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How to reach the top? Fields, forms of capital, and strategies in accessing leadership positions in France among descendants of migrants from Turkey

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the experiences of highly educated descendants of migrants from Turkey when achieving leading positions in the corporate business, education, and law sectors in France. It illustrates the forms of capital and strategies that are considered significant for accessing leadership positions in these sectors, and how experiences vary across different fields. Our research illuminates the various strategies pursued by descendants of migrants from Turkey in their pathways to attaining leadership positions, and suggests how similar forms of capital work in distinct ways across different sectors.

Introduction

A number of recent studies have looked at the experiences of highly educated descendants of migrants in Europe (Crul 2013; Keskiner 2015; Pásztor 2010; Santelli 2013; Schneider and Lang 2014; Shahrokni 2015). Although they still represent minorities in their communities, the experiences of highly educated descendants of migrants provide key information about pathways towards upward mobility. Focusing on descendants of Turkish migrants in different countries, Crul (2013) showed that some education systems provide more favourable conditions for them to enter higher education. Studying descendants of Turkish migrants in the Netherlands and France, Keskiner (2015) illustrated the ways in which distinct forms of support provided by parents contribute to the success of descendants of migrants in school, despite their parents having low levels of education. In France, Santelli (2013) uncovered the role of family migration histories in the success of descendants of Algerian migrants.

While most studies have highlighted the educational experience of descendants of migrants, the current article augments this area of research by studying the professional experience of highly educated descendants of migrants from Turkey working in various occupational sectors in France. Instead of focusing on labour market entry, we studied those who had been employed for a minimum of five years and were progressing towards accessing leadership positions in their sectors. We inquired about forms of capital that descendants of migrants from Turkey perceive to be most significant for accessing leadership positions, and the strategies they develop accordingly.

We introduced a sectoral approach by comparing the occupational experiences of descendants of migrants from Turkey in three different sectors: business, law, and education. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework, we assume that each sector (field) requires different forms of capital and individual strategies. We concentrate on the respondents' perceptions, as individual strategies are shaped by how the actors perceive the rules of the game and the resources they consider necessary (Emirbayer and Williams 2005, 693). While business and law fields were selected to shed light on the second-generation experience in private sectors, the education sector was chosen to illustrate how social mobility trajectories are shaped in the public sector. Our research suggests that similar forms of capital work in distinct ways across sectors, and illuminates the conservation and subversion strategies employed by descendants of migrants from Turkey in their pathways to leadership positions.

Forms of capital, fields, and strategies

Bourdieu defines a *field* as a constellation of stakes and interests; hence, for a field to function, there must be role players, endowed with a certain habitus, who embody the knowledge and recognition of the laws inherent to the field and possess certain forms of capital. Forms of capital are like "aces" in the game, and they confer upon their holder (the players) strength, power, or advantage in the struggle (the game). This theoretical approach provides a framework through which to study individual trajectories within each occupational sector without resorting to either an overly structuralist or individualistic explanation. Hence, we will pursue a relational approach between the rules of the game in the fields (sectors) and the actions/strategies of the respondents as well as the forms of capital they possess, develop, or aspire to.

According to Bourdieu, there is a struggle in each field between "the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out the competition" (Bourdieu 1993, 72). In order to dominate or monopolize a field, one needs to possess the right form of capital in sufficient quantities (Bourdieu 1984). In his classic text on forms of capital, Bourdieu enumerates four types of

capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic – the possession of which bestows power on the holder. Yet, forms of capital are field-specific, and hence, the content of these resources will be determined by each field (Savage, Warde, and Devine 2005). Furthermore, certain dimensions of cultural capital could be deemed more crucial in particular fields, such as language capital (as an embodied form of cultural capital) or education capital (as an institutionalized form of cultural capital) (Bourdieu 1986). Hence, when we study occupational sectors, we would expect each sector to have its own rules of the game and to assign value to different forms of capital. Bourdieu emphasizes that the forms of capital are dynamic processes that require time and effort and that one form of capital can be transformed or converted into another resource (Bourdieu 1986). A prominent example of this feature is attendance at one of the *Grandes Écoles*. Graduating from an elite institution not only provides a diploma (institutionalized cultural capital) but is also converted into symbolic capital in the form of academic entitlement (Bourdieu 1996; Draelants and Darchy-Koechlin 2011) and social capital in the form of providing access to networks that are crucial to achieving occupational mobility (Bourdieu 1996; Kadushin 1995).

