THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ENCOUNTERS WITH UNCERTAINTY: HOW SECONDARY EDUCATION POLICIES
SHAPE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2022

Annem Ayşe Bengigül'e… Hayatım boyunca kutup yıldızım sen oldun. Işığın hiç sönmedi, sönmesin.

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ABSTRACT

The Turkish public education system is in crisis. After overextending to accommodate a rapidly growing young population, it ceased to function as a venue for upward social class mobility. The state has diversified secondary education and established competitive admissions instead of using public investments to standardize the quality of education. These policies created a status hierarchy of high schools following different curricula, controlling unequal resources, and serving students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Since 2002, Justice and Development Party (JDP) governments have rolled out several new high school admission models to lessen the pressure of competitive exams on students while substantially increasing the weight of religious and vocational education at schools. These interventions have further destabilized institutionalized practices and norms in education.

This dissertation examines how parents navigate their children's transition from middle to high school in Turkey's changing national education system. In critical sociological scholarship, parental involvement in schooling and school choices are typically seen as means to leverage unequal resources for competitive advantages against other students. This project proposes an alternative perspective on parental involvement in schooling by framing it as encounters with uncertainty. Drawing on nine months of fieldwork at a public middle school and over 130 interviews with parents, teachers, and tutors, I examine how families of eighth-grade students create a sense of stability and develop educational strategies when facing unclear institutional expectations. I also discuss how they succeed in placing high school assignments in longer life-course narratives and prepare for the future when long-term prospects and educational pathways to socioeconomic attainment appear unclear.

Findings highlight three primary ways Turkish parents create a sense of predictability and engage in strategic action against the uncertainties created by the changes in the high school exam and the promotion of religious and vocational high schools. First, despite the national education field being unable to provide durable institutional expectations, interactions at educational sites produce pragmatic and temporary forms as standard frames of reference for parents looking for guidance. Schools and tutoring centers organize reviews, study halls, and mock exams, assign weekly goals and routines, and promote choice techniques for high school applications. As arbitrary as these might seem to some parents, responding to them by acceptance or rejection launches them into action. Secondly, parents adapt to the absence of durable educational norms and practices by lauding flexibility as the appropriate attitude towards exam preparation. This outlook reduces the disadvantage of making an ineffective choice because it involves routine recalibration based on student performance and well-being. Lastly, high school application deliberations frequently involve family members proposing, negotiating, and rejecting links between placement in various high schools and potential access to particular degrees, universities, and careers. Future projectivity helps the families of eighth graders navigate the ambiguity of meanings regarding the purposes of several high school types.

This in-depth study of Turkish high school transitions extends the cultural sociology scholarship on education by elucidating how parents construct meaningful practices with normative and instrumental values in shifting educational fields.

INTRODUCTION

In July 2018, the Turkish president appointed a new Minister of National Education. The new minister, Ziya Selçuk, faced a tough crowd in his inauguration: just one month previously, a brand-new high school entrance exam was administered for the first time. It was the fifth time in the past fifteen years that the Ministry of National Education (M.O.N.E.) had restructured the high school entrance exam to address long-standing pedagogical problems in Turkish national education. The public was skeptical that the new entrance exam would be any better than before and angry about the sudden, arbitrary announcement. In his inauguration speech, the minister acknowledged this "change fatigue":

> In two months, we will share a three-year plan. Our plan will clarify what we intend to do month by month, year by year. There will not be any surprises for any of our students or parents. Rules will not change mid-game. We intend to proceed gradually with minimal disturbance to anyone.[1]

Months later, on my first week (April 2019) at the middle school where I would do my dissertational fieldwork, the topic of change arose. In the student counselor's office where I introduced myself as a doctoral researcher interested in high school applications, a teacher asked me skeptically, "Are you sure about this research topic? This system (high school exams) is going to change within the next couple of months." His warning was not unwarranted. At the outset of my dissertation, my aim was to understand how Turkish parents influenced their children's social mobility prospects through distinct parenting styles and practices. I planned to focus on parental involvement in education because of the association between schooling and social stratification. According to the social reproduction theory, upper-class parents have useful cultural and social

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[1] Habertürk, "Son dakika: Milli Eğitim Bakanı Ziya Selçuk yeni eğitim sistemini anlattı" July 20, 2018. Accessed on April 14, 2022, at: https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-milli-egitim-bakani-ziya-selcuk-yeni-egitim-sistemini-anlatti-2067154.

resources to help children navigate schools (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; De Graaf and Kraaykamp 2000; Reay 2004; Sullivan 2001). Unlike their working-class counterparts, these parents understand essential deadlines, how to intervene at schools to request special accommodations for their children, where the best schools are, and how to secure admission (Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lareau et al. 2016). They also raise their children from an early age to have cultural dispositions that schools reward (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997).

However, Turkish education's perpetual dynamism defies the social mechanisms of reproduction outlined by these theories. Their emphasis on parents' "feel for the game" (Reay 2004) presumes a certain degree of systemic stability missing in Turkey. The privileged parents invoked by this theory are able to develop "educational strategies" because of their long-term exposure to stable educational conditions. However, change in Turkish society—and specifically in Turkish national education—outpaces Turkish parents' capacity for adaptation. Irrespective of their educational or occupational background, many feel confused, conflicted, and uncertain about how to advocate for their children's educational success. Their educational choices and practices are intimately linked to the structural instabilities in Turkish society, politics, and education. Studying their responses to these structural instabilities gives us new insights into the broader relationship between parenting and the pursuit of educational and socioeconomic advantages.

This project focuses on how families navigate high school transition to illustrate early social competition and stratification mechanisms in Turkey. It accepts educational decisions and school applications as instances of families leveraging their cultural, social, and economic resources to influence student sorting, a key mechanism of social stratification (Domina et al. 2017; Lucas and Byrne 2017). With the institutionalization of formal education in the country, most Turkish citizens believe that schooling mediates the distribution of social positions in society.

Many attempts to act strategically within the education field to attain a desirable social destination. The high school entrance exam is the first time Turkish students are placed on a formal educational hierarchy and the first time they are formally grouped into different classes or schools according to their academic performance.[2] This early sorting impacts their likelihood of college attendance and leads to various employment outcomes (Ministry of National Education 2018c, 2020c). By focusing on high school transition experiences, we are able to observe what families from different backgrounds desire for their children without being restrained by initial placement in an educational trajectory. High school transition is what Ann Mische (2014) calls a period of "hyper-projectivity," a situation that calls forth full deliberation on future possibilities and means of achieving them. It is at this moment more than ever that most families find themselves in a position of having to reflect on their future goals for their children and make critical decisions.

Two main questions guide this research project: 1.) What kind of uncertainties do Turkish parents experience as they help their children prepare for the high school entrance exam and apply to high schools? 2.) How do they respond to and mitigate these uncertainties as they decide the appropriate courses of action in these moments? To address these questions, I use an ethnomethodological approach to study the everyday construction of proper parental responses to contextual uncertainties in a middle-school community in Istanbul. I argue that these interactive and institutional processes mediate the relationship between macrosocial transformations in Turkey and educational practices at the familiar level. Parents decide whether to enroll their children at a tutoring center or determine how to make "smart" school application choices through

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[2] The only exception is the ability grouping at eighth grade in some private middle schools, and the exam-based admission to the Quran Memorization programs in some Imam Hatip middle schools. Because attendance at private and Imam Hatip middle schools is low and preferred only by specific social groups, these student sorting practices are not the focus of this study.

conversations with other parents and teachers. These decisions are *strategic* in the sense that they are guided by an interest in advancing their children's positions in a presumed educational and social hierarchy of academic performance. However, they are also highly *contingent* as they emerge from ongoing interactions between parents, teachers, tutors, and students. These observations demonstrate the importance of symbolic interactionism and pragmatism to explain parents' decision-making in the context of educational uncertainties.

Historical Context

The structural dynamism of contemporary Turkish education has demographic, economic, and political roots. The Turkish population grew thrice in size between 1960 and 2020 (World Bank Open Data 2020[3]). Waves of rural to urban migration accompanied this growth and increased the share of urban residents in the general population from 25 percent in 1950 to 75 percent today.[4] These population trends put tremendous pressure on the Turkish national education system by increasing the number of school-aged children at a time when neoliberalization diverted funds from the public to the private sector (Ercan 1999; Gök 2002). This situation led to oversubscription and a decrease in the quality of public education starting in the 1980s (Baloğlu 1990; Ercan 1999). To maintain the "selective" function of secondary education amid increasing participation, the state designed new elite high schools and increased the role of central exams in student placements. In the absence of policies to address underinvestment and equity, central exams intensified competition and stratification within the public education system (Rutz and Balkan 2009). As a

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[3] See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=TR.

[4] International Finance Cooperation, "Addressing the Challenges of Urbanization" Accessed on April 19, 2022
https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/turkey+urbanization#:~:text=Turkey%20has%20experienced%20very%20rapid,massive%20infrastructure%20and%20investment%20needs.

result, parents who went to school in the 1980s and 1990s saw the value of public secondary education deteriorate gradually until where one goes to high school began to have a remarkable impact over students' life chances.

Turkish education also displays cultural dynamism because of the ideological rivalry between Kemalist secularism and religious conservatism in Turkish politics. The Turkish state has instrumentalized national education for various nation-making projects since its conception in 1924 (Kaplan 2006). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of modern Turkey, had envisioned national education to be the bearer of his modernization project. He proclaimed, "The purpose of our revolution is to render the people of the Turkish republic a modern and civilized society" (Güvenç 1998:50). On March 2, 1924, the new Republic state abolished religious schools and unified instruction under a centralized Ministry of National Education (Özdalga 1999). Restructuring the education system was part of Atatürk's broader interest in Westernizing and secularizing Turkish culture. The pillars of this new cultural agenda were scientific inquiry, rejection of tradition, and secularization of the national identity. To this end, Atatürk's government also replaced the Arab alphabet with the Latin alphabet, removed religious courses from the school curriculum, abolished the Caliphate (the spiritual leader of the global Muslim community), and removed the constitutional article declaring Islam as the official state religion (Özdalga 1999).

In the ninety years that followed, prominent political actors have continued to intervene in national education and pursue competing cultural agendas. They established new high school types, made curricular changes, and introduced new rules and regulations. For instance, when the military generals overtook the civilian government in 1980 in response to the growing popularity of Marxism and the clashes between Marxist and ultra-nationalist students, they began to look for educational solutions to help the youth reidentify with the nation-state. The military junta allied

with central right politics and the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, "an intellectual movement advocating greater integration of Islamic values in the nation's political culture" (Kaplan 2005:666). It introduced Turkish-Islamic ideologues to the State Planning committee where they proceeded to introduce Islamic elements to Turkish education and public culture. The military's position regarding the usefulness of religion changed once again in the 1990s with the growing visibility of Islamic elements in politics and civil society. In 1997, the military intervened in the civilian governance and took over the control of public education (Guven 2005). Aligned this time with secular business and media elites, the military-controlled government closed the middle section of religious Imam Hatip schools and blocked their graduate's access to most higher education degrees. They banned students from wearing headscarves at schools and universities.

Figure 1 Growth of Imam Hatip High Schools, 1960-2020
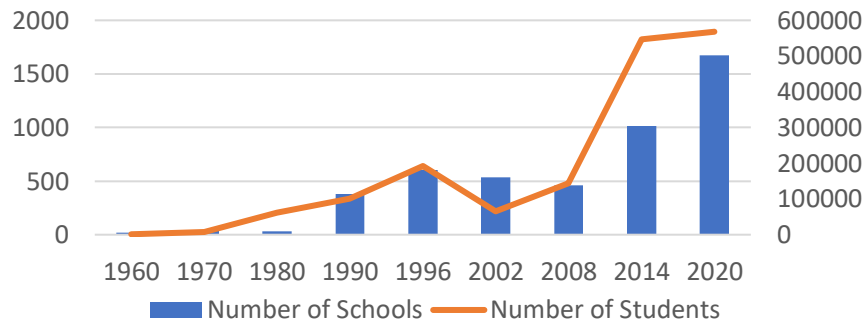
Sources: Aşlamacı and Kaymakcan (2017), M.O.N.E. (2006; 2020c)

When the Justice and Development Party (JDP) was elected to office in 2002, religious education became central to educational policy again. The party has increased the weight of religious courses in the public-school curriculum, removed the headscarf ban from schools and public spaces, lifted formal restrictions to religious school graduates' access to higher education, and established many new religious high schools (Ozgur 2012). As a result, the number of religious

Imam Hatip schools and students enrolled in them display an exponential growth since 2002 (Figure 1).

Although these moves have increased educational opportunities for certain students like females who wear headscarf, pundits observe that JDP's educational policy is better seen as another "social engineering" campaign rather than a liberal initiative to increase individual freedoms (Gençkal Eroler 2019). In fact, much of the social scientific research on Turkish education focuses on this ideological battle for "capturing the minds of the youth" (Kandiyoti and Emanet 2017). Lüküslü (2016) contrasts the "myth of the modern and national youth" under the Kemalist regime with the "myth of a pious generation" under the Justice and Development Party. Kaplan (2006) describes the Turkish state as a "pedagogical state" that promotes alternative educational agendas depending on the ideological leanings of those in power.

Recently, some scholars have begun to explore the implications of these "ideological battles" for parents and students navigating the educational system. They have been specifically interested in the outcomes of the declining symbolic power of secular culture under the JDP rule (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016, 2017; Çelik and Özdemir 2022). While media, business, and state elites in the pre-JDP era proudly embodied secular and Western lifestyles, many of these positions of authority have been transferred to people in the JDP's patronage networks who make routine public displays of conservative and religious values (Kaya 2015). Coupled with the judicial pressures on JDP's political opponents and critics (Kaya 2015), these developments make many secular Turks question whether an investment in education will be sufficient for their children to access high-status positions in society (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016, 2017). In contrast, Ozgur (2012) observes that religious families encounter new schooling options that combine their cultural tastes with opportunities for socioeconomic advancement.

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The present study departs from this scholarship by looking beyond cultural politics and adopting a more comprehensive approach to the JDP's secondary education policies and their impact on families. It focuses on the changes in educational rules and procedures in addition to the instrumentalization of schooling for economic and political agendas. Some of these changes concern the high school entrance exam format and school admission requirements. Between 1998 and 2018, the high school entrance exam has had four different names: High School Entrance Exam (LGS), Entrance Exam for Secondary Education Institutions (OKS), Scholastic Assessment Exam (SBS), and Transition from Primary to Secondary Education Exam (TEOG). With each of these new titles, something about the exam changed whether it was the grade at which students take the exam, the number of test questions, the number of exam sessions, or the selectivity of the questions. New rules for high school admission also accompanied each exam. The Ministry of National Education recalibrated the weight of middle school GPA in students' final exam scores and introduced different geographic restrictions. As a result, a parent who had three children born in 2000, 2003, and 2006 had each of them enter high school through substantially different rules and requirements.

The government's stance on private tutoring has further complicated educational decision-making during the high school transition. Turkey's shadow education sector has expanded substantially since the 1980s to assist students in preparing for the competitive high school and university entrance exams. In the 2009–10 academic year, 1,174,860 students attended private tutoring centers across the country (Özoğlu 2011). However, the shadow education industry includes many tutoring centers affiliated with the Fethullah Gulen movement. The Gulen movement was a "transnational religious movement" whose increasing appetite for political power has created an initial alliance with the JDP but resulted in an anti-constitutional coup attempt

against the government in 2016 after disagreements between the movement and the government grew irreconcilable (Yavuz 2018). In a bid to cut off the Gulen Movement from one of their primary sources of human and financial capital, the JDP began targeting the private tutoring industry beginning in the early 2010s. Subsequent JDP governments have attempted to regulate, suppress, and ban private tutoring by using various legislative and administrative instruments at their command. These attempts destabilized popular scripts about good preparation for the high school entrance exam. They also resulted in the compulsory transformation of thousands of private tutoring centers into private high schools. With the post-coup closure of private schools affiliated with the Gulen Movement, these measures drastically reshaped local education markets.

While many of these macro-level transformations resulted from the decisions of the state and other political actors, the present study focuses on the everyday practices of ordinary educational actors like some of the most recent work in the field (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016, 2017; Çelik and Özdemir 2022). The state, political parties, and elites occupy the educational sphere, but so do schools, public school districts, tutoring centers, students, and parents. The socio-cultural practices of these actors influence many outcomes of interest, such as the political socialization of Turkish students (Ozgur 2012), instructional practices at schools (Nohl and Somel 2016), and students' academic resilience (Cemalcilar and Gökşen 2014; Çelik 2016). The following section reviews the sociological scholarship on students' and parents' educational decisions to establish the theoretical background for the current study. While this scholarship typically focuses on the North American and European contexts, it offers theoretical insights about the social significance of families' decision-making.

Researching Educational Decisions

Like any other research topic, scholarly interest in educational decisions has a political history. By the second half of the twentieth century, many countries had started creating infrastructures to expand schooling at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels to previously disenfranchised groups. The success of these state efforts relied not only on the supply of increased opportunities but also on the manufacturing of demand for schooling (Gale and Parker 2018). Zipin et al. (2015:227) contend that "raising aspirations for education among young people in low socio-economic regions has become a widespread policy prescription for increasing human capital investment and economic competitiveness in the so-called knowledge economies." This developmentalist ideology has spurred many countries into increasing popular demand for schooling.

In this political atmosphere, individual and familial decisions to pursue advanced levels of education became a research focus (Entwisle et al. 2001; Gambetta 1987; Harding 2011). In particular, the decision to continue on to higher education has become a point of interest because college attendance influences whether a student will be employed in the manufacturing or service sectors. College attendance also distinguishes middle-class educational trajectories from working-class ones. Researchers examined why some students were less likely to pursue higher education in an effort to formulate policies that reduce educational inequalities and increase schooling across social groups. Initially, these studies focused on quantitative differences in education, such as the years of schooling students received. As participation in secondary and tertiary education increased but social class differences in socio-economic attainment persisted (Raftery and Hout 1993; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993), qualitative differences between institutions began to attract attention (Lucas 2001). Literature on "educational decisions" began to be populated by studies focusing on high

school track placement (Dauber et al. 1996; Oakes and Guiton 1995) and preferences for different types of higher education institutions (Ball et al. 2002; Hatcher 1998) and degree programs (Thomsen et al. 2013).

With the implementation of the first school choice program in Milwaukee in 1989, the selection of primary and secondary schools also began to attract scholarly attention (Carnegie 1992; Fuller et al. 1996; Gewirtz et al. 1995; Henig 1995). Guided by the ideology of an educational marketplace, state and regional governments across the USA and the UK have pursued policies to increase public school alternatives. Examples include private school vouchers, magnet and charter schools, and inter-district transfer programs. As school choice became pervasive across these countries, policy-driven research about participation in small-scale school choice programs gave way to a more general interest in the process of choosing where to send children to school. For instance, some scholars explored whether differences in preference for educational quality predicted participation in school choice (the rational disposition argument) and whether these preferences were associated with socio-economic background (the "rational" middle-class argument) (Carnegie 1992; Hastings et al. 2005; Kleitz et al.2000). Other studies focused on racial biases to see whether the racial composition of schools' student body influenced parental school choice (Billingham and Hunt 2016; Henig 1990; Renzulli and Evans 2005; Saporito and Lareau 1999). In contrast to these studies' focus on preferences and attitudes, some research found that access to critical resources and proximity to high-performing schools played the most significant role in where parents sent their children to school (Bell 2009; Burgess et al. 2015; Denice and Gross 2016; Patillo 2015). These researchers emphasized that minority and lower-class students' disproportional enrollment in low-performing schools had less to do with their parents' lack of interest in educational quality and more to do with the constraints they faced.

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In the research literature on educational decisions and school choices, individual autonomy in decision-making has been an important theoretical and empirical question (Gambetta 1987; Hodkinson and Sparks 1997; Okano 1995; Tarabini and Ingram 2018). Scholars pitted structural/causal factors against individual autonomy and discretion in endless debates stemming from a shared assumption that disadvantaged students can only break the cycle of social reproduction by being "free" from structural forces. Some argued that action is substantially, if not wholly, constrained by the actor's social location in relations of production, and the resources afforded to them by virtue of occupying this location. Beliefs, preferences, and intentions are irrelevant for choice and decision-making because the social structure affords actors very few feasible alternatives. Research from this view often emphasizes opportunity structures and constraints while neglecting individual expressions of motivation and reasoning. Others also drew attention to structural forces but argued that these forces impact decision-making by imbuing actors with unconscious biases, tastes, and attitudes. They argued that these unconscious influences make actors choose from a much smaller set of alternatives than they objectively have access to. Lastly, a group of scholars underlined intentionality, rationality, and future-reaching. In this view, educational decisions emerge from assessing present alternatives according to expected future outcomes (for a comprehensive review of these theoretical positions, see Gambetta 1987).

Much of the sociological research on school choice adopts the second approach and criticizes what they see as the paradigmatic status of the "rational action theory" (e.g., Gewirtz et al.1995; Cucchiara and Horvat 2014; Beal and Hendry 2012). These scholars consider the rational choice model unfit for parental school choice for two main reasons: They argue that few parents choose based on what policymakers take as a "rational" preference for schools with high performance in standardized tests (Kimelberg 2014). Instead, racial and social class homophily

play a substantial role in school selection. The second point of criticism is that parents often engage in a less systematic and perfect search for information and deliberation than we would expect under a rational action framework. Scholars like Beal and Hendry (2012) and Cucchiara and Horvat (2014) argue that the widespread use of knowledge gathered from informal networks and dissimilarities in information is a testament that parents do not experience school selection as a "rational" process. Overall, the sociological research on school choice parallels broader disciplinary trends by focusing on the influence of social structures on choice outcomes. While this approach avoids rational choice's voluntarism, it can benefit from incorporating a more interpretive and processual perspective that acknowledges indeterminacies and contingencies of educational involvement.

Cultural Capital and Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's work has a tremendous influence over those who seek to develop models for socially and culturally embedded educational choices (e.g., Gambetta 1987; Hodkinson and Sparks 1997). This section examines how the conceptual framework that Bourdieu has developed throughout his career shaped contemporary research on educational processes and practices.

Pierre Bourdieu draws on strong links between social class structure and schooling to examine how education reproduces social inequalities. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), the primary function of schools in contemporary societies is legitimating intergenerational transmission of social privileges. Children born into the "dominant class" inherit a significant amount of "cultural capital" from their families just as they inherit property or social networks (Bourdieu 1973). This "cultural capital" affords them familiarity and conformity with schools' institutional culture and informal standards. Bourdieu (1973) argues that schools academically penalize those who do not inherit this cultural capital through diffuse and informal educational

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activities at home. These differences in inherited cultural capital influence academic achievement and access to jobs, resources, and high-status groups (Lamont and Lareau 1988).

Conceptually, cultural capital is not a precise term. Bourdieu uses the concept in different ways throughout his work (for a review, see Lamont and Lareau 1988), and so do scholars who follow him (Dimaggio 1982; Teachmann 1987). Cultural capital includes attitudes and styles of self-representation, linguistic and cognitive skills, knowledge, aesthetic tastes, and preferences. The content of cultural capital is different in various regional and national contexts because dominant cultures have a unique historical development in each of them. Despite these "content" differences, what renders any of these cultural skills, attitudes, or tastes a type of "capital" is their costliness and cumulativeness. They are also profitable because they facilitate conformity with institutionalized expectations, which create a basis for cultural and social exclusion (Lareau and Weininger 2003:588). According to Lamont and Lareau (1988:158), this exclusion takes four primary forms: self-elimination, overselection, relegation, and direct exclusion.

Although social actions and interactions are critical to how cultural capital influences educational attainment, social action is missing in most of the empirical literature on cultural capital (e.g., Dimaggio 1982; Dimaggio and Mohr 1985; Teachmann 1987; De Graaf et al. 2000, Sullivan 2001; Kaufman and Gabler 2004). Most of the studies in this literature use survey data and regression analysis to test whether parents' or students' cultural capital predict educational outcomes. Nonetheless, the "reasons that cultural capital matters in educational processes are often vaguely specified in empirical studies" (Yamamoto and Brinton 2010:68). Researchers do not observe or measure mechanisms but presume and infer them from the type of cultural capital that is found to be impactful. For instance, if cultural capital operationalized as reading habits is positively associated with educational outcomes, researchers presume that cultural capital works

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by enhancing students' "human capital" (De Graaf et al. 2000). If cultural capital operationalized as participating in high-brow cultural events is positively associated with educational outcomes, then researchers presume that the mechanism is cultural "signaling" to teachers (Yamamoto and Brinton 2010). Only a handful of ethnographic and interview-based studies empirically investigate the interactional and institutional processes through which people activate their cultural capital and get rewarded for it (Chin 2000). These studies follow social actors as they navigate educational settings and demonstrate that their educational strategies reflect their social class backgrounds. Much of the research on parents' involvement in schools fall under this category (e.g., Cucchiara 2013; Reay 1998; Possey-Maddox 2014), and so does symbolic-interactional studies of classroom behavior (Calarco 2011, 2014a, 2014b).

While the concept of cultural capital informs how these school ethnographies make sense of routine educational practices, research on school choice decisions more typically build on the concept of "habitus." Bourdieu develops this concept to explain the social class structure's impact on how individuals navigate social fields (Bourdieu 2013[1977]). Bourdieu argues that people who occupy similar social spaces—determined by their relative distance from material necessity (Atkinson 2010)—develop a shared system of "durable, transposable dispositions" that produce "regular" social practices (Bourdieu 2013[1977]:72). Several studies use the concept of habitus to make sense of class differences in school choice decisions. In a series of co-authored and single-authored publications, Reay and Ball argue that the "working class habitus" predisposes families and students to have unflattering perceptions of their self-worth and makes them consider themselves culturally unfit for high-achieving schools (Reay and Ball 1997; Reay et al. 2001; Reay 2004). People with working-class habitus tend to prefer local, albeit failing, schools for their cultural familiarity. In a similar fashion, Wells (1996) argues that low-income African American

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students' habitus is responsible for their self-elimination from considering suburban schools as a good cultural fit for themselves. Considering high school choice in Turkey, Çelik interprets vocational tracking of high -achieving, working-class students a voluntary choice driven by the self-perpetuating power of their habitus and a "retreat into one's own familiar field by anticipating potential conflicting structures of a new, unfamiliar field" (2018:142). These studies emphasize affective and psychosocial mechanisms of risk-aversion that make working-class students settle for less ambitious educational options and perpetuate social segregation in schools.

An Uneasy Fit: Habitus, Intentionality, and Educational Decision-Making

Using the habitus concept in school choice research is tricky given the unresolved conflict between Bourdieu's general theory and intentionality. Many critics have argued that the classical practice theory is better suited to explain routine, habitual action than deliberate and intentional action (Atkinson 2010; Crossley 2001; Emirbayer and Mische 1998). In Bourdieu's theory, practices generated through habitus are not typically consciously goal-oriented but are "adapted" to the goal of increasing social agents' symbolic and economic profits. To illustrate how habitus manifests in social action, Bourdieu famously uses the analogy of a tennis player who instinctively rushes to the net in anticipation of where the ball will go (Bourdieu 1990). Although the tennis player's action may appear to the observer as the result of a rational calculation, it was guided by his "feel for the game," his corporeal insights for the ball's movements, reflecting his prolonged training on the court.

Bourdieu's provocative insistence that habitus creates strategies that are only subconsciously goal-oriented created much controversy around whether there is any space for intentional or rational action in his theory. In his illustrative summary of this debate, Atkinson (2010:11) contends that Bourdieu's various writings provide ammunition to his critics by giving

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the impression that intentions, reflexivity, and projects ought to be ignored in any serious sociological inquiry.

The neglect of conscious cognitive processes weakens the usefulness of his practice theory for the study of educational behavior in empirical contexts marked by wholescale change of social conditions, structures, and institutions. Bourdieu argues that habitus is born out of a "lasting exposure to conditions like those in which" social agents are "placed" (Bourdieu 1990:11). He reinforces this position in other publications:

> Even when they appear as the realization of the explicit and explicitly stated purposes of a project or plan, the practices produced by the habitus, as the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations, are only apparently determined by the future. ***If they seem determined by the anticipation of their own consequences*** [emphasis added], thereby encouraging the finalist illusion, the fact is that, always tending to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product, ***they are determined by the past conditions*** [emphasis added] which have produced the principle of their production. (Bourdieu 2013[1977]:72)

If habitus is the singular—or at least the most theorized—determinant of social action and requires durable, former structures to emerge and operate, what governs social action in the absence of such structures? The parents making educational choices in Turkey have witnessed vocational degrees ceasing to secure stable and comfortable employment in professions like nursing or teaching in their lifetime. They saw admission to most high schools beginning to require central exam performance. The rules, timings, and format of admission exams changed every few years, and so did the academic standards they imposed on students. In addition, these parents have witnessed a complete reversal of the college chances and social destinations of students graduating from various vocational schools, including Imam and Preacher High Schools. Bourdieu (2000:160) acknowledges that social actors may find themselves in a situation when "a field undergoes a major crisis, and its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed." Their dispositions can become "out of line with the field and with the 'collective expectations' which are constitutive of its

normality" (Bourdieu 2000:160). He further states that those whose habitus is more adaptive to the new rules of the game survive in a social sense, while others experience failure.

However, what remains underemphasized is that collective expectations take time to appear and become institutionalized. In fact, something resembling a stable situation may never materialize. In her study of fertility decisions in Cameroon, Johnson-Hanks (2005) addresses this question. She finds that Cameroon's two decades of economic has generated a "subjunctive habitus" in its people.

> The extreme uncertainty of everyday life does not make people act recklessly or without structure but prestructures their expectations and reactions in a particular way. A habitus is born of repeated experience of uncertainty and sudden change predisposes the actor to discount choice and refrain from committing himself to specific imagined futures, futures that are -in any case- unlikely to be attained. (Johnson-Hanks 2005:367)

Johnson-Hanks elaborates that subjunctive habitus predisposes actors towards what she calls "judicious opportunism": "The activity, therefore, is not to develop a good plan and follow it, but rather to respond effectively to the contingent, sudden, and surprising offers that life can make. (…) Instead of rationalizing means to chosen ends, therefore, actors take advantage of whatever means are available and thus settle on a specific end out of the many that would have been acceptable" (Johnson-Hanks 2005:376). She argues that while these "ends" are situationally produced and not fixed across temporal moments, their pursuit is strategic and action is purposeful. Like her research on Cameroon's adolescents, this research on Turkish families will reveal the importance of being "open" to seizing new opportunities and pursuing flexible strategies.

Although Bourdieu's theories have become doxa in interpreting parents' agency in the realm of education, cultural sociologists have recently begun to criticize the generalizing assertion that those who occupy positions of power perpetuate their privilege through certain "cultural" dispositions and the accompanying strategic actions. Jessi Streib (2018) argues that culture does

not exclusively facilitate social reproduction but also social class mobility. In a series of empiric and theoretical publications, she finds that middle-class cultural practices lead to downward social mobility when they are mismatched with the practices that institutions reward (Streib 2017, 2018). Calarco (2014) and Lareau et al. (2016) similarly emphasize the importance of meeting institutional expectations for securing educational advantages. Unlike Bourdieu's characterization of cultural practices in fields as "instinctive" and "habitual," these scholars underline the difficulty of getting it right when facing the "ambiguity" (Calarco 2014b) and complexity (Lareau et al. 2016) of institutional expectations.

These contextual challenges to strategic action are even greater in times of large-scale changes in the organization of social relations in a field. Significant interventions in Turkey's educational system call forth an analytical approach to parenting practices that cannot ignore parents' reflexivity and the ambiguity of rewards. In her analysis of students' response to ambiguous expectations around help-seeking, Calarco (2014b:186) argues that "strategic" social class practices are "more interpretive and situational than scholars acknowledge." Similarly, by developing this interpretive research project, I argue that understanding how Turkish parents construct "proper" practices in a shifting field takes precedence to a comparative social class analysis of educational strategies. Before we distinguish the educational practices of parents from various social class backgrounds and explore the rewards these procure, we need to understand how what scholars recognize as a "social class strategy" emerges. Such undertakings should begin with theorizing educational encounters and decisions from phenomenological, contextual, and interactive perspectives.

Practical Responses to Uncertainty

This project draws on the recent anthropological scholarship on uncertainty to explain how parents pursue educational advantages for their children in an ever-shifting educational environment. The anthropology of uncertainty offers a robust conceptual framework for defining uncertainty and explaining its impact on social action. Beyond illustrating socio-political conditions that give rise to uncertainty, this literature has many interpretive, "experience-near studies" of how people negotiate uncertainties they encounter daily (Jenkins et al. 2005:12). For instance, Hasselberg (2016) focuses on foreign nationals' experience of deportation and the uncertainty of their continued presence in the host country. Many others address the contingency of life and the uncertainty of survival by people who encounter health problems (Honkasalo 2006; van Dongen 2008) or live in high mortality areas (Johnson-Hanks 2005; Trinitapoli and Yeatman 2018).

