

Self-made lawyers? Pathways of socially mobile descendants of migrants from Turkey in Europe

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ABSTRACT


This study is based on narratives of successful lawyers in Europe who are descendants of migrants from Turkey. I will discuss the main mechanisms whereby social actors have a significant impact on the professional pathways of these upwardly mobile professionals. The findings provide two insights. The relevance of significant others found in literature on educational mobility of descendants of migrants can be extended to professional pathways. Some respondents became acquainted with the middle-class culture of the majority group through peers and school during their youth. This was instrumental in adjusting to the specific white-collar professional environments of corporate law firms. Others who grew up and attended schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods had more difficulties adjusting. However, they became accustomed to middle- and upper-class norms and behaviour at university or on the job by observing and learning along the way.

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Introduction

Over a decade ago, people from disadvantaged ethnic minority groups in north-western Europe rarely experienced social mobility processes. Today, we can observe their gradual but constant advancement in higher education and on the labour market. Highly skilled professionals are accessing well-paid and socially prestigious occupations, and are even managing to gain elite positions. Whereas they still lag behind the majority group, the second generation is making substantial advances compared to the immigrant generation (Alba and Foner 2015; Schneider and Lang 2014). As a consequence of these societal developments, social scientists are increasingly focusing on the upward social mobility of descendants of migrants (e.g. Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2012; Keskiner 2016; Konyali 2014; Rezai et al. 2015; Santelli 2013; Schnell, Keskiner, and Crul 2013; Waldring, Crul, and Ghorashi 2014).

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This paper contributes to gaining insight into the mechanisms of intergenerational upward mobility. It does this by focusing on the role of influential actors in the pathways of lawyers in Europe who are descendants of migrants from Turkey. The central question is: *What is the role of influential actors in the professional pathways of lawyers in France, Germany and Sweden who are children of migrants from Turkey?* To fully comprehend their pathways, I not only analyse the role of influential actors in their labour market pathways, but also in their youth and their educational trajectories.

Descendants of migrants from Turkey are part of the largest immigrant group in Europe (about five million). Their parents predominantly came to Europe as guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s and were generally unable to achieve social mobility in their new country. Scholars have often linked the low educational level of these parents and their migrant and low socio-economic background to the disadvantaged position of the second generation (Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2012). Other scholars have pointed to the fact that they grew up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and attended schools with high numbers of pupils with educational difficulties (Baysu and de Valk 2012; Rezai et al. 2015; Schnell 2014). In this article, I will shed light on what it is like for them to enter and work in a sector with a distinctly different social environment. Even though large corporate law firms and lawyer regulatory authorities have recently made diversity management a priority, the law sector is still dominated by people of native parentage with a middle- or upper-class social background (Van der Raad 2015). Moreover, the law sector is characterized by its emphasis on proficiency in the national language and excellent social and networking skills (see e.g. Lehmann 2011).

Studies on educational pathways have shown the significant role that adult actors can play in the upward mobility of children by noticing and believing in their ability to succeed, and by transmitting institutional knowledge to them (Louie 2012; Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008; Smith 2008; Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003). Studies on career mobility of ethnic minorities from a disadvantaged background generally stress their lack of a social network or inability to use their network in a beneficial way (Agius Vallejo 2012; Bourdieu and Balazs 1999; Friedman and Krackhardt 1997; Light and Gold 2000). I argue that the concept of significant others found by scholars in educational pathways can be extended to professional pathways. Moreover, I show how the socially mobile are able to successfully navigate the white-collar professional environment of law firms.

