Class and Passports:

Transnational Strategies of Distinction in Turkey

This article analyses the process whereby members of new classes in Turkey mobilize their resources so that their children receive US citizenship at birth. Following the actors' self-perceptions and motivations, we argue that US citizenship acquisition is a new capital accumulation strategy, aimed to forestall against risks in intergenerational transmission of class privileges. With this article, we aim to contribute to cultural class studies in the following ways: We suggest that the unpredictable nature of classification struggles become more evident in contexts where transition to neoliberalism is accompanied by dramatic political shifts. We situate the desire for US citizenship within class anxieties in Turkey, informed by historical meanings attached to the binary of "the West" versus "the East." Finally, we break down the boundaries between different country-cases by drawing on citizenship as capital, rather than as a backdrop that actors share. We explain the new ways in which class distinction strategies are transnationalised in the contemporary period.

Keywords: Citizenship, New Classes, Cultural Capital, Social Capital, Transnationalism, Turkey, United States

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In 2011, an estimated number of 600 Turkish women in the later stages of their pregnancy travelled to and stayed in the United States for several months; they put their lives in Turkey on hold and spent tens of thousands of dollars, all for the purpose of giving birth in the US so that their children would obtain US citizenship through the birthright principle.ⁱ Such births are not isolated events, either. Although it is hard to estimate the exact numbers, “birth tourism” appears to have become popular among well-to-do families in China, South Korea, India, and Mexico, among others. Why do these women travel 10,000 kilometres, taking on health risks for themselves and their unborn children, so that the latter are born into US citizenship? What do their motivations reveal about the identities of the new classes in the non-Western world and their new capital accumulation strategies?

Arguing against proclamations of “the death of class,” Savage has written that class today is to be discovered in the ways in which individuals differentiate themselves through cultural practices (Savage, 2000). Whereas most relevant studies have focused on advanced capitalist countries in the West, we suggest that looking at the practices of professional classes elsewhere highlights the significance of transnational cultural identifications in boundary-drawing strategies. With this case study, we propose a sharper focus on the dynamic and transnational nature of these struggles, taking into consideration the global expansion of Westernized consumption patterns, together with histories of nation-state formation and contemporary political shifts and anxieties. Studies on professional classes in environments transitioning to market economies outside of the West reveal the role that Westernized consumption patterns play as a source of local distinction (De Koning, 2006; O’Dougherty, 2002; Öncü, 1999). These practices also have their roots in conditions of postcoloniality and the contextually specific definitions of “the West” (Grewal 2005). With this case study, we document how a mere cultural affinity with the West is no longer enough

for claiming distinction. These groups display heightened anxiety about the possibility of future political developments eroding the legitimacy of their symbolic capital. This anxiety results in a desire to institutionalize their distinctions, historically taken for granted, by acquiring US citizenship at least for their children. Global changes in citizenship regimes and the increasing acceptance of dual citizenship provide unexpected opportunities in this pursuit.

This article is based on in-depth interviews with forty Turkish families in which the mother had given birth in the US for the purpose of acquiring US citizenship for the child, as well as on four interviews with representatives of health tourism companies that catered to them. We contacted our interviewees, most of whom were the mothers, through different points of entry into the field and utilized the method of snowballing. Three categories emerged at the intersection of familiarity with the US and economic power. The first group was composed of couples in which at least one had lived in the US in the past and was a high-level professional or business owner. The second group was also made up of high-level professionals with significant economic resources. However for the second group, their familiarity with the US was limited by the short-term nature of their visits. The third group, and the smallest of the three, had more limited financial means, but also some familiarity with the US. All interviews, which lasted on average, between an hour and an hour and a half, covered parents' motivations for, and interpretations of their children's citizenship status, the intricacies of the journey itself, and the way in which parents then raised their children.