Before examining how this recent and empirical scholarship understands uncertainty (and by association, risk), we ought to consider theoretical perspectives on uncertainty as they have been developed through the twentieth century. Uncertainty was a central concept for Frank Knight (1921), the renowned economist whose examination of the role of entrepreneurial judgment led him to distinguish between different types of information deficiencies. Knight defined risk as the ambiguity people experienced when they had "the quantitative knowledge of the probability of every possible outcome" (1921:199). He compared this with irreducible uncertainty that defies measures of calculation and prediction. Daipha (2012) contrasts the concept of "irreducible uncertainty" with Giddens's idea of "ontological security," or the prevalent mental state experienced by people whose lives revolve around traditions and routines.

While Knight makes an analytical argument, Giddens and Beck make a historical one (Beck 1992; Beck et al.1994). The *Risk Society* (Beck 1992) thesis offers a very specific definition of risk. According to it, risk is the omnipresent probability of physical harm to plants, animals, and humans at a cataphoric level due to the pace of technology and industrialization. Beck and Giddens's work complement each other in their understanding of the challenges of late modernity and their focus on the ways humans address risks and insecurities emerging from the experience of reflexive modernity. "For Giddens, the problem of order is formulated on the basis of such ontological insecurity. The problem is precisely how we can cope with not so much environmental but psychic and social hazards and maintain reasonable levels of order and stability in our personalities and in society." (Lash 1994:117). Giddens (1994) emphasizes that science and other expert systems play a key role in producing public trust and reigning in anxiety about the unknown by providing authoritative definitions of risk situations.

While these scholars focus on uncertainties "solely linked to the appearance of new risks in the world" (Samimian-Darash 2013:1), I conceptualize uncertainty as a more general subjective experience of lacking necessary information about things we care about. This conception follows Susan Whyte's (2009:213) definition of uncertainty as a "state of mind and minding: mind as a noun in the broad sense of intellect, will, intention, feelings, and minding as a verb meaning to care or feel concern." Viewed in this way, uncertainty may involve ambiguity of norms, associations and interpretations, *and* ambiguity about the possibility of an undesirable outcome (Luhmann 1993). Calkins (2019) emphasizes the former as she illustrates the link between uncertainty and reflexivity. Using a symbolic interactionist framework, she locates uncertainty in the erosion, disruption, or critique of conventional definitions of action situations. Uncertainty can also imply an insecure relation to the future due to contextual instability and the possibility of harm

from the outside (what Beck refers to as risk and Luhmann as danger). However, it is important to conceptually distinguish uncertainty from the social conditions that produce it. Whyte states that whereas uncertainty is a state of mind, "insecurity is a social condition" that gives rise to uncertainty in the absence of reliable healthcare systems, protection against violence, and stable social relations (Whyte 2009:214). In this dissertation, I mainly focus on the subjective experience of uncertainty but also refer to insecurity and risk when I explain the unfavorable future contingencies parents worry about in their involvement with schooling.

The anthropological literature on uncertainty illustrates the many ways people respond to the experience of uncertainty in an attempt to reduce or manage it (but also Honkasalo 2006). For instance, Jenkins et al. (2005:10) argue that people respond to uncertainty by "creating and finding some continuity in their lives" using artifacts and technologies, as well as local and scientific knowledge. The papers in their collection focus on institutionalized biomedicine as "the state-sponsored and organized attempt to control uncertainty and create a predictable social environment through rational treatments and public health" (Jenkins et al. 2005:17). Even when they are outside the influence of institutionalized and professional fields, people develop techniques to create the impression of stability and resume the ordinary course of their lives. In *Who Knows Tomorrow? Uncertainty in North-Eastern Sudan*, Sandra Calkins (2019) examines how residents of a remote town experienced uncertainties of ill-health, subsistence, and labor. Her work focuses on the "creation, confirmation and critique of forms as semantic devices to deal with uncertainties" (2019:5). She finds that Sudanese people pragmatically invoked rules, conventions, lists, agreements, and norms to coordinate action, but these forms were often only temporarily effective.

While people may resort to various techniques to reduce situational uncertainty, the outcome of these attempts depend on whether their interaction partners will be receptive to using

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them as "binding orientations for action (Calkins 2019:4). Jenkins et al. (2005) explain the unpredictability of action under uncertainty with the diversity of personal and cultural resources used to define the situation and appropriate courses of action. Similarly, Harding (2011) associates lower rates of college enrollment decisions in disadvantaged neighborhoods with the co-presence of various competing cultural models about the transition to adulthood. The condition in disadvantaged neighborhoods reminds us of Calkins's (2019) framing of uncertainty as the erosion of conventional definitions of a situation. While not using the word "uncertainty," Harding (2011) describes the adolescents in these neighborhoods as experiencing an almost crippling confusion upon encountering a "dizzying array of cultural models," which makes it difficult for them to "act in accordance with the frames and scripts that they articulate" (2011:323).

Contemporary cultural sociology also emphasizes how institutionalized forms of knowledge impact choice behavior (e.g., Daipha 2015; Schwarz 2018). Unlike "dispositional sociologists" who focus on the content of choices (Schwarz 2018), these scholars focus on culturally specific choice techniques circulating in different professional and organizational fields. For instance, Daipha's (2015) work demonstrates that some professional fields create routines, schemas, and material tools to address uncertainties embedded in their operations. Decision-makers draw on these resources and past experiences to produce appropriate responses to the contextual challenges they face. These cultural analyses of choice are compelling for offering a way out of the dichotomy of "culturally disembedded choice" and "cultural determination" of choice (Schwarz 2018).

A third insight about parental responses to contextual uncertainty can be drawn from the contemporary sociological literature on imagined futures (Dewey 1930; Mische 2009, 2014; Schutz 1967). Uncertain situations challenge mechanical behaviors and invoke heightened

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engagement with possible, desirable, and undesirable futures. According to Dewey, we spend most of our lives "absentmindedly" (1930:173) performing habitual actions. Deliberation is called to aid only when we stumble upon a problematic situation where conventional ways of doing things prove themselves ineffective. These deliberations could be individual and collective, such as a summit on environmental action (Mische 2014) or a security council meeting during an international nuclear crisis (Gibson 2011).

In this literature, decision-making involves actively imagining potential future states and courses of action, but in an essentially different manner than presumed by the rational choice theory (e.g., Mische 2009, 2014; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013; Tavory 2018). Scholars such as Mische (2009) describe decisions being shaped both by the past and the future.

> Human action, as Schutz observes, is constructed within an imaginative horizon of multiple plans and possibilities; actors engage in a retrospective/prospective process by which they draw on previously collected "stocks of knowledge," or "typifications" of possible paths of action while "fantasizing" in relation to the developing act in progress. Such an imaginative process differs from that of choosing among clearly defined possibilities, as instrumentalist theories propose, rather, it entails focusing "rays of attention" on a plurality of possible states until one or more alternatives detach themselves "like overripe fruit" and appear before the reflective consciousness as possible objects of choice. (Mische 2009:696)

Although decision-making may appear too haphazard or spontaneous in this description, its emphasis on *"imagination"* accounts for both the diversity of educational choices by people who occupy similar social positions and the possibility of strategic action in the face of substantial uncertainties. Let us illustrate: In *Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools* (2014), a collection of papers on school and residential choice, the editors Lareau and Goyette underscore a significant finding underlining all of the papers: "the origins of preferences are difficult to determine" (xv). Let us suppose we tested Mische's illustrations empirically and found school choice deliberations consisted of a series of future imaginations shaped by cultural techniques of choice, inputs of influential social connections, and personal understandings of what is feasible, desirable, or

unagreeable. In that case, we may not be surprised by the diversity of choices produced through these unique generative processes. These approaches are fruitful for studying parental educational decisions because they show how future-oriented action can be situated and constrained but also creative.

This review brings three critical insights about how people act when they encounter contextual uncertainties. First, they tend to develop an attitude of openness to possibilities (Johnson-Hanks 2005; Trinitapoli and Yeatman 2018). Instead of formulating fixed, long-term goals, they form goals that are amenable to the constraints and requirements of the present situation (Joas 1996; Whitford 2002). Secondly, they frequently draw on available and institutionalized instruments to process uncertainties (Schwarz 2018; Daipha 2015). Thirdly, they produce alternative visions of potential futures that they "try on" to see how agreeable they are. This prospective process allows them to reframe uncertainties towards various potentials and gauge the riskiness of various courses of action. All these insights suggest that researchers ought to pay attention to how present conditions and future conceptions influence educational decisions.

Risk and Uncertainty in the Parenting Literature

For the past twenty years or so, the sociological literature on parenting drew on the Risk Society thesis (Beck 1992) to characterize risk (not uncertainty) as a critical dimension of modern parenting. Research interest in risk had its roots in the transformations taking place in the political economy. From the 1980s onwards, the neoliberal state has progressively replaced welfare systems across the Global North. Education and other essential services have been privatized. Many citizens' financial prospects have become uncertain with declining job security. These global trends have put the middle classes in many countries into a "crisis" about avoiding downward social mobility and transferring their social class privileges to the next generation. A small but significant

body of international education research frames middle-class parents' educational behaviors as strategic adaptations to this sociopolitical context of change and instability (e.g., Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016; Crozier et al.2008; Cucchiara 2013; Çetin and Özdemir 2022; Reay and Lucey 2000). They argue that middle-class parents experience heightened anxiety about regular public schools' capacity to facilitate their children's access to high-status universities and high-status social positions. Some scholars frame educational achievement and attainment as a "defense against uncertainty" (Reay and Lucey 2000:334; Vavrus 2021), while others focus on specific parental involvement in schooling. For instance, they find that middle-class families use school choice instruments to mitigate social class anxieties (Crozier et al. 2008; Cucchiara 2013) and monopolize high-status schools to keep out students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Ball 2003; Çetin and Özdemir 2022). Further, some middle-class parents invest in cosmopolitan cultural capital to help their children compete in global social hierarchies (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016; Ball and Nikita 2014; Park and Abelmann 2004; Weenink 2008).

This scholarship often conceptualizes parenting as "risk management" (Cucchiara 2013) and emphasizes the emergence of a new ideology of "intensive mothering" (Hays 1996). This ideology frames the family as the primary agent to alleviate potential harms posed to children by society (Nelson 2010). Middle-class parents who subscribe to this way of thinking assume that every small decision has significant consequences. School decisions hold particular significance as they impact educational attainment and future financial stability—two factors widely associated with comfort and happiness in life. In this "intensive parenting" regime, parental identity and self-worth are intimately linked with the capacity to put one's children in an educational trajectory towards financial stability. This association creates what scholars observe as a "moral panic around

schooling" (Ball 2003:150) and "deep-seated fears of downward mobility" (Reay and Lucey 2000:321).

There is a small, emergent scholarship that makes similar observations about parents in Turkey. Altan-Olcay and Balta (2016, 2017) investigate "US citizenship acquisition" as a "new capital accumulation strategy, aimed to forestall against risks in intergenerational transmission of class privileges." (2016:1106). Based on in-depth interviews with Turkish mothers who traveled to give birth in the USA, they find that these parents pursued American citizenship for their children to increase their chances of accessing English-medium education and global travel. They argue that these choices are driven primarily by the anxieties induced by Turkey's current political and economic atmosphere on the secular identifying segments of Turkey's professional middle classes.

> As a result of the rise of the AKP, these classes are faced with a situation where government officers deride their habitus (Kaya, 2015) 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. (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016:1111)

Çetin and Özdemir (2022) similarly focus on these secular middle-class parents and how they seek to ensure their children retain their privileges in a changing and unfamiliar country. They recount multiple structural conditions that create a "social reproduction crisis" for these groups: lack of job security in the neoliberal economy, decrease in public sector salaries and the symbolic power of Kemalist ideology, and most relevantly, the "privatization, Islamization and deterioration of public schools" (Çetin and Özdemir 2022:4). The parents they interviewed tried to increase their children's prospects of accessing high-status university programs and social positions by searching for decidedly middle-class public schools and "transforming these schools into private-school like institutions through intense engagement" (Çetin and Özdemir 2022:10).

This research project builds on these studies' insights about the intimate relationship between parenting, schooling, and uncertainty but focuses on both future risks and everyday uncertainties of a practical nature. Although parents often express how macro-structural conditions impact their lives, retrospective narratives about educational decision-making might exaggerate the link between them and macro-trends. Here lies the methodological problem of establishing causal relations between macro processes (e.g., privatization of education, globalization, political change) and individual social action. How can we as researchers infer whether an observed pattern in behavior is a consequence of or strategic adaptation to a specific macro condition and not another? In the case of middle-class parents, how can we evaluate whether expressions of frustration with their country's general economic context or sociopolitical climate is the driving factor guiding their everyday practices, particularly their school-related choices?

To answer these questions, I argue that we should look at mid-range, institutional and organizational arrangements that mediate parents' relation to the state, economy, and education. The idea of educational decisions emerging from present social arrangements and social interactions is not new. Many school choice scholars consider as "constraining" structures not the Bourdieusian "habitus" but policies "decided on by actors in institutions such as school boards or superintendent offices, banks, and city or town governments" (Lareau and Goyette 2014: xvi). Similarly, many have found teachers and guidance counselors play an essential role in shaping educational aspirations and plans (Okano 1995). Following the example of these scholars, I argue that macro-social transformations in the country create field-specific ambiguities for high school transition. Without putting the high school transition regime under analytical focus, we run the risk of neglecting the role of institutions for recognizing and addressing certain conditions as containing uncertainties or risks. The high school transition is a stage of schooling but also an

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organized field of interaction between individual actors including teachers, parents, students, and organizational actors such as schools, tutoring centers, and the Ministry of National Education. These actors naturally reflect on politics, educational policy, and economic changes. However, their actions more readily respond to everyday uncertainties about effectively preparing for the high school entrance exam and strategizing about high school applications.

Summary of Findings and Contributions

This research project examines experiences of high school transition in a middle school community in Istanbul to understand how parents construct educational "strategies" and pursue educational advantages for their children. It finds parents' educational strategies to be highly improvised, contingent upon the social interactions they enter, and fluid from one moment to the next. Irrespective of parents' own socioeconomic status and cultural background, the "right" course of action is frequently unclear, and payoffs are never certain. Most parents feel like they are fumbling in the dark as they try to make mundane decisions like sending their children to a tutoring center, what kind of daily study goals to establish, or which study materials to purchase. There is no single recipe for success, although schools and teachers work hard to impress upon parents some logic of action. Parents mobilize their actions around these prescriptions for a short amount of time but frequently end up questioning or altogether abandoning them in the absence of widespread consensus about the appropriateness of any one logic. In that sense, they exercise "judicious" opportunism (Johnson-Hanks 2005) by constantly recalibrating their approach and expectations of high school exam preparation. We also find this adaptability becoming institutionalized as the "appropriate" mode of school involvement by observing parents and teachers defining being "informed" and "involved" as being flexible and alert.

This dissertation illustrates that exam preparation involves normative uncertainties about what an interactive situation calls forth and how to conduct oneself. Common questions involve how many hours a day a student ought to study, how to act on an observation that one's child is not studying properly, and how to interpret a test performance. Doing well at the high school exam is the shared "end in view" (Dewey 1930; Joas 1996) during the eighth grade. Families try to anticipate high school entrance exam performance by using tools designed for it, nationally representative mock exams as the most visible example. However, they display conflicted feelings about thinking farther ahead than that. Many of them refrain from mentally engaging with the post-exam future with its many indeterminacies. In contrast, mitigating future uncertainties becomes a key concern during the high school application process. Parents use choice techniques based on school rankings to secure exam school placement and produce images of potential trajectories to minimize the risk of encountering political, economic, and cultural problems in the future. In that sense, high school choice is more of a practical task of constructing a school application *list* that can weather several uncertainties rather than a one-shot decision to go to a particular school.

These observations have several implications for future educational research on changing educational fields. First, they call for reassessing the utility of the Bourdieusian "game" analogy for parental involvement in schooling. Turkish parents do not have a "feel for the game" that furnishes them with the instincts of a seasoned tennis player who extends an arm out to the exact location the ball will fall. Their educational decision more readily resembles weather forecasting, habitual in the sense of using some shared tools but never unreflexive or routine (Daipha 2015). Second, the findings illustrate that we need more analytical insights into how parents mitigate educational risks instead of rhetorically acknowledging uncertainty and risk while advancing structuralist arguments. When faced with unclear and shifting institutional expectations, families

experiment with various exam preparation approaches until they settle into a workable solution that seems to satisfy their own emergent expectations from the process. Testing and experimenting (Calkins 2019; Dewey 1930) are integral to producing "educational strategies." However, schools, teachers, students, and parents cooperate on creating these solutions so interactional dynamics ought to be at the center of our analyses of educational decisions.

Research Site and Data Collection

I undertook this research project in a central district of Istanbul. Istanbul offers the most diverse set of high school options for students transitioning to high school in Turkey. There are 1,848 high schools in Istanbul, while Ankara —the capital— has 946 and Izmir has 569 high schools (M.O.N.E. 2020c). These schools offer alternative focuses on comprehensive, S.T.E.M., vocational, or religious education. Several are foreign private high schools that follow an international curriculum. With this many options, the high school application decision confronting Istanbul residents is an amplified version of decisions made elsewhere in the country.

Within Istanbul, I searched for a district and middle school with sufficient demographic and cultural diversity to capture the breadth of educational decisions made by Turkish parents. According to the Ministry of National Education, the average Turkish middle school student attends a public middle school, and public middle schools have the most diverse pattern of high school placement (Figure 2). Public middle-school students qualified for exam high schools enroll in a broader range of schools than Imam Hatip and private middle-school students. High-achieving Imam Hatip students demonstrate an apparent preference for Imam Hatip high schools. Their peers in private middle schools are typically averse to Imam Hatip and vocational high schools. I was

most likely to encounter parents who make different educational decisions in a public middle school, so I decided to focus on one.

Figure 2 Distribution of Student Placements in Exam High Schools (HS) According to Middle School (MS) Attended

	Anatolian HS	Science HS	Imam Hatip HS	Vocational &Technical HS	Social Science HS
Public MS	31%	30%	16%	14%	
Private MS	45%	35%	9%	4%	
Imam Hatip MS	9%	11%	69%	8%	
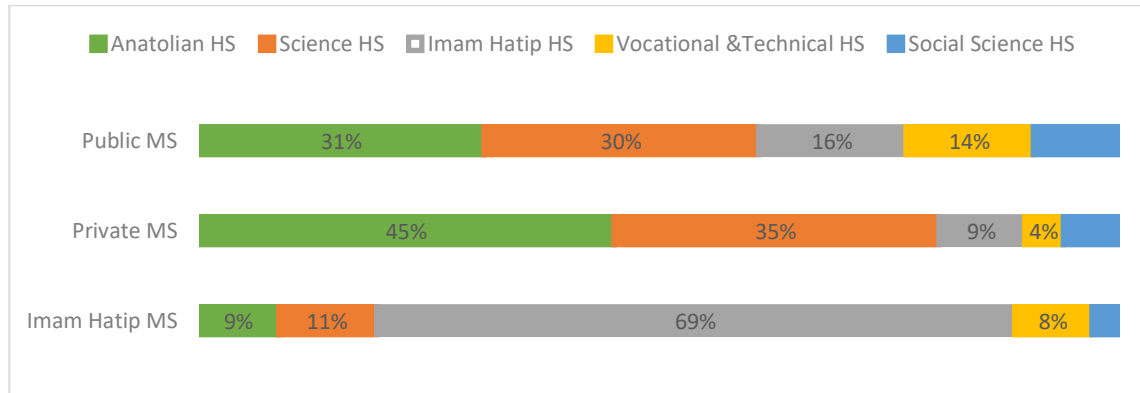
Source: Ministry of National Education (2018a).

Most of the data for this project comes from observations and interviews done in the Kavak Middle School community in a district I call "Magnolia." Kavak was established in the 1960s on land donated by descendants of a former pasha of the Ottoman Sultan. Located in an old and affluent neighborhood, the school continued to attract financial support from prominent families who lived in the area. During my fieldwork, Kavak's surroundings were mostly residential and reflected the community aesthetics absent in the newer areas of the city. Large oak trees lined the side of the streets. They shielded the neighborhood from the city's noise and filled it with the sound of birds. Most apartment buildings were at least twenty years old, but they had signs of recent exterior renovations. Almost all of them had carefully landscaped front yards.

Long-time residents of the area told me that Kavak Middle School used to cater to the neighborhood children from professional households where the parents worked as doctors, bureaucrats, and lawyers. But as private education opportunities expanded in the city during the 2000s, many local students transferred to private schools. Students from outside the neighborhood

filled the empty spots left behind by the local families. Parents of these new students misreported their address on the population registry to secure enrollment in Kavak. The administration also began to request donations in exchange for admission. As a result, Kavak's demographics transformed from majority upper-middle class and professional to a middle- and working-class mixture. Nonetheless, some neighborhood children continued to attend the school.

School Site Observations

Between April 2019 and December 2019, I visited Kavak Middle School about twice a week to attend eighth-grade courses and shadow various eighth-grade teachers and student counselors. I observed the school's efforts to prepare students for the high school entrance exam and school applications. In the first week, I followed a school principal's schedule. As I acquired the lesson schedule for all the eighth-grade classes, I began to plan which classes to attend. There were six eighth grade classrooms at Kavak Middle School. Each was composed of twenty-five to thirty students. I wanted to observe all these classrooms at least once, so I connected with multiple eighth-grade teachers. I mainly focused on math, science, and Turkish courses because these had the greatest number of instructional hours and impacted high school exam scores the most. Nonetheless, I observed some religious studies and English classes to get a sense of classroom instruction in subjects seen as "less consequential" for the high school exam. On my visits to Kavak Middle School, I also attended parent-teacher meetings and presentations about the vocational high schools in the area. I accompanied a group of eighth-grade students on a trip to a local high school. I observed parents receive high school application counseling from the school staff in the summer. In addition to my observations at Kavak Middle School, I observed application counseling at four other school sites during the pilot phase of this research in the summer of 2018. These included two public, one Imam Hatip, and one private middle school.

In-depth Interviews

Between May 2019 and August 2020, I conducted over 130 interviews with 66 parents and 19 teachers, tutors, and administrators (N=85). Recruiting parents have been tricky. I had arrived in the field late in the school year, and there were no scheduled events where I could meet parents socially. I consulted with the principal and various teachers to see how they could assist me with inviting parents to my study. Following their advice, I introduced myself to eighth-grade students and gave them an invitation letter to take to their parents. One week later, I began to cold call their parents. Although some agreed to participate in the study, I met with more suspicion and resistance than I thought (see the methodological appendix). When the school reopened in September, I followed a different approach and accompanied the student counselor to her organized parent-teacher meetings. She gave me the floor at the end of these meetings, and I got a chance to introduce myself and my research. Many of the attendees put their names and phone numbers in the sign-up sheets I distributed.

Although my initial plan was to restrict this study to the Kavak Middle School, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented my return to Turkey in the spring of 2020. In this period, I joined multiple Facebook groups about the high school entrance exam to maintain my connection to the field. These Facebook groups were composed of highly engaged eighth-grade students, teachers, and parents. Members shared posts about anything and everything concerning the high school entrance exam: study materials, news articles, questions, tips, recommendations. I suspected that the group members might like to share their experiences and posted recruitment posters about my research. The posters asked parents and teachers to answer a short screening survey. I invited every survey respondent who gave their contact information to participate in the study and repeatedly shared the survey until the interviews reached thematic saturation. I conducted these interviews and

follow-ups with Kavak's parents over Zoom and WhatsApp. In the final study sample, 53 percent of the interviewed parents were from Kavak Middle School, while 47 percent came from the Facebook groups and previous study participants' referrals. All the parents except eight lived and sent their children to school in Istanbul.

I conducted the in-depth interviews in Turkish and focused on family education histories, exam preparation activities, exam day experience, and high school application decisions. Each interview lasted between 1.5 hours to 3.5 hours. The number of interviews with the participants depended on their availability and continued interest. About half of the participants were interviewed two or more times. There were two types of participants: 1.) Kavak parents who joined the study at the beginning of their eighth-grade school year, who I intermittently interviewed throughout a year, and 2.) parents I recruited from the Facebook groups around the time of the high school exam. With the first group of participants, I observed how plans, strategies, and aspirations change over time. Repeat interviews with them gave this study its processual perspective. The parents from the Facebook groups were highly involved in their children's education, and their retrospective accounts of exam preparation were equally rich in detail. Their interviews demonstrated the distinctive peace and reconciliation accompanying cognitive and affective distance from the taxing experience of the eighth grade.

The parents who participated in the study were socioeconomically mixed. Out of the 66 families, 23 were working-class, 28 were middle class, and 15 were upper-middle class. I used educational and occupational credentials for social class classifications. I classified as "upper-middle-class" the families where at least one parent had a post-graduate degree and worked in a senior/managerial position. In these households, the mother or the father typically worked as managers at big companies, employers, professors, and doctors. "Middle class" families were

composed of at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. It included lawyers, teachers, engineers, accountants, and police officers. Lastly, I classified as "working class" households where the parents either had a primary school, high school, or associate degree. I included those with an associate degree in this category because they held similar jobs to high school and vocational school graduates. The working-class group consisted of people who worked as small store owners, bus drivers, hairdressers, sales representatives, or gas station workers. They held low-paying, low-skill jobs but led financially secure, frugal lives. None of them suffered from inadequate housing, food, or medical care. Some recently divorced working-class mothers had lives strained by financial difficulty, but they typically received some support from their ex-partners or parents. None of the study participants belonged to the under or upper class.

In addition to ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, I collected a vast body of archival records about secondary education policy and high school entrance exams in Turkey. The chapter on the structure of Turkish secondary education builds on these found data composed of 1.) newspaper articles covering education policies and high school entrance exams; 2.) national education laws and decrees from 1995–2021; 3.) policy briefings, mission statements, and other publications by government agencies such as the Ministry of National Education and State Planning Organization; 4.) reports from local and transnational policy think-tanks; and 5.) secondary sources (published books) on Turkish education history. Together, these sources provided enrollment statistics and school numbers. They also helped me establish the chronological order of important events.

Overview of Chapters

The dissertation is organized around seven chapters that focus on different dimensions of how parents navigate their children's transition to high school. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to

the structure of Turkish secondary education in its past and present. This historical overview covers educational expansion, curricular differentiation, and the emergence of entrance exams for secondary and tertiary education. It contextualizes parents' educational decision-making by discussing key policies that intensified competition in high school admissions and destabilized the field of competition.

The next two chapters focus on how families navigate the various uncertainties that characterize high school transition. Chapter 2 begins the story at the beginning of the 2019 school year when many of the interviewed parents' children started eighth grade. It follows these parents and their children as they shuffle between school, private lessons, and tutoring centers in preparation for the upcoming high school entrance exam. The chapter explores the many links between the JDP government's educational policies and eighth-grade families' experiences of exam preparation to establish "uncertainty" as a defining feature of these experiences. These families faced many uncertainties regarding appropriate venues of exam preparation, effective preparation techniques, and chances of success, so they established study routines that were highly malleable to feedback and new information. In other words, they exercise what Johnson-Hanks (2005) conceptualize as "judicious opportunism."

Chapter 3 considers uncertainties involved in the decision surrounding high school applications. It shifts the focus to the end of eighth grade when the children of the interviewed families have taken the high school entrance exam. It examines the school choice techniques families adopt in response to the radical uncertainty of placement in an exam school. It explores the conditions that render school applications as risky and focuses on the search and evaluation tools parents use to make "safe" choices. It finds that teachers promote and parents collectively use school rankings as a decision-making device to alleviate the uncertainty of student placements.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on "future projectivity"—cognitive, affective, and practical engagement with the future (Mische 2014)—as a core feature of high school application decisions. Subsequent chapters explore local, cosmopolitan, and pious projects as three alternative middle-class projects that crystalize during the high school application process and help parents decide between high schools with different curricular focus and institutional ethos. These chapters demonstrate that while parents manipulate the near future by using school rankings to increase chances of placement in a high exam school, they simultaneously consider the attractiveness of their school options by associating them with broader educational trajectories. In this way, they engage in what Tavory and Eliasoph (2013) describe as "coordinating" long- and middle-term futures projects.

Lastly, Chapter 7 focuses on uncertainties specific to families who lack school options and influence over student placement. By examining the high school application experiences of children disqualified from exam high schools, it illustrates how uncertainty of upward social mobility emerges from the government policy on vocational education, and how it impacts applicants' sense of agency.

CHAPTER 1: HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Every year, around two million students in Turkey transition to high school. Life for these 13- to 14-year-olds is not easy as high school placement is a competitive, zero-sum game with potential access to well-trained teachers, school campuses with rich amenities, and a ticket to college at stake. A vibrant exam preparation industry encourages students to dedicate hundreds of hours and thousands of liras to private tutors, test banks, and studying. Nonetheless, high school entry has not always been this competitive in Turkey. Exam-taking was uncommon until the 1990s, and most high school enrollments were based on address. This chapter provides a historical overview of the Turkish secondary education system and examines the origins of competitive admission exams. It builds on archival and secondary sources to demonstrate how Turkish secondary education has expanded, differentiated, and stratified. I use a three-part periodization that includes the elite training period in the middle Republican era, the mass education phase between 1970–2005, and universal education after 2005. I draw on enrollment records and secondary literature to argue that between the 1970s and 1980s, the state policy shifted from limiting the number of schools and protecting "quality of education" to pursuing a human-capital driven campaign of educational expansion. Since the 1970s, primary and secondary school enrollments steadily increased, and demand for higher education grew along with it. With more students seeking university placement than can be accommodated, access to selective high schools has come to play a crucial role in eventual university placements. This historical overview introduces the reader to the organizational context in which parents help their children transition to high school.

Theories of Educational Expansion

For the past century and a half, schooling has expanded worldwide, evolving into what social scientists call a quiet "educational revolution" (Baker 2014). Many states succeeded in transforming primary schooling into a mass phenomenon by the 1950s by creating infrastructure and campaigning to their public (Meyer et al. 1992). Mass secondary education followed soon after. Efforts to increase schooling often span decades because expansion requires substantial financial investments in infrastructure and staff. Population increases set back enrollment targets, and concerns with the quality of education slow down expansion. But what causes expansion of education?

Social theorists explain educational expansion as economic, political, and cultural processes at the national and global levels. According to functionalist scholars, education has expanded to address modern social problems like social integration, political legitimation, and labor force participation. Critical functionalists like Bowles and Gintis (1976) claim that mass schooling perpetuates social class domination and maintains social discipline by making people accept subordinate positions in society. They argue that formal education expands to previously excluded and disenfranchised social groups in crisis moments to promote harmony and avoid social disintegration. The economist variant of functionalism argues that modern societies create mass schooling systems to meet the human capital requirement of the market economy (Caillods 2007). They see educational expansion as a driver of economic development because only a workforce skillful in problem-solving, communication, and analytical thinking can compete in the new knowledge-based global economy. On the demand side, changing incentive structures in the economy drive demand for longer years of education.

An alternative perspective on educational expansion is that of neo-institutionalists whose analysis focuses on the ideological construction of the nation-state (Meyer et al. 1992; Boli et al. 1985). Neoinstitutionalists argue that mass schooling is a central feature of the nation-state, which views national society as a "progress-oriented project" (Meyer et al. 1992). Mass education constitutes a symbolic link between the individual, seen as the primary social unit, and the nation-state, the site of sovereignty. Schooling expands as countries become integrated into the world society and encounter pressure to abide by the nation-state model of political organization. International institutions like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) play a crucial role by framing investment in education as the primary driver of national prosperity and equity.

Once established, mass education has various social consequences. First, educational expansion reduces the social value of education. Public debates about "diploma inflation" and "rising credentials" illustrate this effect (Brown 2003). Social scientists explain that education is viewed as a "positional good" (Hirsch 1976) whose primary purpose is distinction. Shavit and Park (2016:1) indicate that "the value of educational credentials is attributable, in part, to their relative scarcity in the population." People who view education this way respond to the expansion of education at a particular level by aspiring to higher levels of education to outdo their peers and maintain a positional advantage. Their behavior results in the "opportunity trap" (Brown 2003) where social payoffs to educational investment diminish as more people participate in education. Nonetheless, individuals lose more if they do not pursue the highest level of attainment they can. Viewing education as a positional good also encourages educational organizations to compete for the position of delivering the highest valued "good" (Marginson 2006).

Adopting this perspective helps us understand why educational expansion may not always eliminate academic and social inequity (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Raftery and Hout 1993; but also see Breen et al. 2009; Breen and Jonsson 2007). When states invest in new schools, train more teachers, and lower tuition, we might expect this to create new opportunities for previously excluded groups and weaken the association between educational attainment and social class background. Nonetheless, schooling rates within social class groups did not change in the early stages of educational expansion in many countries (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Raftery and Hout 1993). In fact, enrollment increased among lower social classes only after it reached universal rates within the upper classes. This observation has led to the development of the "maximally maintained inequality" theory, which states that socioeconomic inequity persists after educational expansion until educational participation reaches saturation among the upper classes (Raftery and Hout 1993). However, increasing enrollment across social class categories may not bring equal opportunity when differences in instructional effectiveness, infrastructure, resources, and prestige persist. Social origins continue to influence social destinations when states lack resources to maintain educational standards while expanding schooling (Caillods 2007), and curricular differentiation between high schools perpetuate inequitable returns from track placements.