Social mobility and significant others

The literature on the career mobility of highly skilled employees generally observes the importance of work-related social relations for professional success. These studies find that having a social network that provides

information, resources and career sponsorship enhances an individual's mobility (Bourdieu 2011; Podolny and Baron 1997; Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden 2001). Studies on these topics that focus on ethnic minorities find that compared to the dominant group, they are less able to use social relations to benefit their careers (Friedman and Krackhardt 1997; Light and Gold 2000), especially if they have been raised in poor households and communities (Agius Vallejo 2012). Agius Vallejo (2012) finds that Mexican Americans who grew up in middle-class households and neighbourhoods are more comfortable interacting with middle-class whites in professional white-collar environments than are those raised in poor households and neighbourhoods. Those with middle-class parents follow the straight-line assimilation (Gordon 1964) and experience fewer challenges when incorporating into the dominant middle class. The socially mobile encounter rigid class and ethnic boundaries within white-collar professional spaces, while simultaneously experiencing class boundaries with their less affluent co-ethnics. This leaves them feeling that they are not integrating into the dominant middle class, but that they are achieving a minority middle-class status, as Neckerman, Carter, and Lee's (1999) minority culture of mobility indicates (Agius Vallejo 2012).

Studies on the role of significant others in the upward social mobility of children of migrants focus on educational pathways. They find that high achievers have access to support from both parents and significant others (Louie 2012; Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008; Rezai, Severiens, and Crul 2016; Smith 2008). Parents play a vital role by utilizing their immigrant optimism and aspirations for intergenerational upward mobility to support their children in their educational pathways. However, unlike parents in middle-class families (of native descent), they lack the tools to help their children achieve their educational aims, for example, by helping them with homework assignments, or by advising them on important educational decisions (Louie 2012; Rezai, Severiens, and Crul 2016).

The literature observes two important characteristics of significant others. They notice the young person's abilities and demonstrate the belief that the student can accomplish success (Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008). They also take on the role of "institutional agent" (Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003, 234) by transmitting institutional knowledge, such as information about college enrolment. Their involvement is often incidental rather than continuous, but it can be transformational and have lasting consequences for children (Louie 2012; Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008).

In this article, I will illustrate how socially mobile lawyers of Turkish descent navigate the white-collar professional environment of the law sector in Europe and how they make use of their ties to significant others along their pathways.

Table 1. Occupation of lawyers per city.

	Frankfurt	Paris	Stockholm
Independent lawyer	1	4	-
Lawyer, small firm	3	2 ^a	1
Partner, small firm	-	1 ^b	3 ^c
Lawyer, medium-sized firm		2	-
Associate, large firm	4	-	1
Senior associate, large firm	-	-	1
Partner, large firm	1	-	2
Total	9	9	8

^aOf which one lawyer works two days per week as an independent lawyer, and three days per week for the firm.

^bThis partner is the founding and sole partner of the firm.

^cOf these three partners, one is the founding and sole partner of the firm, and two are founding partners together with one other partner.

Methodology

This article is based on in-depth interviews with twenty-six lawyers who are children of migrants from Turkey and reside in Stockholm, Paris and Frankfurt (see Table 1). The vast majority are in their thirties and early forties. All of the participants (twelve male, fourteen female) have a law degree and have passed the equivalent of the bar examination in their respective countries. They practise corporate law, sometimes along with other fields of law. The interviews are part of the ELITES, Pathways to Success project that focuses on successful professionals of Turkish descent in Europe (see Crul, Keskiner and Lelie, *in press*).

I have applied an issue-focused analysis method (Weiss 1994) to study the pathways of my participants and to learn the mechanisms of upward career mobility in which significant others have been of influence. I will give an overview of these findings in the next section before illustrating the main mechanisms with case studies. I apply case studies to give the participants a face and to illustrate their experiences “within the context of their lives: this is what it is like to be this person in this situation” (168). Since my interest lies in upward mobility, I have selected respondents for the case studies who were particularly successful in their career and whose interviews were rich enough to vividly demonstrate a specific mechanism.

Findings

How can we characterize the lawyers we interviewed? They are bright: often having been overachievers at school. They have perseverance and a strong work ethic. They are go-getters: ambitious, optimistic, confident and resilient. Their well-developed social skills are highly valued in the law sector, as the ability to network and collaborate with colleagues is a vital skill within their profession. However, these lawyers have not walked alone on their journeys.