In the following sections, we situate our case study within the literature on new classes, showing that, in this case, struggles for distinction have resulted in a new capital accumulation strategy, one that takes place beyond national borders and is expected to further class positions both within, and outside of the country of residence. We then contextualize these actors' national positions in terms of the historicity of their ties with the West. We unpack the ways in which class anxieties intersect with distant imaginaries of "the West" and

coincide with political contestations regarding the role of religion in public life. Using our interviews, we make the following arguments: for these actors who define their identities in terms of secularism and “Western orientation,” their children’s US citizenship is born out of a divergence between their cultural affinities and their apprehensions about the future of Turkey. As a result, they search for new strategies of capital accumulation to forestall possible decreases in the value and legitimacy of their accumulated resources. The institutionalization of their children’s connection with the West through US citizenship can be seen in this context. This is a transnational strategy developed to alleviate local anxieties about the generational transfer of class distinctions.

This empirical material enables us to engage with new class studies in three ways: first, we seek to contribute to the literature’s transnationalisation by introducing a case study from Turkey, where the dynamic nature of classification struggles is especially pronounced. We take into consideration the political changes that produce perceptions of downward valuation of the characteristics that have historically formed the distinction of urban professional classes. Second, by documenting the historically specific nature of these cultural battles and class strategies, we connect debates on new classes to discussions within postcolonial scholarship about meanings attached to binaries such as “the West” versus “the East” and secular versus religious. Finally, we aim to break down the boundaries between different country-cases in a new way, by drawing on citizenship acquisition as a capital, with local and transnational imaginaries, rather than as a backdrop that these actors share. We document not only the individualization of class identification processes, but also their transnationalisation.

“The West” and the Classification Struggles in “the Non-West”

Bourdieu has shown that classes and class boundaries emerge as an effect of struggles encompassing not only matters of economic capital accumulation, but also what he refers to as social and cultural capitals (1984, 1989). Cultural capital denotes educational achievements, matters of taste, and consumption practices that appear unconnected to economic inequalities—but, in fact, are inherently related (1994). Social capital enables us to capture the networks that people can comfortably navigate and/or to which they can connect. The ability to convert these different capitals into one another endows people with symbolic capital, whose potency is derived from its “disinterestedness” (Bourdieu, 1986).

Inspired by Bourdieu, new class studies propose that we stop thinking of class as an empty slot waiting to be filled by people (Bottero, 2004; Devine and Savage, 2005). Today although an overt identification with a collectivity is absent from people’s discourses, individualized strategies of identity-making continue to be classed (Savage, 2000). Bottero and Irwin have also argued that “‘class’ can be best seen as a set of claims about the nature of the social hierarchy, claims which hold variable force across diverse contexts” (2003: 468). The rich empirical work on taste, cultural practices, and consumption habits (Katz-Gerro, 2002; Le Roux et al., 2008; Savage et al., 2001) shows the multiplicity of strategies that people deploy in everyday classification struggles. Such practices and discourses involve claims of disidentification (Reay, 1997; Skeggs, 1997), as well as claims of distinction (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Lawler, 2005b). These are emotionally laden processes, not only because they speak to definitions of morality and authenticity (Lamont, 1992; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997, 2005; Mendez, 2008), but also because they involve unpredictability and anxiety on the part of individuals.

Bourdieu has likened class boundaries to a “flame whose edges are in constant movement, oscillating around a line or surface” (1987: 13). In other words, class and classification are never settled processes, but always entail evolving social relations (Lawler,

2005a). This becomes especially evident in the uncertainty with which individuals attempt to transmit class privileges to the next generations (Lareau, 2003; Byrne, 2006; Reay, 1998). The anxieties that drive and trail practices of intergenerational transmission of class privileges become more visible in contexts where the values of capitals are tenuous, due to the intensity of political, economic, and social transformations.

In recent decades, many countries in the Global South, including Turkey, have transitioned to neoliberal market economies. Among them a number have experienced significant economic growth. As a result, new professional classes with a significant purchasing power have emerged (Goodman and Robison, 2013; Ong, 2006), constituting new markets for Western products. The consumption patterns, life-styles, cultural orientations, and anxieties of these groups show similarities around the world (O'Dougherty, 2002; Öncü, 1999; Caldeira, 2000). Based on their similarities, they have been alternatively called transnational classes, third world cosmopolitans, new professional classes, and new consumers (Grewal, 2005; Hannerz, 2002; Myers and Kent, 2004; Sklair, 2001).