If we take the established or traditional elites as the dominant role players in each field (Savage and Williams 2008), descendants of low-educated migrants from Turkey enter the struggle as newcomers. Having entered the field, the new agents need to become familiar with the rules of the game and resources required, which in turn shape their strategies[1] in the struggle. While those in the dominant position try to monopolize their specific form of capital and are inclined towards conservation strategies to reproduce or preserve their resources and positions, the newcomers "are inclined towards subversion strategies" (Bourdieu 1993, 74). Through subversion strategies, the newcomers aim to transpose the rules of the game and the valued forms of capital in the field, hence altering the system of domination within the field to their advantage (Bourdieu 1993). Emirbayer and Williams (2005), however, have noted that in order for the game to function within the field, all players should agree on the rules of the game, and these are set initially by the dominant group. This makes subversion strategies more difficult to adopt, and thus newcomers to the field are more inclined to adapt, conserve, and reproduce the existing system. In a study on high-ranking directors in the corporate business sector in France, Harvey and Maclean (2008) illustrated that, consciously or unconsciously, the new upcoming business elite reproduced the resources and norms of the established elite rather than subverting them. Yet, for newcomers, gaining access to the field can be challenging. Shahrokni (2015) studied upward mobility experiences among descendants of North African migrants attending *Grandes Écoles*. The study illustrates the price of upward mobility and the difficulties that descendants of North African migrants experience in integrating into the norms and social life of

the *Grandes Écoles*. Shahrokni (2015) also points out the specific experiences of descendants of migrants, criticizing ethnicity-blind approaches in French sociology.

Bourdieu applies the concepts of field, habitus, and forms of capital to uncover reproduction mechanisms. When studying the experiences of descendants of low-educated migrants from Turkey gaining access to high-status positions, we adopted an alternative stance by applying his theoretical framework to understand upward mobility processes. It is often said that upward mobility is an under-emphasized area in Bourdieu's studies (Friedman 2014). We posit that his theoretical framework could also help explain certain mobility patterns due to the nature of forms of capital that are open to development in "volume" and in "composition" over time (Bourdieu 1984, 114). We illustrate below that certain forms of capital, which are significant in the field and which are not inherited from one's parents, could also be appropriated and developed over time with effort and investment. This insight contributes to the missing link in Bourdieu's work on mobility illustrating how upwardly mobile people close the cultural and social capital gap between them and people from higher socio-economic status backgrounds.

Study

In this article, we focus on twenty-seven interviews with descendants of migrants from Turkey born in France and living in Paris and its surroundings. The majority of the migrants from Turkey arrived in France as guest workers or political asylum seekers, and most had lower levels of education (Danış and İrtiş 2008). According to previous studies, descendants of Turkish migrants are among the worst-performing groups in education: in 2008, 27 per cent of descendants of Turkish migrants aged 18–35 had left education without any diploma compared to 9 per cent of the general population, and only 14 per cent had managed to study to obtain a higher education diploma for two years or longer (Brinbaum, Moguérou, and Primon 2010). In a study on the descendants of migrants from Turkey in Strasbourg, Keskiner (2016) illustrated the strong work orientation that drives most young people out of school before they can attend higher education. Hence, those who have acquired a higher education degree form a minority among the descendants of migrants from Turkey (Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2013; Keskiner 2013) and only a small group within this minority were able to access high-ranking positions in various sectors (also see the introduction to this special issue).

For all three sectors, we undertook intensive mapping, searching for Turkish-sounding names in online databases, using professional networking sites such as Linkedin as well as websites of the Ministry of Education,

schools, and the Paris Bar. We also contacted network or occupational associations and participated in their meetings in order to recruit our respondents. Highly skilled middle-class Turkish migrants who had come to France to study at a *Grande École* to access high-status positions in either Turkey or France were excluded from the study. We screened every single profile we retrieved to ascertain whether the subject had been born and raised in France and if their parents were labour migrants or had low socio-economic status. In all three sectors, we only interviewed respondents with low-educated parents who had migrated via a guest-worker migration scheme.