The vast majority of the twenty-six participants mentioned social actors who played an important role during their educational and professional pathways. I will first give a brief overview of who these actors were and of the role they played in the pathways of the respondents. Subsequently, I will use case studies to illustrate the mechanisms of upward mobility in which significant others were of influence.

Overview of all participants

During their educational pathways, most of the participants had access to both parental support and support from significant others to help them achieve their educational goals. Their parents supported them emotionally and transmitted to them the importance of education as a means to achieving upward social mobility (see also Rezai et al. 2015). Significant others supported them by communicating their belief in their abilities to achieve their educational goals or by transmitting institutional knowledge (see also Rezai, Severiens, and Crul 2016). The significant others mentioned by the participants were mainly teachers, university professors, extended relatives, older siblings and peers. In most cases, teachers and professors had been especially important in giving them confidence in their abilities. They did so by acknowledging their talents, thereby helping them to develop a strong belief in themselves. Teachers had also been important for some of the respondents because of the institutional knowledge they had shared, such as advising a student to try to get in to a *grande école* (Ivy League school). Extended relatives and older siblings also boosted their self-belief, and in some cases helped them with school work or advised them on important educational decisions. The participants' peers were generally school-oriented peers who also had high educational aspirations and similar ideas about the importance of education (see also Louie 2012; Rezai, Severiens, and Crul 2016). They were a source of emotional support, assisted them with school work and advised them on educational decisions. Several participants solely or predominantly had friends from a middle-class background of native heritage. This also gave them access to the support that middle-class parents can provide. Besides being able to approach their peers' parents for help with schoolwork and educational decisions, they underline the relevance of these friendships and the access to these homes in adopting the culture (norms, values, beliefs and common ways of conduct) of middle-class people of native origin.

Looking at social support in their labour market pathways, I found that most parents played no important role. All participants, however, described significant others who advised and assisted them as they scaled the professional ladder. At the beginning of their professional careers, these significant others are mainly friends from university or the preparatory period for the bar examination. They help them to find their first internship or job by

informing them about a job opening, or by recommending a firm that they had heard good things about. During the first years of their professional career, some of my participants had one or several senior colleagues or supervisors who took on a mentoring role. This varied from supervisors who took a young lawyer under their wings, provided abundant guidance, and functioned as role models, to senior colleagues who could be approached for advice on the content of a case or asked to “decode” [Yesim, Frankfurt] requests from partners. The latter is generally part of a firm’s policy.

It is also during the initial phase of their careers that they adopt the social rules of law firms. People who grew up attending schools with a middle- and upper-class majority-group population (and found peers there), generally face few challenges when learning the rules of the game. For others, who grew up in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods, this takes more effort. They learn the social rules of the white-collar law sector during law school and the preparatory period for the bar examination, and as professionals, they use their social skills to observe and copy behaviour of colleagues and ask them questions about how and why things are done in certain manners.

Later on in their careers, the networks they have built help them to move up the career ladder. They subsequently find jobs by being recommended to firms – rather than firms being recommended to *them* as was the case at the beginning of their careers – or because people in their network have obtained hiring positions and are able to offer them interesting career moves. Lawyers who become independent, which is a recurring step for the French lawyers more so than for the others, generally do so by starting a firm or by sharing office space with a former colleague. Having access to a mentor or confidant whom they can approach for advice on important decisions can be vital.

In the following, I will make use of narratives to illustrate the three main mechanisms of how significant others have influenced the professional pathways of my participants.

The case studies

Presenting the educational and professional pathways of three lawyers, I will focus on the role of influential actors. Each case study stresses a different mechanism.

The three lawyers portrayed here all practise corporate law. Eser (forty) works as a partner at a large and prestigious international firm in Frankfurt. Dilek (thirty-four) has been working as an independent lawyer in Paris for four years, primarily serving medium-sized and large corporations. The Kaldani brothers in Stockholm work at large corporate law firms: Dakan (thirty-seven) as a partner, and Iva (thirty-four and the focus of the narrative) as a senior associate with good prospects of becoming a partner in the near future.