These actors' strategies of distinction often draw on cultural affinities with the West (De Koning 2006, Üstüner and Holt 2010) and transnationally recognizable educational and professional credentials (Babb, 2001; Dezalay and Garth, 2002). Postcolonial studies allow us to historicize these personal strategies within processes of anti-colonial nation-state establishment in the twentieth century. This is a history in which nationalist elite reacted to but also, ironically, drew on the colonial discourses which contrasted the civilized, rational, enlightened "Western" with its "Eastern" other, the latter often described in terms such as irrational and overly-religious (Adas, 1989; Chatterjee 1996; Altan-Olcay 2012). As anti-colonial nationalist elite sought to simultaneously define their cultural authenticity and to catch up with the West, they also engaged in producing homogenized and selective definitions of the latter. Such definitions also became part and parcel of urban classes' self-definitions, as

a result of their historical access to modern schooling, some with origins in colonial periods (Colonna 1997; Altan-Olcay 2008). Consequently, locally appropriated imaginaries of the West became central to individualized claims of value, legitimacy, and distinction during the twentieth century. Nevertheless, this was always a conflicted process because of anxieties of “authenticity” of belonging, both in the new nation and the West (Bhabha 1997).

Even though Turkey was never formally colonized, the experience of the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and World War I was foundational in the newly republican elite’s turn toward the West and efforts to distance the new republic from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and Islam (Kasaba and Bozdoğan, 1997). Western modernity became, in many instances, synonymous with Kemalist secularism, which the elite vigorously adopted to control public expressions of religiosity and fend off political rivals (Tarhanlı 1993). Furthermore, women became the most crucial symbol of this modernization project. Cultivating “the modern Turkish woman” was seen as an important step in breaking with the Ottoman past (Kandiyoti 1991). State reforms undertaken to build the modern, secular, and Western-oriented new nation state also influenced symbolic struggles in the everyday, around the so-called traditional versus modern ways of life (Kandiyoti, 1997), imbuing the urbanized and Western-oriented groups with symbolic capital (Öncü 1999, Üstel and Caymaz, 2009). Although these classes underlined their distinction from “traditional” classes through their westernised patterns of living, this was never an unequivocal process. They were occasionally put in a position of political unease, reflected in the state’s fears of moral corruption and the loss of the “truth” of national identity (Kadıoğlu, 1996). This was especially pertinent for women, who were expected to adhere by norms of modesty and claims around cultural authenticity in conjunction with their westernized lifestyles (Arat, 1994).

This historical experience is also reflected in the findings of contemporary studies on these classes, which identify the ambivalent meanings that “the West” and “Western” life-

styles continue to take in individual strategies of consumption and distinction (Karademir Hazır, 2013; Üstüner and Holt, 2010). From the 1980s onwards, the transition to and consolidation of neoliberalism enabled the rise of a new generation of professionals in globally connected sectors of the economy (Emrence, 2008). These actors were now even more intensely connected with Western life-styles and consumption patterns due to their disproportionate economic power and the increased availability of such goods and services. Their everyday consumption practices became corollaries to their claimed distinctions from other classes and disidentification with certain factions of the newly urbanized middle classes (Öncü, 1999; Ayata, 2002). For these classes, the West became synonymous with the US, and they began to look for more direct ways to establish connections with the latter, such as education, work, and investment (Bali, 2002). That said, these classes defended their cultural authenticity by invoking patriotism and nostalgia for the early republican period (Özyürek 2006).

Bourdieu's focus on the uncertainty of meanings of capital is also fruitful for understanding transformative shifts in societies. In periods of transformation, the volume, composition, and trajectory of their capital can no longer guarantee people the social positions traditionally taken for granted (Bourdieu, 2008). This in turn necessitates the formulation of new strategies to maintain and improve existing positions in overlapping inequalities. In this sense, focusing on the case of Turkey is rewarding because it offers a venue to discuss social changes associated with the transition to a neoliberal order, together with the contemporary incongruous relations with the West in the political sense.