"Effectively maintained inequality" theory posits that quality differences are important sources of educational inequity because

> Socioeconomically advantaged actors secure for themselves and their children some degree of advantage wherever advantages are commonly possible. On the one hand, if quantitative differences are common, the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain quantitative advantage; on the other hand, if qualitative differences are common the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain qualitative advantage. (Lucas 2001:1652)

Positionality and effectively maintained inequality theories suggest that qualitative differences in education perpetuate social inequities after educational expansion. The following

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section describes how Turkish secondary education has expanded and discusses its consequences with these insights in mind.

Expansion of Turkish Secondary Education

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Turkish state suppressed secondary school enrollments to maintain the "quality of education." In response to new political and economic pressures, it has since increased enrollments but failed to standardize the quality of education due to high levels of population growth. Further, horizontal/curricular differences between high school "types" have offset equity gains from increasing secondary school enrollments.

Enrollment rates, number of students, and schools highlight how pervasive a level of education is in a country. We notice three distinct periods when we consider how the number of high schools and high school students changed in Turkey: from the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 to the mid-1950s, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, and from the mid-1970s to date (Figure 3). In the thirty years between 1923 and 1954, expansion is gradual, and the number of high school students increased by only eighty-two thousand. The number of high school students increased by one million over the next thirty-year period and by roughly four more million in the thirty years after that. Likewise, the number of high schools increased by 384 between 1924 and 1954; 2,740 between 1954 and1984; and 5,850 from 1984 onwards.

Changes in enrollment rates suggest a similar historical trend (Figure 4). There are two common ways of calculating enrollment rates: by gross enrollment or net enrollment. Gross enrollment rates are calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled at a specific level of education by the number of people in the appropriate age group in the population. Gross enrollment rates can exceed 100 percent because they account for people who may have enrolled early, late,

or repeated a grade. In contrast, net enrollment rates offer a more parsimonious estimate and reflect the proportion of pupils of the official school age in the total population for that same age group.

Before the mid-1970s, Turkish primary school enrollments increased substantially while secondary and higher education remained below 20 percent. From the 1970s onwards, secondary, and higher education gross enrollments increased too. Nonetheless, a substantial portion of Turkish students continues to be left behind while their peers continue to the next level of education every year. As late as the early 2000s, only half of the high-school-aged children went to school and less than half of the college-aged people were enrolled in a university by 2018.

Figure 3 Number of High Schools and High School Students, 1924-2015
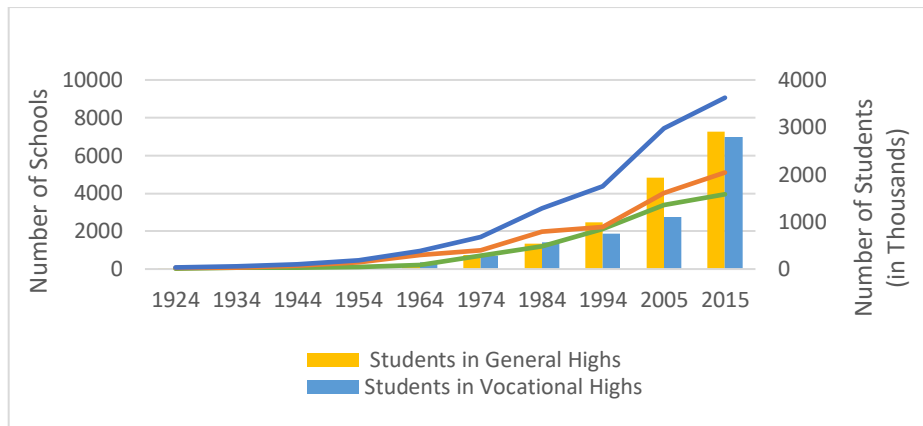
Source: Okçabol (1999), M.O.N.E. (2006, 2019)

Figure 4 School Enrollments by Year and Level of Education
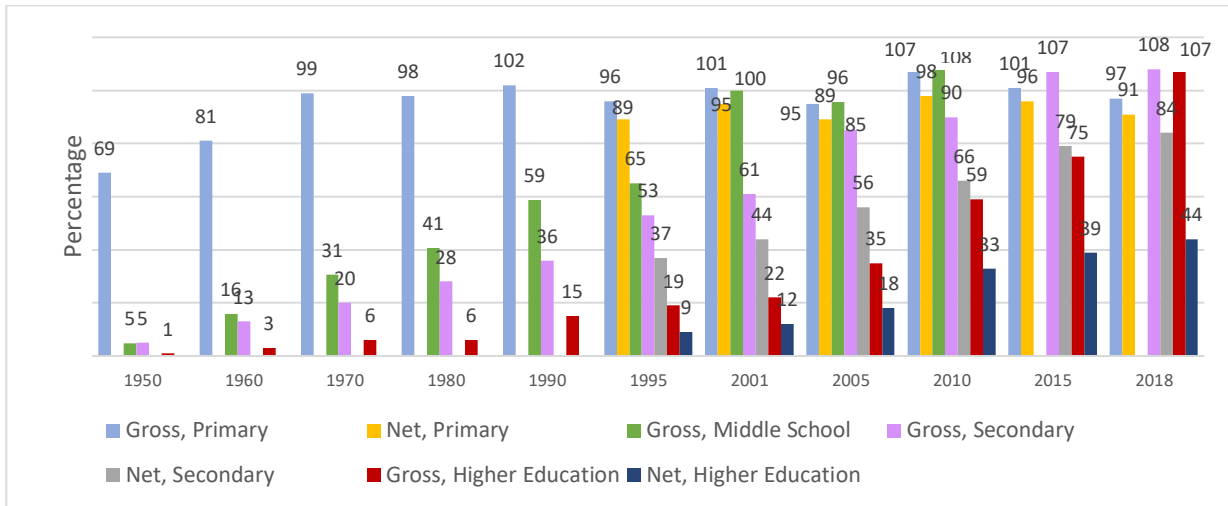
But how did school enrollment ratios remain low despite exponential increases in the number of high school students? The answer lies in Turkey's demographic trends in the twentieth century (Baloğlu 1990). The Turkish population has increased steadily from 27 million in 1960 to 84 million in 2020 (Figure 5). Compared to many European countries where the school-aged population has declined, the growth of this group in Turkey has put tremendous pressure on the national education system and the state's efforts to expand educational opportunities. The following sections examine the expansion of education in its historical trajectory.

Figure 5 Population Growth in Selected OECD Countries, 1960-2020
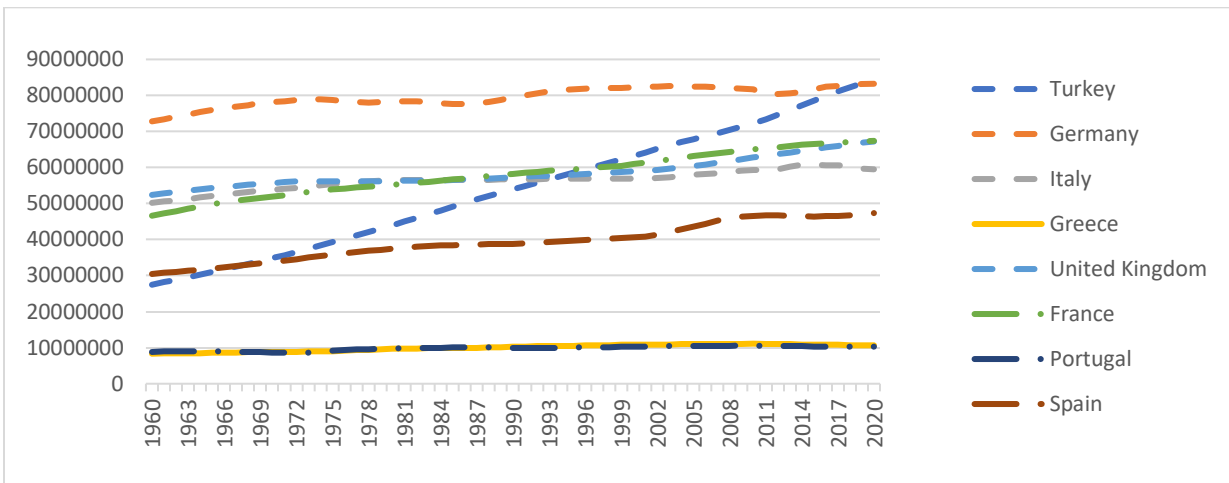
Source: World Bank

High School Education Under the Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic

For most of its history, the Ottoman Empire had a religious education system comprised of two major institutions: the sübyan mektebi[1] (pupil schools) and the medrese (Güvenç 1998). Sübyan mektebs were typically attached to the local mosque and provided three years of Quranic instruction for young children. Medreses were higher education institutes that focused on religion and law. In different periods, instruction in natural sciences and literature was included, contested, or discontinued. Religious authorities managed these schools for several centuries, and private foundations (waqfs) covered their expenses. The only exception to this rule was "enderun," the palace school that trained a few for state service.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, increasing state involvement in schooling began to transform the field of education (Gök 2007). When a Russian fleet burnt down the Ottoman Navy in 1770, many attributed this to the technical shortcomings of the Ottoman military (Güvenç 1998). To emulate Western nations' example and professionally train his army, the sultan established

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[1] Sübyan mektebi was also known as "mahalle mektebi," the neighborhood school.

modern military schools in 1773. These schools enrolled graduates of primary schools (sübyan mektebi) and constituted the empire's first public secondary school institutions. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman state continued to increase its involvement in education by establishing the first Ministry of General Education (Maarifi Umumiye Nezareti). The ministry introduced secular subjects like Turkish, arithmetic, history, and geography to the sübyan mektebi curriculum and mandated primary education to its subjects in 1869. Ottoman rulers also continued to establish new secondary school institutions. Rüşdiye, idadiye, and sultanis constitute various schools that sübyan mektebi graduates had to complete before entering medreses.[2]

These efforts to modernize public education created a highly decentralized education field. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the Turkish Republic inherited a secondary education system comprised of three different types of high schools, following three separate curricula, and supervised by three separate ministries. The middle section of medreses followed a religious curriculum; public high schools (rüşdiye, idadiye and sultanis) followed a secular curriculum. Private high schools followed a mixture of both under the control of foreign missionaries and ethno-religious minorities (Dönmez 2005). The new Republican leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, feared this pluralism would hamper his nation-building project by promoting conflicting messages about self, community, and the nation (Gök 2007). Worried about the ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences of the population residing in the empire's remaining territories, Atatürk sought to establish a unitary education system that would create a body of citizens loyal to the nation-state and its modernization project (Gök 2007). The Unification of Education Law of 1924 stopped religious education in schools. It transferred the control and management of all schools

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[2] In the Hamidian era, Sultan Abdulhamid transformed traditional sübyan mektebi to modern iptidai schools and opened new iptidais around the country. The total number of students, including women, in primary and secondary education schools in the provinces were 868,879 in 1893 (Alkan 2000:98).

from the Şeriyya ve Evkaf Vekaleti (Ministry of Shariah and Foundations) to Maarif Velaketi (Ministry of Education).

Early Republican era education policies focused on centralizing the education bureaucracy, building a standardized national curriculum, increasing literacy, and expanding primary education (Nohl, Akkoyunlu-Wigley 2008; Wigl 2008). The state also reorganized secondary education. The late Ottoman public education system had a 3+3+3+3 system: three years of iptidai schools preceded three years of rüşdiye, three years of idadi, and three years sultani. The Republican state replaced this with five years of primary education, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. In 1923, it renamed Sultanis as "lycees," the name that high schools would be known for from that point onwards.

Expanding secondary education was not yet a priority among these policy initiatives. As a result, Turkish high schools remained elite institutions until the 1970s. Elite institutions differ from mass and universal education institutions in student enrollments, the social meaning of school attendance, procedures of entry, and their consequences for socioeconomic attainment (Trow 1973). Schools retain "elite institution" status until they enroll about 15 percent of the appropriate age grade, at which point they become mass institutions. They become universal institutions when they enroll about 50 percent of the age-grade (Trow 1973). In the elite stage, Turkish high schools prepared students to enter the ruling class (Doğan 1999; Kazamias 1967). For instance, Kazamias examined Turkish high school students' values and social origins in a series of publications where he named them the "potential elites and modernizers of Turkey" (Kazamias 1967:23). He argued that the ethical character and the worldview of high school students set them apart from the rest of the society.

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In many respects, they are different from what have been described as "traditional" Turks. Generally, the majority of them are secular in their attitude toward religion; they are optimistic about their future aspiring group mindful of their role in building a new society to be "achievement" oriented; and they are relatively "mobile." (Kazamias 1967:37)

This was because Turkish high schools were exclusive and highly selective for decades. Kazamias (1966) uses 1960 census data to estimate that 6.5 percent of the 14–16 age group attended a high school. Similarly, Küçüker (2017) estimates that only four out of every 100 students who started school between 1923 and 1953 enrolled in high school nine years later. This number increased to eighteen from 1968–83 and 39 in 1983–99 (Küçüker 2017).

Low levels of enrollment were a direct outcome of official policies. Hasan Ali Yücel, former Minister of National Education and one of the architects of modern Turkish education, had once said that the mission of high schools was to train the "münevver" (enlightened) class of the nation (Cicioğlu 1982:140). He advocated for establishing new vocational high schools to suppress general high school enrollments. Such vanguardist ideas remained influential well into the 1960s. It was a widespread notion among politicians that increasing access to secondary education might introduce disciplinary problems and lower the quality of education (Cicioğlu 1982). They saw regulating demand for high schools as a core component of national education policy. For instance, the National Education Council of 1962 proposed introducing new restrictions to high school registration (Cicioğlu 2010). In the following school year, high schools enrolled students based on exam performance for the first time.

However, the expansion of secondary education began to attract supporters towards the 1970s. In 1957, the Menderes government launched a campaign to establish a high school in every city (Küçüker 2017). The use of entrance exams in 1964 was discontinued after a single year, in what Cicioğlu (2010:154) attributes to the "fanatic of egalitarianism." In subsequent National Education Councils, access to high schools emerged as a problem to be solved. For instance, in

1970, high school education was recognized for the first time as a "right" for all citizens who completed primary education. In 1974, the Council recognized the discrepancy between demand and supply, noting the necessity of investing in teacher training and physical infrastructure as well as protecting the quality of education.

High Schools as Mass Institutions (1975–2000s)

By the 1970s, primary school gross enrollments reached 100 percent. This success switched focus to secondary education. Between 1975–2000, the number of high schools, high school students, and enrollment rates increased rapidly (Figures 3 and 4) as Turkish secondary education entered its "mass access" stage (Trow 1973). High school degrees became common in the cities, which increased the number of people qualified for employment in skilled jobs and enrollment in higher education. While the exact mechanism behind this expansion requires careful examination, widespread urban migration and the growth of industrial and service sectors in the same period are noteworthy (Oney 1994). Changes in urban population and economies may have increased demand for education or created a market demand for vocationally and professionally trained employees, which would have put pressure on the state to improve and expand schooling. However, new international trends may have also played a norm-setting role. Following the economic crises of the 1970s and 80s, many OECD countries began to invest in upper secondary education heavily to combat rising youth unemployment (Briseid et al. 2004). For instance, the French state extended compulsory education to the end of upper secondary education in 1985 (Briseid et al. 2004). These trends have reached Turkey through its burgeoning cooperation with global organizations like the World Bank, IMF, and UNESCO around neoliberal reformations.

The neoliberal transformations of the Turkish state and society in the 1980s significantly shaped secondary school expansion. As a part of the neoliberal structural adjustment programs

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Turkey adopted, public investment in public education decreased, and private education came to be subsidized (Aydoğan 2008; Gök 2007). While Turkey's young population continued to grow and more people began to enroll in high schools, investment in public schools declined (Baloğlu 1990). Instead, the state used many public resources to support private education through income and corporate tax credits, land grants, and low-interest loans (Altınyelken et al. 2015; Ercan 1999).

Neoliberalization of education is evident in the changes of educational expenses' share in the gross domestic product (GDP). Between 1972 and 1989, educational expenditures' share of the GDP decreased from 4.36 percent to 2.77 percent (Baloğlu 1990). Many OECD countries spent more of their GDP on education than Turkey despite the slower growths of their school-aged populations. In 1998, Turkey's public spending on educational institutions as a percentage of its GDP was the lowest among OECD countries (Figure 6). Similarly, Turkey's per-student spending at the secondary level has been lower than the OECD average since the 1990s (Figure 7).

Figure 6 Public Expenditure on Educational Institutions as a Percentage of GDP in OECD Countries
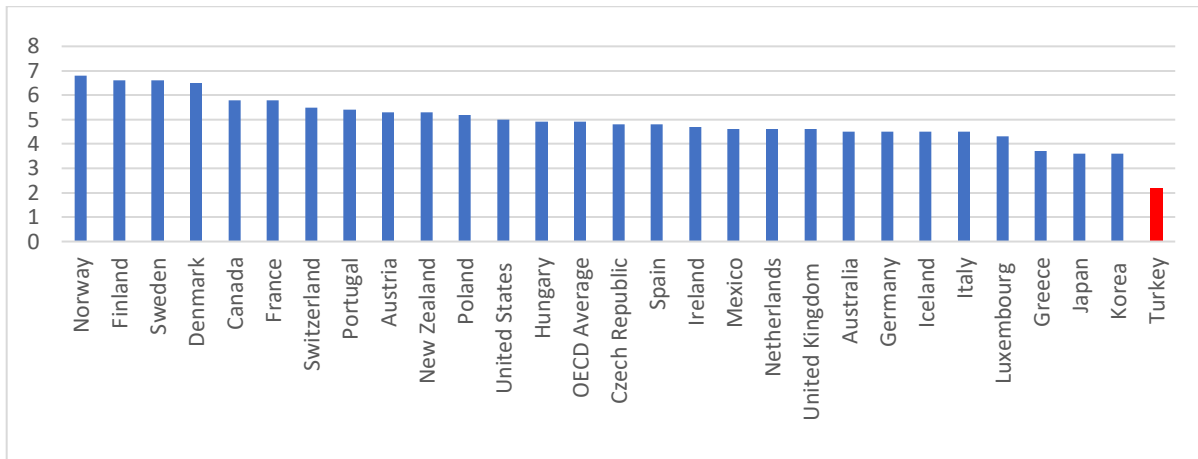
Source: OECD (1998)

Figure 7 Per Student Spending by Country, Secondary Education
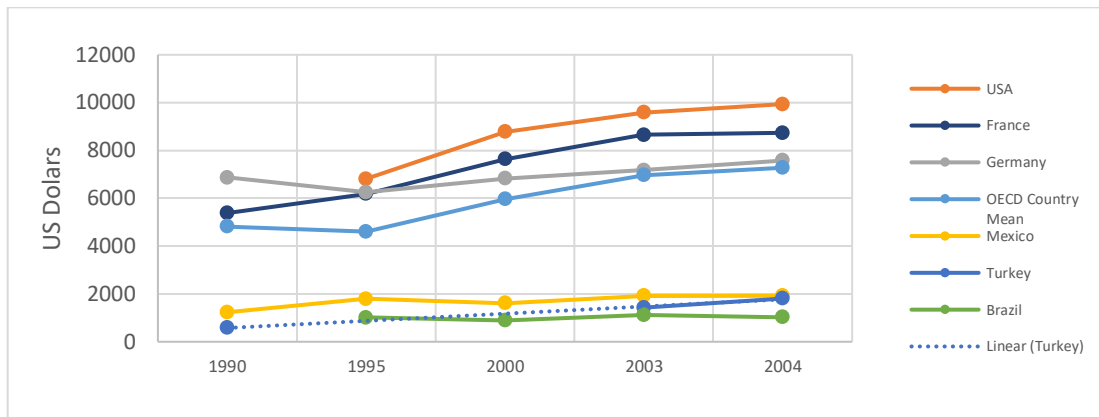
Source: Gürüz (2008)

Although enrollments grew, the quality of education took a hit in the 1980s and 1990s when the state did not increase investment proportionately (Ercan 1999; Gök 2007). One sign of this was the overcrowding of public schools: the student-to-teacher ratio in Turkish middle and high schools was 31 in 1989, compared to 10 in Italy, 13 in Germany, and 18 in China (Baloğlu 1990). Fifty percent of urban general high schools began double shifts to sustain effective instruction in overcrowded facilities (Baloğlu 1990). One group of students attended school from morning to noon and the other from noon to the afternoon. Public school administrations also began to require registration fees and donations from parents to compensate for the lack of funds, which increased household spending on education (Altınyelken et al. 2015). Ercan (1999) characterizes this period as the "ghettoization" of public high schools and underlines the state's abandonment. This label is a stark contrast to high schools' "elite" reputations before the 1980s.

High Schools as Universal Institutions (2000s- to date)

When the Justice and Development Party (JDP) came to power in 2001, it took over a high school system that was overcrowded, underfunded, and stratified by location, sector, and school type. Instead of eliminating these quality problems, the JDP government focused on enrollments because its leaders saw educational expansion as a prerequisite for competing in a globalizing

economy. The party extended compulsory education to twelve years in 2012 and built 1,626 new high schools between 2005 and 2015 (MEB 2019). As a result of their efforts, 84 percent of all high-school-aged students attended high school by 2018.

However, JDP's neoliberal education policies aggravated social class inequalities in educational opportunities in other ways (İnal and Akkaymak 2012). The government privatized many educational services, which increased household expenditures on primary education four times between 2002 and 2011 (İnal and Akkaymak 2012). Parents paid for 14 percent of all primary and secondary school expenditures in 2018, compared to the OECD average of 8 percent (OECD 2018). Students are less likely to equally share the returns from private investments in education than they would from public investment, which is likely to perpetuate educational inequalities between the haves and have-nots.

The prevalence of private educational expenditures becomes a problem in the face of the discrepancy between high school and higher education access. While high school enrollment reached universal rates by the 2000s, universities remained elite institutions. In 2005, only 18 percent of university-aged students attended a university (Figure 4). Because higher education did not expand to accompany secondary education enrollments, a bottleneck in college admissions has persisted since the 1970s. Every year, only 9 percent to 34 percent of applicants are placed into a higher education program (Baloğlu 1990; Gürüz 2008). Those who fail the first time often take the entrance exam for a second and third time, making admission more competitive for students graduating from high school.

The higher education bottleneck renders the education field highly competitive and impacts educational decisions through primary and secondary schools. Specifically, competitive admissions sustain a large shadow education sector that aids students with exam preparation for a

fee. Through the shadow education sector, household income directly influences higher education enrollment. The higher education bottleneck also magnifies the consequences of overcrowding and underfunding in public education. It makes placement in higher education dependent on access to "good" high schools. In the following section, I will describe stratification and differentiation among high schools to illustrate how competition and inequality continue to be defining features of Turkish secondary education despite decades of expansion. This excursion will also help contextualize the current examination regime in high school placements.

Organization of Secondary Education

When the new Turkish state reorganized secondary education in the 1920s, it introduced separate vocational and general education tracks. Turkish politicians imagined general high schools and vocational high schools would have a simple division of labor. The former would educate the elites and the middle classes. Vocational schools would train urban populations for skilled and semi-skilled employment in the industry and bureaucracy. In the 1950s, the Imam Hatip schools were established as a separate track, but it is still debated today whether it is a third track or belongs to the general or vocational education tracks.

Over the twentieth century, the Turkish high school system retained its track duality while increasing curricular differentiation within the tracks. Turkish bureaucracy developed a complex system in which specific branches would control and supervise the education of its future hires. Accompanied by various trade and commercial schools, these vocational schools amounted to twenty-two different school types by 2010. Even academic high schools became increasingly differentiated in their curricula. Their diversity is because nation-building is Turkey's foundational national education mission. Turkish ruling elites have reinterpreted the ideal-typical citizen according to the hegemonic cultures of different epochs and frequently intervened in the school

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system's organization to introduce schools that would shape their students in the image of this ideal-typical citizen (Boone et al. 2018; Kaplan 2006). School-type variation in the general high school category constitutes the legacy of rotating and ideologically fragmented state elites.

Once Turkish secondary schooling reached the "mass" phase, curricular differences became associated with quality differences, and a new school status hierarchy emerged. By the 2000s, between-school and school-type differences in educational outputs started to appear as a persistent problem in policy documents such as government programs and think-tank reports (Atılgan 2018; Gür et al. 2013). They found strong correlations between school type, academic skills, and educational attainment (E.R.G. 2012; M.O.N.E 2018b). Given these associations, horizontal and vertical differentiation in the secondary school system requires close examination.

General High Schools

The most prevalent of Turkey's three high school tracks is general education. Half of all formally educated high school students attend a general high school (Figure 8). General high schools' mission is to "give students general culture and to prepare them for higher education in light of their interests and skills."[3] There are three types of schools under general education: Anatolian high schools, science schools, and social science schools.[4] Anatolian high schools are the oldest general high school type. They were established in 1955, at a time when the Turkish state entered the NATO bloc and came under the influence of US foreign diplomacy. The government designed them as selective high schools that would follow a similar educational model to the existing foreign private high schools. They would offer humanistic education in a foreign

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[3] Ortaöğretim Genel Müdürlüğü. 2015. 'Türk Eğitim Sistemi ve Ortaöğretim' Ortaöğretim Genel Müdürlüğü.'
[4] Fine arts and sports high schools, formerly included in general education, were transferred to the Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education in 2018.

language, typically English. Anatolian high schools would educate an elite who was patriotic, loyal to their state but also proficient in global cultures (Ortaöğretim Genel Müdürlüğü 2017). They would facilitate international connections for the country. Anatolian high schools' social function and status evolved over the decades. First, their medium of education gradually became Turkish, and their middle sections were closed in 1997. Later, the Ministry initiated a program to increase the number of Anatolian high schools to increase the quality of education in general education. The Ministry has rebranded 901 general high schools as Anatolian high schools since 2012.[5]

Figure 8 Student Enrollments by High School Type (2018-2019)
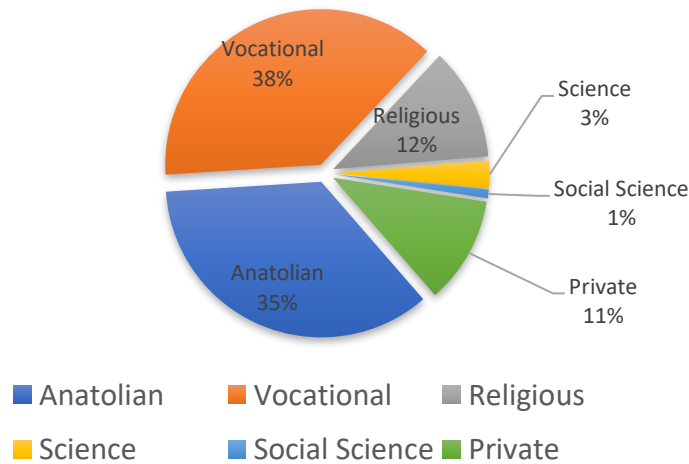
Source: M.O.N.E (2019a). Open education students are excluded from corresponding categories.

Today, all high schools that offer a general education are known as Anatolian high schools. Anatolian high schools enroll 35 percent of all high school students, but there are vast differences when it comes to social statuses and quality of education (Figure 8). Some are prestigious schools, like Galatasaray and Istanbul Erkek High Schools, whose history dates to the late Ottoman period. The identities of these schools revolve around the public notorieties of their alumni and the role

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5 Ortaöğretim Genel Müdürlüğü. 2017. Ortaöğretim Broşürü. p.22.

they played in national history.[6] But newer neighborhood schools in low-income districts also carry the Anatolian high school label.

The second general high school type, science high schools, enroll about 3 percent of all high school students. They were first established in 1964 to support the national science industry (Ortaöğretim Genel Müdürlüğü 2017). Their science and technology focus reflected the Cold War culture of the scientific race, where national boundaries in technical expertise became highly important. The science high school curriculum has chemistry, physics, and biology as mandatory courses at all grades, while they are electives in eleventh and twelfth grades in Anatolian high schools.[7]

The last type of general high schools, social science high schools, were first established in 2003 to prepare students for social science college programs and careers (Ortaöğretim Genel Müdürlüğü 2017). According to the Statute for Social Science High Schools, the ideal social science high school student knows an advanced foreign language, follows global cultural and scientific trends, is familiar with Turkish cultural heritage, and participates in cultural production (M.O.N.E. 2003). Social science high schools have a humanities focus and mandate instruction on subjects like sociology, psychology, Ottoman language, logic, and art history, typically electives in Anatolian high schools.

Vocational and Technical High Schools

Vocational education has been a central component of Turkish national education since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. In this early period of etatism, the state established vocational

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[6] For instance, students of İstanbul Erkek Lisesi were known for voluntarily enlisting in the army during the battle of Gallipoli and the Independence War. Galatasaray Lisesi is known for educating members of the bureaucratic elite of the late Ottoman Empire.
[7] Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu (2018).

high schools to train skilled labor to support its manufacturing and telecommunications industry (Pamuk 1981). The needs of the state bureaucracy dictated the shape of vocational education, with specialized schools existing in fields as specific as law, railroad, meteorology, finance, and commerce. Vocational training was advantageous because of expanding public employment opportunities and helped the state regulate popular demand for general high schools. Vocational school advantages continued well into the 1960s and 1970s when the import substitution economy with high levels of labor organization maintained the socioeconomic payoff of vocational training (Özer 2019a).

In the 1980s, vocational education entered a period of crisis. The state stopped arbitrating between capital and labor due to the largescale privatization of public economic initiatives. The gap between employer expectations and vocational training expanded because vocational schools remained under state control. Likewise, the market ceased to meet labor expectations for wages and benefits following the suppression of unionization after the 1980 coup. Vocational school graduates became less likely to find employment in their training fields and less likely to have job satisfaction. Currently, only 10 percent of vocational school graduates in the workforce work in their field of training (Özer 2019b). At the same time, blue-collar jobs have lost their appeal as neoliberal restructuring reforms brought foreign capital into Turkey. Multinational companies and private enterprises that entered the Turkish market created various white-collar employment opportunities (Bali 2002). These developments substantially increased demand for higher education and the popularity of college-tracked general high schools among the general population (M.O.N.E. 2018c:12).

Contrary to shifts in popular demand, increasing the share of vocational education in secondary education remained a national education priority in the neoliberal period (OECD 2007).

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International organizations like the OECD published various reports that urged successive Turkish governments to address the "imbalance" between general and vocational secondary education by channeling "65 percent of school-age children in secondary education to technical education" (OECD 2007:94).

Vocational education became the central reform issue in the JDP era (Özer 2019a and 2019b). The party's vocational education policy has three broad aims: to increase the quality of vocational and technical training, to improve the social perception of vocational and technical schools, and to involve various stakeholders in decision-making and financing (M.O.N.E. 2018b). To implement these policies, JDP increased the vocational education budget from 6.32 billion TRL in 2013 to 12.5 billion in 2018 (M.O.N.E. 2018b). JDP also reorganized the vocational education system by replacing specialized training with the acquisition of skills in broadly defined fields. It reduced school type diversity among vocational high schools from twenty-two to five and facilitated easier student movement between programs. Anatolian Technical and Vocational High Schools are the most common vocational schools in the current system. These schools offer general education in the ninth grade, at the end of which students select a vocational education field. Tenth-grade education consists of field education, and eleventh- and twelfth-grade education offers courses with further specialization. Students enrolled in vocational programs acquire applied training, while technical program attendees acquire theoretical knowledge of their fields. They may continue their training in related higher education programs if they so wish (Özer 2019a and 2019b).[8]

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[8] Other vocational high schools include vocational training centers and Anatolian high schools with mixed programs. The latter are comprehensive schools established in low-density locations, offering religious, vocational, and religious education programs. Vocational Training Centers are apprenticeship programs that provide one-day formal classroom instruction and on-the-job training for the rest of the week (Özer 2019).

Religious (İmam Hatip) High Schools

Imam Hatip high schools are public faith schools attended by 12 percent of all Turkish high school students (Figure 8). They offer a mixture of secular and religious subjects and prepare students for higher education.[9] They occupy a controversial status in the Turkish education system because Islam's role in education has been a constant source of conflict among secular and Islamist state elites in Turkey (Boone et al. 2018; Kandiyoti and Emanet 2017; Kaplan 2006). When the Turkish Republic was founded, Atatürk and his founding People's Republican Party (PRP) passed a series of reforms restricting religion in the public sphere (Kuru 2009). Among these was the closing of all Islamic schools with the Unification of Education Decree in 1924. The Democrat Party (DP) gained support against PRP by providing a platform for groups who believed the state should provide religious education and services (Güven 2005). In 1951, shortly after coming into power, the DP established Imam Hatip schools.[10] Although they emerged as vocational schools for religious functionaries, succeeding conservative governments passed reforms that made them attractive for students who wanted to work in nonreligious fields (Ozgur 2012). These included the 1973 inclusion of college preparation in their mission, the 1976 admission of the first female students, and the 1982 establishment of the right to apply to all higher education programs (Boone et al. 2018). Subsequently, the proportion of Imam Hatip students in all high school students increased from 2.6 percent in 1965 to 10 percent in 1997 (Ozgur 2012).