Except for Eser, who was a baby at the time of migration, all were born in the countries where we interviewed them. Their parents migrated to Europe in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. Being Assyrian Christians, the Kaldani family had left Turkey primarily for political reasons. The mother is illiterate and the father attended primary school. Both parents attended Swedish courses for immigrants. In Sweden, the father worked as a locksmith before starting his own restaurant. He ended up running two restaurants together with his wife. Today, he is retired and his wife works at her brother's advertising company. The Kaldani brothers have an older sister. Eser's parents emigrated for financial reasons. His mother is illiterate and his father attended primary school. In Germany, Eser's father started off as a factory worker, and went on to work as a locksmith. He passed away some years ago. Eser's mother worked as an ironing helper until she became incapacitated. Eser has two older brothers and a younger sister. Dilek's parents also emigrated for financial reasons. Her mother attended primary school, and her father attended university for a few months prior to migration. In France, after having worked as a factory worker, he became self-employed, exploring different business areas. Her mother worked in low-skilled jobs. Dilek has three younger siblings.

Below, I illustrate the main mechanisms of support that emerged from my data. The first mechanism stresses a characteristic feature of significant others that has been underlined in the literature on educationally high-achieving children of migrants. It concerns the communication of belief in the children's abilities to accomplish educational success which has a positive effect on their self-belief (see e.g. Louie 2012). I argue that the self-belief my participants developed during their educational pathways continues throughout their professional pathways. This mechanism also underlines the relevance of becoming familiar with middle-class majority-group culture. Eser's narrative illustrates how this combination can help someone to develop into a confident professional. The second mechanism concerns the fundamental role that mentors can play in the careers of the lawyers. Dilek's history captures how participants who have become familiar with middle-class culture during their youth can make use of their social skills to find valuable mentors and to maintain this relationship during further phases of their careers in order to access advice and guidance. The story of Iva shows the integration into corporate culture of an upwardly mobile professional who grew up and went to school in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. This third mechanism concerns the role of social actors in becoming acquainted with the social rules of law firms.

The striker and his Mannschaft: building self-belief during one's youth

Eser (forty) is an international advisor at a prestigious law firm. He is known for being one of the main players in the legal practice area of mergers and acquisitions related to Turkey, specifically in the field of technology law.

Growing up and education. As he had not been to kindergarten, Eser could not speak a word of German when he started primary school at the age of seven. After four years of primary school, children go to secondary school, which is split into different streams. This did not give Eser enough time to reach the level required for *Gymnasium*, the pre-university stream. He was advised to go to *Förderstufe*, which gave him two more years to catch up. Eser perceives these two years as being extremely important for his pathway and believes that otherwise he “would not be sitting here today”.

Eser's parents took a rather “passive” attitude towards education. They “neither encouraged nor hindered” it. Eser explains this by saying that his parents had their hands full with raising four children “more or less properly”. In *Förderstufe*, two teachers noticed his potential, and gave him the encouragement and recognition he needed to do his best. Recognition has always been important to Eser, as “one wants to be acknowledged”. There is a substantial difference between *Förderstufe* and *Gymnasium*, so Eser had to work hard the first year to pull through. At *Gymnasium*, his class teacher and French teacher had a great impact. They encouraged him to be diligent, not by exerting a “tremendously active influence” but by giving him recognition through “very banal things”. Eser believes that his migrant background was one reason why his teachers made such an effort to encourage him. As they lived in a small town, his teachers knew his parents, and “somehow or other they thought it was great that a child from a migrant family which had difficulties with everyday life, so to say, could develop so well”. Eser graduated from *Gymnasium* with an above-average GPA. This had not been a straightforward accomplishment. During the last years of *Gymnasium*, Eser sustained two severe football injuries, which kept him off school for some time. Since he did not “tumble over”, this crunch point contributed to Eser's self-confidence. Football also gave Eser's self-esteem an important boost; as one of the best strikers in the region, he was always selected for tournaments.