Although the idea of "Westernisation" was foundational in the discourse of the new republican elite in the years following independence, Turkish state actors have historically refused to fully liberalize and democratize, and insisted on defining "the West" in selective terms (Çolak, 2006). For the majority of the republic's history, this attitude reflected and even

overlapped with the distinction strategies of these classes, who were also ambivalent in their imagination of, and adaptation of the West. However, in the current context two new sources of anxiety have emerged among these classes. First, these actors, who identify more closely with secularism and Western “ways of life,” feel threatened by the governing Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), whose rule has become increasingly authoritarian and exclusionary of the so-called “White Turks.” As a result of the rise of the AKP, these classes are faced with a situation where government officers deride their habitus (Kaya, 2014) and where they feel anxious about their historically assumed distinctions. Second, the transformations in economy, labour market and law meant that their economic gains are not secure (Bora et al., 2011). These experiences have pushed many to strive for new strategies of distinction. Focusing on this moment of uncertainty, this article asks: what strategies do these classes deploy? Is there anything to be discovered at the intersection of capital accumulation strategies, classification struggles at the local level, and global possibilities of transnational citizenship (Bauböck, 1994, 2010; Soysal 1994)?

A New Cultural Capital under Anxieties of Symbolic Distinction

Travel for birthright citizenship has become a possibility first and foremost, due to the increased legal acceptance of multiple citizenships. Whereas until the 1980s, most states used to prevent it, today more than 100 states accept or turn a blind eye to multiple citizenships (Sejersen, 2008). These trends are reflected in the current citizenship regimes of Turkey and the United States. In 1981, the Turkish Nationality Act was amended to remove obstacles to dual citizenship (Keyman and İçduygu, 2003). Furthermore, since 2009 a new citizenship law acknowledges the right to multiple nationalities. In the US, several Supreme Court rulings have made the loss of citizenship impossible without the consent of the citizen (Aleinikoff, 2000). Furthermore, the principle of birthright citizenship grants everyone born in the United

States with a right to US citizenship, regardless of their parents' status. For these families, these legal changes mean that they could obtain US citizenship for children without the loss of national rights to property and inheritance.

Moreover, these parents decided to give birth in the US because of the uniqueness of its birthright principle, which requires relatively manageable investments in time and money. They could mobilize their border-crossing social circles to locate accommodations, hospitals, and doctors. In fact, a transnational market revolving around these families' practices has emerged, connecting an array of health tourism companies, hospitals, doctors, and real estate firms (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2014a). All parents had long-term visas prior to their decision and entered the US without problems. During their time in the US, they had sufficient language skills and institutional familiarity to navigate the bureaucracy surrounding the children's citizenship processes. Most importantly, they had the necessary economic resources.

This picture, painted in broad strokes, gives us one answer to the question why: because they can. Yet, ability is not a condition that sufficiently explains the reasons behind these actions. The driving force for this strategy comes from perceptions of threat to their ability to transmit class privileges to their children and operates at two levels, which are intrinsically related. First, unpredictability in the field of education in Turkey limits parent's capacity to plan for their children's schooling. Second, negative perceptions of the country's political direction provoke anxieties about their own symbolic distinctions, making issues of generational transmission of cultural capital all the more critical. US citizenship emerges as a new form of cultural capital to forestall these anxieties.

Even though there was some diversity along the axis of economic capital, many interviewees were composed of couples with diplomas from foreign-language schools in Turkey and/or prestigious universities in Turkey, or the US. Many had either lived in the US

for education or work, or had travelled there frequently. What all these families shared was the necessary capacity to transfer the aforementioned capital to their children. In fact, every single child at school age was enrolled in private, foreign-language schools, most of which followed an American-style curriculum. Nonetheless, these parents felt that, as one of them put it, “Turkish citizenship [wa]s just not enough” for their children. When we probed further, almost all of them stated concerns about their children’s education:

My economic fortune appears less guaranteed every passing year. I am working extremely hard ... so that I make enough money for [my son’s] future. [But] unless someone dies in the family and leaves me their inheritance ... schools and private universities are very expensive. I thought if my son had US citizenship, I could get some tuition reduction [in international schools].