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[9] Compared to Anatolian, science and social science high schools, Imam Hatip schools have a very flexible curriculum with many hours of the week dedicated to electives. Mandatory instruction in secular subjects comprise 33 of 40 hours of weekly instruction in ninth and tenth grades. It decreases to 12 hours while mandatory instruction in religious subjects increases to 12 hours in eleventh and twelfth grade. The remaining 16–18 hours are electives. Top Imam Hatip schools tend to schedule extra math and science courses as electives, which makes them able to match the duration of STEM instruction in general high schools.

[10] It should be noted that a prototype of Imam Hatip schools was opened in 1924 and remained operative until 1930 when they closed due to "lack of demand" (Çakır et al. 2004).

During this period, some Imam Hatip schools began to develop notoriety and a strong academic reputation. Kartal and Kadıköy İmam Hatip school graduates scored top points in 1994, 1995, and 1996 university entry exams, making their schools household names. Yet Imam Hatip students' increasing access to higher education disconcerted the military leadership, who considered themselves guarantors of secularism (Guven 2005). They supposed Imam Hatip schools diverted students away from the ideal of modern, secular citizens (Pak 2004). When the Welfare Party (WP) won the 1994 local elections in many cities, the ascent of Islamist politicians to positions of power alerted the military. On February 28, 1997, the military-dominated National Security Council initiated a "purge of bureaucrats suspected to be affiliated with Islamism" and closed "Quran courses and Imam-Hatip schools' middle sections" (Kuru 2009:161). They banned headscarves in schools and workplaces. A year later, the Higher Education Council installed a rule that restricted Imam Hatip graduates' access to higher education (Çakır et al. 2004). They began to multiply the university entrance exam scores of vocational and religious high school applicants with a negative coefficient when they applied to programs outside their areas of study.

Sanctions against Imam Hatip schools and the headscarf ban constituted JDP voters' main grievances when the party came to power in 2002. The Supreme Administrative Court repealed the JDP-controlled Higher Education Council's first attempt to abolish the coefficient practice in 2009. A legislative effort to outlaw the headscarf ban in 2008 resulted in JDP's indictment in the Constitutional Court (Akbulut 2015). After the secularist hold over the judiciary weakened, the third JDP government abolished the coefficient practice in 2011 (Ozgur 2012). It reopened the middle section of Imam Hatip schools and began to build new Imam Hatip schools, increasing their numbers from 450 in 2002 to 1,408 in 2016 (Eğitimsen 2017). Today, JDP invests in Imam Hatip and vocational high schools disproportionately to their sizes in secondary education. One-

third of the Ministry of National Education's budget for education expenditures goes to the General Directorate for Religious Education even though they are attended by only 12 percent of all students (Eğitimsen 2017). On average, the Ministry spends 12,707 Turkish liras on an Imam Hatip student, 7,504 on a vocational student, and 6,153 on a general education student (Eğitimsen 2018).[11] Similar trends in investment budgets suggest that the Ministry seeks to increase the weight of vocational and religious education in secondary schools by increasing their capacities. For instance, 550 million Turkish liras are allocated to the construction of general school facilities, 460 million Turkish liras to religious school facilities, and 739 million Turkish liras to vocational school facilities from the 2019 Ministry budget (M.O.N.E. 2019a:256). Future chapters will illustrate how this discrepancy between supply and demand for different school types impacts high school application decisions. But to better understand general education's popularity, some observations about vertical differences among school types are in order.

High School Predicts Academic Performance

In an equitable world, schools in a nation are so similar in their outputs that where one attends school is inconsequential. Most parents want access to good schools, irrespective of socioeconomic background and location. However, when between-school differences are substantial, access and school placement become important. Equitable access to good schools depends on standardization in an education system. Standardization means that academic performance differences between students within the same school are larger than those between students attending different schools. Turkish high schools have very little standardization, and students with similar performance attend the same schools. In the 2018 Programme for

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[11] Political and educational analysts contend that JDP's Imam Hatip school policy is part of a broader cultural and political agenda to increase the role of religion in state and society. For more, see Gençkal Eroler 2019 and Lüküslü 2016.

International Student Assessment test (PISA),Turkey was among the ten countries with the highest between-school differences in reading skills (M.O.N.E. 2019b). Forty-three percent of the variation in Turkish students' reading scores could be explained by between-school differences, compared to the OECD average of 29 percent (M.O.N.E. 2019b). These numbers are indicative of the low standardization of educational quality.

Low standardization is also evident in school type differences in academic performance. In PISA 2018, average scores of general education students surpass average scores of vocational and religious education students in all three subjects (Figure 9). Science high school students have the highest average score, followed by social science high school students, Anatolian high school students, Imam Hatip school students, and vocational school students. These differences are partly due to the self-selection of high-performing students into science and social science high schools through central examination. Nonetheless, different high school types control different levels of educational resources, which magnify prior performance differences. For instance, Özdemir (2016) used multi-level models to explain differences in PISA test scores. He found that high school type has the strongest association with math performance. The variable accounted for much of the influence of the average classroom size, index of school physical infrastructure, and quality of school educational resources. These results indicate that science and social science high schools command crucial educational and socioeconomic resources that magnify early differences in academic performance.

Figure 9 PISA 2018 Average Student Scores by School Type
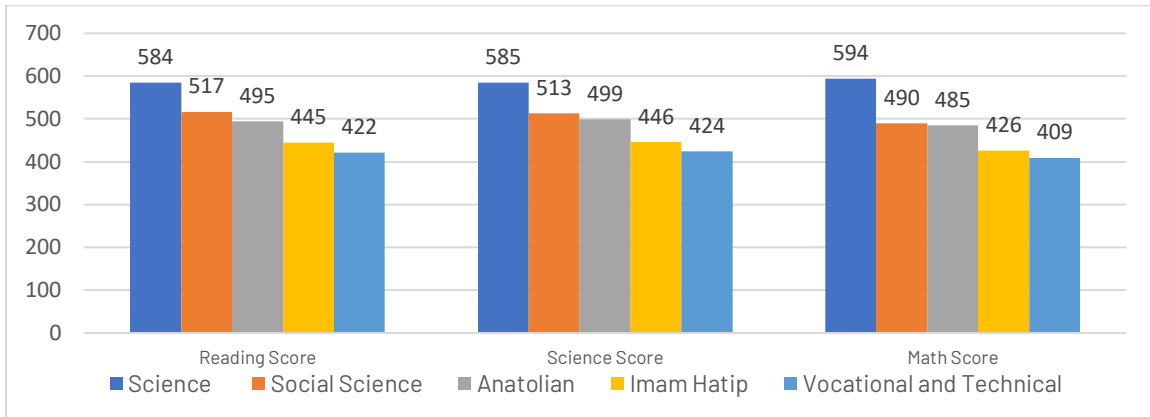
Source: M.O.N.E. 2019b.

High School Type Predicts University Placement

Another sign of low standardization is school-type differences in college placements. These differences reinforce general high schools' prestige and the relative unpopularity of religious and vocational high schools. Between 1998–2011, the Higher Education Council used different coefficients to calculate vocational and Imam Hatip school graduates' entrance exam scores. This discriminatory practice lowered their rate of college placement. Yet even after the coefficient restrictions have been lifted, differences continue to persist (Table 1). In 2019, one in every four applicants from general high schools got into an undergraduate program compared to 16 percent of applicants from Imam Hatip schools and 5 percent from vocational schools. The gap becomes more prominent when we examine subcategories of general high schools. Social science and science high schools are considerably more likely to place their graduates into an undergraduate program and less likely to put them into associate programs than other high schools. Furthermore, applicants from technical high schools are no more likely than other vocational school graduates to get into undergraduate programs despite technical schools' selective admission criteria and tendency to have more academic courses than other vocational high schools.

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Table 1 University Placement by School Type, 2019

	Applicant*	Undergraduate Programs	% In Applicants from the Same HS Category	Associate Programs	% In Applicants from the Same HS Category
Total	2,528,031	409,591	16%	343,874	14%
All General Education	1,223,875	313,751	25%	144,836	11%
Anatolian HS	639,016	180,988	28%	83,814	13%
Science HS	41,201	20,361	49%	484	1%
Social Science HS	7,838	4,561	58%	203	2.6%
All Vocational Education	1,073,566	56,891	5.3%	167,680	15%
Technical HS	40,036	2,346	5.9%	6,624	16%
Imam Hatip	215,285	34,994	16%	29,857	14%

*This is a non-exhaustive table representing select school type numbers. It does not include applicants from some general high school categories like private schools. Of the vocational school category, separate numbers are provided for only the technical school category, because they follow the most college-oriented curriculum out of all vocational high schools.

Source: M.O.N.E. Formal Education Statistics, 2019-2010

University Placement Records Matter

Curricular differentiations in Turkish secondary education build on the principle that academics should not be a universal goal and that secondary education should be sufficient to prepare most students for full participation in society. This sentiment found the following expression in the comments made by the late Minister of National Education Ziya Selçuk: "There

is a problem if the number of university students is too high in a country. Everyone needn't go to college."[12] For many politicians and bureaucrats, vocational high schools are supposed to provide the necessary qualifications to find secure employment for those who "need not" go to college.

However, Turkish employment markets penalize those who lack a university degree. Among OECD countries, Turkey has one of the lowest labor force participation rates for those without a tertiary degree (Figure 10). People with vocational school degrees are employed at higher rates than those with only a general high school degree. But a general high school degree is associated with better access to higher education, and people with higher education degrees have the highest employment rate by educational attainment. Turkish policymakers tend to emphasize higher rates of employment among vocational school graduates compared to general high school graduates to promote vocational education. Still, this comparison is only meaningful if a student intends to conclude schooling at the end of secondary education.

Given tertiary education's additional economic advantages (e.g., higher earnings and benefits) and social status, high school applicants often evaluate their options by their effectiveness in placing students into higher education programs. Because high schools vary substantially in this capacity, high school placement becomes a competition in its own right.

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[12] https://haber.sol.org.tr/turkiye/milli-egitim-bakani-herkes-universite-okumak-zorunda-degil-279052

Figure 10 Employment Rates by Educational Level in Select Countries, Ages 24-65
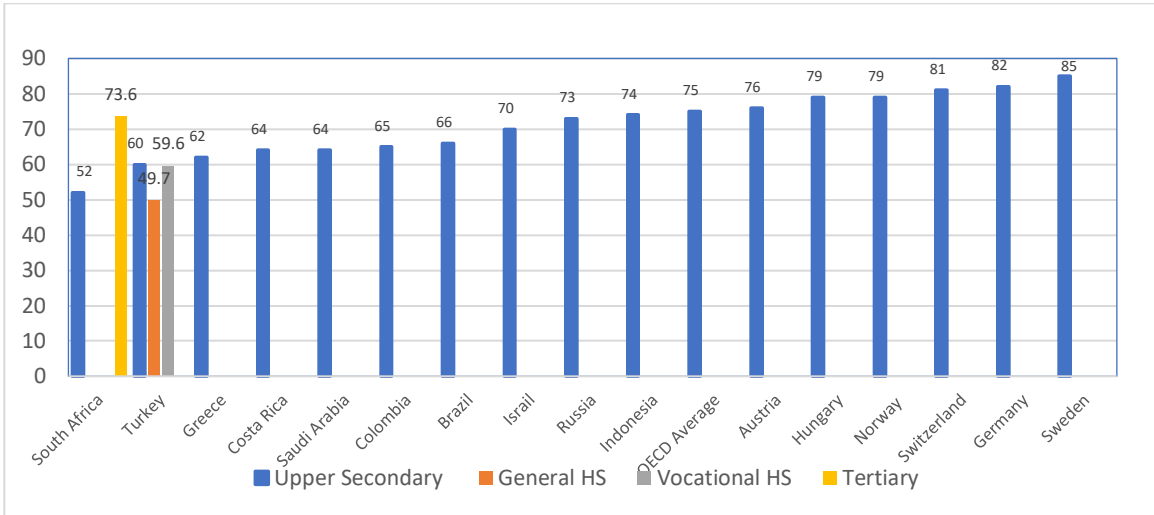
Source: OECD Employment Outlook 2021, M.O.N.E. 2018c

So far, we have focused on the expansion and defining features of Turkish secondary education. These include insufficient investment in public schools, high curricular differentiation, between school differences in academic outcomes, and high rates of unemployment among people with only a high school degree. These contextual factors help explain the high stakes involved in high school placement and why families experience it as an intense competition.[13] Yet before we conclude this chapter and focus on these transitional experiences, more information on the contemporary student placement regime is in order.

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[13] Policy circles have repeatedly pointed out how these factors have been perpetuating entrance exams' high stakes. For instance, the Education Reform Initiative argued that curricular differentiation between school types and differences in the quality of education increased exam-related stress among students, in their commentary on the new Secondary Education Reform Proposal. Source: https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Orta%C3%B6%C4%9Fretim-Tasar%C4%B1m%C4%B1-2.pdf.

History of High School Admission and Central Exams

Central exams emerged as a student selection mechanism in the late 1970s in response to the growing demand for secondary education and between school inequalities. Since the early 2000s, exam-taking has become a universal phenomenon that defines the educational careers of all Turkish students. Reform attempts to curb its prevalence have been largely ineffective.

In the early decades of the Turkish Republic, the only requirement for high school admission was the successful completion of middle school education. In this period, similar middle school and high school enrollment rates illustrate that access to middle schools was a critical factor in high school enrollment (Figure 4). Middle schools' geographic distribution served as a natural and sufficient control over demand (Küçüker 2017). Most towns at the time did not have a middle school, and most middle schools operated as the junior sections of high schools in large towns. In the absence of middle schools, most primary school graduates terminated their education, and high schools often had enough seats to accommodate those who sought enrollment after middle school.

Between 1950 and1980, policymakers responded to increases in middle and high school enrollments by considering new high school admission regulations and experimenting with central examinations. The discontinued high school entrance exam of 1963 is an outcome of these efforts (Cicioğlu 1982). When Anatolian high schools were established in 1955 and administered admission exams, this was an attempt by politicians to reclaim secondary schools—or some secondary schools—as academically selective institutions to train elite students (Rutz and Balkan 2009). In other types of high schools, official recommendations by student counselors helped determine the post-primary school careers of students.

Between 1980 and 2000, admission exams became more commonplace when new "selective schools," like Science High Schools and Anatolian Teacher's Training Schools, were

established. The Ministry of National Education also launched a national exam in 1983 to regulate admission to the junior (middle) section of private high schools. Some vocational schools began to use academic admission criteria, such as middle school GPAs, letters of recommendation, and personal interviews (Küçüker 2017). In this period, more people began to apply to selective high schools and participated in national exams. For instance, three hundred thousand of the one million eligible students nationwide took the Anatolian high school entrance exam in 1996 (Rutz and Balkan 2009). Rutz and Balkan (2009:47) argue that the growing popularity of entrance exams reflects a change in the attitude of middle-class families towards elite schooling.

> In the decades leading up to the announcement of the SMSEs (selective middle school examinations), there was a growing aspiration among middle-class families to provide their children with university education, but this did not necessarily result in a rapidly increasing demand to send them to elite public and private middle schools as a necessary step for entering university. The elite middle schools, especially the private foreign schools, were the place where upper middle-class families sent their children.

In other words, top high schools mainly used to cater to upper-class families and served a social reproduction purpose. After the Ministry established national exams, the new middle classes and some working classes incorporated these schools into their upward social mobility strategies.

In the 2000s, high school transitions entered another stage where exam-taking shifted from a common but largely middle-class practice into an almost universal phenomenon. The number of eighth-grade students who took the high school entrance exam has increased every year (Figure 11), until exam takers constituted 88 percent of all eighth-grade students in 2020 (M.O.N.E. 2020a). High school attendance has also grown at an unprecedented rate during this period, with gross enrollment reaching 90 percent in 2010 (Figure 4).

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Figure 11 Number of Students Participating in the High School Entrance Exam
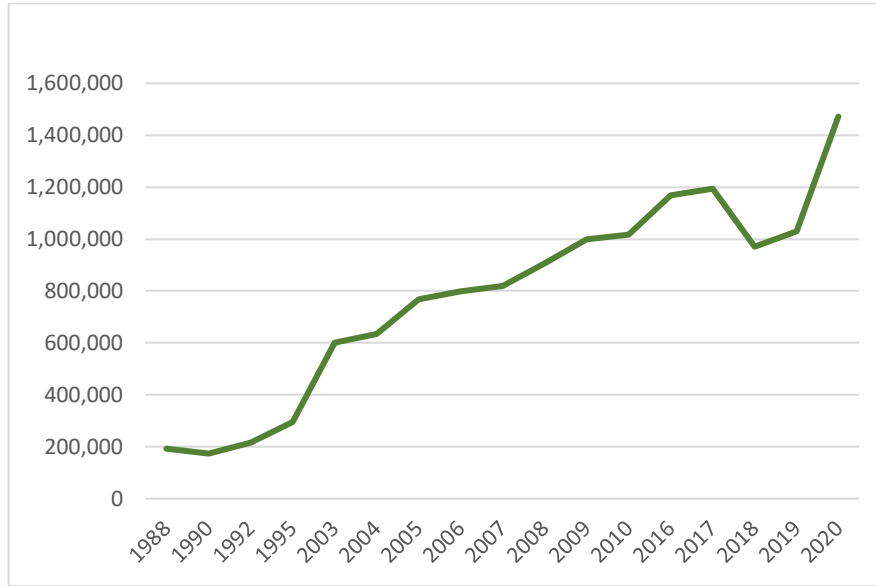
Source: Numbers retrieved from newspapers by the author[14]

As participation increased, central exams' impact on the students and formal education became a defining concern in policy circles and national discussions (Atılgan 2018; E.R.G 2018:28). Policymakers, politicians, and pundits began to emphasize adverse effects like high levels of student stress, growth of shadow education practices, and perpetuation of school hierarchies (Gür et al. 2013; E.R.G. 2018). Think tanks have repeatedly urged the Ministry to reduce the number of "selective admission" schools, restrict the high school exam to students who have proven their academic skills, and use other admission criteria for the rest of the students (E.R.G 2013). Politicians, pundits, and the public alike began to believe that families undermined the aims of formal education by centering student lives around exam preparation. They further

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[14] National newspapers annually publish the numbers of students who apply for and take the high school entrance exam. The number of exam takers are reported for every year except for 1988 and 1992, where only the number of exam applicants were available. Observations from other years suggest that the difference in the number of applicants and exam takers is often negligible. Between 1988 and1995, the numbers belong to fifth grade students who sought admission in the junior section of Anatolian high schools. Sources: Bianet (2007), Cumhuriyet (1988, 1990, 1992, 1995), Hürriyet (2006, 2008), M.O.N.E. (2016), Posta (2018), Sabah (2009, 2010), Sarıer (2010), Vatan (2017).

cautioned that schools were becoming irrelevant institutions and that private tutoring centers were taking over their core educational function.[15] A "lost childhood" narrative permeated public discourse, highlighting the idea that competitive pressures of exam preparation crushed childhood years better spent exploring, learning, and playing.[16]

The JDP drew on these concerns to justify multiple experimental redesigns of the entrance exam. These exams differed in their requirements, content, scope, calculation of student scores, and logistics without offering permanent solutions to the problems associated with central examinations.

LGS (1997–2004). In 1997, the Ministry of National Education replaced separate Anatolian and science high school exams with a single exam that determined student placement at the end of eighth grade.[17] Students were required to have a GPA of four out of five or above to participate in the exam. This requirement restricted the number of exam takers. The LGS tested students on the eighth-grade curriculum in a two-hour exam in random school locations in their district. Those who wished to apply for private high schools or police training schools would take separate central exams.

OKS (2004–2008). OKS resembled LGS in format and requirements. The main difference was that it eliminated the separate admission examinations for private and police high schools. Put

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[15] https://www.star.com.tr/acik-gorus/dogrularin-yanlislari--goturdugu-yeni-sistem-haber-789312/.

[16] Interview with Minister of National Education Nabi Avcı, accessed at http://www.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2014_07/09012902_8temmuz2014kanal24szbitmedenprogram.pdf.

[17] This was facilitated by the expansion of compulsory education to eight years and the closing of the junior section of Anatolian high schools. Yet it is important to note that the "Anatolian high schools" of the time were not the "Anatolian high schools" today. Under the Anatolian high school umbrella were different types of high schools with a foreign-language emphasis and an examination for admission. This included Anatolian Imam Hatip high schools, Anatolian vocational high schools, and Anatolian teacher's training high schools.

differently, OKS scores began to determine admission to all selective admission high schools (Aksoy and Arık 2017; Gür et al. 2013).

SBS (2008–13). Policymakers argued that giving students multiple exams would reduce exam-related stress by lowering the stakes of each session. They also believed incorporating GPA into the final score would make school performance (and, by extension, schools) relevant again. The new entrance exam introduced a three-step system whereby the Ministry combined scores from three annual exams with middle school GPA to estimate a final "Secondary School Admission" score. SBS removed academic requirements from exam taking, increasing the number of exam takers compared to the OKS (Figure 11).

Pundits commended SBS exams for strengthening the correspondence between curriculum and central exams but criticized them for failing to lower dependence on non-school exam preparation services (Gür et al. 2013). They argued that SBS reduced the age of private tutoring to ten and started exam stress from an earlier age (Aksoy and Arık 2017). Exam preparation at such a young age would adversely affect student well-being and social and emotional development. The Ministry listed the sixth and seventh grade examinations after one year following widespread opposition.

TEOG (2014–17). In the mid-2010s, frustration with the examination system led various Ministers of National Education to publicly express their interest in eliminating entrance exams (Gür et al. 2013). Competitive entrance exams' association with shadow education drew a lot of criticism in these years when the JDP's relationship with the Fethullah Gülen movement grew tenser. The Gülen movement was a religious cult-like movement led by a self-exiled cleric in the USA. It was known for its involvement in private schooling, having established numerous schools,

universities, student dorms, and private tutoring centers.[18] The exam-centric transition between levels of education put thousands of students in contact with educators affiliated with the Gülen movement who ran private tutoring centers. Because the Gülen movement's primary recruitment strategy was to introduce students in these private tutoring centers to their way of life (Ebaugh 2009), President Erdoğan and his followers were adamant that entrance exams served the movement's interests.

As a result, the government began to pursue policies restricting the shadow education sector and strengthening the association between schools and high school entrance exams. The exam that replaced the SBS exams reflected this agenda. TEOG exams redesigned entrance exams as an integral part of the routine student assessment in middle schools. In TEOG exams, students would be tested separately in all subjects, over two days, twice in their eighth-grade year, in their schools. Their performance in these tests would constitute their midterm exams and reflect in their school reports. Policymakers also hoped that TEOG would lower exam-related stress because it extended test-taking to multiple days and ceased using single performance indicators to determine high school placement.

LGS (2018–to date). In July 2016, the political hostility of the Gülen movement towards the JDP resulted in a failed coup attempt to remove the government from power. One of the many emergency rule decisions that followed was obliterating the Gülen movement's civil society infrastructure, including their educational establishments. The Erdogan government began to think that if central exams persisted, so would the private tutoring industry and the movement that dominated much of that industry.

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[18] For further information on the organization of the Fethullah Gülen movement in education, see Bekim Agai (2007), Ebaugh (2009), Yavuz (2018), Yavuz and Esposito (2003).

In September 2017, President Erdoğan declared his dislike for high school entrance exams in a television appearance.[19] A few days later, his Minister of National Education, İsmet Yılmaz, hastily announced their intention to end high school entrance exams but did not disclose the system that would replace TEOG. This announcement created a huge wave of public speculation and uncertainty. How would placement decisions be made in the absence of central exams? Pundits criticized the decision for being arbitrary and not reflecting data-driven evaluations of the previous system and its effectiveness.[20]

The details of the new transition policy were determined and shared within the next several months with the public.[21] Under the new arrangements, high school placement would consist of two separate systems: local student placements and central student placements. Students would be admitted into schools in a geographical zone according to submitted preferences, residential addresses, and middle school GPAs in the local placement system. The central placement system would place students into a smaller number of exam schools according to student preference and exam performance. The LGS system reduced the number of exam schools so that exam schools would accommodate only about 10 percent of the students transitioning to high school. The aim was to make exam taking "voluntary" and give families the option to sidestep central exams for high school placement. Yet, most eighth-grade students continued to apply to the entrance exam regardless of their likelihood of entering the top 10 percent in the absence of stringent eligibility requirements. The new high school exam's contents also signaled its selectivity. When the

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[19] Bianet, "Erdoğan: TEOG Kaldırılmalı," September 16, 2017. Accessed on April 18, 2020 at http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/189883-erdogan-teog-kaldirilmali.

[20] Cumhuriyet, "Bakan açıkladı: TEOG sınavı yapılmayacak... Artık tüm yollar İmam Hatip'e çıkıyor" September 18, 2017 Accessed on November 2, 2021 at https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/bakan-acikladi-teog-sinavi-yapilmayacak-artik-tum-yollar-imam-hatipe-cikiyor-826632.

[21] Hurriyet, "Liseye sınavla girişte başarı puanı yok" November 21, 2017. Accessed on November 2, 2021: https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/egitim/liseye-sinavla-giriste-basari-puani-yok-40653510.

Ministry publicized the first sample questions in December 2017, pundits noted that the questions were more challenging than TEOG questions because they required advanced abstract reasoning skills.[22] They made similar observations about the questions in the first LGS exam administered in June 2018.[23]

These reform attempts demonstrate that student placement is an unresolved problem for the Turkish secondary education system. None of the proposed transition systems succeeded in addressing the prevalence of exam preparation and taking or reducing the hierarchies that defined the secondary education system. Furthermore, they garnered criticism for being "band-aid-like solutions" to endemic problems, ignoring stakeholders' input and reflecting short-term political calculations rather than careful deliberation and planning (Aksoy and Arık 2017; Gür et al. 2013). Pundits accused the JDP of turning the Turkish education system into a "yap-boz," which commonly translates as a "puzzle" in English but means "do-undo."[24]

Discussion

This chapter highlights that as Turkish education expanded over the past forty years, structural hierarchies and quality differences between schools solidified due to specific demographic and political factors. These hierarchies emerged when the state first established Anatolian and Science High schools and became further solidified when it introduced academic admission criteria for most high schools. This highly structured and visible field of competition

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[22] Sozcu, "Uzmanlar LGS sorularını değerlendirdi: Okumayı sevenler bu sınavda avantajlı olacak!" December 29, 2017. Accessed on November 2, 2021 https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2017/egitim/uzmanlar-lgs-sorularini-degerlendirdi-okumayi-sevenler-bu-sinavda-avantajli-olacak-2152057/.

[23] Hurriyet, "LGS soru yorumları: Sınav kolay mıydı zor muydu? İşte uzmanların LGS hakkında yorumları" June 2, 2018. Accessed on November 2, 2021 https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/egitim/uzmanlar-lgsyi-yorumladi-sayisal-sorulari-eleyici-olacak-40855723.

[24] Birgun, "Liselere geçiş sistemi bir kez daha değişiyor!" July 18, 2018. Accessed on November 2, 2021 https://www.birgun.net/haber/liselere-gecis-sistemi-bir-kez-daha-degisiyor-223720.

formalized secondary education as a "positional" good (Hirsch 1976). The Turkish state plays a central role in rendering education competitive by universalizing admission exams and failing to introduce viable alternatives. The following chapters will examine the impact of these conditions on how families navigate the transition to high school. I will illustrate that the high school entrance exams create an "opportunity trap" (Brown 2003) where students feel obliged to compete with their peers for better educational opportunities.

This chapter also highlights dynamism as a crucial element of Turkish secondary education. The organization of secondary education and transition procedures have changed many times, undoing former reforms, bringing back even older ones. These changes reflect the centrality of national education to the political ambitions of various ruling elites. Political projects like economic development and religious/secular indoctrination continue to shape secondary education policy more than concern for educational equity in Turkey. How these political interventions and the overall dynamism of Turkish secondary education shapes experiences of high school transition will be the focus in the coming chapters. Specifically, I will illustrate that changes in religious and vocational school policies have alternatively restricted and expanded school choice options for specific groups, shaping their capacity for pursuing positional advantage in education. I will also illustrate that dynamism of the secondary education system has implications for parents' ability to draw on personal experiences and cultural resources in pursuit of social class advantages for their children.

Perhaps most importantly, I will show that the dynamism of the Turkish education system creates a pervasive uncertainty about the direction and purpose, means, and capacities of families to leverage educational opportunities for positional advantages. High school transition

experiences—from the management of exam preparation to school applications—are riddled with

efforts to reduce these uncertainties.

CHAPTER 2: EXAM PREPERATION UNDER UNCERTAINTY

Eighth grade is a difficult period for students and their families. The upcoming high school entrance exam (LGS) transforms life rhythms, proposes a new set of goals, and sets high expectations from students about how they ought to spend their every waking hour. The importance of the entrance exam is a shared, unquestioned social truth, and the question that many eighth-grade families face is not whether to participate in the exam but how to prepare for it. Most families accept that success at the LGS depends on more than attending classroom instruction, completing assignments, and preparing for school exams. But just what it takes and how to assure satisfactory results for one's efforts is an elusive question.

Take Adile, a college-educated math tutor whose son Emre attended Kavak Middle School. Adile hired a private tutor for Emre when he started seventh grade. She asked the tutor to give Emre assignments from test banks, check his work during their weekly meetings, and help him solve questions he struggled with. She expected this to help her son get used to multiple-choice tests in preparation for the high school entrance exam at the end of eighth grade. At the beginning of eighth grade, she supplemented one-on-one tutoring by enrolling Emre at a tutoring center where he attended regular mock exams and received problem-solving assistance. During eighth grade, Emre went to school from 9 am until 4 pm. After school, he solved multiple-choice tests for two hours and went to a tutoring center four days a week. His mother checked up on him and kept track of how many problems a day he solved on average.

Despite all this work, Adile was unsure whether they were doing enough to get Emre into a good school. She compared her son's work schedule and tablet use to other eighth graders. Was he too distracted by video games? Did he solve enough practice tests a day, or should they increase

the number? She worried. She did not have a good measure for gauging how well her son was doing. She considered Emre's performance at the tutoring center's mock exams. He often left half the math questions unanswered, but LGS math questions were challenging, and she heard hardworking students improved their performance over time. She suspected that ranking was a better measure, but it wasn't easy to interpret how ranking fortieth among the 200 students at the tutoring center would translate on a national scale. At some point, she asked a teacher at Emre's tutoring center what she ought to expect from him. "Would this kid be able to get into Kabataş High School or not? I think a teacher ought to tell." She felt hopeful, curious, and insolubly ambiguous about her son's chances on the LGS exam.

Uncertainty characterizes eighth-grade experiences of parents who differ in education, economic resources, and children's level of exam preparedness. This uncertainty is due to the inherent contingency of the present's relation to the future. Future outcomes depend on more circumstances than what the human mind can comprehend at any point in time. Furthermore, parents are peripheral actors with limited control over their children's performance, which depends on sustained efforts like paying attention in class, taking notes, following up with questions, reviewing lessons, and managing time. Exam performance's contingency on these actions renders the whole parenting enterprise insecure.

Yet—as will be argued in this chapter—some of this uncertainty has its source in current government policies that aim to restructure high school admission and the central examination regime. This observation suggests an orientation to the study of uncertainty both as a cultural phenomenon that is experienced, interpreted, and managed, and as "the by-product of a particular political economy" (Cooper 2015:36). Governmental efforts to regulate and reform high school admission procedures have introduced new ideas about appropriate educational behaviors and their

potential future effects. They generated uncertainties in three areas: the venues, methods, and results of exam preparation. This chapter examines these three types of uncertainties in their origin, manifestation, and impact on how parents help their children navigate exam preparation. It will demonstrate that improvisation and adaptability are the primary tools through which parents manage uncertainties they encounter, attesting to educational decision-making's contingent, processual, and pragmatic nature.

Social Landscape of Exam Preparation

The average Turkish student prepares for the LGS within a network of supporting adults such as parents, schoolteachers, student counselors, personal tutors, and tutoring center teachers. The roles and responsibilities of these institutional actors are not entirely differentiated. Instead, each family redefines them during the exam preparation year, forming new ideas about their contributions to their children's study ethics and exam performances. These pragmatic reorientations respond to a crucial uncertainty about the appropriate venues for exam preparation.

<u>Schools, Tutoring Centers, and Homes</u>

It was a chilly and rainy Saturday morning in October 2019. Musa Hoca, the social studies teacher at Kavak Middle School, invited parents of eighth-grade students to brief them about the high school entrance exam. There were about 100 people in the conference room when Musa Hoca began to speak. He started his speech with a description of the conditions under which their students were taking the test. This year, the number of students applying to high school was 600,000 more than the previous year due to the lowering of the school-age entry requirements eight years ago. He explained that the increase meant competition for admission would be exceptionally high this year, so they began their exam preparation efforts early to have a head start. Over the summer, he required all students to commit to an hour-long daily study and regularly

report their progress. When the school year began, he organized study sessions during lunch breaks for students to come and solve practice tests under the supervision of various teachers.