Besides self-confidence and diligence, Eser believes that his rootedness in German culture contributed to his successful pathway. Being part of a football association was a significant aid to understanding German culture; “when the master butcher coaches the boys at five p.m., that is just marvellous”. While growing up, Eser had many friends of native German origin. The mother of his best friend, Jacob, was a teacher and his father was an engineer. Thanks to this friendship, Eser could experience how German middle-class families live. There was often a newspaper on the table and Jacob would read the sports section. It was important to witness such things, and being exposed to them at a relatively young age contributed to Eser's rootedness. He believes that this is an important reason for why he feels German and understands “how Germans function”.

Eser worked very hard during his studies. To prepare for the first state exam, he attended a *Repetitorium* for a year.¹ Not only did he pass, he was among the top seven per cent of graduates. By the age of twenty-three, he was already able to start the *Referendariat*, the preparatory period for the bar examination. This smooth pathway “triggered a certain dynamic” within Eser. During his *Referendariat*, one of his professors suggested that Eser do a Ph.D. He was also asked to work as a *Repetitor* at the *Repetitorium*. For three years, during the entire *Referendariat*, he gave classes to law students who were preparing for the first state exam. At the second state exam, he finished among the top ten per cent of graduates.²

Entrance to the labour market and further career. During his studies, Eser already knew that he wanted to work for a large corporate law firm; he “wanted to see the big world, the international topics”. During the *Referendariat*, he decided to do an internship in the United States to polish his English. He sent out applications and found a firm in California. Coincidentally, a friend whom he knew from the *Referendariat* was doing an internship at a top international corporate firm in the same city, and convinced Eser to apply for a job at that firm.

By this point, Eser had an impressive CV. At both state exams, he had finished among the top graduates. He had worked as a *Repetitor* for three years, and had almost finished his Ph.D. He was able to take his pick of jobs in the corporate law sector. Back in Frankfurt, he started to work in technology law at the firm recommended to him by his friend from the *Referendariat*. Eser’s starting salary was so high that his “father couldn’t believe it”. Eser’s mentor was one of the most important partners in the firm; something “you need [...], if you want to make a career there”. During the ten years Eser worked at the firm, he quickly climbed the career ladder. After five years, he made junior partner. However, “that didn’t go without effort” and was “bloody exhausting”. Eser worked extremely hard, made long hours, and attended many of the firm’s social events. This was a very intense period in his life.

Seeing career opportunities in Turkey’s position as an emerging market, he changed from the technology department to mergers and acquisitions, while still working predominantly on technology law. Soon after, he made senior partner. Eser underlines the relevance of team work in large firms, especially in mergers and acquisitions: “M&A is a *Mannschaft* exercise”. He was put in charge of setting up a Turkish branch for the firm in Istanbul. He was promised a promotion for this, but the partner of the local firm they had merged with feared that Eser would get in his way and wanted to safeguard his own position. Eser could not stomach this deception from his firm: “I didn’t want to accept that, I am too good for that [...] there must be some level of mutual trust”. Since the *Mannschaft* wanted out and Eser felt treated unfairly, he

decided to change firm, taking the entire M&A team to another prestigious firm that was highly committed to recruiting them.

The Parisian lioness and her counsellors: the importance of mentors

Dilek (thirty-four) works as an independent lawyer specialized in corporate law in Paris, mainly working with medium-sized and large corporations.

Growing up and education. Dilek knows her parents were proud of her educational accomplishments “but they never told me, they would tell it to other people. So I always wanted to be the best”. Both parents, each in their own way, contributed to Dilek’s character: that of a self-confident and independent woman. Dilek describes her mother as the stereotype of a traditional religious Turkish mother with a strict upbringing style. However, she worked outside the home while Dilek was responsible for taking care of her three younger siblings. Dilek believes that this responsibility helped to make her the strong person she is today.