This informant was afraid that economic instability could undermine her ability to educate her son in the private schooling system. Even though most of our informants had grown up during an era when their families had comparable choices between public and private schools, at the time of the interviews, they did not consider public schools for their children. This has much to do with the declining quality of the public education system in Turkey, especially in foreign language training, and increasing role of religious education in public classrooms. As a result, some parents regarded their children’s US citizenship as an extension of their capability to send their children to the best schools in Turkey or in the US, especially for college. These parents foresaw US citizenship as an additional capital, which could bolster their children’s local distinction in the future. This inter-generational investment required thinking and planning ahead, however:

[I]t is hard to know how things are going to be in 15-20 years. There is so much constant change in the Turkish education system... We thought maybe we could circumvent that a bit.

As this quote indicates, people were also motivated by the unpredictability of the Turkish education system. Over the last twelve years, there have been thirteen major changes made to the national education system (Aktaş Salman, 2013), creating volatile conditions where school-aged children are likely to begin their education under one system, and plan their transition to higher levels of education based on its requirements, only to end up being assessed by a completely different metric when new rules are implemented. The interviewed parents described their encounters with the Turkish education system using terms such as “panic” and “risk”. Perceptions of chaos prevailed, and they feared for their ability to plan their children’s education. One way in which they attempted to forestall this unpredictability was to opt for private schools. Even these are not bulletproof, however, because private schools are also governed by the national education system to a great extent.

More importantly, education has become a field for the struggle between Islamist and secular elites. As Kaya (2014) has observed, AKP and previous governments have all utilized education to propagate their vision of society. However, AKP’s interventions—such as lifting the headscarf ban, equating religious and secular degrees, and heavily increasing the role of Islamic education in the national curriculum—have amplified the anxieties of secular groups. For these families, the increasing Islamisation of the curriculum, impossible to avoid completely even in private schools, equated a threat to both their ability to transmit their cultural dispositions to their children, and to retain historically assumed distinctions associated. Thus they sought alternative routes for transmitting their cultural dispositions, while also opening new paths for ensuring distinction.

The parents saw their children’s US citizenship as an opportunity that expands choices not only in the field of education, but also for managing unpredictability in general. One of the interviewees put her perception of everyday life in Turkey in the following words:

I feel like we are very slowly getting used to things changing ... Someday we will wake up, look around us and say: “wow, where are we?” I hope it doesn’t happen. ... But this is not Switzerland. It’s the Middle East, always boiling, always unpredictable.

Such descriptions of unpredictability are reminiscent of Beck’s conceptualization of risk society, which depicts individuals’ increased preoccupation with the unknowable future and their calculated actions to try to mitigate perceptions of risk (Beck, 1992). Despite Beck’s proclamations to the contrary (2002), however, risk society is a classed society because there is an overlap between one’s sense of risk, one’s ability to guard against it, and one’s position in prevailing inequalities. These actors’ greater resources allowed them to act on fears of unpredictability and devise alternative routes of capital accumulation for their children, to devise alternative routes for cultural capital accumulation for their children, under conditions of uncertainty. In this sense, US citizenship constitutes a risk management tool for ensuring and bolstering existing cultural capital transmission strategies, in case the usual mechanisms no longer work.

US Citizenship as Social Capital Beyond the Nation-State

As can be seen from the last quote, the perception of uncertainty in education is part of a generalized anxiety about the contemporary and future values of the dispositions that define parents’ distinctions. Hirschman (1970) writes that members of an organization have two possible responses when they perceive a decline in the quality or benefit of membership to any organization: They can either withdraw from membership (exit), or attempt to correct the relationship (voice). In the case of declining quality of public education, private schooling constitutes an exit option for these groups. However, the Islamisation of the national curriculum limits the utility of this path for secular groups. For these actors, the possibility of

an exit from the citizenship altogether becomes a plausible alternative to the decline in the perceived quality of the public sphere, where they feel threatened by perceptions of Islamisation. Hence, this is a newly invented exit strategy *from* Turkey and *to* the United States, adopted to reinforce accumulated capital, to shift direction, and to institutionalize transnational connections in the event that Turkey no longer provides suitable living conditions for their children. This strategy transforms the institution of citizenship into a transnational social capital.