Both reaching and interviewing our respondents were challenging tasks. The accounts they gave were mixed. On the one hand, our respondents were very self-conscious of their "success" given their backgrounds (Delaney 2007). On the other hand, despite their steep social mobility, their accounts included feelings of modesty and exclusion in their new positions, due to their ethnic and lower socio-economic class backgrounds. Similar mixed narratives were documented in previous studies on the upwardly mobile (Friedman 2014; Miles, Savage, and Bühlmann 2011). Friedman (2014) negates the widespread belief that upwardly mobile people are always content with their current status: instead, they display mixed feelings of being split between two habitus.

The corporate business sector encompasses a wide variety of professions in today's economy. In the ELITES project, we selected our respondents based on their having managerial responsibilities or having worked in a senior position with a certain expertise for a minimum of five years. We interviewed twelve descendants of migrants from Turkey who work as portfolio managers, senior analysts, product engineers, sales managers, and application managers (for more details, see Konyali in press).

In the education sector, we focused on a broader category of professionals that included academics, school directors, directors of NGO organizations working in the field of education, and consultants (for further details, see Waldring in press). However, we were not able to find any school directors or directors of NGO organizations in the French context. This article contains six interviews with secondary school teachers and teacher trainers.

Exploring the law field, we focused on lawyers specialized in corporate law. All the respondents had passed the bar exam and possessed at least five years' experience in a corporate law firm. Among the nine respondents we interviewed, five have already started their own law firms or become independent lawyers (for further discussion, see Rezai in press).

We did not seek a gender balance in our sampling but it reflected the given divisions in the sectors; the majority of our respondents in the business sector were male, while the majority of the respondents in education were female. In law, there was a gender balance in our sample.

Findings

Since forms of capital and strategies are field-specific, the empirical findings of the study will be presented per sector. We asked our respondents what resources they deemed crucial to accessing positions of influence and leadership. Their answers illustrate their perceptions of what they regard significant and the strategies they built accordingly. The concluding section discusses the similarities and differences between strategies and the forms of capital addressed across sectors on the basis of the theoretical framework we introduced at the beginning of this article.

Business sector: "One needs a grande École diploma but … "

When asked about the significant forms of capital needed to attain leading positions in the business sector, most of our respondents indicated two resources: first, the importance of acquiring a *Grande École* diploma; second, the importance of social networks. All our respondents regarded these resources as crucial, irrespective of their specific profession (be they specialized in marketing or finance), occupational position, or their likelihood or aspirations to achieve a leading position.

However, only a minority of respondents had actually acquired a *Grande École* diploma. While they all held master's degrees, most of them said that they had not been informed about the importance of the *Grandes Écoles* for occupational mobility during their studies. Orhan, who is from a low-educated immigrant family in Strasbourg, has been working in one of the largest corporate banks in Paris as a senior marketing specialist for five years. After acquiring his master's degree in econometrics, he conducted an internship in the United States. These credentials helped him to find a job as an auditor in a French-American firm. During one of his auditing missions to a corporate French bank, he received an offer for his current job. Despite his achievements and good relations with his seniors, Orhan felt rather stuck in his position:

> O: In France everything is determined by your education. For example, if you have graduated from the [Grandes] *Écoles*, this will keep you moving for a long time … They have both a network and a reputation. Public university graduates always remain second and third-grade people. However, being a graduate of the *École Polytechnique* or one of the *Écoles de Commerce* is something very different because they have a certain weight and they count on each other. The most prestigious school in my field, for instance, is ENSAE (*École nationale de la statistique et de l'administration économique*). Since this is the most successful school in the field of statistics and econometrics, all of these people have become directors. And I am not talking about small directors, I mean department managers.
>
> I: Does this have an effect on internal mobility within the company?

O: Definitely. You cannot read "ENSAE" among the profile requirements for mobility. Yet even if they don't tell you, they don't choose you. You see that the people working at these teams always have the same profile. The graduates of a certain school are always in the same place.

I: Do you see this as an obstacle for your mobility?

O: Of course I do, both for my mobility and my career.

I: Isn't there a way to overcome this by going to certain places or doing certain things?

O: No, there isn't. You have to be a graduate of one of those schools in the first place. You have to be familiar with their system.