Dilek’s mother tried to prevent her from going to university, fearing that it would lead to indiscrete or dishonourable conduct, such as running away with a boy. While understanding his wife’s concerns, Dilek’s father wanted his daughter to attend higher education. He was more “open-minded than other Turkish men” and Dilek underlines his influential role in her educational pathway. The fact that he had not been able to obtain a university degree was an important motivation for him. Dilek had helped her father from a very young age, becoming familiar with the ins and outs of running a business. This understanding of what it actually means to run a business set her apart from other lawyers. Dilek had no Turkish friends while growing up; instead, she befriended French children and children from other minority backgrounds. She preferred to keep people of Turkish background out of her social life because as a girl she felt that “the community is something that prevents you from living freely”.

The first year of law school was difficult for Dilek. Although she had to work harder than her peers, she managed to pass the freshman year. In the sophomore and third year, Dilek finished as the best of her year. Following the advice of the head of the corporate law department who had noticed her talents, she did a master’s degree in corporate law and finance.

During an internship, Dilek met Olivier, who was her supervisor and has played a crucial role in her career ever since. She asked his advice concerning her future plans: “I always do the same. I even said I wanted to open my own office. I discussed my project with my boss. I said, ‘I want to do this. What do you think about my work?’”. Dilek wanted to work in both finance and law but thought that this would be difficult. Olivier told her that she would have to pass the bar examination if she wanted to be a lawyer. This was a very decisive moment for Dilek, because if it were not for this conversation, Dilek might not

have become a lawyer. Olivier also told her that in order to find a good position as a financial agent, she would have to enrol into a *grande école* business school. Dilek got a master's degree in corporate finance, which was rated as the best course in France. While studying at business school, she also attended the preparatory course for the bar examination and became a barrister.

Entrance to the labour market and further career. Dilek has been practising corporate law as an independent lawyer for four years. She has an apprentice and shares office space and facilities with six other independent lawyers. Ever since graduation, it had been Dilek's goal to become independent, "but first I had to learn how to work, how to be a lawyer". That took her five years.

Dilek met Olivier during her first internship. During her master's in corporate law and finance, she had conducted a financial analysis of a large internationally operating company. She decided to apply there for an internship. Because of the analysis, her letter seemed so professional that the CEO had a hard time believing that she had written it herself. She also found both internships during business school by sending out applications. The first was at a French law firm that specialized in capital investment. Since she was not sure whether to accept the offer, she consulted Olivier. She was looking for an internship exclusively in Finance. Olivier made her realize that this internship matched her aim of working in a position that combined finance and law. She did her second internship at a firm that was within the global ranking of the top ten corporate firms, "they are the stars of law".

After the bar examination, Dilek worked at two large American law firms, where she learned the tricks of the trade and refined her skills. She worked in departments related to corporate law, such as mergers and acquisitions, capital markets and banking. At her last firm, Dilek worked for a partner who trusted her with being the sole correspondent for two files, "as if I were a partner". It was here that she learned how to manage the client-lawyer relationship. Having mastered this skill, Dilek decided it was time to do it alone.

One of her American clients had followed her, but this was not enough. Dilek had to build a clientele. She spent the first months in Istanbul to establish a network there. She set up a partnership with a local firm and introduced herself to different chambers of commerce. After four years of hard work, building a good reputation, and developing her network, Dilek now obtains most of her clients through her network of former study mates and work colleagues, and her Turkish network. Her study mates and colleagues are either lawyers or "very well-placed financial agents in the Parisian scene", the latter group she knows from the *grande école* business school she had attended. To develop her Turkish network, she mainly tries to spread her name through Turkish business associations.

Dilek relies on her own instincts when she needs to take important decisions, saying “If I succeed it is because of me, if I fail it is because of me”. However, she has three men whom she contacts if she needs to make a big decision regarding her career. Besides Olivier, the other two are a senior associate and a partner from law firms where she had worked previously. “If I have a big file and I need to ask them: ‘how can I do this’, or something like that, they will reply”. This help is also a two-way street, and has been for some time. Dilek had just started her own office when she received a phone call from Olivier: “he said, ‘I need your help’, and I said, ‘OK, what can I do for you?’ He replied, ‘Someone will call you and you will have to recommend me’”. This was a big moment for Dilek: “I was so happy because I was his trainee and now I had to recommend him”.

