealistic career’ next to his professional one. He founded an association focusing on Turkish youth in Sweden:

We said that everything is a struggle. We made it, you can also make it. This reasoning we tried to inject. And this to an extent worked out. Because after I finished university, this generation, most of these persons, let me not say most, but about half of them started studying at the university. This means, if there are positive examples it works.

It was also often expressed that hard work alone is not enough and that one needs support, luck and resilience, but Mr. Erdiñç (Paris) is one of the few who explicitly mentioned the role of unequal conditions caused by more structural constraints: (...) [w]hen you don’t have the knowledge you don’t know where to go”. This, however, did not lead him to conclude with less emphasis on individual agency than other respondents: “if you work, if you inform yourself, you can be everything that you want”. His belief in individual agency was also nurtured by a religiously driven work ethic: “Allah gives to those who work”.

A few other respondents also acknowledged reasons for individual frustration, even though there might be the will to succeed. Such as Mr. Eren (Frankfurt), who mentioned the segregation of classes according to ethnic groups when he went to primary school. Accordingly, he states that 90% of pupils with a Turkish migration background went to the lowest secondary school category in Germany. Obstacles and frustration due to being perceived as ‘different’ play a prominent role in Mr. Uzun’s (Paris) reflections, as well. He suspects a ‘glass ceiling’ that kept him from moving further upward:

I tell myself I comply with all the criteria; I have done everything that I needed to do, what is there still left to do? I say, what is the last criterion that I don’t have?

He wondered whether this is the same discriminatory criterion that causes persons with ‘different’ names to apply more often in order to get a job interview. This did not prevent him from thinking that his case illustrates how one can

manage to achieve one’s goals “despite all those obstacles”.

Most respondents tell a story in which they stick out as exceptional individuals from a disadvantaged group. The discourse is shaped by an achievement ideology in which performance is evaluated from an agency-driven perspective, which often results in the differentiation of others with less exceptional career. They argue that personal characteristics explain why they made it while others did not.

Conclusion

While there is a lack of European sociological literature on narratives of personal success and failure, some U.S. American research confirms that people tend to explain their own success as well as others’ failure through individual agency (cf. Hochschild 1996). The primary motive of this article was to examine occupational achievement narratives of adult children of migrants from Turkey in the corporate business sector across three sites. Upwardly mobile children of migrants from Turkey present their own trajectories as a continuation of their parents’ migration project which played a crucial role in stimulating their drive to achieve. They also take parental experiences as an additional frame of reference to evaluate their own position. Accordingly, achievement not only occurs in spite of whom they are, but is primarily caused by their self-conception, paired with an adaptive and optimistic stance towards difficulties they face.

Their narratives display similarities with some nuanced differences across contexts. In all three settings respondents have to cope with a group disadvantage. They are aware of this when they tell their exceptional story, as they always emphasize how they managed to overcome this disadvantage. In Germany, respondents especially underline the lack of resources in the early years of their educational pathways. In France, the *grandes écoles* still seem extraordinarily important in offering a shortcut into the labour market. The standardized compulsory primary education and generally high quality of universi-

ties in Sweden is why respondents do not identify access to institutions as a problem, but rather the adjustment to requirements. Once, however, they manage to adapt themselves to these requirements, their success becomes evidence of a functioning system. In addition, an increasingly internationalized corporate business sector seems to contribute to a comparable Turkish second generation experience that is rather similar across settings. That is to say, since they managed to bypass structural obstacles provided by local and national contexts, they themselves became part of a professional context whose dominant discourse is shaped by an achievement ideology which seems rather similar across settings.

Respondents clearly demonstrate an awareness of existing constraints and they were confronted with difficulties foremost in their educational pathways, but they also emphasize that ambition, opportunism and hard work can overcome these challenges. Their proven ability to adapt themselves to difficult situations strengthens their belief in and their justification of the status quo. Unwilling to simply accept an inferior position in society based on a disadvantaged group identity, they even attribute part of their achievements to it. Some of them even make professional use of their perceived difference, literally turning group disadvantage into individual advantage, making it a strong case for their own 'employability' and a main reason for their exceptional success (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 185). This becomes obvious in the ways in which they deal with potentially discriminatory encounters, as well, as they avoid critically confronting and exposing these controversial experiences as such. Moreover, they are even critical towards those that do feel offended. For them, being different thus not only refers to being different compared to the majority population, but also being different from others with a similar background (cf. Cuádras 2006).

Their justification of the status quo happens at the expense of the already disadvantaged group (Jost and Banaji, 1994). When referring to the reasons why others do not manage similar

achievements, they also put the blame for 'failure' on the individual level, pointing out the deficits of others. Thereby, they not only demand that other children of migrants be as resilient and proactive, but they also expect other parents to be as supportive and motivating as their own. This might, in turn, strengthen the stigmatization of an already disadvantaged group (Link and Phelan 2001), while the counter-narrative, in which society needs to provide equal chances, was hardly found. However, although the small sample size does not allow for further conclusions concerning a gendered pattern, it is noteworthy that female respondents appeared to have a less resolute narrative on their own success and others' failure than their male counterparts.

There is a general tendency to stick to the narrative of achievement ideology that states that chances will come your way if you try hard enough. Even those corporate business professionals that feel a certain responsibility towards others from a similar background do this by once more stressing the necessity of individuals to invest in their goals. One could also argue that respondents are left with no other way to explain their achievements. Even if they are aware of their exceptionality, they might not really believe (anymore) that structural changes in the society are going to happen soon or should realistically be expected. So, it seems they can almost not dismiss individual factors to make sense of their own position. Nevertheless, they thereby accommodate and rationalize the status quo by both internalizing and perpetuating its inherent inequalities (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004).

Given that the selection of respondents was based on a certain professional position, the so-called 'dependent variable', one could argue that a comparative perspective is secondary to this article's argument. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the narrative on the necessity to turn disadvantage into advantage was found in a similar fashion in all three cities. The similarities of achievement narratives across sites confirm the influence of a neoliberal emphasis on individual

agency in post-industrial economies (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Still, findings from this research cannot be easily generalized to other professional contexts, as they are based on a specific sample of corporate business professionals. Because of this, research conducted in other areas, such as law or education, may yield different outcomes. In the research that may follow, including a group of native descent in comparable professional positions, as well as focusing on institutional differences concerning issues -- such as labour market entry or the role of social networks in professional pathways -- might further our knowledge on the role of group disadvantage in individual career trajectories.

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