I saw many parents murmur approvingly as Musa Hoca expressed his commitment to improving all their students' performances and holding regular meetings about their progress. During the Q & A, one father took the floor to thank Musa Hoca for his devoted work over the summer. Months later, when I interviewed the same man from the audience, his opinion about the school's involvement in exam preparation had changed. He believed that the school let them down by being uninvolved in their children's daily study routines during the COVID-19 pandemic. He compared Kavak with what he knew of teachers elsewhere and said,

> In our hometown, there is a school where the children of my relatives go. It's public, but it has students in the top 0.2 percent, 0.3 percent. I heard about the work of their teaching staff and got very upset. The teachers got up each morning and called their students to say, "Today's a new day; let's get to work." They called the students again later at night, keeping tabs on them individually. These are public school teachers.

Few people in the Kavak community seemed to agree about what the school could or should do for exam preparation. A school's primary role is to provide classroom instruction according to the lesson plan determined by the Ministry of National Education and test students on their mastery of this content. Teachers are not legally obliged to perform many other roles, although some (like Musa Hoca) assumed them voluntarily. Kavak teachers tended to think they played a peripheral role in exam preparation. They believed this was so because their students and families cared so little about schoolteachers' instructional role in their exam preparation efforts. During a conversation in the teachers' lounge, Melek Hoca, a science teacher, told me that their students did not take classes seriously because they learn course content at private tutoring centers before schoolteachers begin to cover those topics. She continued, "It used to be shameful to receive private tutoring in the past. People would assume there was a problem with the student if she

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received tutoring. Now, students use tutors like walking crutches. Parents form a team with a private tutor while school and schoolteachers are left outside of it."

Another science teacher, Beyza Hoca, started her first class in September by asking her students to raise their hands if they attended a private tutoring center. After looking at the raised hands, she turned to me and told me that they all attended a private tutoring center except for four students. She then asked the students what they covered at their tutoring centers. Some students told her that they completed instruction of the entire first unit. Beyza Hoca turned to me and said sarcastically, "I love tutoring centers; they leave me nothing to do."

Schoolteachers' secondary role in exam preparation was also apparent in the temporal changes in the organization of classroom activities. Most eighth-grade teachers finished instruction by April and allowed students to solve practice tests in the classroom. Instead of the familiar, booming voice of a middle school teacher trying to be heard, muffled sounds of paper shuffling, whispered exchanges, and intermittent warnings characterized most of my classroom observations from April to June 2019. The school's two eighth-grade math teachers spent course periods solving problems their students brought (from their various test banks), but such teacher-led efforts were not typical otherwise. Teachers who taught courses like Religious Studies or English felt notably overlooked because the LGS exam asked very few unchallenging questions on their subjects. Students displayed their lack of interest by solving math or Turkish questions under their desks.

Towards the end of the year, many Kavak students skipped school to devote their uninterrupted time to problem solving. Teachers often had little control over this and only advised their students how to properly skip school without incurring any penalties. For instance, Musa Hoca concluded one class in April with the following warning:

> I want to say a few things about attendance. You have been asking about absenteeism, but don't. There is no such thing as "right to absenteeism." Authorized leaves of absence are

half a day or a day long only. You can skip school without an excuse up to twenty days. After twenty days, your teachers meet to determine whether to pass or fail you. Listen carefully; there are rumors that attendance might impact placement priority in local school applications. We don't know the weight of this compared to other factors since the Ministry has not released the placement handbook yet. But if you choose to skip school because it may interrupt your studies, then at least bring a medical report.

The beginning of the COVID pandemic showed another aspect of Kavak's limited involvement in the lives of its students as they prepared for the entrance exam. When schools were closed indefinitely, there was a two-week break without any plans for school resumption. Later, the Ministry of National Education announced that although schoolteachers would soon resume courses online, spring semester courses would not be graded, and eighth-grade students would only be tested on the first semester modules in the LGS exam. Without the usual imperatives, like grades and attendance, that connect students to school, the Kavak teaching staff entirely disengaged from their eighth-grade students. In this period, online courses by Kavak teachers were irregular and few. For example, a class schedule shared by the student counselor Merve shows only two eighth-grade classes on April 24, 2020: one science course and one math course, held simultaneously at 8:45 am. An eighth-grade student intent on attending school that day would only have to attend a single class. On Monday April 27, two Turkish courses were scheduled at different time slots to cover the same topic of "syntax." In the two-week schedule shared with me, Kavak teachers offered no more than two eighth-grade courses a day, and their scheduling seemed to follow no discernable logic to maximize exposure to different topics. In the same period, those students who resumed exam preparation (and many did not) attended online tutoring sessions and mock LGS exams, defying the stay-at-home orders to meet with personal tutors.

Unlike at schools, teachers at tutoring centers often work at more than in an instructional capacity. A typical tutoring center assigns a principal advisor to all its students and separate tutors for math, science, Turkish, and social studies classes. These advisors hand out study plans and

check whether students abide by them. They call parents regularly with updates on students' performance. Tutoring centers also hold biweekly mock exams and weekly "etuts" where groups of 2–10 students bring test questions that they couldn't solve on their own. Ability-grouping is another feature of tutoring centers that differentiates them from schools. Tutoring centers regularly rank their students according to their mock exam performances and reassign them to classrooms based on these rankings. Tutors use different instructional materials in each class to match students' abilities.

Personal tutors offer an even more customized tutoring experience. While a tutoring center advisor is responsible for all the students in one or two classrooms, private tutors only work with a few students. They typically meet the students in their own homes and get to know their domestic environment, habits, strengths, and weaknesses personally. They regularly interact with the student on an informal basis and advise them on various topics. The greater intimacy of this relationship leads students to say "abla/abi" (older sister/brother) as they address their tutors. In contrast, they use the "Hoca" (teacher/guide) title for schoolteachers and teachers who work at tutoring centers.

The "Closing" of Tutoring Centers

In 2013, Fatih Bey's tutoring center had been open for less than a year when government officials began to make public statements criticizing private tutoring centers. "I think we were one of the last people to enter this sector because a couple of months later, the rumors began. It lowered our morale. We speculated about how much time we had left and whether we would be closed soon or not." In March 2014, Fatih Bey's fears came true: The parliament passed an amendment that removed the term "tutoring center" (dershane) from the National Education Law (Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu). The amendment stated that former tutoring centers could operate under the "temel lise" (basic high school) status. Temel lise was a new, temporary status that former tutoring centers

could take on while their owners worked to transform these establishments into full-blown private schools by 2018. When the amendment passed, Fatih Bey handed over his business license to the Ministry of National Education and received a permit to run a "temel lise" in the same facilities as his tutoring center. Over the next several years, he purchased land for his private school. He kept an eye on the legal battle between the government, which sought to shut down tutoring centers for good, and the courts, which deemed these laws anti-constitutional restrictions to the freedom of private enterprise. When Fatih Bey decided that the government was fighting an uphill battle, he reentered the tutoring sector by renting two new buildings and hiring instructors.

Figure 12 Growth of Tutoring Industry Over Time
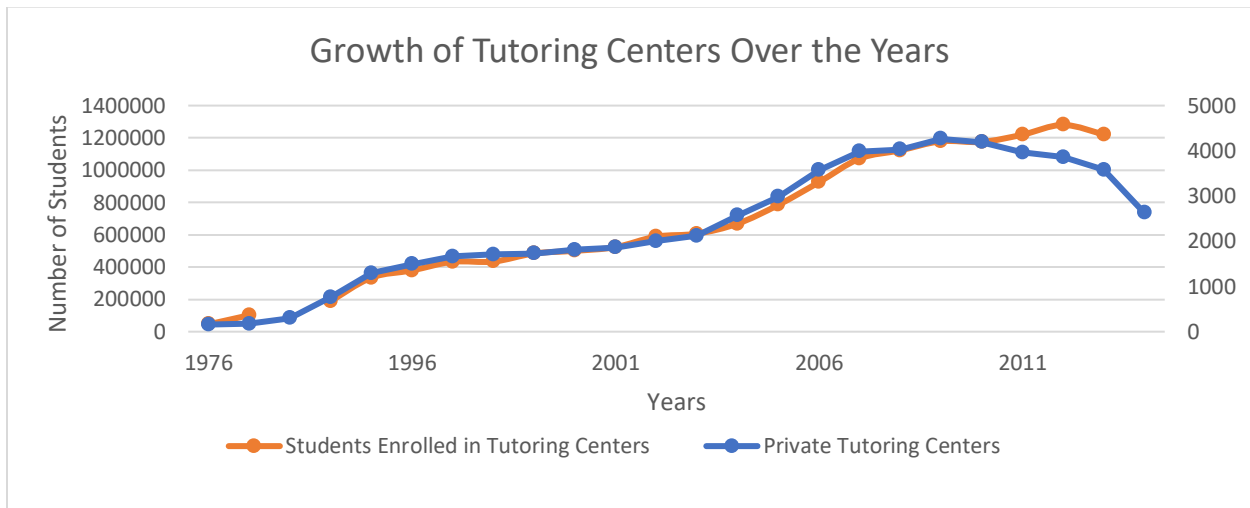
Sources: Tansel and Bircan (2008), Özoğlu (2011), M.O.N.E (2013). The estimated numbers in these studies differ within a very small margin depending on whether they used ÖZDEBİR or M.O.N.E numbers. I use M.O.N.E numbers for years available and ÖZDEBİR numbers to supplement them in the missing years.

Fatih Bey's story illustrates the uncertain status of tutoring centers that began in 2010. Over the past forty years, tutoring centers have been a fixture in the Turkish education landscape (Özoğlu 2011). As demand for secondary and higher education increased in the 1980s and admission exams spread, private entrepreneurs saw an emergent market for exam preparation

assistance. A religious group became a particularly central figure in the tutoring sector. Starting as a piety movement around the religious cleric Fethullah Gulen, the Gulen group aimed for a spiritual and sociopolitical transformation in Turkey and to replace the Kemalist elite in bureaucracy, judiciary, and the corporate world with a new social, political, and economic elite (Watmough and Ozturk 2018). Organization in the education sector was central to this project. Since they opened their first tutoring center in the 1970s, the movement established an extensive network of private schools and tutoring centers to locate promising students across the country and socialize them into the group's ideology through academic mentorship and informal religious instruction (Agai 2007). By the early 2000s, the movement had 150 private schools, 150 private tutoring centers, and many private student dormitories (Agai, 2007:160).

The tutoring center controversy emerged as the Gulen movement's quest for political power began to put them at odds with their political ally, the JDP. Political scientists who studied the group argued that it should be "conceived as a transnational parapolitical network" (Watmough and Öztürk 2018:34) where members engaged in covert political actions to seize financial and political power. The JDP first began to see the Gulenists faction within the state bureaucracy as a threat when Gulenists in the police and the judiciary launched a surprise anti-corruption probe against government officials in December 2013. To curb the movement's economic and social influence, JDP targeted the tutoring industry by outlawing it in March 2014. This move started a long and drawn-out legal battle concerning the status of private tutoring. The People's Republican Party brought the amendment to the Supreme Court, who ruled it unconstitutional in July 2015. The court stated that the amendment violated fundamental rights and freedoms (such as the right to education and work) and failed to provide non-school alternatives to meet the need to prepare for entrance exams.

With its plan to ban tutoring centers halted, the government decided to make it difficult to operate a tutoring center by overregulating them. In August 2015, the Ministry of National Education introduced a new term "öğrenci etüt eğitim merkezi" (student education center) for tutoring centers. It required those with a "dershane" license to reapply for authorization. They limited instruction to a maximum of three school subjects, forbid tutoring centers from allowing unenrolled students to participate in their mock exams, and required mock exams to have open-ended rather than multiple-choice questions. Effectively, these rules interrupted the routine operation of tutoring centers, which relied on instruction in every tested subject and repeated student assessment through mock exams in the format of the entrance exams. Following the coup attempt in July 2016, the government introduced further restrictions. A statutory decree reduced the number of subjects from three to one. In March 2017, the government officially banned tutoring centers from enrolling middle-school students.

While the motivation behind these efforts has been to curb the Gulen movement's influence, the JDP government often defended its position on the tutoring centers from a pedagogical perspective. It claimed it acted on a long-standing critique of tutoring centers since their spread in the 1980s. The government framed tutoring center attendance as harmful for students' social and emotional development and argued that tutoring centers eroded popular perception of schools as effective education sites. For example, in a public appearance in November 2013, President Erdogan asked, "If there are tutoring centers, why do we have schools? If we have schools, why do we have tutoring centers?[1]" Later in his speech, he claimed that 95 percent of science high school students went to a tutoring center. He alleged this to be a slight on

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[1] Hurriyet. "Eyy dershane sahipleri birbirimizi aldatmayalım" November 25, 2013. Accessed on December 30, 2021, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/egitim/eyy-dershane-sahipleri-birbirimizi-aldatmayalim-25200676.

the teachers and the effectiveness of the country's most prestigious high schools. "These are science high schools. Is this not disrespectful to our teachers who teach there? Our teachers are ignored." Similarly, a regional newspaper article from 2015 covered the transformation of a former tutoring center into a private school and emphasized how schools could guide exam preparation. The piece quoted the school's student counselor, who said they were going to address a "long-lasting dream of students" to "take care of this at school so that they wouldn't be so tired."[2] The counselor claimed that their schools would grant this wish by offering extensive counseling about student performance.

These framings about the functional correspondence of schools and tutoring centers are fundamental to the ambiguities around which institutions should be primarily responsible for assisting with exam preparation. To substantiate their argument that exam preparation could and should be done through formal schooling, the JDP committed to financing after-school and weekend classes (Destekleme ve Yetistirme Kursları) in public middle schools. Kavak also offered these courses, but they were not very popular among Kavak's teachers who had alternative side income sources. In his seminar at the beginning of the year, a parent asked Musa Hoca whether he would offer a course for students after school. Musa Hoca made a face and said, "It is not worth the 3-5 liras they give us. I told my students not to request a course from me, but some students have applied for it anyway. It is scheduled on Monday afternoons, but I will not attend." Another Kavak teacher, Korkut Hoca, put into context how much they were compensated for these after-school courses: an experienced schoolteacher would make somewhere between 150 and 400 liras an hour if he tutored a student at his house, whereas the hourly payment for the state's after-school

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[2] Gazete Rize, "Uğur Dershaneleri Uğur Okulları Oldu" March 28, 2015. Accessed on December 30, 2021, https://www.gazeterize.com/egitim/ugur-dershaneleri-ugur-okullari-oldu-h17634.html

courses was 35 liras in the 2019–10 school year. Without strong monetary incentives for teachers, the government's efforts to replace tutoring centers with public schools through after-school and weekend courses did not fare well during my fieldwork.

Where to Prepare, and with Whom?

At the end of Musa Hoca's LGS seminar, Kavak mother Rabia met two other mothers. These women claimed that 90 percent of Kavak's eighth graders attended a tutoring center. Rabia was surprised, as she later told me. "Tutoring centers are forbidden, I mean, how come?" She asked the other mothers where they sent their children. One of the locations they named charged 10,000 Turkish liras a year, while the ones their children attended charged 5,000. Rabia's husband did not want to enroll their son in a tutoring center. She told me that he enrolled at a tutoring center when he prepared for the university entrance exam but stopped going after one week because it did not help him. He got into an engineering program in a reputable university without tutoring assistance, so he argued that individual hard work was all it took to achieve good results. But Rabia believed otherwise. "I feel like a tutoring center is necessary." She worried about being able to "fill the gap" by attending a tutoring center and was unsure that her son was studying enough hours in a day. She was looking forward to him following the school's weekend courses, but it was already October, and the classes were yet to start. She hoped the schoolteachers would recommend specific test banks to them, but she was disappointed to realize they would not (more on this later). She had to purchase her son's first books "randomly." She had no expectations from the school besides the weekend course and book advice.

> I don't know if they'll do anything. Musa Hoca said that parents ought to … that we ought to … I mean I don't know what anyone else but us could do anything.… Frankly I don't expect much from the teachers. They should do their lectures, but anything other than that? I don't know. It's up to them.

Several parents echoed Rabia's surprise about operational tutoring centers. The highly publicized tutoring center controversy and the government's periodical announcements that they would shut down tutoring centers for good created an information asymmetry among middle-school parents. Some, like Rabia, were surprised and confused to learn that students continued to attend tutoring centers. For instance, I asked a father I encountered at Kavak during the high school application week whether his son went to a tutoring center. He wavered and frowned in response. "Tutoring center? Weren't they closed?" Parents from small towns and remote districts also assumed the practice was permanently discontinued because the few tutoring centers in their vicinity were closed for good.

Nonetheless, these parents remained in the minority because tutoring centers persisted in bigger cities like Istanbul in one form or the other. Among the interviewed families, tutoring center attendance was common: 64 percent of all parents enrolled their children at a tutoring center at one point in the eighth grade, while the number was even higher at 83.5 percent among Kavak families (Table 2). Because sampling for the study was not random, it is not clear what these frequencies say about eighth-grade families in Kavak or Istanbul. However, ethnographic data suggests that many parents knew that some tutoring centers remained open, albeit under more legally precarious or informal conditions. In Kavak's district and the surrounding areas, tutoring center signboards frequently announced this continued reality. Teachers, parents, and students casually referred to "dershane" or "etüt merkezi" (both words for tutoring center) in their conversations about exam preparation routines, and most Kavak teachers assumed all their students had tutoring assistance for exam preparation.

Table 2 Venues of Exam Preparation Among the Study Sample

	Kavak Families		Non-Kavak Families		Total	
Home and School	4	11%	12	39%	16	24%
Private Tutor	2	5.5%	6	19%	8	12%
Tutoring Center and Private Tutor	12	34%	1	3%	13	20%
Tutoring Center	17	48.5%	12	39%	29	44%
Total	35	100%	31	100%	66	100%

Yet a bird's-eye view of tutoring center enrollments obscures the fact that a critical portion of eighth-grade parents felt ambivalent about tutoring center attendance. The general perspective on tutoring centers was that they were a "necessary evil," a place that put an unfair physical and mental burden on their children. Attending a tutoring center meant students who leave their homes early in the morning for school do not come back home until after 8 pm. One mother mentioned that her daughter would be so tired after school that she would take half-hour naps in the car while she drove her to the tutoring center. Although most parents agreed that tutoring centers were costly in more than one way, some also were ambivalent about its "necessity." For example, some parents doubted its added value for self-motivated and high-achieving students:

> Good students tend to get bored at tutoring centers. They think they are better off self-teaching. (Haluk)

> She was in the VIP class, but it didn't do anything. It didn't improve her [score] much, she started off the year at the top second percentile, and she remained there. (Doğa)

I can't tell how effective it [the tutoring center] has been on my daughter really… […] I feel like this year, a student who paid attention at school and followed online instructions and had a bit of inner drive could do well [without a tutoring center]. (Armağan)

In addition to doubts about the added value for high-achieving students, some parents were ambiguous about its impact on struggling students. These students, they expressed, needed special attention, but tutoring centers were too crowded to be effective and did not take individual measures to improve student learning. Take İlkgül (Kavak), who said, "It's like a school. You have classrooms of 20–25 people. They lecture and lecture. They administer exams, but they do not take the students who fail and sit down with them one-on-one. They don't say, 'This is where you struggle. Let me instruct you on this.'"

Some parents who were concerned about the financial and physical cost of tutoring centers found after-school courses at their children's schools attractive. When Medine (non-Kavak mother)'s son graduated from seventh grade, his math teacher from school made them a promise. He said that the students who ranked in the top fiftieth on the school's recent assessment test would receive free exam preparation assistance from math teachers. The teachers would assign the students to classrooms based on their exam performances and offer after-school courses every day to review the curriculum and help with problem-solving. Before this proposal, Medine planned to enroll her son at a tutoring center. "I hadn't expected much from the school, to be honest. We were thinking of sending him to a tutoring center, but they dissuaded us." Medine agreed to it because the program aligned with her need for a place where her son would regularly go to solve practice questions under adult supervision. Her son's school ended hours before Medine got off work at 6:30 pm, and she wanted to make sure he did not spend that period idly by himself at home. By November, Medine learned that the school principal still had not designated a space for their math teacher to meet with his students while another group had already started their program. When I

asked her why, she explained it was "due to personal enmities." Regretting her trust in the school, Medine argued with the school administration and enrolled her son at a tutoring center months after everyone else had started in mid-August.

Medine's case illustrates the first strategy for managing uncertainty about exam preparation venues: adaptability. She initially considered the math teacher's program to be like a tutoring center and decided to try it. With time and new information, she made a different choice. Other families also often changed their initial decisions: some started with a tutoring center and later hired a private tutor. Others began with a private tutor and later hired a second tutor. Yet others found their tutoring center moot and decided to let their children study individually.

Other strategies for managing uncertainty about exam preparation venues were social cues and imitation. Eighth-grade parents paid attention to each other's exam preparation strategies. They inquired about whether and which tutoring center other children attended, names of hired tutors, the fees, the number of hours other children worked etc. Because tutoring center attendance was so typical in Kavak middle school's community, when parents had doubts about the potential benefits and costs, they did what they saw others doing. For example, Nil explained how she decided to send her son to a tutoring center in the area in the following way:

> I knew some students who went there the year before. They explained the center's system and the exam performance of the center's students. They said it added a lot to them and that the tutors were very involved with the students. One of my friends told me that she couldn't help out her child because she was a working mother. She couldn't make him study or make sure he did his assignments. So, the tutoring center filled that gap for her. With us, we are able to assist our child but of course, it is not the same as what an institution can do for him. Does it tire him out? Yes, very much so. He works hard. It is not proper for children to both go to a school and after to a tutoring center. But under these circumstances…. It is not only my kid. The system requires this, so we kept pace. We felt like if my kid did not attend a tutoring center, we would not be enough for him. Because in his class, all the parents…. You look at his classmates and everyone sends their children to a tutoring center. We hear the same thing from all parents: that we could not be enough for them. We felt required to send him so that he did not fall behind.

Like Rabia, Nil used her conversations with other parents and students to determine the proper course of action. Because the entrance exam is extremely competitive, witnessing the "price" that her son's competitors paid motivated them to make a similar sacrifice.

While attending school and a tutoring center was common practice, some parents tried to do a bit of everything out of desperation. The fewer results these parents received, the more help they sought to remedy it. For instance, Meltem, another Kavak mother, enrolled her son at a tutoring center in seventh grade. She often visited the site to assess its quality of education and soon decided that the tutors were too young and inexperienced to help her son. Classrooms were also crowded, and her son tended to get distracted in that setting. In eighth grade, she planned to prepare her son for the high school exam with four private tutors. She believed her son needed instruction at the most basic level, whereas tutoring centers began with eighth-grade topics. "He needed to review everything since the first grade. I told the tutor to start with arithmetical operations." Later, she noticed that her son did not solve the practice problems that his schoolteachers and tutors assigned as homework, so she decided to enroll him at a tutoring center with the hopes that he would solve more tests. Like Meltem, many parents routinely monitored their children's performance and work routines and added new forms of exam preparation assistance to get better results.

Strategies for Exam Preparation

Due to Turkey's long history of entrance exams, exam preparation is a routinized activity. After all, all organizations run on routine, and educational organizations like schools and tutoring centers are heavily involved in exam preparation. Those in the field believe that adequate preparation results in three primary skills that students can draw on at the entrance exam: master of the subject matter, emotional regulation, and time management. Those who master the subject

matter will be able to answer questions correctly, those with proper time management will not run out of time before they get to solve all the questions, and a calm and collected state of mind will facilitate it all. Three practices are commonly prescribed to acquire these skills: understanding the basic concepts in class through instruction and reviews, solving practice questions, and taking regular mock exams. Above all, students are expected to study for several hours every day, consistently through the eighth grade.

Although this may look overly formalized, there is much room for customization and improvisation in this framework. Parents and teachers looked down upon those who blindly followed others' examples and rigid formulations about exam preparation. These people maintained that those who expected their children to succeed in the exam must be "bilinçli," a Turkish word for a highly informed, involved, and committed person. For instance, Helin, a science instructor at a tutoring center, told me that "the problem with" some parents was an unreflective approach to exam preparation.

> They expect you to have a magic wand because they've enrolled their child in a tutoring center, when they have not addressed the gaps in their learning from the past seven years. They think: "I enrolled him at a tutoring center, I bought him lots of test banks. We are set."

Instead, many considered that finding a venue and tutors/teachers was only the first step of "bilinçli" parents' exam preparation involvement. They also ought to determine which study materials to acquire, how many hours to study in a day, how many practice questions to solve, which subjects to focus on, whether to balance exam preparation with extracurriculars and hobbies, and finally, how much supervision to exercise. Most of these questions confused or frustrated families at any given time, but two have become even more difficult to answer after the transition from the TEOG exam to the LGS in 2018. These are the study materials to be acquired and the

number of daily problems to be solved. The next sections will outline how families found workable

solutions to these questions.

Source of Uncertainty: Changes in the Level of Exam Difficulty

My middle-school math teacher Didem looked back at me from my computer screen and

asked me where I wanted her to start. It was a surreal experience, after having prepared for the

high school exam as her student, to ask her to talk about how she taught eighth-grade math and the

rationale behind her practices. "Start from before the LGS, please," I had told her.

> Okay so TEOG. I don't know if you know much about the previous examination system.
> It covered only eighth-grade materials and was very easy. It tested common standards. Let
> me put it this way, the best kids full'ed [a common expression for answering every question
> correctly], and the worst kids in the classroom scored 15 [out of 20]. So, the exam was not
> selective at all.

Didem Hoca's comments about her students match larger patterns. In the 2017 TEOG

exam, 17,000 students correctly answered every question in the second exam session, and 665

students correctly answered every question in both sessions.[3] When the Ministry of National

Education renamed TEOG as LGS, one of the changes they made was increasing the difficulty of

exam questions. In Didem Hoca's view, this change was substantial.

> If you take the LGS questions and insert them into TYT [the college entrance exam], they
> will fit right in. I mean it. If we gave LGS math questions to ninth, tenth, or eleventh-grade
> students, they wouldn't be able to solve many of them. The questions defy rote learning.
> They give some information, and they ask the students to use analytical thinking and causal
> thinking. They require them to use their brain. They are of top-notch quality.

Other interviewees similarly described LGS questions as long paragraphs that gave

different and multiple types of information and required students to incorporate these into a multi-

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[3] Gazete Vatan, "Zirve'de 176 Öğrenci" July 1st, 2017. Accessed on January 4th, 2022:
https://www.gazetevatan.com/egitim/zirvede-176-ogrenci-1080928.

step solution. They argued that these questions took a considerably long time to solve and required focus and analytical thinking.

The unique difficulty of the LGS exam questions was a common understanding in the field. National media outlets interviewed experts on the exam day who drew attention to challenging questions. Newspapers published articles that compared the smaller number of students who correctly answered every question in the 2018 LGS to those who answered all the questions correctly in previous years' TEOG exams.[4] Booksellers and teachers began to refer to TEOG questions as "old generation questions" and LGS questions as "new generation questions." Parents widely used this terminology to describe how the LGS exam challenged their children at a new level.

> [daughter's name] was terrific at math. She was at the top of her class in seventh grade—I was keeping tabs. Her math was always good until *the new generation* questions appeared. She then lost her interest/enthusiasm for math. (Buket)

> No matter how good [daughter's name] is in math, everyone has got for their work cut out with these *new generation questions*. It takes time to get used to them, to not be intimidated when you come across these questions, to read a question of that length, and to comprehend…. (Funda)

This change in the exam's difficulty level created ambiguity about what study materials to use for a significantly challenging exam. Students who took the first LGS exam in 2018 experienced this uncertainty acutely. The Ministry of National Education began to publish monthly sample questions to familiarize students with the the exam's new style. Still, there was an overall scarcity of test banks with the "new generation" questions. Tansel was an eighth-grade social

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[4] Gazete Vatan, "Zirve'de 176 Öğrenci" July 1st, 2017. Accessed on January 4th, 2022: https://www.gazetevatan.com/egitim/zirvede-176-ogrenci-1080928.

studies teacher whose daughter took the entrance exam in 2019. He describes the difficulty of finding appropriate study materials.

> In the year before my daughter took the high school exam, unknowns were paramount. How many questions were there going to be? Were they going to be open-ended or multiple-choice? Publication houses were holding back and waiting for the system to become clear before putting together a team to create new questions. In my daughter's exam year [2019], some of the source materials on subjects like history or religion [still] had a lot of short questions, questions in the old style. She would solve them in the blink of an eye. [But] There were [also] some test banks that had new generation questions. These had come out in the spring semester of 2018.

By 2020, most publication houses had updated their test banks with "new generation" questions of varying difficulties. The problem then became one of matching. Parents had to acquire test banks that would challenge their children but not burn them out to improve their performance throughout the eighth grade. Institutional guidance was particularly needed but lacking in a lot of cases. In public schools, the Ministry of National Education forbade teachers from using, promoting, or requesting their students purchase any study materials besides the official Ministry textbooks.[5] It gave governors orders to investigate teachers who went against this rule. As a result, it was risky for public school teachers to recommend specific books for inquiring parents or students. Private school teachers faced a similar restriction because of economic competition. As many franchise schools have their own publication houses, the administration often requested that teachers refrain from promoting a competing group's test bank. As a result, schoolteachers often advised their students to purchase books according to their own learning level and goals. Take Ziynet, a Turkish teacher at a tutoring-center-turned-private school in Istanbul:

> I advise them to know their own needs and to tell the storekeepers once they go to a bookstore: "I am good at Turkish so [give me] a [testbank] with good questions, or "I want to review the materials a little bit more in Turkish, so [give me] an intermediate book," or

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[5] Memurlar.net, "MEB, Kaynak Yayın Aldıran Okullara Soruşturma Açın, Dedi" September 2eighth, 2018, Accessed on January 4th, 2022: https://www.memurlar.net/haber/778826/meb-kaynak-yayin-aldiran-okullara-sorusturma-acin-dedi.html

"I want to start Turkish from the beginning. Give me a book that's a little easy." This is how we start with our students. I give them support with the selection of their second test banks. For instance, I say, "You have finished this book. You don't need another book in the same fashion. These may be better for you." It is risky to recommend publications because we have our own publications as private schools. So, we do not like recommending much. We typically assign parts from our test books and solve those questions in the classroom.

In contrast to schools, tutoring centers typically distributed sets of test banks that made the task of study material selection easier. These sets would include separate books for every exam subject and were replenished throughout the year as students worked through them. Enrollment fees covered their costs. Still, most families often bought test banks separately here and there, but tutoring centers' book provisions lowered the stakes of these spontaneous purchases.

Changes in LGS's difficulty level introduced a second problem: how to tell whether a student was studying enough. Eighth-grade parents typically assumed a supervising role concerning exam preparation. They observed their children and evaluated whether they were putting in the necessary effort. They made sure their children attended study periods and mock exams at their tutoring centers. They monitored whether their children sat at their desks with their books open, without their phones, every day for substantial amounts of time. They perused the pages of test banks for scribbling and markings to see whether their children solved the problems and compared their answers with the answer key. Among these indicators of adequate exam preparation, solving a specific number of questions every day occupied an important position. Parents often became involved in setting a particular number as a goal and making sure their children did not routinely fail to meet that goal. Nonetheless, it was not clear to many just how many questions were enough with the "new generation" questions and the amount of time it took most students to solve them.

Teachers and tutors tended to say it was relative and there was no "one-size-fits-all" answer. For instance, in a PTO meeting with some eighth-grade parents, Kavak's student counselor Merve told the parents in attendance that she was often asked how many practice questions a day were "sufficient." She stated, "This depends entirely on the topic and the student. There is no single formula." Tutors similarly set different daily study goals for each student. They assigned fifty questions to some students and 100 to others. The logic was often unclear to parents: Were the assignments made according to students' aptitude for work and motivation? Or did they reflect how much a given student needed to study to perform at a particular level? The arbitrariness of the assignment was also evident in the contradictory expectations from the same students. Some students were instructed to solve fifty questions by their tutoring center teachers, 150 questions by their private tutors, and 100 questions by their schoolteachers.

Serendipitous Decisions and Judicious Purchases

To answer how Turkish parents make decisions regarding exam preparation, it is perhaps necessary to examine our assumptions about the nature of social life and action that raises the question of how people act under uncertain conditions. Most conceptions of social action involve intentionality as the realization of prior intentions through available means (Johnson-Hanks 2005). We tend to think social action is the act of choosing appropriate means to fulfill previous preferences based on a sufficient level of confidence about the causal power of available means. In this scheme, uncertainty about the causal power of available means inhibits action, leading us to the question of the possibility of action (and choice) under these circumstances.