The Kaldani brothers: “the world of the law firms”

Iva (thirty-four) is a senior associate at a large Finnish-based law firm in Stockholm. Together with the head of the real estate department, Iva makes the department’s principal decisions. His older brother, Dakan (thirty-seven), is a partner at a large Swedish-based corporate law firm, where he is responsible for the real estate group.

Growing up and education. The Kaldani parents had always made it clear that they wanted their children to attend higher education. They were not able to help them with homework assignments and important educational decisions, but they helped them in other ways, such as financially, so that they only had to focus on their education. Iva expressed his feelings: “I mean, they worked really hard for it, so ... you know the kind of effort they put in just to be able to provide for you. So I am very grateful for that”. Conversely, the school environment was demoralizing. Teachers had low academic expectations and pupils had few academic ambitions; “... about maybe two per cent went to university”. Iva experienced racist remarks from teachers and describes them as being “tough and cruel”. Because of the school environment, both brothers were not planning on going to university. Dakan told his father that he did not see the point and would rather become a restaurant owner. His father agreed,

he said, “But I want to try you out, so you’ll join me for work the entire summer holidays and if you still find it appropriate or a good thing to do, please go ahead. You can drop out of school, no problem.” And, of course he knew that I wouldn’t like it.

Dakan remembers getting up at five in the morning with his parents and arriving at home late in the evening, working hard, and being obliged to be friendly to customers he did not like. He decided to change his laidback

attitude and obtain the grades needed to be admitted to university. While Dakan had to figure things out on his own, Iva had an older brother to help him with his schoolwork. Once at law school, Dakan did his best to get the highest grades he could, because he knew the importance large corporate firms attached to that. Iva seems to share his older brother's determination and ambition. Once he had decided to study law, he wanted to be the best he could be. He describes law school as a highly competitive and extremely grade-focused study, because that is "all you have to show whether or not you are a good student" (Iva). Pursuing the same pathway, the brothers had a sense of fellowship.

Entrance to the labour market and further career. Dakan has played an important role both in Iva's educational pathway and in his professional career. Iva jokingly says that although he would never admit it to his brother, Dakan is his "biggest inspiration and support". Iva did his first traineeship at a large Swedish-based corporate firm. Dakan had given Iva's résumé to the recruitment office and when Iva was invited for an interview, he knew he was halfway in. Obviously, during the interview, he had to show that he was "worth the time and money they invest in an associate", but he was familiar with how the recruitment system worked. Law firms in Sweden rely greatly on recommendations from employees or business partners to recuperate the time and money they invest in associates. While he understands the rationale behind this practice, Iva – who is now in a position to recruit himself – is critical of it.

I don't really appreciate the way we do things sometimes. Somebody gets a job because they are connected to someone else at the law firm [...]. But that's the way it works. [...] So that's why contacts are very important. It's very unfortunate [...] I know that with my background, a lot of people are not given the chance due to this system.

While he underlines the relevance of connections for recruitment, Iva found his second job at one of the most prestigious international law firms by submitting an application. At first, he was somewhat hesitant about taking up an offer from such a top international firm, thinking, "Who am I to just start there ...?". Dakan convinced him by saying things like: "there is nobody there that is better than you". Iva's further career benefited greatly from this step. After approximately two years, he was headhunted by his current boss. This was at the same firm where Dakan had started his career. After two years, Iva and his boss were asked to set up the real estate department at their current firm, where he has been working for the past two years. Iva considers his boss as a friend. Since he is also from an ethnic minority background, Iva was able to identify with him, and decided to stay with him. "It's not easy to identify with somebody who is 55, Swedish, parents well-educated, et cetera.

[...] there is not much diversity among the partners but if there is, you need to find them. Just hold onto them.”