Orhan highlights how having a *Grande École* diploma also provides symbolic value, prestige, and recognition, as well as social network contacts that are valuable for both entry and promotion. Having learnt the rules of the game and become a dominant player in this sector, Orhan was not convinced that he could subvert the rules of the game and alter his chances, and as a result, he modified his career and is planning to move to another country, such as the United States, the UK, or Turkey, where he thinks his skills will be more appreciated.

Respondents who held a *Grande École* diploma were more confident about their future mobility within their companies. On the one hand, this was due to the prestige of their diplomas; on the other, it seemed as if the diploma gave them a confidence that helped them not to see their ethnic or low socio-economic background as an obstacle. In fact, when talking to highly educated descendants of Turkish migrants about their routes to leadership positions, the possibility that their ethnic background could block their mobility was like mentioning the elephant in the room. Respondents felt subtle forms of discrimination or exclusion in their daily interaction with their colleagues (Waldring, Crul, and Ghorashi 2015). Whether or not this influenced their chances of reaching leadership positions was another matter. Some respondents who had not yet been promoted to their aspired positions suspected that it had to do with their ethnic background, arguing that this was the only thing that set them apart from those who had been promoted. Others attributed it to the fact that they did not possess a *Grande École* diploma (like Orhan above) or come from a high socio-economic background rather than to their ethnic background. In fact, some respondents emphasized that not being part of the "bourgeoisie", which they associated with having upper-class parents, being from the centre of Paris (rather than the *banlieues*), attending prestigious schools and *Grandes Écoles* and participating in high-brow cultural activities, was the real drawback rather than having migrant parents. Hence, acquiring a *Grande École* diploma was one way in which to overcome such potential obstacles. Firat had illiterate parents who migrated

to Paris and worked in the manufacturing industry as low-skilled workers. They were determined, however, to support their children's education and provided full emotional and financial support as far as they were able to do so. Firat was very successful throughout secondary school and his academic career. He studied at an *École de Commerce* on a full scholarship and later completed an engineering master's at an *École Polytechnique* – once more with a scholarship. After a successful career as a trader, he adjusted his pathway and started working in one of the largest French energy companies, soon becoming the leader of a large project. His long-term goal is to become the CEO of a branch within the company, for instance, the Turkish branch. Throughout the interview, Firat repeatedly highlighted the value of having *Grandes Écoles* diplomas; yet, he was also critical of the French system, saying it has to transform and accommodate new profiles to compete in today's economy:

> F: This elite has stifled France. It didn't renew itself, new profiles didn't show, the same people from the same socio-cultural background are always at the top. This has impoverished France: they don't know the world or different companies somewhere else, so French firms have remained weak. To be successful in China or Russia you don't need a successful *Polytechnique* graduate, you need someone who knows the culture. We are successful in Russia because we have a Russian CEO and he knows the market and is very successful … Before, France had an enclosed generic economy, and most turnover was produced in France. Hence the top positions were occupied by this elite. But now we have the global economy, today 60% of the French firms' turnover is gained abroad; so you need to think of the world. Think global, act local as they say.

Similar to other *Grandes Écoles* graduates, Firat was very well aware of the rules of the game within his sector. Having acquired the valued forms of capital in his field, his master plan could be interpreted as a subversion strategy whereby he deploys his ethnic background – which some respondents perceived as being an obstacle to upward mobility – as an advantage, to enrich his chances of achieving his aspired-for future position (see Konyali in press). Being a conservative Muslim, Firat did not perceive his ethnic or religious background as an obstacle to his mobility in a French firm, where he claimed that until twenty years ago even the manual workers were selected based only on having "native origins". Firat has not yet become a CEO and we do not know if he will; yet, his impressive career and resources have endowed him with a level of confidence that enables him to aim for a leading position and struggle to transform some of the rules of the game in his field.

Respondents without *Grandes Écoles* diplomas turned to other strategies to increase their chances in the sector. In that sense, not all of our respondents were pessimistic about their chance of reaching a higher position with a less prestigious diploma. Instead, they underlined another crucial resource to make it in the field: social capital. All of our respondents emphasized that

they became aware of the importance of social networks by being exposed to corporate culture in their careers. In fact, networking was the most common conservation strategy in the business field. Ahmet held a master's in Business Economics and worked as a portfolio manager in a corporate French bank. He highlighted the importance of social networks as follows:

> I: How can one acquire a leading position?
>
> A: With connections. With many connections. Because in our profession you have to be open towards people, companies and all departments. We have connections and are able to receive training. This is how you rise from the starting position. Things will not work out well for a portfolio manager if he is closed up in himself, sitting in front of his computer screen, not finding out what is happening behind his screen, or trying to understand the firms and departments.