Against this mechanical understanding, John Dewey argues that "the distinctive character of practical activity, one which is so inherent it cannot be eliminated, is the uncertainty which attends it" (1929:6). Many anthropologists and cultural sociologists follow Dewey's example in

offering a novel perspective on uncertainty, chance, and contingency as fundamental aspects of human experience. They argue that people engage with such precarity in various ways: some attempt to control or eliminate it and others learn to live with it (Cooper and Pratten 2015; Honkasalo 2006). Further, these scholars emphasize that uncertainty and contingency do not arrest action but spur deliberative action, imagination, and improvisation (Cooper and Pratten 2015; Whyte 2009). Johnson-Hanks (2005) argues that meaningful social action does not involve a commitment to a specific imagined future but an openness to forming new goals as opportunities present themselves in crisis contexts marked with substantial uncertainty. She calls this flexibility "judicious opportunism" (Johnson-Hanks 2005).

Turkish parents demonstrate a similarly judicious approach to strategizing for the high school entrance exam. Instead of searching for a perfect set of study materials, they engage in trial-and-error. They gather advice from multiple sources, purchase study materials in small installments rather than at once, mix books with various difficulty levels, and discard some along the way after testing their fit with their children. Most importantly, they act with the acknowledgment that there is room for calibration.

For example, Suleyman was a public employee from a small Anatolian town who was heavily involved in his son's exam preparation. Suleyman's son attended a private middle school but not a tutoring center. In the August before eighth grade, Suleyman purchased him a set of books that involved instruction and practice tests. His son reviewed fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade topics through these books. When the school year started, Suleyman examined a sample study plan that the school's counselor gave them, watched Youtube videos about productive study habits, and meticulously created an "ambitious" study plan for his son. According to the program,

his son would solve sample problems from 6 pm to 10:30 pm in forty-minute sessions and ten-minute breaks.

His son needed many test banks to solve four hours of problems every day. Suleyman learned about potential books from multiple sources. He asked schoolteachers and perused Facebook group posts where other students and parents named books their tutors and teachers recommended to them. Based on these recommendations, he purchased some books. Soon after, he noticed that their selection was not working.

> I understood we made a mistake. We thought publications with difficult math questions were good, so we began problem-solving through difficult test banks. I figured that math is a course where you must proceed in steps. Later, with the assistance of one of his teachers, we rank-ordered the books we had purchased according to their level of difficulty. He [the son] resumed his study by solving the practice questions on any given topic in easy books and proceeded to more challenging books.

Like Suleyman, many parents addressed the dilemma of adequately challenging their children by rank-ordering test books and proceeding from "easier" to the more "difficult." Ata was another father who used a similar rationale when purchasing his son's test banks. I had recruited him into the study through a Facebook group on LGS. As we talked about the group's influence on his son's exam preparation experience, he mentioned benefiting from advice circulating about which test banks to buy. "Teachers (group members) used to publish certain stuff. Someone from the previous year had created a list of test books and ordered them from easy to difficult. That excel table came in very handy. We started with the easy books from that list."

Two factors enabled these parents to address the study material uncertainty through rank ordering: exam preparation was a year-long period, and they were confident of their children's commitment to studying for the exam over several months. Parents could adopt a judicious selection criterion without a pressing need to get it right the first time. The long, temporal horizon also gave parents room for improvisation without a massive penalty. For instance, many parents

told me they purchased test banks that later proved to be of little use. This frustrated some, while others saw it as a natural, unharmful part of the preparation experience. To illustrate this, we may compare Funda with Sare. For Funda, selecting test banks for her daughter was a stressful task.

> It is so difficult to buy a test bank because your child must like it. She must accept it. She must say: "These questions are good." I have had to put away some books. They were untouched, but I put them away, because she said: "I don't want to solve these problems, mom. These questions are not fit for me." That was very tough. Because a new type of question came out: the "new generation questions." They are so long. Yet the book you buy has to be difficult in a reasonable way. If you buy something that's too easy, it's a waste of money. If you buy something that's too difficult, it's hard on your child. So, you try to find a middle ground. I did a lot of reading. I would read the comments on that [Facebook] group, I told you before. I received a lot of help from them. Which publication house is reasonably difficult? Which of them is too difficult? Which publication house to start off with? Which one to save for later? You cannot even get to feel happy about her performance in any publication houses' mock exams because she says the questions were too easy. These are very confusing matters for parents, especially if your child does not go to a tutoring center or something and you are overseeing the whole thing.

Funda pointed to the "new generation questions" as the source of the uncertainty about test bank selection. Despite the underlying frustration and confusion in the excerpt, Funda was a middle-class mother for whom the trouble was not the monetary cost of an unused book. Instead, an off-the-mark purchase reminded her of her solitude in the task of exam preparation. Like Funda, Sare also put away test banks that she purchased upon inspecting the questions more closely. As a middle school science teacher, she was experienced in the task.

> We were very deliberate…. We asked, which books are good? Which are well prepared? Sometimes, I would buy a book and ask him to leave it after solving a few tests because it was inappropriate for us. For example, I purchased Hiz's 600 questions in the winter break. The questions did not seem to be of high quality.

Another factor that allowed families to be flexible in book selection and mitigated some uncertainties about the appropriate material was the number of books they expected their children to finish by the time they took the entrance exam. Because this number was far too great, no matter which book they started with, they would have worked with a large set of test banks by the end of

eighth grade. For instance, a Kavak student counted forty-seven books in her room when I interviewed her and her mother in May, a month before the entrance exam. Buying this many books was common among the participants, as illustrated by the "memento" pictures parents took before bagging and throwing out test banks after the LGS (Figure 13).

Figure 13 Adile's son's test banks

Source: Author

The uncertainties surrounding suitable study materials may seem like a byproduct of social class position. I have previously stated that tutoring centers eliminate this type of uncertainty through book provisions, and the families I quoted in this section had forgone tutoring centers. But parents like Suleyman, Ata, and Funda were not precarious: they represented secularly middle-class households with post-secondary degrees and exceptionally high-achieving children. They did

not lack the resources to enroll their children at a tutoring center; they chose to approach exam preparation as a collaborative project between them and their children, whom they monitored and coached consistently through eighth grade. They believed tutoring centers had little to offer them at best and slowed their children down at worst. As such, their experiences of uncertainty in book purchases point to a different type of uncertainty than that introduced by material limitations and precarity. It is the uncertainty of parents who have a strong cultural inclination to be committed to their children's education but must discover what that looks like by playing it by ear. It is the uncertainty of social class reproduction under strain and rapid changes.

How Many Questions are Too Many? Setting Daily Test Goals

When I visited Sultan at her home for an early morning interview in late October, she welcomed me to an elaborate breakfast table in her kitchen. Sultan was an eighth-grade mother with a high school degree whose husband had a primary school degree. Despite their little schooling, they owned a successful business with two branches. Her husband—who had no English skills—had gone a few years ago to the USA to explore new business opportunities. Sultan singlehandedly parented her four children, the second of whom was a male eighth-grade student at Kavak Middle School. Over tea, a generous serving of pastries, salami, honey, and cream, Sultan lit a cigarette and launched into the interview with heartfelt complaints about her son.

> He is supposed to prepare for the entrance exam. But he doesn't study at all. I don't know what we can do about this tablet obsession. He attends the school's [after hours] courses. He was there yesterday. He told me he solved 200 questions when I picked him up afterwards. I asked him which subject it was, and he said English. I told him to ease up on English; it's a waste of time. He needs to focus on math and Turkish. But he said he likes English and knows it well. He also asked me whether four wrong answers in 200 questions were good or bad. I said, "It's good, it's good. Now move on to Math."

For parents whose children eventually did not get a seat at a selective high school, the defining struggle of eighth grade was motivating them to study. These parents were at a complete loss as to how to establish work discipline and improve their children's grades. Their attempts to convince their children to study for the LGS exam led to frequent familial conflicts and eroded their sense of agency as parents. Those who struggled in this sense were typically working class, divorced, or separated mothers who lacked social, economic, and cultural capital. Fatma and Dilara had trouble sending their children to a tutoring center because their ex-partners would not agree to pay for it. Sultan, Dilara, and Hasret felt they couldn't establish clear academic expectations for their children because their (ex) spouses undermined or did not support them in this endeavor. On multiple occasions, these parents followed up expressions of frustration and desperation about their children's exam preparation by soliciting my advice about what they could do differently. For them, then, precarity was disguised as uncertainty, "the lived experience of a pervasive sense of vulnerability" (Cooper and Pratten 2015:1). Chapter 7 examines eighth-grade experiences of this type in greater detail.

However, having more cooperative children committed to studying did not mean parents experienced less uncertainty, albeit perhaps a different type of uncertainty. Many of them were aware that sitting at one's desk all night, isolated from their tablets and families, did not guarantee that children studied for the entrance exam effectively or consistently. They tried to establish responsible study practices but experienced many uncertainties due to the changes in the level of difficulty in LGS questions.

Before delving into how families navigate these uncertainties, we ought to say a few words about how people on the ground measured adequate exam preparation. One of the most frequently used tools was daily and weekly study programs. These programs sometimes specify how long

students should study, but most also set the number of sample problems students ought to solve from their test banks (Figure 14). Counselors in private schools, private tutors, and tutoring center advisers typically gave students a weekly study program. They asked students (and their parents) to report back to them with the actual number of questions they solved. For instance, science tutor Helin called her students' parents every two weeks. She expected these parents to answer how many questions their children solved daily (not many did). Parents with children who did not go to a private tutor also tried to keep them accountable. Some of them created elaborate excel sheets that tracked how many problems they solved in each test bank they owned and how many they answered correctly (Figure 15).

Figure 14 Weekly Schedule Sample

This schedule has a column for each weekday. The top cells list Turkish, math, and science as the primary subjects that a student should study every day, with "Hedef:40" or "Hedef: 30" indicating the number of problems that ought to be solved within that subject. English, science, and social sciences are listed interchangeably throughout the week, showing their secondariness. İlkgül's daughter abided by these instructions partially. On Monday, she reported having solved the appointed math and science questions, but not the Turkish or English ones. Between Tuesday and Friday, she did not report any problem-solving. On Saturday, she solved some math and social sciences questions, but the numbers differed from the given goal.

Source: Author

Students rarely had the same weekly study program throughout eighth grade. On weekends and holidays, they solved more problems because they had more time without school. It was also a common understanding that students should start the year with consistent but small efforts, but their efforts should intensify in the months before the entrance exam. For instance, many students increased the number of problems they solved daily during the spring of 2020 when schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their parents found this fortunate because it happened in the months right before the exam, a period that they associated with hunkering down and working.

Within these general terms, doubts about the adequate number of problems one should aim to solve arose frequently. It was typically social contacts that instigated these doubts. Someone would hear some other students solve a remarkably higher number of problems, forcing them to reflect on their own child's routine. The fact that parents never brought up those who solved fewer questions is noteworthy as it attests to the pressure they experienced to keep up in this competitive endeavor.

At the beginning of the chapter, I introduced Adile, a Kavak mother who asked her son to intensify his studying upon learning his former school friend solved more daily problems than he did. Parent networks generated these anxieties by offering parents contrasts and counterfactuals. But they were also resourceful for parents who were already struggling with how to measure their children's study effectiveness. Every parent I recruited from the LGS Facebook page mentioned how reading the posts in the groups made them reflect on how many questions a day a student ought to or can solve. For instance, Ata told me that people often started a thread asking whether a particular number of questions were sufficient. Then others would comment that they solved 200 or 300 questions a day. Once, his son and a friend decided to test a claim that someone solved 1000 questions a day. They set their alarms at 4 am and did not stop problem-solving except for

brief bathroom and food breaks. They declared it was impossible to reach that number despite their best efforts.

Figure 15 Sample of a Study Aid

	ÇARPANLAR VE KATLAR			ÜSLÜ İFADELER			KÖKLÜ İFADELER			VERİ ANALİZİ			BASİT OLAYLARIN OLMA OLASILIĞI			CEBİRSEL İFADELER VE ÖZDEŞLİKLER			DOĞRUSAL DENKLEMLER			EŞİTSİZLİKLER			ÜÇGENLER			EŞLİK BENZERLİK			DÖNÜŞÜM GEOMETRİSİ			GEOMETRİK CİSİMLER			TOPLAM			
	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	SORU SAYISI	D	Y	
mrkz	69	65	4	118	116	2	160	157	3	21	21	0	67	66	1	125	122	3	100	98	2	73	73	0	104	101	3	50	49	1	63	63	0	135	131	4	1085	1062	23	98%
	6/29/19			6/29/19			6/29/19			7/3/19			7/11/19			7/12/19			7/13/19			7/14/19			7/18/19			7/19/19			7/26/19			7/26/19						
firca	35	35	0	52	48	4	68	65	3	35	35	0	53	52	1	61	60	1	58	57		60	59	1	47	46	1	37	35	2	16	16	0	46	44	2	568	552	16	97%
	6/29/19			6/29/19			6/29/19			7/3/19			7/11/19			7/12/19			7/13/19			7/14/19			7/18/19			7/19/19			7/26/19			7/26/19						
tudem eğitim	35	35	0	35	35	0				40	39	1	38	38	0	34	34	0	35	35	0	53	52	1	54	53	1	37	37	0	37	33	4	43	37	6	484	469	15	97%
	6/29/19			6/29/19			6/29/19			6/29/19			7/16/19			7/16/19			7/16/19			7/16/19			7/18/19			7/19/19			7/26/19			7/26/19						
KVA	200	198	2	185	183	2	150	149	1	65	64	1	87	87	0	130	128	2	180	178	2	97	97	0	174	172	2	71	68	3	69	68	1	201	199		1609	1591	18	99%
	7/1/19			7/1/19			7/2/19			7/3/19			7/11/19			7/12/19			7/13/19			7/14/19			7/18/19			7/19/19			7/26/19			7/26/19						
	339	333	6	390	382	8	418	410	8	159	158	1	241	239	2	351	345	6	391	385	6	284	282	2	362	356	6	195	185	10	191	184	7	425	415	10	3746	3674	72	
	98%			98%			98%			99%			99%			98%			98%			99%			98%			95%			96%			98%			98%			

Sheet tabs: MATEMATİK | MATEMATİK ZOR | FEN | FEN ZOR | TÜRKÇE | PARAGRAF | İNKILAP TARİHİ | İNGİLİZCE | DİN KÜLTÜRÜ | +

In this excel sheet that Ata prepared for her son and shared with me, there are different sheets for every subject. The sheet on display is for math. Column A lists logos of different test banks. The other columns list eighth grade math topics such as square roots, exponents, and equations. Ata has put down in the cells the number of questions in the corresponding test banks for each topic, along with the number of those his son answered correctly (D) or incorrectly (Y). He has also calculated the percentages of correct answers for each test bank and math topic.

Source: Author

Some parents were deeply unsettled by hearing other children solved more questions daily. They typically responded to this information by asking their children to solve more. For instance, Ayfer was another mother I recruited from the LGS groups on Facebook. She told me that she would read posts about how many questions everyone's children solved, but her attempts to get her son to go above fifty questions a day often resulted in a brawl and her husband's intervention. Funda was another mother who described reading posts about students who solved "300–400" questions when her daughter hadn't gone above "100–150" as "worrying." She often told her daughter how many questions other people were solving to communicate that she had high expectations. "There have been times when she solved 280 questions, but it backfired in a couple

of days. The poor child feels suffocated. There's no need." In these cases, parents used affective and verbal cues from their children to determine how much was "enough" in the face of uncertainty.

Parents often mentioned changes in LGS's difficulty as the source of their ambiguity regarding daily study measures. Consider Bilge, a mother who joined the research through the online survey I distributed on the Facebook groups. Bilge was an engineer with an associate degree, married to another engineer with a master's degree. Their twins—a boy and a girl— attended a private school that the parents chose for its reputation for LGS preparation. The twins were professional athletes who continued training and participating in races during eighth grade. In our first interview, Bilge had told me that her daughter, Sanem, would solve thirty to fifty problems a day. In our second interview, I noticed Sanem sitting next to her mother by the camera and invited her to join the discussion. In response to a question about the role of sports in her eighth-grade experience, Sanem brought up how much studying was enough.

> *Esma:* Can you tell me a little about what it meant for you to swim in eighth grade?
>
> *Sanem:* So, I have this thing about ... studying hard. When I was pressed for time, I solved more problems. When I had too much time on my hands, I procrastinated. I didn't *not solve anything,* but I didn't solve too many. For instance, my friends would solve 400 problems. When would I have time to solve 400 questions? How is it even possible to solve 400 questions?
>
> *Bilge:* Sweetheart, I can do the math. These questions each take three to five minutes to solve. You are typically slower at the beginning. Five times 400 makes 2000 minutes. What's that divided by sixty? That would mean no sleep. It's not realistic. Still, some folks pressured their children about this. For instance, if you need to solve 400 questions, there are many different types of books. Some of these have basic questions that test you on summations or something. Some kids solve problems that will add nothing to them to reach a certain number of questions. Or they randomly circle a choice or copy from the answer key.
>
> *Sanem:* They solve easy questions.
>
> *Bilge:* That's what I said. What's it called these days, new generation what?

Sanem: New generation questions. I used to solve the toughest ones.

Bilge: Sanem's test banks were always a bit… The twin's tutor used to assign them different books based on their capacities. She used to give books that would challenge her. What is the use if Sanem solved questions like "What's 300 plus 500'?

This interview excerpt illustrates a common belief among some families that solving more problems does not mean better learning. Because the high school exam has a mix of easy and difficult questions, students with bigger ambitions learned along the way that they ought to practice with complex questions, solving fewer. For instance, Rüya was another upper-middle-class mother whose children would later get into Istanbul Erkek High School (ranked second in Turkey). She explained why they did not expect their children to solve the same number of questions every day.

> They are kids, but they are smart kids. When I inquired about the number of questions, they would defend themselves. They would say: "I solved fifty problems from Nar test book, but when I work on Karekök, I usually solve 250." As parents who're familiar with these names, we used to consider that and say, "Okay that's an easy test bank, that's a harder one. So, fifty is fine."

Eighth-grade students and their parents believed problem-solving to be a helpful exam preparation strategy. They frequently attempted to use the number of problems students solved daily to measure whether they effectively prepared for the exam. Despite widespread discourse about the number of problems in the field, many believed that there was no golden number that could be prescribed to all students. The elusiveness of this standard of hard work stressed some families more than others, who concluded that they couldn't evaluate their children's exam preparation efforts with the number of problems they solved.

Anticipating Exam Performance: Uncertainties about the Future

In the LGS workshop that he organized at the beginning of eighth grade, Musa Hoca distributed a list to the parents in the audience. It was a list of students with some scores next to

them. He explained that he used students' grades from the previous year to estimate their potential high school entrance exam scores if "nothing changed." He then encouraged the audience to use this list to "candidly" reflect on their children's chances of doing well in the exam and consider what steps they needed to take during this school year to see any improvements.

When I interviewed İlkgül, a middle-class Kavak mother, a few weeks later, she told me she did not feel good about Musa Hoca distributing that list. She thought using student scores from seventh grade when most students did not take the upcoming exam "seriously" wouldn't accurately predict their potential exam scores. She believed her daughter was already working harder than she did back then. When I asked her whether she could guess what her daughter would do in the exam, her reply emphasized the uncertainty and contingency of the future.

> Think of it as a marathon. It will come down to what my daughter does in the last bit, whether she sprints to the finish line in the last two to three months. We must direct her, but it's up to her at the end of the day. That three-month period towards the end is critical. I can't say anything for sure at this moment.

How social actors produce and use anticipatory knowledge about the future sheds light on cultural and organizational processes (Calkins 2019; Daipha 2015; Flyverbom and Garsten 2021; Gibson 2011; Mische 2009, 2014; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). From a governmentality perspective, anticipation in the form of prophecy, predictions, contingency plans, and narratives are a means to control and shape the future (Mische 2014; Flyverbom and Garsten 2021). With the amount of effort put into preparing for the high school entrance exam, the tasks of evaluating current student performance and anticipating future performance are important preoccupations for families, students, and teachers. It grounds decision-making and helps parents or tutors determine whether they should intervene to align students' present conduct with future possibilities.

Organizational actors and practice play an essential role in producing narratives and numbers to help families anticipate their children's exam performances. Teachers tend to believe

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that too many students take the entrance exam out of a blatant refusal to predict (or acknowledge) their dismal chances of succeeding in the LGS exam. This creates a lot of frustration for teachers who wish to orient their teaching towards within-reach skills, academic and otherwise. For instance, Oya, the deputy principal at a private middle school, argued that 20 of their 60 eighth-grade students consistently failed to rank in the top ten percentile in the mock exams that they administered. She believed that these students' families should use the *"feedback"* that the school had given them to realize that their efforts to prepare for the LGS were futile and better abandoned. Concerned with the potential pushback to this direct forecast, she expected parents to come to this conclusion on their own.

> We often remind parents of their students' current state through their assigned mentors. We say: "Your child has this many mistakes, answered correctly that many questions. Here is his ranking." But this depends a little on the parent's capacity, education, and familiarity with these things. For instance, a parent came up to me in April to ask whether her son had a chance of getting into Kartal Imam Hatip High School. A parent rarely catches me off-guard to this degree. You see how removed she is from everything despite the weekly input we give them. Her child takes a weekly mock exam. It's clear how many questions he answered correctly. A parent with this wish ought to know the cutoff score for Kartal Imam Hatip.

This excerpt illustrates key dimensions of the anticipatory practices that I will touch upon in the rest of the chapter. Oya's reference to the month (April) in which she had this conversation establishes temporality as an essential theme. Oya expected the parent would have a clear sense of her son's potential performance *by April*, with the help of his performance in mock exams that the school organized throughout the year. Ambiguity about possible exam performance was indeed more remarkable in the fall semester, when interviewed parents often concluded their speculations about their children's future with "I don't know," "We'll see," and "kismet." However, this does not mean predictability increased incrementally throughout the year with repeated performance. In many of their experiences, like İlkgül's emphasis on the last three months of exam preparation,

their children's exam performance was made or broken by how they spent the spring months. This observation was particularly salient during the remote education period in 2020. Some students lost constant contact with teachers, while others improved their learning significantly through serendipitous encounters with miracle-working tutors.

A second important theme in Oya's excerpt is the allusion to the tools of anticipatory knowledge production. Oya underlines two metrics parents could potentially use: the number of questions a student has correctly answered in the test banks, and the student's ranking in mock exams. While teachers generally encourage using these as cues, in-depth interviews with parents revealed the imprecise nature of the tools of anticipation. The difficulty level in different mock exams varies greatly because schools and tutoring centers use tests prepared by multiple publication houses. These test results give families inconsistent input about their children's status. For instance, Reyhan (Kavak) told me that "one day (name of daughter) comes up to me and says she did well in Turkish and answered every question correctly. The next day she says she had six incorrect answers in Turkish." Even parents who have a remarkably detailed account of their children's exam performance might feel uncertain about its implications. For instance, Adile told me how many questions her son answered correctly in various subjects on three separate mock exams within one minute. She connected this information to predictions about how many questions he is likely to and ought to answer correctly in LGS to get into a good high school. But she concluded it with how little she still "knew" about the future, alluding to the difficulty of anticipatory knowledge production.

> The first mock exam they gave the kids in his tutoring center was called the "negative motivation exam." I found out later. It was a tough exam. They tried to make the kids face the reality of the exam and get motivated. It was awful. They use these exams to assign students to classes, as you know. My son ranked thirty-fifth in the 195 students at the tutoring center in that assignment exam. But in this negative motivation exam, he ranked 120th. I felt awful. I considered whether he struggles with anxiety during the exams.

Anyway, then they had a second mock exam. It was an easy one, but when he turned back and checked his answers, he was surprised he was off the mark in many of them. He had nine correct and five incorrect answers in math. He struggles in Turkish. He had four mistakes in the Turkish section [in the second mock exam]. Then they gave them a medium difficulty exam. He had twelve correct answers in Math. He improved in math. He had thirteen incorrect answers, but I think he'll turn them into correct ones [in time]. I sense that he can go up to fifteen [from twelve]. Frankly, it is my first time preparing a child for LGS, so I don't know either. [After more reports about performance in other subjects] If he wanted to get into a good school, I told him that he could not have more than seven incorrect answers. He asked, "It's not possible to do now [with current scores]?" and I said no. It really isn't.

With the difficulty of mock exam questions constantly fluctuating, parents often struggle to form definitive expectations of their children based on the number of correctly answered questions. Ranking in mock exams also means little because most mock exams are locally administered to a few hundred students, while LGS compares the exam performances of approximately a million students. The number of questions that a student correctly answers in tests might reflect their level of learning, but this is only an indirect indicator of LGS exam success, which depends on how well a student performs relative to others in his or her year. In this sense, LGS connotes the "positionality" of learning in Turkey's high school transition regime. With positional goods, the scarcity of something determines its value. No matter how many questions a student correctly answers in a mock exam, without information about how other students would fare in the same exam, parents struggle to incorporate these results into anticipatory knowledge about their children's potential LGS performance.

Many parents acknowledge the "positionality" of LGS performance by registering their children for nationally administered mock exams. These exams differ from the regular mock exams because of the hundreds of thousands participating in them. The most famous of them are the ÖZDEBİR exams, administered approximately six times a year for eighth-grade students by The Private Education Foundation. Talk about mock exams consistently frames them as tools of

interpersonal comparison and future forecast. This frame stands in significant contrast to the view of exams as assessment tools for student learning. For instance, Sare told me, "Sometimes I didn't think his tutoring center was sufficient. I made him sit exams like ÖZDEBİR and TÖDER to see his ranking in Turkey. We did well in some of them and dropped down in some." A student I interviewed along with his mother used the analogy of racehorse blinders to make a similar point.

> Think of it this way. You start the race. You are running. Do you know how horses wear blinders to avoid seeing others and getting distracted? We were not racehorses; we needed to see the state of affairs with our competitors, so we participated in national exams.

Yet even national exams are not very precise tools for comparison and forecast. Their impreciseness became apparent during the COVID pandemic when all education went online. Ata's son participated in many mock exams before March 2020. His rankings fluctuated from being placed in the top 1,000 to being placed in the top 3,000. Ata employed an operative algorithm for future prediction: they would disregard the best and the worst performance and take the average of the rest. After March 2020, ÖZDEBİR started to mail mock exams to students' homes rather than administering them in person at tutoring centers. Ata's son's rankings began to noticeably decline in this period. "Our ranking in the last two exams was pretty bad. By bad, I mean top third percentile. We had prepared so well and put so much effort and labor into it. Later, we noticed exam questions circulated among students online." He and his son spent this period worrying about the implications of his latest rankings. "Two weeks later in the LGS exam, we saw that we had no reason to worry. Our results were like our (initial) mock exams, and we were among the top 0.49th percentile. The result was more or less what we were expecting." Like Ata, Rüya mentioned panicking when her twins' rankings declined from first and second to tenth and thirty-second in the school's online mock exams. She contacted the student counselor to inquire about this decline, and the counselor tried to reassure her that the twins were still doing fine, but other students were

"catching up." This explanation did not comfort her until her children revealed that their friends texted about exam questions on WhatsApp. This new bit of information helped Rüya explain away the worse than expected rankings with the imperfectness of mock exams as a tool for student comparison.

As these examples illustrate, anticipating exam performance is fundamental to exam preparation practices and experiences. Many students and parents are preoccupied, sometimes incessantly, with tools that promise to shed light on their chances of success at the end of this year-long endeavor. They mobilize traditional means of learning assessment for producing anticipatory knowledge. Still, these tend to result in fractured and inconsistent information for parents whose relation to the future remains uncertain. Unlike uncertainty about venues or strategies of exam preparation, this future uncertainty is not a fundamentally hostile force in their lives. While parents are sometimes distressed about the inconsistency of anticipatory practices, unknowing the future affords them the hope and motivation to keep pressing on until that fateful day in early June.

Discussion

The aim of this chapter has been to analyze how preparation for the highly competitive high school entrance exam was socially organized. This question has been motivated by recent developments in research on education that emphasize the key role of "institutional standards" in the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic advantage (Lareau et al. 2016). Following Bourdieu (1984) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), scholars began to see schooling as a "field of organized striving" (Martin 2003) composed of hierarchical positions. Access to these positions is influenced by economic, cultural, and social resources whose value is specific to the field (Lareau et al. 2016; Marginson 2008; Maton 2005; Naidoo 2004). Much of the research on education over the next several decades occupied itself with examining how access to resources has patterned

access to privileged positions in the education field, without due attention to the social practices that facilitated this process. As scholars began to focus on how parents and students put their resources into the pursuit of educational advantage (e.g., Calarco 2011; Lareau et al. 2016; Streib 2018), they began to engage more closely with the game metaphor of the field theory (Martin 2003), drawing particular attention to the importance of playing by the rules. These scholars argued that "convergence between institutional expectations and individual behavior" was crucial to success in the educational sphere (Calarco 2014b:185).

This research project set out to follow the example of such work to examine what rules and institutional standards characterize the high school transition field from the perspective of actors who occupy it: students, parents, teachers, and tutors. The answer to this question would illuminate cultural frames about educational achievement and advantage, as well as the educational mechanisms of social stratification. Yet the analyses in the chapter reveal that eighth-grade students and their families do not believe that the success of their exam preparation endeavors depends on adherence to clear rules or procedures. Even the experiences of actors occupying the most privileged position are characterized by a myriad of uncertainties stemming from the Turkish education systems particular openness to political pressures. In that sense, this chapter deals with the social implications of the Turkish state's regular interventions in the secondary education field as detailed in Chapter 1.

Specifically, this chapter demonstrates how political incursions into the education field threaten the process of generating common frames and procedures to guide and orient exam preparation practices/strategies. It introduces three categories of uncertainties: uncertainties about the social landscape of exam preparation, uncertainties about strategies of exam preparation, and uncertainties about the future outcomes of exam preparation. The JDP government's political

campaign against tutoring centers created substantial ambiguities as to whether families ought to coordinate exam preparation with schools or private tutors. At the same time, confusion about appropriate study materials and programs emerged in the aftermath of the change in the format and the heightened difficulty of the high school entrance exam. Lastly, the shift from a common-standards exam to one of selection and ranking created ambiguities about students' chances of success in the LGS.

These observations reveal the dynamism of the Turkish education field to which social agents remain committed in the absence of the guiding influence of a well-functioning habitus. According to Bourdieu, social fields compel agents to be interested in the social games that define them. Using the notion of "*illusio*" for being caught up in the game, he contends that agents have internalized interests in showing up and participating in the game; they "admit that the game is worth playing, and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing" (Bourdieu 1998:77). Most eighth-grade Turkish students and their families have *illusio* in this sense: a certain interest in preparing for and participating in the high school entrance exam. Yet Bourdieu's descriptions of the successful contestant as a well-socialized actor who internalized the structures of the field rests on a certain degree of durability and predictability of these structures. For instance, he contends that

> having the feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game. While the bad play is always off tempo, always too early or too late, the good player is the one who anticipates, who is ahead of the game. (Bourdieu 1998:80)

In contrast to this perspective on social action as habitual mastery of familiar conditions (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) or the enactment of taken-for-granted schemas and solutions, Turkish parents act deliberately, creatively, and judiciously in an education field undergoing an incessant process of reorganization. They seek to eliminate uncertainties about exam preparation

by seeking professional help and drawing on extended social networks. Yet few of the means available to them procured certainty. Instead, many struggled to live with the uncertainty and navigated it by being flexible, using social cues, and playing it by ear. This is not to say that they did not draw on any "stocks of knowledge" (Schutz 1970) or act haphazardly, but that each family created and pursued "locally rational solutions out of the more or less institutionalized heuristics and techniques with which they have equipped themselves over time" (Daipha 2015:9).

Although this chapter has empirically demonstrated the types and sources of uncertainties that influenced eighth-grade educational experiences in Turkey, more work is needed on the interplay of uncertainty and social class. I distinguish qualitatively the uncertainties expressed by the parents of the students who are "in the game" from the uncertainties expressed by parents of the students who are detached from the game and those who others (such as teachers) see as unworthy of the competition. I suspect that these qualitative differences might have a social class component, with the first type of uncertainty being connected to the ambiguity of social class reproduction while the latter is a manifestation of social and material precarity. However, without purposive and theoretical sampling to test this question, it must be put to rest.

CHAPTER 3: SCHOOL APPLICATION UNDER UNCERTAINTY

It is June 1, 2019, on a Saturday morning. I am accompanying my nephew (along with my father and brother-in-law) to a public middle school in the Magnolia district for the high school entrance exam that a million other students across the country will be taking with him. My nephew happened to be an eighth-grade student during my fieldwork year. All through the short car drive, my sister sends me text messages with prayers to have my nephew recite before entering the exam building and requests that I make sure he eats from the trail mix she packed with us. When I tell him that I will be making observations at the exam site, he declares, "Be prepared to see many girls who don't have faith in themselves to cry at the end. I may tear up a bit too."