All couples defined their identities in terms such as “modernity,” “secularism,” and “Western.” They expressed concerns that the current government was challenging each of these identifications. The interviewees talked angrily about an assault on the defining characteristics of the Turkish republic. One interviewee reminded us that “[m]any people in Iran had to leave the country abruptly, with a few pieces of belonging, when Khomeini came to power... [My husband] does not believe it could happen here but... I was still adamant about giving birth in the US.” The interviewees often articulated fears about the government’s growing distance from the “Western world”. Overall there was a sense of not feeling secure in their local belonging.

This is a concern especially for women and for parents of daughters, who frequently expressed nostalgia for the early republican period and its emphasis on women’s rights. Every parent of a daughter brought up their child’s gender as a causal factor in their decision. Despite the fact that this history was never unequivocal on questions of women’s rights, these actors saw a stark shift in the way women’s roles in society were being defined in terms of religiosity, modesty, and domesticity. Some referred to the frequency with which high-ranking politicians have made statements about the “natural inequality” between men and women. One, for instance, said that anyone who had a daughter should consider this exit option because in the future “their daughter’s freedom may be taken away; maybe she will be

banned from the streets; maybe she will be harassed by the public police.” When we asked whether they would recommend this practice to others, one interviewee told us: “If they are going to have a baby girl, they should definitely go for it. The status of women in this society is so unclear.” In other words, US citizenship consolidated an exit option for the daughters if gender inequality continued to deteriorate.

Although many interviewees described a sense of feeling constricted, they acknowledged that these changes did not have an immediate impact on their lives. Yet, they feared a time could come when their current resources would not suffice for their children. The threat of having their life-styles and cultural norms delegitimized weighed on their minds. In this conception, the newly rising, so-called Islamic classes threatened to take over enrolment in Turkey’s prestigious schools and commandeer its businesses. Given these anxieties, they imagined their children’s US citizenship acting as an institutional connection to a world whose norms have historically been aligned with their local distinction. If these stopped working in Turkey, not only would the children be able to exit the country, they would also have a seamless passage to a welcoming place where they could transfer their accumulated capital. This accumulated capital would be recognized in a society such as the United States, they expected.

Several interviewees used variations of the phrase “global citizen” while describing their urban lives, Western-style cultural consumption patterns, norms, and jobs that afforded them international connections (Altan-Olcay and Balta, 2014b). When we asked what they meant by this description, their explanations revolved around two sets of characteristics. First, it meant flexibility, openness, and an ability to live and work anywhere. Ong (1999) has used the term “flexible citizenship” to explain the practices of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals who circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investment, work, and family relocation. These flexible citizens seek to

acquire various residency permits and passports in an effort to escape local regulations established by states (Ong, 1999). In this particular case, institutionalizing these claims for children means that the latter could flexibly change locations if the parents' fears about the future of the country did in fact materialize.

Second, this portrayal is also about a particular imagination of the West. The interviewees frequently described a "mentality" and a sense of freedom, which they associated with everyday life in the US. Contextualized within these self-descriptions, US citizenship inspired dreams of transnational lives for their children, safely equipped with their familiarity with "the American system." Grewal (2005) has shown that constellations of "the American dream" and discourses of multiculturalism—circulated among networks of upper and middle classes in postcolonial contexts, immigrants, and diaspora communities—produce diverse notions of America. This is the "the American Dream" denationalized and renationalized in contextually specific ways (Grewal, 2005). For these particular groups, the American dream with its promises of success, safety, and multi-cultural acceptance speaks to desires for their children. Not only did US citizenship constitute an exit option, parents hoped that their children would thrive in the "American system" because they would already have been brought up according to its norms. One interviewee said:

My mentality is very close to theirs, my work ethic, way of life ... They are always functional, rational. They are very direct and open. Even when they are firing someone, they are open about the reasons. That's what I do in my work, as well. They do not have backstage stuff going on. I am a very direct person, and so is my husband. That's why we have internalized America.