To extend his knowledge, Ahmet started a networking activity called "AFTER(ish)" to attract highly skilled descendants of migrants from Turkey working in various sectors in Paris. This was the first networking drink ever organized among highly skilled descendants of migrants from Turkey and it soon became popular. Regarding social capital, none of our respondents mentioned the Turkish migrant community in France as an important resource for their careers. Ahmet, however, deemed a wide network in different sectors crucial for a portfolio manager, so he initiated this organization to bring together highly educated descendants of migrants from Turkey, stressing that they would supply crucial business contacts.

In addition to outside networks, building social capital within companies is also an important strategy for upward mobility. Most French corporate firms with multinational establishments, such as BNP Paribas, Société Générale, or Natixis, give their employees the chance to work in other departments or abroad. Our respondents considered such forms of mobility crucial for accessing positions of leadership. Born and raised in Strasbourg, Filiz had studied statistics at a public university and worked as a researcher for a limited period. She then found a job in a corporate French bank, thanks to a friend who was also a highly educated descendant of Turkish migrants working at that company. Filiz explains how she discovered the importance of social networks:

> F: I had to change my network because, for example, within our bank, you can change your department every three or four years. There is also internal mobility, so there are ads for positions but it is internal. Even if you apply for a position, there is already someone [they have in mind]. Therefore, networking is very important, even within the company … For example you should keep in touch with former colleagues. You have to go out for lunches. You have to avoid hanging out with the same people every time. You have to be open. For example, within our establishment there is an association only for female employees. You can participate in such things, you meet other people there … There was a lady I knew from a previous department … I had lunch with

her one day and I told her that I was ready to change my department, that I already had a mobility status. She replied, "Let's arrange something for you." She arranged two interviews for me, and sent my CV to them. She told me: "Give me your CV and I will send it to people I know." I received two positive answers. This was when I realized. Of course, I only accepted one of them. I recommended a friend of mine, who was unemployed and looking for work, for the job offer I rejected, and sent her CV. She got the job thanks to me. Networking is very important; it is everything.

While a *Grande École* diploma could still be key to achieving a leadership position, not all of our respondents acquired such degrees and those who lacked these resources tried to carve out alternative pathways towards upward mobility. The professional networks they built either with other descendants of migrants from Turkey or their colleagues at work were one of the most prominent resources in this respect. Furthermore, all our respondents are in a constant process of learning and developing forms of capital to help them acquire dominant positions. The majority tried to adapt to the existing laws of the game, conserving and reproducing the pre-established norms and only those in privileged positions highlighted subversion strategies.

Education sector: "it's all about the exams … "

All of our respondents in the education sector were tenured teachers with more than five years' experience and two of them were teacher trainers. They all had worked as contracted or sub-teachers prior to acquiring the CAPES certificate.[2] Once they had obtained the CAPES, they all attained tenured teaching positions in secondary schools. Most of our respondents regarded the job of inspector or school director as a position of leadership and influence in their sector. Some of them aspired to these positions. When asked what was required to obtain a job like this, they pointed to the strict exam structure, specifically the exam called *agrégation*. Some of our respondents had tried to pass the *agrégation*, but none had yet succeeded. Isil, who had worked as a Spanish teacher for eight years, has passed the CAPES exam and aspires to become a school director or inspector one day; thus, she mentioned that she also needed to sit the *agrégation*. Throughout her career, she had been faced with difficulties regarding her ethnic background. As a result, she explains the choice of her current profession in terms of the exam structure providing a "neutral" opportunity structure:

> I: I chose this profession because it is based on passing a test. I have not had any problems with applying for jobs; I got the job every time. But before [I took the CAPES exam] when I would apply to Catholic schools, five or six years ago, it was then that I really understood how it feels if someone is not taken on because of his or her personal beliefs, religious beliefs or origins, and that really hurts.