There are about 600 people in the schoolyard by the time we arrive: sleepy fathers in slippers, showing up dutifully for this monumental event; mothers in headscarves haphazardly thrown around their heads and reciting Quran in a last-minute attempt to persuade Allah to aid their children. They read from thin booklets that I recognize from social gatherings, such as funerals and childbirths. Other parents hold another type of booklet distributed to the crowd by representatives of a tutoring center. Behind the logo of the tutoring center, the booklet consists of a list of high schools in Istanbul along with their base scores for placement from the previous year.

When the students are admitted one by one into the building at 9:10 a.m., bringing with them the allowed pencils, pencil sharpeners, erasers, IDs, and unmarked water bottles, parents begin to leave the schoolyard. No one is allowed in the yard while the exam resumes. By 10:40 a.m., when the first part of the exam ends and students are allowed a break, I join the hordes of parents walking towards the school and spot multiple people taking naps in cars parked along the side street by the school, filling time as they wait for their children. The school administration

takes a little too long to let in the crowd gathered before the gates. Parents begin to complain, "Can someone please open these gates?" Another one answers, "Would they ever? They have to make us suffer." "Bureaucracy…." Someone behind me mutters.

Once inside, parents try to locate their children among the crowd, some lamenting not having set a meeting spot. Many of them are asking the students how the exam went while trying to coax them into eating the bagels and chocolate bars they brought to increase their blood sugar. My brother-in-law and I spot my nephew at the meeting spot he suggested earlier. He tells us that his exam went well but that he couldn't focus much. As he read some questions, his mind drifted off and he tried to guess whether his friends would get the right answer. We tease him about being too selfless. As I look over the schoolyard, I note that most of the students seem to be in good spirits and are chatting happily with their adult companions. An announcement from the speakers cuts through the noise in the schoolyard, broadcasting that the exam will end at 12:50 p.m. and the test booklets will be released an hour later for any student who wishes to retrieve them.

Soon after, we are asked to leave the schoolyard again. When we come back to the schoolyard around 12:50, it is buzzing with excitement. Students who have left the exam early are explaining to their companions with great enthusiasm how many questions they had been able to answer, how many they left unanswered, and how they regulated their emotions throughout the whole ordeal. As my nephew predicted, I notice two students in tears, being consoled by their friends and parents. "It's not the end of the world, baby. Don't you worry," an adult woman is telling one of them. My nephew does not go back to the school retrieve his answer booklet because

he does not care to check his answers. Many others are the same, interviewed parents tell me later, because they have memorized their answers by heart.[1]

A few hours after the end of the exam, unofficial answer keys begin to circulate online. Television channels invite teachers to walk their audiences through the solutions. By the time the Ministry of National Education publishes the official answer key the next day on their website and newspapers distribute it,[2] a majority of exam takers have already checked their answers and consulted websites for an estimated exam score and ranking.[3] The last week of school starts on Monday, and few of the exam takers are present when I visit Kavak Middle School. Many of the families have either already gone on vacation or will be after the graduation party that is scheduled on the weekend. Irrespective of their children's performance, many experience a period of blissful relief and anticipation in the upcoming few weeks.

On the morning of June 24, they wake up early in the morning to check their official exam results on the Ministry's website. The morning is spent amid phone traffic, speaking to friends and kin who called ready to congratulate or console. On WhatsApp groups that day, teachers encourage their students and parents to share their results. Disappointed families ignore the requests, while happy ones humbly chose to text the results to favorite teachers in a private chat. After the official results are in, vacations are quickly concluded, bags are packed, and most families return to Istanbul to start the official school search.

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[1] The sequence of events from here onwards is compiled from the recollections of the interviewed families.

[2] See https://www.sabah.com.tr/egitim/lgs-sinav-sorulari-ve-cevaplari-yayinlandi-mi-2019-meb-ile-liselere-gecis-sinavi-lgs-sorulari-ve-cevap-anahtari-4676144; and https://www.haberturk.com/lgs-soru-cevap-anahtari-2019-meb-lgs-sorulari-ve-lgs-puan-hesaplama-icin-tiklayin-2482753.

[3] There are many websites online solely created for this service, but it is also offered by educational consulting websites and the websites of private schools. Some examples are https://lgspuanhesaplama.net/ https://www.basarisiralamalari.com/lgs-puan-hesaplama/.

The first and main round of high school applications takes place between July 1 and July 12. To aid parents through this process, the Ministry of National Education publishes an online "Guideline for Application and Student Placement in Secondary Education Transition" and launches an "application robot" for searching high schools with filters like location, school type, and quotas.[4] Kavak Middle School holds an information session for eighth-grade parents on July 2, where two classroom full of parents come to listen to the vice principal and the student counselor explain best practices for school applications and answer frequently asked questions. At the end of the meeting, parents line up in front of the presenter's desks to quickly get their opinion about the application lists they have drafted. The school does not empty for another forty-five minutes after the information session ends, and tens of parents visit it every day until July 12 to seek advice and to submit their formal applications.

It is this period of deliberation and decision-making that will be the focus of the next chapters. I will demonstrate that high school applications are problem situations ridden with uncertainties due to endogenous changes that undermine predictability within the student placement system. The primary problem is producing an application list that can reasonably be expected to enable a student's placement in a good school. Yet to be able to do that, parents must determine which schools are good (adopt a set of evaluative criteria) and their children's chances of getting into them. They need to determine how to balance different criteria against each other, such as which school attribute one should prioritize if one school has more of A but the other has more of B. The question of what is the appropriate attitude raises problems as well: Must they be risk averse in the list construction, or daring? Several external factors make it particularly

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[4] "Application Robot for Students Who Will Apply to High Schools with LGS"
https://www.meb.gov.tr/lgs-kapsaminda-okul-secimi-yapacak-ogrenciler-icin-tercih-robotu/haber/18905/tr

challenging for parents to answer these questions, as this chapter will illustrate. To process these uncertainties, parents typically turned to educational professionals who prescribed a set of rules and norms as "best practices" of school application. These practices revolved around the technical use of school rankings and the pursuit of the "highest" possible ranked school, irrespective of other school attributes. This logic of decision-making was promoted in national media, by the Ministry of National Education, and at schools. Parents felt they were expected to defer to rankings on multiple occasions. This chapter will demonstrate that the promotion of rankings as a decision-making device seeks to reintroduce predictability to a highly unpredictable student placement system by urging parents to make predictable choices. Yet parents' frequent use of other evaluative and selective criteria threatened institutionalization of school rankings and the stability of the placement system.

School Rankings in Context

Rankings and ratings are universal tools of valuation and decision-making in contemporary societies. They belong to a wide range of quantitative heuristics used for classification, categorization, and commensuration in political, commercial, and scientific organizations (Diaz-Bone and Didier 2016). Rankings reflect the contemporary trend of "economization," i.e., the use of evidence-based evaluation, reports, and performance measures in today's governance regimes (Mau 2020). In this cultural atmosphere, we revere numeric representations for their supposed objectivity, efficiency, and rigor (Espeland and Sauder 2016; Porter 1995). While rankings are equipped with this powerful and legitimate medium, their current pervasiveness also stems from organized efforts (Ringel et al. 2020). Formal organizations are capable of periodically producing new rankings and publishing them to larger audiences—an undertaking that requires a substantial

number of resources. Rankings have been institutionalized over the course of the late twentieth century as their production became organized.

Once produced and published, rankings demonstrate a high degree of "reactivity" by influencing individual and collective behavior (Espeland and Sauder 2016). This is due to their general usefulness in reducing complex and qualitative differences into simple numbers that are frugal and transportable. Rankings make evaluation time-efficient and cognitively less straining (Espeland and Sauder 2016). Rankings also communicate information about what other people believe about the value of organizations and objects. Past research demonstrates that decision-makers tend to infer quality from status when quality is uncertain (Correl et al. 2017; Salganik and Watts 2008). School rankings are particularly salient because of education's credentialing nature. Hiring managers often evaluate job candidates based on their institutional affiliations (Rivera 2011), and so people who want an advantage in the employment market draw on rankings and the "status beliefs" (what most people think are high-quality schools) therein to make schooling decisions.

While rankings assist individual decision-making, their widespread use has collective consequences that undermine social cooperation and equity (Mau 2020). As people and organizations are ranked through a mechanism that turns qualitative differences into quantitative ones, this often results in a self-reinforcing status hierarchy that is difficult to change (Espeland and Sauder 2016; Mau 2020). Rankings also put competitive pressures on people and organizations by rendering their performance, status etc. publicly visible, relative, and commensurable.

In Turkey, rankings play a central role in student placement into secondary and higher education institutions. Students are officially ranked according to their performance at the entrance exam. This rank order is an important indicator of who will get "the first pick" because the Ministry

places students into schools in their application lists using this order. A student at the top of the list is much more likely to be placed in their first choice compared to a student in the middle of the list. Position in the exam ranking is usually expressed in "percentiles" because of the large number of exam takers. Unlike the North American school systems, a student in the 90th percentile has not ranked higher than 90 percent of those in their cohort. In Turkey, the smaller the percentile, the higher a student's ranking. Hence someone in the first percentile has ranked higher than someone in the second percentile and so forth. Student rankings do more than determine students' likelihood of matching with their first-choice school. They also constitute the basis of "school rankings" and influence how students evaluate the status of schools under consideration.

Uncertainties of High School Placement

In his LGS seminar to eighth grade parents in October, Kavak Middle School's social studies teacher Musa Hoca laid out an important problem: "600,000 more students will be starting high school this year than last year. Do we have enough schools to accommodate this increase in student numbers? Will high schools have to start double-shifts?" In 2012, the JDP government had passed a law that lowered the age of first grade enrollment from six years of age (72–84 months) to five years of age (60–72 months). This was a controversial step as opponents to the law argued that five-year-old children were not developmentally ready for the first-grade curriculum. Pedagogical appropriateness of the law aside, the law created a substantially large first grade cohort that consisted of students who had waited to start school at age six, and students who just reached age five. This cohort started eighth grade in the 2019–20 academic year during my fieldwork. Many in the field speculated about the implications of competing against a larger cohort. With more students vying for the same seats, placement would be more competitive and selective, but just how much more was an unknown. For instance, Olcay's son was 67 months old

when he started first grade. He was unhappy through most of that year and did not want to go to school. Olcay told me she regretted not enrolling him at school the next year. In our first interview, months before the exam, she told me that "given the number of students who'll take the exam, I don't believe my son stands much of a chance." Another Kavak mother, Rabia, alluded similarly to conditions of heightened competition. "My cousin's daughter had three incorrect answers in last year's LGS and ranked in the top first percentile. This year you need to have fewer incorrect answers because so many people are going to be participating."

This uncertainty persisted well into the summer, after students had taken the exam but not yet received their official scores. Parents and students used imperfect tools in this period to predict their rankings. On the internet, there were many websites that gave an estimated exam score and ranking to students who put in the number of their correct answers. Exam takers by and large used these tools but took the predictions with a grain of salt because rankings were contingent on a number of factors, including the number of exam takers in a given year. Eighth-grade mother Ayfer explained her skepticism of online prediction tools in the following way:

> I was really focused on what was going to happen after the exam, like what is going to happen? How will the percentiles change? Online groups were very informative. Because when I put the number of correct and incorrect answers, we were given 5.7 percentile with last year's data, but every post I read on the topic said that percentiles would fall a lot and that's what ended up happening.

The specific educational policy to lower the age of schooling then created uncertainty about students' position in a merit-based hierarchy of relations. This information deficit was problematic for parents who, following the LGS exam, had started to formulate preferences and expectations about which schools their children could potentially attend. Once a problem of a highly contingent future, ascertaining their children's potential ranking was now a pressing matter with high school applications only one month away.

After the reception of official results resolved uncertainty about student rankings, it was followed by another uncertainty concerning the likelihood of being placed in a particular school under consideration. This was an uncertainty that applicants had to endure throughout the application period. Parents typically had little confidence in their children's likelihood of being placed into a given school because schools' selectivity fluctuated a lot from one year to the other. There were two common metrics to evaluate high schools' admission selectivity: rankings/percentiles and what is called a "base score." The base score referred to the exam score of the last admitted (worst performing) student in a school. Schools' base scores fluctuated because the Ministry maintained its score calculation algorithm while constantly changing the difficulty of the entrance exam (Table 3). Rankings were typically seen as less volatile than base scores, but still changed each year. In 2018, the first year of the LGS exam, almost every high school admitted students with lower exam scores than those of 2017 because the test questions were typically more difficult. Base scores increased in 2019, only to reduce again in 2020, when the Ministry increased the difficulty of exam questions to be able to rank order the greater number of exam takers compared to the last year.

Between 2017 and 2020, most schools have progressively become more selective, but the change was more pronounced in some schools than others (see table 3, for instance, and compare Galatasaray and Validebağ's rankings between 2019 and 2020). In the weeks before student placements in 2018 and 2020, there was talk that school percentiles would increase, but no one would predict confidently the magnitude of this increase.[5]

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[5] The fluctuations may reflect the instruments shared and promoted by the Ministry of National Education. One might ask if, instead of the exam scores of the students at the leftmost end of the distribution, the Ministry published the median or mean exam score of all the students admitted to a given school, parents might have a stronger impression of how selective a school has been (and was going to be) across the years.

Table 3 Changes in Admission Metrics in Select Istanbul High Schools

	Base score				Ranking Percentile			
	2017	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
Anatolian HS								
Galatasaray	499	473	500	494	0.04	0.05	0.01	0.02
Haydarpaşa	489	414	480	463	2.18	1.48	1.04	0.89
Beşiktaş Atatürk Anadolu	489	388	463	441	2.25	3.48	2.69	2.42
Nabi Avcı	479	372	445	432	5.79	5.40	4.94	3.30
Hayrullah Kefoğlu	471	364	444	420	8.92	6.55	5.12	4.69
Science HS								
Atatürk Fen	496	451	493	485	0.29	0.27	0.20	0.15
Şehit Münir Alkan	489	411	477	461	2.12	1.68	1.30	1.01
Şehit İlhan Varank	486	392	465	445	3.38	3.09	2.46	2.07
Validebağ	not an exam school	378	464	452	-	4.61	2.60	1.56
Imam Hatip HS								
M. Emin Saraç	481	365	443	433	5.16	6.40	5.29	3.21
Ahmet Sani Yazıcı	479	352	428	418	5.97	8.55	7.62	4.94
Fatih Sultan Mehmet	479	347	425	408	6.05	9.34	8.02	6.46
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	467	342	412	389	10.46	10.47	10.28	9.83

The author selected every tenth Anatolian and every third Science and Imam Hatip school from the lists of exam high schools in the M.O.N.E application website to represent schools in different districts and at different levels of academic selectivity. Base scores and rankings retrieved from sorubak.com.

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic introduced another set of uncertainties. Istanbul's top Anatolian high schools, such as Galatasaray and Kabataş, typically enrolled a substantial number of students from outside of the city, but how popular would boarding be during a global pandemic? Some parents speculated wistfully that the safety of student dormitories would constitute a new concern, and fewer students from outside of Istanbul might apply to top schools. On some occasions, this scenario emboldened parents to include schools that they considered out of their usual range in their application lists.

There were also uncertainties about student placement procedures that complicated application decisions. After reading the Ministry's handbook and attending information sessions at their middle schools, it was still unclear to some parents whether their chances of being placed in a school depended on the position of that school in their application list. For instance, would administrators from School A see that it was their third choice and decide to enroll someone who listed it as their first or second choice? Should they rank the school that they are most likely to get into as their first choice, or the school that is harder to get into but commonly seen as a better one? Did it matter at all? What was at stake, if anything, in how one rank-ordered the schools in their application list? These questions constituted some of the main sources of confusion for parents as they produced an application list.

Institutionalized Solutions: Educational Experts and Promotion of Ranking-Based Decision-Making

At noon on July 2, 2019, about sixty parents filled two classrooms at Kavak Middle School in Istanbul. It was the second day of the twelve-day high school application period, and Kavak Middle School had organized an information session about application rules and procedures. Vice principal Tarik Hoca led the meeting in the first classroom and student counselor Merve had

teamed up with Turkish teacher Ceren to lead the meeting in the second classroom. These people would be fixtures in the school over the next two weeks, advising eighth-grade families and answering their questions. As I took a seat to listen to the meeting in progress, the Q & A session had already started. A female parent raised her hand to relay some advice she received from her son's private tutor. "He told us to put two schools that are a few percentiles above our ranking at the top of application list. What do you think?" Merve Hoca, the student counselor, told her that it would not be a problem if the school is only one percentile above theirs; but, she continued, it would be a waste of application slots to name schools two or three percentiles above their ranking. Turkish teacher Ceren Hoca quipped, "Tarık Hoca [the vice principal] recommends the same thing."

Reference to rankings is a fundamental element of conversations about high school applications. Education professionals like Tarik, Merve, and Ceren Hocas routinely frame ranking percentiles as the key decision-making device, and the Ministry of National Education institutionalizes rankings' role in high school applications. Every summer, the Ministry's website launches a page called the "Tercih Robotu" (Application Robot) in which visitors are asked to select a city, district, and the type of high school they are interested in browsing. Then the website gives them a list of high schools with the following information: name of the school, its type (Anatolian, science et.), duration of education (four or five years), whether it is co-ed or not, whether it has boarding, the primary foreign language, quota, and lastly, the highest and the lowest ranking of the students admitted in the previous year (Figure 16). These lists send a strong message to eighth-grade families that ranking percentiles are among the school attributes that ought to be most relevant to their decision-making. Although the Ministry provides both metrics, it is only the

second one—the lowest ranking of the students admitted—that schools are associated with in public discourse.

Figure 16 Ministry's High School Application Information Page

Tercih Kodu	Okul Adı	Okul Türü	Öğretim Süresi	Öğretim Şekli	Pansiyon Durumu	Yabancı Dili	Kontenjanı	2018 Yılı En Düşük Yüzdelik Dilim	2018 Yılı En Yüksek Yüzdelik Dilim	
23558	BEYOĞLU / Galatasaray Üniversitesi Galatasaray Lisesi	Anadolu Lisesi	Hazırlık + 4 yıl	Kız/Erkek	Pansiyon(Kız/Erkek)	Fransızca	100	0,05	0,01	?
23544	FATİH / İstanbul Erkek Lisesi	Anadolu Lisesi	Hazırlık + 4 yıl	Kız/Erkek	Pansiyon Yok	Almanca	180	0,08	0,01	?
23516	BEŞİKTAŞ / Beşiktaş Kabataş Erkek Lisesi	Anadolu Lisesi	Hazırlık + 4 yıl	Kız/Erkek	Pansiyon(Erkek)	İngilizce	120	0,14	0,01	?

Source: https://e-okul.meb.gov.tr/SinavIslemleri/BasvuruIslemleri/OKSTERCIH/SNV08008.ASPX

Student counselors and pundits further the institutionalization of rankings by prescribing how they ought to be used in newspaper opinion pieces about "LGS application tips" and "things to watch out for."[6] Whether on national media or in middle school hallways, education professionals typically argue that the generation of a smart application list is a prerequisite of guaranteeing high school placement. Failing to secure placement in an exam high school is the danger that everyone attempts to avoid. The prescription for success is using rankings at every stage of decision-making, from searching for potential schools to evaluating school desirability and arranging an application list. Specifically, they contend that applicants ought to rank-order

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[6] See https://m.bianet.org/bianet/egitim/246720-lgs-tercihleri-basliyor-tercihler-neye-gore-nasil-yapilmali and https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/uzmanindan-lgs-tercih-onerileri-lgs-tercihleri-nasil-yapilmali-3549416 and http://www.gazetevatan.com/adim-adim-lgs-tercihinde-dikkat-edilmesi-gerekenler--1400116-egitim/.

schools they are applying to according to their rankings. They should start their list off with one or two schools slightly above their ranking, followed by several schools within their ranking, and a few schools below their ranking. The underlying principle of these expert opinions is matching student ranking to school ranking and the underlying goal is placement into the highest ranked school possible.

The first step of action is setting a range of rankings in search of potential schools. Tutors and teachers advise parents to use *disjunctive screening*, a non-compensatory screening method in which decision-makers eliminate options below or above a minimum/maximum acceptable cut-off point for a single attribute (Gilbride and Allenby 2004). For instance, Ayfer's son had ranked in the top third percentile. His adviser from the tutoring center recommended looking for schools between the 2.5th and 9th percentiles, while a schoolteacher recommended the 7th percentile as their lower boundary. Similarly, İlkgül's daughter ranked in the top eighth percentile, and she was advised to look for schools in the 4th to 12th percentile range. In 2019 when applicants could name five instead of ten schools, they used narrower ranges in their search for potential schools. For instance, Zeynep's daughter had ranked in the 6th percentile. Their schoolteacher had told them to look for schools in the 5.5th and 8.5th percentile range. The fewer schools they could name, the closer their percentile had to be to their children's own ranking in order to guarantee placement.

Teachers also advised parents to order the schools they would apply to according to their rankings. In addition to a value proposition about the academic superiority of schools with a higher ranking, this recommendation was a hack to increase likelihood of placement into an exam school. If placement in any given school has been impacted by the school's position in an application list, teachers would have advised applicants to rank as their top choice the school they perceived as their most likely match. However, this was not the case. On occasion that an applicant's first choice

was already filled with higher-ranked students who were given placement priority by the Ministry, they would have a nonzero chance of being placed into their second choice only if that second choice was a lower ranked school than the first. Given higher ranked students' higher likelihood of having highly ranked schools in their application lists, naming a highly ranked school as one's second, third, fourth preference does not increase their likelihood of being placed into an exam high school. Social actors do not formalize the ineffectiveness of ranking a higher ranked school at a lower position in an application list in the same fashion as I do. They use the term "dead choice." The concept of dead choice implies a school with no chance of placement due to their ranking percentile and their specific position on the list.

For instance, in an application counseling session I observed, a family had decided to rank Atatürk Fen High School as their top choice. When the father suggested they put Kabataş High School in second place, his son objected. "That would be a dead choice because if Atatürk Fen's not happening, Kabataş's not happening in any event." Similarly, when Canan called Korkut Hoca, her daughter's math teacher, to ask his opinion on their application list draft, he told them to move a particular school up on the list. "If you put it to the bottom of the list, that would be a dead choice." In both examples, we see school rankings working as an instrument to reduce uncertainty of student placement rather than as a status hierarchy that shape the way people judge alternative options.

Educational experts promote rankings as the principal instrument of decision-making and believe that rankings render school applications a straightforward, technical, and potentially efficient process. Yet actual decision-making events display a messier reality: School applicants confront multiple contextual uncertainties. Family members each bring diverse sets of values, interests, and behavioral orientations. What emerges out of this as an application submission is not

a choice in the rational sense, but a pragmatic decision where the biggest role rankings play is that of processing uncertainty.

Narratives of Decision-Making under Uncertainty

This section examines how Turkish parents make school choices under conditions of radical uncertainty created by frequent political intervention to high school admissions. When we inquire about school choice in Turkey, we need clarify the form of choice exercised in this case. Within a centrally administered student placement system, placement decisions are made by the Ministry of National Education. Parents do not decide where to send their children so much as decide where to apply. The importance of this distinction will be revealed in the following section. Parents typically believe that the task at hand is producing an application list that reduces the uncertainty of student placement and allows them to assume some control over the outcome. Every school in that list collectively serves this purpose. Fixating on single schools, allowing emotional attachments, and having unrealistic aspirations are considered risky behaviors with potentially hazardous consequences. Using institutionally sanctioned instruments (rankings) and blueprints of action give families a sense of security and rationality in an impossible situation that mandates social action (submitting a school application) but has a high level of contingency.

The following narratives will demonstrate that parents process uncertainties of student placements by interpreting particular courses of actions as risk-taking or risk-minimizing and using rankings to determine the risk level. We would be mistaken to assume application lists are ordered preferences that emerge out of complex valuation processes that pit various options with various attributes against each other. The locally defined decision-making problem is not whether to select the school with the better facilities, the school with the convenient location, or the school with the higher ranking. Placement into an exam high school is such a contingent scenario and the motive

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of securing placement is so overbearing that parents rarely find themselves in a position to extensively evaluate school quality or reflexively consider the criteria by which to conduct this evaluation. Instead, evaluations are pragmatic in nature: information about schools is gathered and processed not to establish definitively a school's desirability compared to another school, but to prepare oneself to come to terms with various potential outcomes.

<u>Tales of Safe Risk-taking</u>

Oğuz and Canan were divorced, Kavak parents whom I interviewed separately throughout their daughter's eighth grade tenure. When their daughter Sima ranked in the top 6th percentile in the LGS, they started to create draft application lists and compared notes. To finalize their application list, they consulted many people and sources: Sima's math teacher Korkut from Kavak Middle School, the appointed advisor from the tutoring center she attended, a neighbor who is a retired teacher, and Canan's older sister whose daughter also took the exam in the same year. Canan also attended the information session at Kavak and read the Ministry of National Education's school application and student placement handbook. When Sima was placed into Ginger Anatolian High School, the eighth choice in the application list, the family was unanimously happy. Oğuz told me it was "the second-best school within easy commute distance" to the apartment where Canan and Sima lived.

Their case is illustrative of various uncertainties shaping decision-making from the beginning. Johnson-Hanks (2005) argues that social action under uncertainty is rarely the fulfilment of prior intentions as radical contingency hinders commitment to specific futures. Others, too, have underscored that preferences are often formulated in decision situations (Whitford 2002). Within the Deweyan pragmatist tradition, ends are "discovered" in a situation that "presents us with conditions that we experience as a need, a conflict, a deficit, or a lack."

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(Whitford 2002:340). During Sima's eighth grade school year, Oğuz had a very vague sense of the type of schools that he wished his daughter to attend, and only a guess about her likelihood of attending a local school in their neighborhood. Beyond these, he brought no prior preference to the application process. When I asked him to recount their application experiences, he begins it emphasizing their openness to situational opportunities, linking it to the uncertainties of the student placement system.

> So here is the thing: the scoring system, I mean the rankings from the previous years were not announced initially. They announced the base scores and all after they took the exam. So, in the years before, we did not pay attention to this topic. We didn't monitor things like what does she need to score for what. Because percentiles and all change every year.

He goes on to explain that their teachers advised them to use school rankings, not base scores, in creating their application list, as the latter was a more volatile indicator of how selective a school was likely to be at a particular year. Here, a definite concern about "being left in the open" (failing to secure placement in an exam high school) influences their use of school rankings during the application process.

> We have been told to check last year's ranking percentiles, not base scores because base scores vary. For instance, you may have 150 students who scored 500 this year, but you may have only one student who scored 500 last year. Subsequently you may expect placement because you've been paying attention to the base score [of the applied school], but she may suddenly find herself in the open. Because her ranking was not high enough.

So, they began to craft a draft list with school percentiles in mind. Their daughter Sima vocalized a strong desire to go to Celal Bayar[7] Anatolian High School, and her parents consider her placement to Celal Bayar "a sure thing" because she had ranked in the top 6th percentile and Celal Bayar had closed placement at 7th percentile the previous year. Sima wanted to put Celal Bayar at the top of her application list, but her parents wanted to start the list off with higher ranked

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[7] All school names affiliated with study participants are replaced with pseudonyms.

schools, reasoning that they were better schools, and they couldn't know whether they would remain popular.

> We had a school that was in the top 2.5th percentile, a whole five points [sic] above Sima, because we don't know what's going to happen. Sima opposed it, saying there is no chance she would get in. Yes, it is true that it looks impossible, but we don't know what's going to happen in this process. Nobody has any foresight. We are going through a very weird time. We don't know how people will make decisions in this weird time.

Oğuz was talking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on parents' preference for private vs. public high schools. He believed that over the first months of the pandemic, online education by public schools had been ineffective, and this could make public exam high schools less popular in the following academic year. His expectation was grounded in observations about the volatility of school percentiles from one year to the next. Canan's description of how they came to move Celal Bayar to the bottom of their application list further reveals how school staff promote ranking as a rational "strategy" to parents who feel lost, directionless, and out of their depth.

> You had to act very strategically with the applications. For instance, we were considering whether we ought to write down the school we liked the most as our top choice. Our teachers told us that the school with the smallest percentile is the most difficult to get in to, so mark that as your first choice. If you cannot get into it, the system will check whether it can place you to your second choice and so forth. That was the strategy they offered us. We knew nothing of this before. We had no prior experience.

Sima's teachers also insisted that they keep the school in the 2nd percentile on their list, citing (similar to Oğuz) the unpredictability of the system. The family initially followed this advice and named it as their top choice. But after concluding they had a better chance of placement in a school in the 4th percentile than a school in the 2nd percentile, they moved the school in the 2nd percentile to the second topmost spot. In the end, this decision did not impact the placement result as Sima was placed into Celal Bayar.

The care with which Sima's family ordered the schools in her application list illustrates their uncertainty and anxiety about securing placement in an exam school. They were trying to

strike a balance between ambition and risk-averseness, and they used the previous year's rankings to assess the riskiness of various application list combinations, all the while knowing that their instrument was imprecise.

In a similar fashion, the decision-making processes of many of the interviewed families are characterized by perceptions of risk, the temptation of schools that appear out of reach, collaborative deliberation, and expert advice on using rankings to mitigate uncertainties. For example, Zeynep, another parent, had drafted an application list to which she was considering adding a highly selective school from the top. To accommodate this addition, she would have to remove one school from the list, and she considered removing a school from the bottom of the list. Her daughter's teacher objected to it.

> I was thinking of what would happen if we put Cevdet Sunay High School at the top and did not apply to Kenan Evren at all. But her teacher said we would be left in the open. This system … you must think hard, and you must act very logically. There were people who didn't. I have a friend whose child was ranked in the fifth percentile. Her list composed of one school each in the second percentile, third percentile, fourth percentile, fifth percentile, and sixth percentile. Her son was not placed anywhere. Not even to my daughter's school! Because he hadn't applied to it. They looked down on it and didn't apply.

Not all families felt that they successfully balanced ambition and risk management in their application decisions. Retrospective accounts by those disappointed with their application results highlight a sense of miscalculation, discovery of one's naivety, and regret.

Tales of Miscalculation

Reyhan was a single Kavak mother with three daughters. Her youngest, Nurbanu, had taken the LGS the year before Sima and ranked in the top 3.5^{th} percentile. At the time, students were allowed to apply to five instead of ten schools, meaning every single school in the application list had to be chosen with utmost care. At the beginning of the application period, Reyhan attended the information session at Kavak and listened to Tarik Hoca's general guidelines. Everyone in the

family participated in the decision-making: Reyhan, her two elder daughters, Nurbanu, and the girls' father, but they did not consult anyone outside the immediate family about their application list before submitting it.

Reyhan started her narrative about their application experience with Nurbanu's devastation about her placement result. Nurbanu was placed into her older sister's school, Ahmet Necdet Sezer Anatolian High School, a school that had closed admissions at the 6.5th percentile the year before. They had only added it to the bottom of their list as a safety measure but had expected that she would be placed into one of their top choices.

> From the first four schools on the list, she could get into two and had a higher score than the other two. Our vice principal, Tarik hoca, had said, "we call the fifth spot on the application list the safety valve. Put a school three percentiles below yours so that you are not left in the open. The ranking system is unpredictable." Three percent below our ranking is sixth percentile. Among schools in that range was her sister's school. It's not an unfamiliar school, we know the student profile, the teachers. We are happy with her school, so we included it in the list. But none of us was expecting she would be placed there. We just put it down for the sake of it. When the results were announced, Nurbanu was so upset. She cried a lot. She cried the whole day. It was a tough spot: I can't say it is a bad school because my other daughter goes there, but I can't say it's a good school either because it is well below her ranking. So, it was a very difficult situation.

As Reyhan detailed how they decided on the five schools in their application list, she brought up strong disagreements among family members that led to arguments. Nurbanu objected to schools in the neighboring district that she saw as having low social status, and her older sister vetoed an Anatolian high school with a similar ranking to Nurbanu's on the grounds that its university placement record was not good. Reyhan herself wanted to eliminate schools with a long commute. The morning of the last day of applications, Reyhan's ex-husband called them to insist that they add Fahri Korutürk Science High School to the list. He preferred science high schools to Anatolian high schools, and Fahri Korutürk was very close to his home. They were reluctant to add it to their list because as a public-school teacher herself, Reyhan had heard predictions that

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Fahri Korutürk was going to be very popular this year and that it would close admissions at a significantly higher ranking than Nurbanu's. To accommodate the father's request, they took out a school from the list. Looking back, Reyhan considered that to be the misstep that led to their disappointing placement result.

> Her father bargained with her. He said, if you want to have Süleyman Demirel in the list, I want you to have Fahri Korutürk. So, in effect, we killed one of our spots. We knew Fahri Korutürk was a long shot because I have friends in the School District. They had told me that Fahri Korutürk's ranking could go up to 2.5th percentile this year. But it was a bargaining chip for her father. So, we ended up wasting a spot. Initially, we had Atatürk High School in that spot. Most likely, we were going to be placed there. But we haven't, and now we are having to pursue a transfer to Atatürk High School.