Iva describes “the world of the law firms” as a male-dominated, conservative business, peopled by middle-aged Swedish men with well-educated parents. Many of the “big lawyer families” have been lawyers for generations, “going back to the nineteenth century. It is not your world. You are not supposed to be in it”. But since Iva enjoyed working as a lawyer, he decided to stay. He does not perceive having to adjust to the culture of law firms as a burden, but as a game that “either you play, or you don’t”. Once he got a grip on how he was supposed to behave, he simply adapted to it. Iva explains:

That’s something you feel, something you learn when you start to work at law firms: this is how it’s done, this is how it works. You don’t do that, you must do that. After a couple of months at a firm, somebody tells you what to do, what not to do.

He seems to find the large transactions and being part of the global economy (his work was directly affected by the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers) exciting. But he also enjoys hanging out with his childhood friends, with whom he talks about very different matters and who would never be able to comprehend his life as a lawyer. He finds the duality in his life “nurturing” because he receives different inputs from his private and professional life. He combines both worlds, changing roles between them. One way in which he changes roles is his use of language. In his personal life, he uses suburban Swedish. In his professional life, he speaks “law language”, characterized by an elite Swedish accent, jargon and a formal way of speaking that is learnt at law school and is similar to the language used in law books. He moves between his professional life, characterized by large transactions, big clients, and colleagues who chat about golf and hunting and his personal life, mixing with childhood friends who own hair salons, run coffee shops and discuss football.

Conclusion

The three mechanisms of influential actors concerning the career mobility of children of disadvantaged migrants that have emerged from my data underline the influence of significant others on professional pathways. They also stress the social skills and network abilities of the upwardly mobile professionals. The first mechanism stresses the combination of encountering significant others who acknowledge one’s talents, and becoming acquainted with middle-class majority-group environments during one’s youth. Growing up with peers from a middle-class native background and getting to know their families help youngsters to learn and identify with majority norms. Influential social actors who acknowledge one’s talents help to build a strong self-belief. Together, these two features help an individual to develop into a confident

professional in a white-collar work environment. The professionals make use of their social skills to find valuable mentors and maintain their relationship with them during further phases of their career in order to have access to their advice, guidance and network. This is illustrated by the second mechanism. Others, who grew up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, attending schools where many of the pupils had educational problems, encounter brighter boundaries in the law sector, which is still dominated by people of native heritage from a middle- or upper-class social background. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the third mechanism, they use their social skills to comprehend the social rules of “the world of the law firms” by observing interactions between colleagues and gaining information from them in order to facilitate their incorporation into the white-collar professional environment of the law sector.

This article contributes to the increasing body of literature on the social mobility of descendants of disadvantaged ethnic minorities. It draws connections between research on the impact of significant others on the educational pathways of upwardly mobile individuals and research on career mobility of descendants of migrants. It has shown that the relevance of significant others found in the literature on educational mobility of descendants of migrants can be extended to professional pathways. Furthermore, it adds to studies on the minority culture of mobility as observed in an American context (Agius Vallejo 2012; Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999) because it shows that being raised in a middle-class family is not the only way for descendants of migrants to successfully incorporate into white-collar professional sectors. Becoming familiar with middle-class majority norms and ways in one’s youth (e.g. through school and peers) can have a similar effect. Additionally, this article showed that having grown up in a disadvantaged environment does not necessarily mean that one cannot be successful in a white-collar professional environment. People learn what conduct is expected of them in the new environment along the way and behave accordingly. However, this does not preclude experiencing feelings of lack of belonging. They can still be unable to associate entirely and comfortably with their colleagues of middle- and upper-class native parentage.

Notes

1. The classical law study in Germany comprises two stages: the academic law study, and a two-year practical training at court, with government authorities, and law firms (Trier University 2015). Both parts end with a state exam. The first state exam covers the material of the academic law study, but most students attend a *Repetitorium* for about one year to review this material (Jurastudium 2015). The second state exam is a prerequisite for practising law as a barrister, and for legal professions such as judge, notary and senior civil servant (Trier University 2015).
2. For an explanation of the second state exam, see the previous endnote.

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