Hence, as Isil recounts, the CAPES exam provides credentials that make you a public official, and you are appointed to a post by an automated central system. However, exams are highly competitive, difficult contests. Another teacher, Yeliz, thought that she did not stand a chance in the CAPES exam next to candidates with native parentage. Yeliz had low-educated parents. Her father worked as a construction worker and her mother as a housewife. Yeliz was born in Paris and received her entire schooling in France. She elaborated on the insecurity she felt during the oral exam:

> Y: The only time I didn't have much confidence in myself was when I had to do my teacher test: there was, I would say, a problem of language. I was afraid of spelling mistakes, making phrases, accents, because I was always engaged with people other than French people.
>
> I was never with French people and so when I had to do the interview I was scared to talk. I didn't want to talk because I was scared to make a mistake. I had a French friend who I am still very good friends with. She said that, really, you speak better than that native girl over there, so stop having a complex. I don't even understand why, but I think that you have this at the back of your mind. And they don't teach us to have confidence in ourselves, like in a *Grande École*, or to be the best of the society

Similar insecurities were highlighted by other respondents who had had difficulty passing the oral exam. Oral exams are sites of performance where class bias comes most to the fore (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 162). Despite the fact that they were all born, raised and trained in France, respondents who experienced uncertainty or failure in oral exams doubted that this condition might be related to their ethnic background. Hence, even though the entry and promotion requirements in the education sector were based on exams, the element of competition rendered those exams less accessible for some of our respondents. Furthermore, despite the intense emphasis on the education sector being based on exams, social networks continued to be of crucial importance for upward mobility. Ozgul, who has worked as a teacher for eight years and has passed the CAPES exam, clarifies the distinction:

> O: I think that networking is not very important when finding a job because it depends on your individual success, in other words, on the exams that you pass. If you pass *CAPES* you can teach in high school, if you pass *agrégation* you can teach in higher education. Social networks are important if you want to arrange your place of assignment. You might want to choose a school depending on the profile and general attitude of your students, or the school's connections. Then your network becomes important.

Ozgul's remark is important, since in most of the interviews, teachers were concerned about where they would teach and whether they would teach in deprived areas with difficult class environments. Moreover, Yeliz argues that

social networking in the education sector is needed to achieve leadership positions, just as it is in any other sector:

> Y: Well, it's like any other environment. For example, to be an inspector you need to put yourself out there. You have participate in trainings all the time, as the more training you do, the more inspectors you meet, the more you learn about inspections and the work, so that you are on one line with them … You have to be nice to the inspectors, go out with them, drink coffee, show them that you accept all their recommendations, because they can provide references.

Yeliz's point was exemplified by the experience of the two teacher trainers, who have the most esteemed positions among our respondents. These teachers had been spotted by inspectors due to their successful teaching styles, and were invited to train other teachers. Nevertheless, not all the respondents aspired to such positions as positions of influence. Bahar, who was working as a teacher trainer, was fed up with her position. She argued that the classroom was where one could exert most influence and therefore she was planning to return to teaching.

The education sector in France displays a rather rigid structure, requiring specific exams and credentials to attain leadership positions. Hence, most of our respondents abided by the rules of the game and tried to adapt to these rules, following conservation strategies. Social capital pertaining to connections with persons in position of power, such as inspectors or directors, was also perceived to be crucial in providing access to leadership positions.

Law sector: "In order to succeed in this profession you need a network"

In the law sector, becoming a partner of a law firm or going independent were the two most aspired to positions among our respondents. One of our respondents argued that "the philosophy of this profession is that this is a liberal, independent profession, so you also have the wish to be your own boss". All of our respondents had already passed the Bar exam and saw it as a minimum requirement for entering the field, rather than as an asset for upward mobility. All of our respondents had started their careers as interns, and later as employees in large corporate law firms. Some respondents had nurtured the ambition to become independent from the start and treated their experience in these companies as both a learning process and an opportunity to build professional knowledge and social networks. Others had assessed their options along the way. After working as an employee in two large corporate law firms, Derya decided to start her company with other lawyers. Even though she had enjoyed working at her last post, she had weighed up her options after five years:

> D: I decided to quit for several reasons. The first one was that in the firm where I worked, with that kind of firm, after five years you have to take a decision. I evaluated my situation, asking myself where I wanted to be on a professional level, if I wanted to work intensively in this firm and become a partner one day. The opportunities to become a partner are truly limited. People told me it is really difficult to become a partner in this type of structure, especially for a woman; you need to have a typical profile, so being a woman I would say is already a little handicap … I can say that for our firm about 80%, if not more, of the partners are male. So *voilà*, so I said either I would continue to fight through the structure in this firm and risk never becoming a partner, or I would leave and create my own firm and would have the independence that I have currently, which is in contrast to what I had before in this firm. I can be in direct contact with my clients, whereas before it was more difficult, since my other firm has a hierarchy that must be respected.