Another described daily life in the following way; "[n]ot everyone on the street may have in-depth knowledge about what is going on in the world, but the way they greet you in the street, that civilized attitude alone is enough. You can walk in the shortest shorts in the street; go out

in your bikini. No one would care.” “The civilized attitude” which this interviewee described was a reoccurring theme in many interviews. Some talked about the cultural practice of affording people their space and freedom; others mentioned friendliness toward strangers. This attitude was the result of a generalized understanding of equality as opposed to, as one suggested, “the caste system” in Turkey, where no one mingles with those unlike themselves.

According to this interviewee, “the American system” retained a sense of comfort in everyday life because everyone respected the rules, and one another. Everyone talked about the “American system,” which they believed gave US citizens security and stability because the rules were reliable. This led to two conclusions: first, things worked; people trusted them to work; and this created a virtuous spiral. Second, if you had the right work ethic, you could make it in America.

If you are not looking for ways to abuse this system, you make it one way or another. You can live your life in good circumstances because the American society and the American legal system have established a setting where, excuse the language, even an idiot can survive, can live securely.

These actors belong to a privileged minority of Turkey. Yet, the US passport for their children and its association with life in America with predictability, rule of law, and rewards for work ethics provided them with a sense of security, should their privileges be taken away in Turkey. Motivated by fears about defunct classification strategies in the local context, they utilize their existing knowledge of the West and their connections to institutionalize their identification with the West for their children. This multi-cultural America, with rules, where anyone can make it, alleviates their fears for their children’s future. In this sense, the children’s US citizenship is a new kind of capital accumulation, not only because it transnationalises the strategies that they have invented to fend off local economic and political risks, it also lets parents expand the field where their children can manoeuvre in seeking

distinction. Their children, they hope, will make it in America, because they are legal and legitimate members.

Ambivalences, at Home and Abroad

These expectations have yet to be substantiated, since the children in question were all under the age of 18 at the time of research. However, cracks were already beginning to emerge with this backup plan. The parents' own experiences of alienation in the US revealed the possibility that regardless of how thoroughly they cultivated "Western" dispositions in the children, their offspring might still end up feeling like outsiders in the US, because they would have grown up in Turkey. Such moments of ambivalence, interwoven with stories of hopes, suggest problems with the translatability of local class privileges to the US. This means that acquiring the US citizenship for children may not be a solid intergenerational strategy of class distinction after all.

Those informants who had lived in the US had the kind of cultural capital repositories that could reduce the likelihood of downward mobility often experienced by professional migrants, in their host settings (Erel 2010). Their acclamations of meritocracy in "the American system" reflected this ability. Nevertheless, subtle patterns of exclusion also emerged in their stories. One interviewee said that the US might look like a land of plenty and opportunity, but "people don't understand that better homes, neighbourhoods, cars, etc. ... belong to the bank. So to keep up this life standard, you work like crazy." Even when people were willing to "work like crazy," some remembered that they could never be on par with Americans who were born and raised there. Some suggested that this was especially due to deteriorating perceptions of people coming from Muslim countries. Many more attributed this to the fact that they never looked and sounded "American enough." While their cultural

capital, defined around affinity with the West produced symbolic distinction for them at home, they could not always pass as “Western enough” outside of Turkey.

Not being “Western enough” can be thought to follow on the footsteps of Bhabha’s conceptualization of mimicry (1997). Whereas these actors were brought up in Western-oriented, secular households, and mostly educated in foreign language schools, there was still a feeling of in-betweenness. This disrupted their seemingly clear delineations between the so-called East and the West. They defined themselves as part of the West; disliked that Turkey was becoming “more Eastern” and yet, felt more connected and comfortable in Turkey. When many of them had had the opportunity to continue living in the US in the past, they had ultimately returned to Turkey in pursuit of this connectedness: “[Those who stayed] do not have many ties here. They are not close with their families, friends... Others have all returned.” Some put it in more blunt terms, acknowledging that it was about their local privileges:

We have a different kind of life here. It is very privileged. You cannot have the same standards there. Living well is about whom you know. If I fall sick here, I have a large family, friends, and acquaintances. I am nobody over there. ... This is not really about money. It’s about networks, being included, being rooted.