In her interview, Derya highlighted that she enjoyed being in direct contact with her clients, going to court to plead, and so on. She also pointed at the gendered nature of the associate boards in corporate law firms, which was not a concern highlighted by all respondents. Yet, other respondents also eventually found it difficult to attain partner positions after working for large corporate law firms; they all underlined the restricted and closed nature of the board of partners which was mostly occupied by upper-class males with networks in higher circles. Such partners were members of interlocking elite circles and brought in big clients. Hence, the majority of our respondents have started their own companies with other lawyers as partners or have become independent lawyers, while others who were still employed in corporate law firms aspired to such positions in the future. In either case, all respondents pointed towards the same resources that were needed to achieve this status: extending one's social network and building one's own clientele. Various strategies were mentioned with regard to building one's own clientele. Derya once more emphasized how crucial it is for a lawyer to participate in networking activities:

> D: OK so I think that a lawyer has one extremely difficult task: marketing. One cannot just have a firm. You also need to have clients knocking on your door. So I participated in network drinks and training courses. I went abroad, because I worked with a business firm in Istanbul, I went to Turkey every now and then. I would say that if I had to give numbers, about 50% of my clients are Turkish, and 25% of this 50% are from firms located in Turkey. They are Turkish law firms and business firms, which have business affairs here in France or cases being heard in France.

As Derya's account illustrates, this is the point at which their Turkish background became significant for most of the lawyers in our study. The Turkish community living in France, Turkish companies doing business in France, or French companies investing in Turkey were listed as important sources of clientele. Other respondents had become active in Turkish immigrant

associations: not only did they conduct legal work for the organizations, but they also acquired clients via the associations or the meetings held there. Not only were respondents participating in organizations: they were also actively building their own networks. Another profile is Emel, who was born and raised in Paris. Her parents both had primary school education from Turkey. Emel has been working as a senior lawyer in a prestigious law firm for seven years and hopes to become a partner. To achieve this, she has started building her own clientele. As a strategy, she joined an association called the European Association of Turkish Lawyers:

> E: Actually different lawyers – French, Belgians, who are Turkish in origin – met up. I don't know the details: they met and they thought it would be a good idea to bring together lawyers with a Turkish background on a European level. We haven't managed to really get it off the ground and develop it yet as we are all busy with our own activities. We meet periodically to try to organize a conference or things like that … So I have been a member for two years. What motivated me was to meet other lawyers, to open a door with the hope that cases would come in. Employee status is only temporary, and as a partner, we need to have clients. I said that if they need a lawyer in France they can come to me, and so they will think about me. There have not been many yet, but I also joined in order to meet people.

The lawyers who participated in our study had pursued various innovative networking strategies to turn their background into an advantage, making use of their competency in the Turkish language and their familiarity with Turkish culture. Most of them had started their own firms using their alternative "cultural" and social capital. This could be interpreted as a subversion strategy: but rather than changing the rules of the game, these lawyers are setting up their own niches within the law field. In that sense, the law sector stands out as the field in which almost all the respondents actively utilized their Turkish background for their careers. This finding points at the temporal and fluid nature of social networks (Ryan et al. 2008). While earlier in their careers our respondents relied on contacts with lawyers with native-born parents, thereby bridging capital as often mentioned in the literature, contacts with co-ethnics became valuable when starting their own business. This does not mean that they relinquished their bridging networks but that they simultaneously used both bonding ties with the communities and bridging ties with the clientele and business contacts of native descent to expand their social capital.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we have studied what kind of resources highly educated descendants of migrants from Turkey deemed necessary to attain leading positions in their occupational sectors (irrespective of whether they had already

achieved or only aspired to achieve such positions), and the strategies they pursued to acquire these positions.

To begin with, none of our respondents had inherited advantages from their parents with regard to their profession or educational pathway. Almost all the respondents had low-educated parents and none of their parents was able to assist them with their educational or occupational decisions. This required all of the respondents to actively build their resources through education and participation in their occupational sectors in order to gain access and achieve upward mobility.

Most of our respondents followed conservation strategies, meaning that once they had figured out the rules of the game and necessary resources, they tried to adapt and develop these forms of capital in order to attain leadership positions. Yet, the nature of the resources required by each sector shaped both their chances and their motivations. If they were not able to develop the resources needed to reach leadership positions in their field, they often applied alternative strategies to gain access to leadership positions. The alternative strategies did not so much challenge the existing rules of the game as try to bypass them.

In the business sector, acquiring a *Grande École* diploma was perceived as a condition for attaining a leadership position, as has been shown in previous literature (Maclean, Harvey, and Press 2007). The smaller group of respondents who had acquired a diploma from an elite higher education institution were also more confident about challenging the rules of the game, arguing that the field should be more open to leaders with a different ethnic background, since this facilitated good leadership skills, especially when operating foreign branches. The education sector was attractive to our respondents for its "neutral" structure where upward mobility is facilitated through state exams; thus, passing the state exams was the most crucial resource. Social capital was a valued resource in all three sectors; yet, it was most central to law field, where the respondents often relied on their Turkish background to build a clientele in order to become a partner. According to the respondents, one generally needed one's own clientele in order to become a partner. Most respondents were not optimistic about becoming partners in the top corporate law firms they worked in. In what we call a sub-strategy, they turned to their ethnic community or utilized the economic relations between Turkey and France to create their own niche within the field. In the long run, this could challenge the rules of the game, but it does not yet seem to be threatening the position of the traditional elite. Such a strong reliance on Turkish language capital or social connections with the Turkish community in France or Turkey was not evident in the business or education sectors. This finding also underlines how reliance on bonding capital or social networks with co-ethnics is different for second-generation groups (Agius Vallejo 2012). Born and

raised in France, our respondents were equipped with resources that enabled them to rely on strong emotional support from their families (Rezai et al. 2015), bridging networks with people of native descent to give them access to professional opportunities, and knowledge and connections with co-ethnics to build clientele, all at the same time. Being highly educated professionals, they were able to tap into all of these resources to their advantage (see Vermeulen and Keskiner forthcoming).

In all three sectors, the question of whether their ethnic background forms an obstacle to their upward mobility surfaced as a concern for most respondents. Hence, the strategies and the resources we have listed above should also be interpreted as strategies to overcome potential obstacles stemming from their backgrounds while facilitating upward mobility. Considering their pathways, it is hard to say whether our respondents have already achieved leadership status. While some were clearly on their way to attaining positions of power, others lacked the opportunity or motivation to reach such positions. Yet, considering their parents' low socio-economic position, as well as the overall position of the Turkish ethnic community in France, they have achieved outstanding careers. Their trajectories exemplify that upward mobility can be achieved through developing significant forms of capital in the given fields. These findings illustrate how Bourdieu's theoretical framework can be applied not only to study reproduction but also to understand upward mobility. In this way, our study contributes to a line of studies filling in the missing emphasis in Bourdieu's work on social mobility (Friedman 2014). To conclude with Bourdieu's game analogy: despite their low socio-economic background, our respondents are (or are on their way to becoming) important players in the power game of their field. They have developed intensive knowledge of the rules of the game and collected significant aces. Some have already begun to occupy positions of power, bending the rules of the game to their advantage, while for others, the struggle continues.

Notes

1. Bourdieu uses the concept of strategy to explain "the objectively oriented lines of action" which the agency produces through practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 129). Strategies can be both conscious and unconscious circumscribed by or in response to the objective conditions in the field (Bourdieu 1996, 273). The notion of strategy in Bourdieu's usage is crucial to bringing structure and agency together in understanding practices.
2. CAPES is a certificate granted by the French Ministry of Education to teach in secondary and upper secondary education. After five years of higher education, candidates have to pass a written and oral competition in order to obtain a CAPES certificate. Since 2010, teachers must have both a CAPES certificate and a master's degree.

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Disclosure statement

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