Acquiring US citizenship for the children is a transnational capital accumulation strategy that banks on existing stock of capital at home. As the last quote reveals, however, not all capital crucial for distinction at home is seamlessly transferable elsewhere.

In Turkey, these actors’ historical distinctions rely on affinities with the West, but their dispositions make them feel unwelcome in today’s political environment. They are the actors more likely to study, live, and adjust to behavioural repertoires in the US. However, the US, with all its imaginaries of inclusiveness and multiculturalism, still elicits a feeling of

alienation. This is also a risk for their children, which the parents attempt to mitigate with US citizenship. US citizenship is an ambiguous capital which parents invest in to retain the possibility of class distinction in multiple locations. It is ambiguous because there is a real chance that children who grow up in Turkey will be unable to transfer their local privileges to the US, despite their passports. In other words, despite all the material and emotional investments made in childbirth in the US as a transnational strategy of capital accumulation, an element of risk remains.

Conclusion

By utilizing the trend of Turkish citizens travelling to the US to give birth and thus acquire US citizenship for children as case study, this paper has aimed to contribute to studies on professional classes outside of the West and their strategies of distinction. We have argued that the institution of citizenship itself is now drawn into capital accumulation strategies. The expectations of these families reflect the transformation of membership in the US polity into a new kind of cultural and social capital, providing flexibility in times of anxiety.

First, the children's US citizenship provides a way to bolster the existing trajectory of cultural capitals in the local context. US citizenship is expected to consolidate and institutionalize prior investments in westernized cultural practices, which have historically been the source of these groups' symbolic distinction. US citizenship is an additional resource for cultural capital accumulation, because it increases the parents' ability to protect their children from the unpredictability and growing Islamisation of the Turkish educational system and public sphere, while simultaneously investing in the latter's future. This is a strategy that is informed by historically and contextually specific imaginaries of "the West" and individual affinities cultivated throughout people's lives. The strategy is also the result of feelings of threat against these cultural dispositions and their historical values. Thus, it is an attempt at

generational transfer of resources at a moment in time when these actors experience their own dispositions in a conflicted manner, insecure in their own distinctions.

Second, US citizenship is an exit option for the children, should there be a dramatic reversal of values and trajectories of existing capital, even if it does not mean actual exit. This is a new twist on Hirschman's (1970) argument about the possibility of an exit from public services for those who can afford it, because in this case, the value of Turkish citizenship begins to deteriorate in the eyes of these groups. Furthermore, US citizenship is expected to operate as a transnationalized social capital, allowing children to move their existing privileges seamlessly from their home countries to the US. This expectation is based on a combination of the value attributed to US citizenship and families' affinity with the West, which they transmit to their children.

Finally, this is not an unambiguous move. Investment in their children's citizenship acquisition is an ambivalent process, laden with anxieties. Their Westernized cultural capital has, for now, produced for them a symbolic distinction at home. Beyond Turkey's borders however, they do not always pass as "Western enough." Having this cultural capital in the US does not necessarily give them the distinction that it does in Turkey. These uncertainties and contextual specificities reflect both the historical ambiguities of post-colonial nation-state building and reveal, for today, that capitals that define class positions are temporal as well as place-specific (Bottero and Irwin, 2003).

Overall, extending the analysis of classification struggles beyond the West enables us to see more clearly the role that political and ideological transformations, together with neoliberal transitions, plays into the complex strategies individuals devise to reproduce and bolster their social class positions. We argue that capturing the dynamic nature of classification struggles requires paying equal attention to recent transitions to market economies as well as legacies of nation-building and their connections with the West, and

contemporary political transformations which might challenge these formulations. It is through political shifts that class identifications find meaning. At the intersection of all these developments, we see the emergence of new anxieties and new strategies of reproducing class distinctions. Such a focus also allows us to identify the ways in which cultural capital and social capital are no longer uniquely nation-bound.

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NOTES

ⁱ This estimation is based on statistics received in 2012 from the Turkish General Directorate of Population and Citizenship via correspondence. The calculation reflects an approximation based on the number of Turkish citizens who currently reside in Turkey, but were born in the US during 2011.

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