Table 4 Nurbanu's Application List

	The School's Ranking Percentile
1. Turgut Özal Anatolian HS	3rd
2. Süleyman Demirel Anatolian HS	3rd
3. Cemal Gürsel Science HS	3.5th
4. Fahri Korutürk Science HS	4.5th
5. Ahmet Necdet Sezer Anatolian HS	6.5th

Like Reyhan, a lot of the families who were unhappy with their placement results believed that the volatility of the school rankings from one year to the next was the main culprit. Some saw themselves as having gambled with fate and lost because they overreached. Eda's son Ali ranked in the top 10th percentile. They thought that he would have a good chance of being placed into Yavuz Sultan Selim Anatolian High School since its ranking from the previous year was 14th percentile. But they decided not to apply to it because it would require a long commute. There

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were not any options in Kavak's district that would be a good match for Ali's ranking, so they

applied to only three exam schools, all substantially higher than his ranking at 7.5th, 8.5th, and

8.1st percentiles. When they received the placemen results, Ali was not placed into any of them.

Putting aside their reservations for commute, they included Yavuz Sultan Selim on their list in the

second and third rounds of application, but they did not have any luck with so few openings. Ali

described this process from his perspective:

> I was a little sad during the applications because there weren't any good schools in our vicinity that I could get into with my ranking. Those that existed were across the Bosporus or in [a district in Istanbul's outskirts]. Transportation would have been a problem; going to those schools would have taken two hours because of the traffic. So, I applied to schools above my ranking, thinking, "maybe I can match." But it would be a long shot. I remember thinking I wish I picked different schools. Like, I wish we'd applied to the school we named in the second round in the first round. I was caught up in dreams, but school rankings matter a lot. I wished I didn't apply to schools with super high rankings.

While Ali attributed his lack of placement to their miscalculation and optimism, his mother

Eda emphasized the futility of using last year's percentiles in a volatile student placement system.

When I asked her whether they had consulted any schoolteachers or tutors before submitting their

applications, she replied that they met with her son's adviser from the tutoring center he attended

but argued that "no one could foresee anything." She explained:

> School percentiles for your year ought to be known beforehand. A school may have admitted students in the eighth percentile last year, but we don't know what it's going to do this year. If school rankings were announced by the time, we were submitting applications, there would have been less room for error.

Narratives of safe risk-taking and narratives of miscalculation illustrate how parents utilize

school rankings with varying degrees of effectiveness to mitigate the uncertainties of the high

school placement regime. Those who were happy with their placement results typically interpreted

the volatility of the system as an opportunity for making bold moves while taking safety measures

to ensure placement in an exam school. They approached the application list in a holistic matter,

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heeding expert advice that the list ought to consist of schools with absolute likelihood of placement, as well as schools with reasonable likelihood of placement. They paid attention to rumors about whether school rankings were expected to increase or decrease, as well as to trajected popularity changes of specific schools. They viewed decision-making as "strategy building" using the terms "strategy" and "logic" to describe their mode of decision-making. Even though their children were rarely placed into one of their top three choices, they were often happy that they were placed into a school irrespective of the risky options they included in their application.

In contrast, parents who were not happy with their placement results typically underlined the debilitating influences of the uncertainties they encountered while making application decisions. Like others, they believed they ought to use school rankings, but the messages rankings communicated were less clear. They were also heavily invested in specific schools or used singular criterion like geography or school type (for example, some excluded all single sex schools from consideration, significantly constricting their options). It is also noteworthy that fewer of them met with multiple teachers and tutors to "strategize" about their application list.

Explaining Rankings' Prevalence

In *Beyond Test Scores: A Better Way to Measure School Quality* (2017), Jack Schneider laments how Americans' fixation on standardized test scores undermines complexities of effective education. Building on a case study of a school district, Schneider and his research team develop a multidimensional and comprehensive assessment of school quality that goes beyond standardized test scores. In Turkey too, quality of education is by and large expressed by school rankings in everyday speech about school applications. As a high school graduate interested in a social science degree, I was advised to apply to Boğaziçi University's political science program instead of the sociology program because political science programs were more selective, and placement into a

sociology program would mean a waste of my exam score and ranking, or so a college professor and a family friend told me.

I was perplexed to find not much has changed in the ten years since my high school graduation: here was a group of middle-school students whose parents similarly deferred to school rankings after gathering a lot of other information about the schools under consideration. Turkish parents do think about more than school rankings: they compare school facilities, form strong impressions about the staffs' attitude in the schools they visit, and consider ease of commute. Yet many also reveal that they ignore most of this and order schools according to their rankings in the application list they submit. Why is this the case? As I reflected on this question and re-read the interview transcripts, it became apparent that ranking-based decision-making is associated with the contingency and indeterminacies of high school placements described in the previous paragraphs. Ensuring school placement is so closely wound up with risk calculations that parents get caught up in the rankings game and begin to see the entire process through the lens of rankings. This preoccupation with the uncertainties of the placement system leaves no space for reflexively and critically thinking about the instruments they use to measure educational quality.

A second factor in the widespread use of rankings at the expense of other school attributes is the popular conception of the LGS exam as a race and a cutthroat competition. When I ask my interviewees to describe LGS to me, they univocally use the analogy of a race, and refer to the students as "racehorses." Consider the following excerpts:

> This examination system should be abolished. It should seriously be abolished because the kids work like racehorses, they can't enjoy their childhood. (Eda)

> I think LGS is like a horse race because students, especially the ones in the top five to ten thousand are competing to get ahead of each other and it resembles a horse race. The one with the greatest knowledge and the greatest resources wins. Of course, sometimes, rarely, there comes a student who get ahead despite all the odds, like the Bold Pilot [a famous racing horse]. (Furkan)

I tell myself I shouldn't be thinking like this, but the system makes you step onto that racetrack. No matter how much I tell myself I shouldn't be thinking like this, you want your child to get ahead, because you prepare him. It's like he is an athlete, and you are the coach who is preparing him. (Haluk)

Rankings complete this race metaphor. A race ranks not only its participants but also the prizes. Using metals of different values to classify medallions allows the organizers of athletic competitions to match awards to performances: the top performing athletes receive the gold medallion, followed by silver and bronze. In a similar way, the high school exam ranks high schools—the prize for outstanding exam performances—along a single and indisputable vector. The fact that rankings are calculated by nothing other than their popularity and have no input about teaching effectiveness or quality of school facilities does not matter as long as exam takers are being distinguished from each other through the prizes they receive.

Parents bring with them the frame of "race" and "athletic competition" for the LGS to the application decisions. A frame is a strong cultural concept that captures how people conceive of themselves, the world, and their surroundings (Small et al. 2010). The race frame reinforces the institutionalization of ranking-based decision-making as the "appropriate" course of action because people with this frame believe that school placement is the prize for the exam performance, and that prizes ought to be proportionate to performances. This is manifested in the many instances when being placed in a school above one's ranking was an occasion for celebration while being placed in a school a few points below one's own ranking was a source of disappointment. Remember Reyhan's disappointment when her daughter was placed into a school three percentiles below her. Now consider Emine, who put a similarly high value on matching student and school rankings as closely as possible:

Our ranking did not go to waste. My son was at fifth [percentile] but got into a school in the second to fifth range. He is going to get educated among students who are better than

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him. I am happy about that. I mean happy that instead of enrolling at a school in the fifth to seventh range, he got into a school at the second to fifth range.

Many parents evaluate others' application practices through this lens and expected everyone to apply to the school with the highest ranking they could afford. Take Piraye, who was particularly upset about the unexpected popularity of Fahri Korutürk, a school they hoped to get into. She attributed this to the lack of ambition from parents with higher ranked students.

> Most parents are insensible. Something I encountered a lot during the application period is parents who insist on sending their children to a particular school when their child has a chance of going to a very good school. They say this one's closer to their home. When their child has a chance of getting into a school like Kabatas or Istanbul Erkek, they choose Fahri Korutürk and contend themselves with less. They try to put their first percentile child to a fourth percentile school.

Expectations about matching ranks also make some people put pressure on parents who defy their expectations. Consider Funda, who was advised to ignore ease of transportation to maximize school ranking:

> We reside in [name of the district] but high-quality schools are typically in [name of another district]. We hadn't been to see schools or done extensive research online. The results came in and we learnt that she was ranked at the 0.39^{th} percentile. It's a good percentile. [name of an Anatolian High School close to residence] is at 1.29^{th} percentile. People kept saying, "Don't waste that child's percentile. That school is low. Why would you send her there? Choose a higher school." Everyone had an opinion.

These examples demonstrate the normative character of rankings as a decision-making tool. Parents have encounters in school corridors and on phone calls that remind them of the social expectations to use rankings for screening, preference ranking, and determining whether their placement result is agreeable with them. In *Who Knows Tomorrow? Uncertainty in North-Eastern Sudan* (2019), Sandra Calkins argues that people invoke "forms" (rules, conventions, lists etc.) as binding orientations for action and coordination in uncertain situations. In her case study, she finds that gold miners bracket out uncertainties and invest in, rather than question, rules of revenue distribution to coordinate collective action in an uncertain economy. In Turkey, too, parents expect

other parents to use a particular form —rankings— so that their own school applications bear fruit. If most applicants apply to the schools with the highest ranking possible, this coordinates application decisions and makes school placement a predictable business.

Other Factors in School Application Decisions

Having established school rankings as the primary "choice technique" (Daipha 2015; Schwarz 2017) that institutional actors promote and parents observe, we can examine the circumstances under which high school applicants defy expectations placed on them about the use of school rankings. So far, this chapter drew on exchanges between families and educational professionals to highlight how parents are instructed in the proper manner of decision-making, which revolves around risk management and utility maximization using a singular criterion of decision-making. Ranking-based school applications reflect "governmentality" (Foucault et al. 2007), a disciplinary power that shapes people's conduct in order to perpetuate predictability and social legitimacy of the examination system in Turkey. Based on a study of high school applications in the 1990s, Turkey, Rutz, and Balkan (2009) argued that popular perception about the fairness, objectivity, and meritocracy of the student placement regime rested on the widespread use of base scores in school applications. Although base scores have been replaced by school ranking percentiles as the primary decision-making tool in the thirty years since their research, rankings are similarly promoted, expected, and rewarded in the current student placement regime.

However, high school application narratives reveal parents taking note of other factors like school type, location, commute, and climate. On occasion, these factors and school rankings operate in a complementary fashion, and parents are able to create application lists that reflect their preference for a highly ranked school located in a "desirable" neighborhood with comfortable transportation. In these cases, all the evaluation criteria they use direct them towards similar

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choices and create no occasion for reflecting on which school attribute is a higher priority. On other occasions, parents find themselves having to "choose" between rival concerns and preferences because their school options do not align multiple advantages. These are the instances in which the use of rankings as the primary decision-making instrument is the most challenged.

School rankings often fail to effectively narrow down options for residents of metropolitan cities like Istanbul where the number of potential schools exceeds the number of schools students are allowed to include in an application list. Due to its population density, a typical Istanbul district has as many as fifteen exam schools. Infrastructure for public transportation facilitates application across district lines, further increasing the number of schools parents take under consideration. In the face of such excess, parents invoke multiple criteria to determine an initial consideration set. The following pages describe these criteria and their impact on the institutionalization of ranking-based decision-making.

Economic analyses of decision-making seek to formalize how social actors choose from among complex alternatives and multiple attributes (French et al. 2009). They classify choice heuristics, differentiate value functions from utility functions, and propose various models of decision-making as a single or two-stage process. This focus on the formal properties of decision-making practices obscures the opportunistic and dynamic way in which real life decisions are made. Decision-makers invoke certain criteria for search only to haphazardly replace them with another; they put a lot of effort into obtaining some information only to disregard it later, and they criticize attending to a specific quality but eventually do what they objected to so vehemently. Verbal accounts of decision-making are similarly fragmented and contradictory: they are defiant of clear narratives that begin with a problem, resume with a middle that addresses the problem, and concludes with the resolution of the problem. To understand how a certain application list

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processually took its final shape, I had to do a lot of backpedaling seeking clarification. The experiential and semantic messiness of decision-making ought not to be overlooked as one reads the following paragraphs about the use of multiple decision-making heuristics.

Geography as Space

Geography is a shared concern that impacts how applicants screen for options and how they finalize their application lists. It has two dimensions: geography as space and geography as place (Bell 2009). When school applicants consider distance, commute time, and means of transportation, they are attending to the spatial dimension of geography. These are salient concerns in a city like Istanbul with ever-present traffic jams and overcrowding of the public transportation system.

Parents invoke geographic criteria in two basic modes with different degrees of affinity with rankings. First of these is a non-compensatory screening where applicants use both rankings and geography to determine an initial set for consideration. In this mode, the two criteria are complementary and simultaneous: a pragmatically loose sense of "proxy" (in rankings and physical space) is applied to select schools for further examination. In further stages of deliberation, applicants eliminate the option that is geographically distant from multiple options with a similar ranking, observing both ranking and geographic criteria. When ordering schools in their application list, these applicants rarely find themselves in a situation that requires them to establish whether rankings or geography is the most important attribute for them.

Many of the applicants from Kavak Middle School have been able to utilize geography and rankings in a complementary fashion due to the locational properties of their school district. Magnolia was a central district with schools that were overall more selective than high schools in peripheral districts. This meant that Kavak applicants typically did not have to make a tradeoff

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between rankings and ease of commute in their school choice deliberations. A typical interviewee from Kavak Middle school ranked closer, older, and more selective high schools at the top of their application lists, followed by farther, less selective schools. Consider Sevim, who seamlessly strings together their aversion to schools that require longer commutes and schools without established reputations.

> My husband had done extensive research on the internet. He found the most optimal schools, the ones that are close to our home. By close I mean easy to access with transportation. In a city like Istanbul, you have schools in [names of peripheral districts] …. These are all recently established schools. We don't know their quality. Are they good schools or not? We know nothing about them.

For these parents, the double-screening criteria often effectively narrowed their options to a manageable size. For Oğuz, the number of options were almost a little too small for his comfort. "Really, with Sima's exam score, when we looked for a close by, commutable school that she could easily get into, we were left with a very limited number of schools. Because many of them were—I mean we never even considered remote districts like [names a few]."

Yet other applicants' use of geographic and rankings criteria was less harmonious. They experienced these as rival priorities when most of the options in their school district either had higher or lower rankings than them. Remember Funda, who was warned against starting their application list with a local school in the top 1.29^{th} percentile when her daughter ranked in the top 0.39^{th} percentile. She and her family deliberated this choice at length and rationalized prioritizing commute. Her opinion swayed at times, and she wondered whether they would be doing "injustice" to their child, but her husband had been able to convince both her and her daughter in the end.

> What made sense to [daughter's name] was the following thought: "If I leave school at 3.30 pm, I'll be home at 4. I can take my time with eating and resting before homework."

Funda's case exemplifies the second mode of invoking geographic criteria as an alternative to rankings-based decision-making. The family have attempted to use both heuristics as long as possible but found themselves in a position that forced a choice onto them. Another applicant who found themselves in a similar spot was Doğa, a Kavak mother I interviewed along with her daughter, Canset. Doğa was one of the parents whose preference for commute increased Fahri Korutürk High School's ranking and attracted Piraye's ire (who accused these parents of being insensible). In their description of their application experience, Canser and Doğa bring up the choice between an easy commute and going to a school with the highest possible ranking as the first hurdle that they had to resolve.

Esma: How did you feel upon receiving your exam score?

Canset: I was very happy, but my percentile was a little low compared to my score. I expected a higher percentile. Then the application period was upon us. Our student counselor—

Doğa: She considered ranking percentiles.

Canset: Exactly. She prepared a list according to rankings, not location. For instance, there was Tansu Çiller High School in [name of district]. How am I supposed to go there? It would take me an hour and a half. There was Kenan Evren High School, again in the same district. Another hour and a half. Then we had Kemal Tahir High School and Fahri Korutürk Science High School, among those I could get into. I was really into Kenan Evren High School, but my older sister and brother reminded me that I would have after school tutoring at eleventh and twelfth grades. When we visited Fahri Korutürk, it was so crowded. Those in the top first and second percentile have all applied to it. Its ranking increased tremendously. It was my top choice and I got in.

Esma: Which schools did you have in your second and third place?

Canset: Tansu Çiller and Kenan Evren.

Esma: So, can we say that you were willing to travel the distance if you didn't get into Fahri Korutürk?

Doğa: They are both successful schools. I would have loved her to go there if they were closer. But we gave it a shot. We commuted to see how long it would take to go there from our place. It took an hour, in the off season, at 11 am. In the winter, there is going to be

bad weather, there is going to be more people in the metro, more traffic…. It scared us off, to be frank. If she got in, we would have her take the school bus, but that would take her an hour and a half too.

Doğa and Canset's concern with ease of commute led to a compromise in which they kept highly ranked schools in their application list but ordered their list according to geographic, not ranking, criteria. This decision went against the advice of educational professionals and the social expectation that applicants arrange their list to optimize school rankings. Doğa was happy with their decision because they later learnt that Fahri Korutürk closed admission with a much higher ranking compared to the previous year. They took a risk by prioritizing the school with the lower ranking but were pleasantly surprised that Canset would not be "going to school with low scoring students" after all.

Geography as Place

As they make application decisions, parents also consider "social, economic and political meanings people assign to particular spatial locations" (Bell 2009:495). Parents use demographic information and cultural cues to classify schools, neighborhoods, and districts as "safe" social places for their children. Safety as parents understand it is multilayered: it involves safety from crimes like sexual harassment, theft, and physical assault, as well as safety from unwanted social influences based on cultural, racial, political, and socioeconomic differences. Obviously, perceptions of safety and danger change with time. Cultural tolerance and affective responses to differences are impacted by political atmosphere and social location (Edgell et al. 2006). The sociological literature on symbolic boundaries demonstrates the cultural mechanisms through which differences becomes a basis for social segregation (Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont 1992). Bracketing out these broader questions about the origin and mechanisms of symbolic

boundary work, I describe here three district classifications that parents drew on as they made application decisions.

Magnolia: The District of Social Safety

For many of the interviewed high school applicants, Kavak Middle School's district Magnolia was the gold standard of school districts. They conceived of the district as populated by university-educated and family-oriented people who were on average culturally, if not always religiously, conversative. This cultural identity was manifest in the physical environment of the district center that held majestic Ottoman mosques and old cemeteries some residents visited to pay respect to deceased Sufi leaders. Some odd stores sold alcohol for private consumption, but few establishments in the district served alcohol, and there were no well-known bars or clubs. The district's typical nightlife consisted of university students grabbing coffee or smoking shisha, and families who joined mosque congregations or went for a post-dinner dessert during Ramadan, the month of fasting.

Kavak parents either already lived in Magnolia or sent their children to a middle school in Magnolia, so they preferred to apply to schools in Magnolia to preserve the cultural environment they favored. For instance, Sevim described Magnolia as "nezih"—nezih is an adjective from the root of "purity," meaning something whose respectability stems from its stainlessness. She stated, "Central Magnolia is an old settlement, and it reflects on its residents. They are cultured people."

Kavak parents used "culture" to signify a middle-class morality centered around family life, secure employment, and social etiquette that regulates intergenerational and neighborhood relations. They thought attending a school in the Magnolia district would put their children in contract with "cultured" people, in this sense. Sare, another eighth-grade mother who lived in Kavak Middle School's neighborhood said her son's best friends from school were mostly children

who lived in the neighborhood. She commended them for having open communication, engaging in polite conversation with adult acquaintances they come across in the neighborhood and helping them with their shopping bags. She professed moral similarity in the peer environment as an important factor in their high school applications.

> I would like him to be friends with people from similar families like us, with similar moral values and religious convictions. Not simply religious views, though, because morality is a separate concept. You can be Christian but raise very decent children with very humanistic values. They ought to be family oriented.

Other parents also emphasized that enrollment in a Magnolia high school promised cultural familiarity and a sense of continuity unshaken even by differences in religious views and practices. Consider the following excerpt by Esat, a Kavak father who described their preference for schools in Magnolia:

> Surely, he is going to encounter all sorts of people but at least he goes to school with people *of* this area. This was our wish. We live in Magnolia. The schools we applied to are also in Magnolia.

Parents' fondness for Magnolia manifested in application lists composed entirely of schools in the district, or when the lists were mixed, a nervous anticipation for placement in Magnolia schools. Their perceptions about Magnolia were essentially relative, formed in comparison to other districts. What Magnolia stood for opposed what its neighboring districts stood for.

Rose: The District of Secular Entertainment

Magnolia's neighboring district, Rose, had a distinctly different identity. It was a center for entertainment and art, bringing together bars, clubs, theaters, and art exhibits. Unlike Magnolia, Rose's population favored leftist parties like CHP and HDP. Walking down the streets of Rose, one would frequently encounter political party representatives or environmental and LGBTQ

activists distributing leaflets and organizing demonstrations. It was also socioeconomically more advanced, with the average resident better educated and having greater income than the average Magnolia resident.

For much of the Kavak community, Magnolia represented old traditions, safety, community control, and family. In contrast, Rose represented youth, individual liberty, exploration, and danger. For instance, an eighth-grade student I was conversing with during the last weeks of school described his impression of the two districts in the following way:

> The other day, an older man came up to me while I was walking in Magnolia and asked me if I was gay, just because I was wearing tight jean! Another time, I was sketching on my own and an auntie scolded me for not doing schoolwork instead. This is Magnolia for you. Me and my friends, we prefer to hang out at Rose. That place is secular in every aspect. There are lots of elderly people in Magnolia.

People often invoked secular vs. conservative, young vs. old symbolisms to distinguish Rose from Magnolia. Many of the interviewed parents worried about their children growing culturally estranged from them if they started frequenting Rose. For instance, Piraye was warned about a high school in Rose. "People told us, 'when students go there during adolescence, they never come back.'" Another Kavak mother, Doğa, described her family as "mutassıp" (strongly religious), and named two districts that would not be a good fit for her female child. "I wouldn't want to worry about her. I wouldn't want her to be placed into Rose Anatolian high school … and thank Allah she wasn't."

Among these parents, exposure to a drinking culture was a big concern. Quite a few of them brought up underage drinking as inappropriate, irrespective of their own religious convictions and practices. For instance, Zeynep was a non-Kavak mother who came from a religious background but did not wear a headscarf. She told me that her son (in high school) one day came up to her and said all his friends drank beer and that he was going to taste it as well. She told him

to go ahead. "You are a young man now. I cannot keep you from anything. But you ought to know it is *haram* to drink. It would be a sin. Know this, and the rest is between you and Allah. It is a matter for your conscience." She had a similar exchange with her younger daughter who told her she purchased an alcoholic fruit cocktail with her friends but ended up throwing it away because her conscience did not allow it. Zeynep tried to discourage her children from drinking and bending to peer influence without undermining their independence and agency. She also chose school locations with that in mind. When she began to describe a high school they applied to as being in a bad area, I asked her what she considered a bad area. She mentioned signs of physical decay before moving on to describing the underage drinking scene at Rose.

> For instance, Rose Anatolian High School … I wouldn't like that school much for her. I know of the type of students who go there. After school, they rush to the district [center. So do the students in my son's school. He says, "Mom, all of them go to beer houses after school." All of them, and I mean ALL. Without exception. Beer houses are full of students from Rose High School and my son's high school. Even he went along a few times. It is impossible to expect a high school student to come straight home after school. They are surely going to go some placed to hang out with friends after school. I cannot prevent it.

While Magnolia and Rose were specifically relevant to Kavak parents, interviewees from different parts of the city used similar semantic frames about culturally conservative vs. secular districts. Many incorporated these frames into their application decisions by forming strongly favorable opinions about options in conservative districts. Take Ayfer, whose favorite school option was in the Gardenia district:

> Let's assume he enrolls at Cem Karaca High School. When he attends Cem Karaca, he is likely to walk to Gardenia center to take the bus. They may hear the azaan [call for the prayer from the mosque]. Maybe one of them says, "bro, it's time for asr prayer. let's make ablution and pray two raqats." Whereas, if they are at Lily, they will cross streets where bars are lined up. They're likely to say, "let's try it. let's drink one glass of beer." Maybe I am thinking of fringe scenarios but that's what I think. Some people say, "if you kid wants to have a drink, they'll have it wherever." Or they say, "if someone wants to pray, they'll pray wherever." But I beg to differ. You run into a mosque in every two steps in Gardenia, but you would be hard-pressed to find two mosques in the entire district of Lily.

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Ayfer's musings illustrate the strong links parents draw between adolescent practices and spiritual, commercial, and cultural landscape of districts. She juxtaposes mosques and bars as two distinct poles of influence. Like many others, she tries to manipulate potential influences over her son's conduct through the high school applications they make. Chapter 5 will further examine how pious parents' desire to raise religiously observant children impacts their locational preferences. Instead, this section aims to illustrate how locational preferences in school applications reflect a shared symbolic landscape where neighborhoods and districts represent alternative lifestyles. These lifestyles are expressed as binaries (e.g., secular vs. religious, modern vs. traditional, old vs. young, dangerous vs. safe, familiar vs. stranger) and reflect long-standing ideological struggles over the soul and identity of the Turkish nation.

Carnation: The District of Crime and Rural-to-Urban Immigration

Magnolia's other neighboring district, Carnation, was also frequently avoided by Kavak parents in high school applications. Dislike for Carnation was rooted in a moral and aesthetic suspicion of ethnic minorities, Syrian refugees, rural immigrants, the working class, and the poor. Many of the interviewees viewed these demographic groups as culturally backward, likely to engage in criminal activities, and morally deficient. They tried to avoid schools and districts where their children would encounter people from these stigmatized groups and considered Carnation among them.

Consider Sevim, a resident of Kavak's neighborhood whose son was placed into Barış Manço, a local high school in another neighborhood in Magnolia. At the time of our interview, they were waiting on the result of their request for a transfer. She told me she has reservations about the school's locality. Remembering her comment about another local school, Kani Karaca, having a "great location," I asked her to compare the two's locations for me.

Kani Karaca's location is more Magnolia than Carnation. It is close to Carnation but different from it. Family structure in Carnation is very different, it's very mixed. When you think about the family structure there … I mean statistics may have changed, but we know from previous periods that Carnation has a higher crime rate than Magnolia. This crime rate impacts children, families, the surroundings…. On top of that, you know, high school is a time of rebellion… There are thinner addicts, there is this and that…. People say there are many addicts and dealers in Barış Manço's neighborhood. It's very plausible. You would expect that in that neighborhood.

Although Barış Manço is in Magnolia, Sevim believes the school's neighborhood shares the same criminal threat as Carnation. In contrast, Kani Karaca is more like Magnolia. When I further probe, she associates crime with demographic profile, particularly with immigration from rural regions with a Kurdish majority.

Esma: You told me you do not like the family structure in Carnation. Can you tell me what you mean by family structure?

Sevim: There are people from very different regions there. People from eastern cities, from Northern cities. It's a very mixed place. This mix creates a lot of cultural differences. I mean there are obviously very cultured, very educated people there too but it's a mix and it has high crime rate. What's a high crime rate? Stabbing, homicide, thievery … these things are more common there. We read about it on the news.

Violent crime and drug trade were not the only "danger" eighth-grade parents associated with immigrant presence in the Carnation district. They perceived of immigrants as morally and culturally irreconcilable with their values. Take Fatma, a divorced mother of two who graduated from high school and worked as an accountant. In her description about their ongoing search for high schools, she declared that she did not "prefer schools where there are many people who lack culture." She then said she eliminated schools in Carnation from consideration for this reason. The following exchange demonstrates her perception of urban to rural immigrants as people who defy public etiquette, but she also believes the same etiquette forbids openly expressing this sentiment.

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Esma: When you are talking about the location of a school, do you mean the physical environment or the people?

Fatma: I am talking about the culture.

Esma: Can you give an example?

Fatma: I couldn't because I would have to name cities, and I don't want to do that.
Esma: How do you mean?

Fatma: People who live in Carnation, people who migrated from certain cities.

Esma: Why not?

Fatma: It would be unethical. But culture really matters. When you are walking on a street. Let me explain with an example of what happened to me. When someone bumps into you and you say, "excuse me?!" if they continue to walk without saying anything [giving an apology], or when they spit on the floor … which by the way has happened to me. I asked him what he was doing and he almost beat me up, as if he was in the right. […] If I bump into someone, I apologize. But there is no such culture in Carnation.

Among the inappropriate behavior parents associated with Carnation residents were sexual harassment, stalking, and other forms of nonconsensual contact. When a teacher advised Oğuz and his daughter Sima to apply to a local high school in Carnation, he turned it down.

A woman or a man can fancy someone and may enjoy looking at them. But this gaze must not make the other person uncomfortable. If it becomes accosting, or molesting, this becomes a problem. In my opinion, the school that was recommended to us is this type of place. Most of the boys there see women and girls as an object and are very possessive. I am sure there are nice kids among them as well. But when you look at Carnation culture, the sociological structure there, you see this is a pattern.

These shared perceptions about the people in the three districts led many parents to completely bypass schools in Rose and Carnation as they searched for high school options. They used locational information as a non-compensatory screening tool to eliminate schools in certain districts from consideration. In some instances they initially ignored their own cultural fears and anxieties in order to have a large consideration set, but these tended to resurface by the time they finalized their application lists. At the last minute, many of them hastily scratched off Rose and

Carnation schools from their application list, not deeming their rankings attractive enough to ward off their social anxieties.

Figure 17 Symbolic Landscape of School Districts from the Perspective of Kavak Middle School Parents
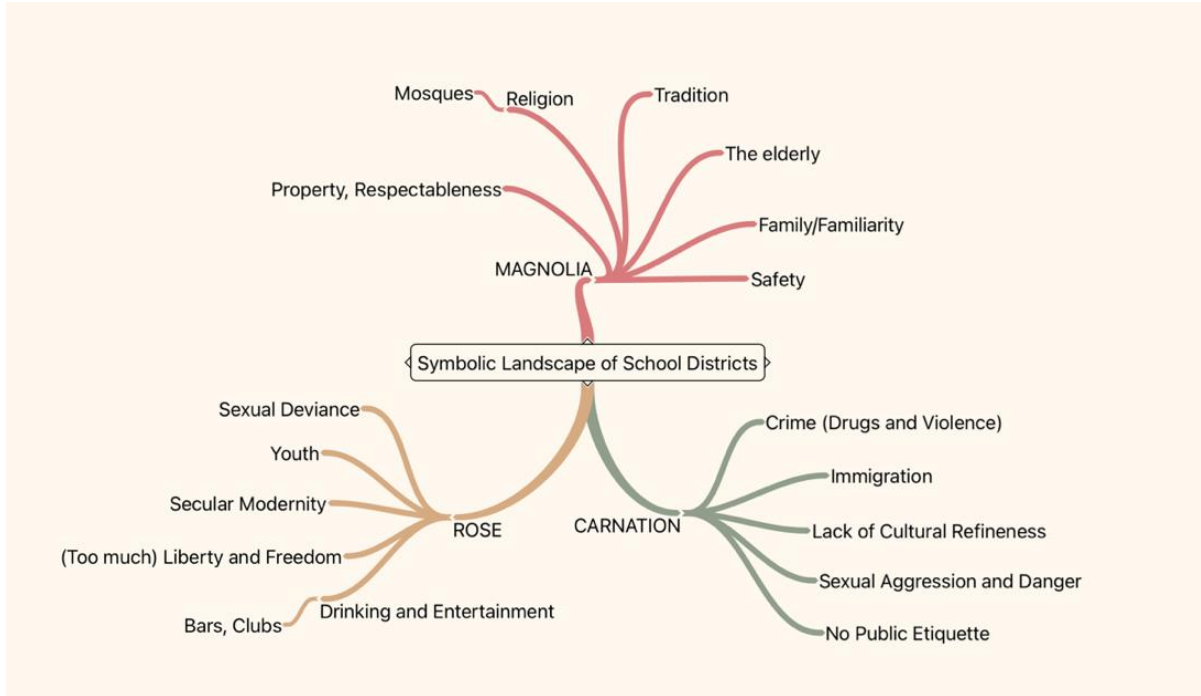
Source: Author

The preceding paragraphs elucidate how geography influences parental decision-making regarding high school applications. I argue that parents articulate both spatial and place-based preferences: they consider length of commute and mode of transportation, but also moral and cultural signs associated with school districts. Using geographic criteria to screen, eliminate, and rank school options defies the expectation that applications ought to be made strictly according to rankings. Nonetheless, on many occasions, parents defy their teachers' advice about well-ranked schools and eliminate those with longer commutes and located in "bad" districts. Locational preferences undermine mechanization of school applications as a game of ranking matching. They

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maintain a certain level of academic heterogeneity in high schools while reinforcing symbolic boundaries between urban districts and reproducing sociocultural enclaves in the city.

Locational Evaluations Help Parents Embrace Contextual Uncertainties

How parents talk about school locations suggests that locational evaluations work as an emotional regulation mechanism against the uncertainties of student placement. On multiple occasions, parents talked about a school in the third or fourth spot on their application list that had a better location than their top choices. This made me initially question whether geographic information played any role whatsoever in the "desirability" of high schools. Why did some parents spend so much time describing to me the locational qualities of the schools in their application lists, only to reveal they strictly arranged schools according to their rankings? Upon closer examination, I found locational evaluations helped parents establish a basic contentedness with placement in any of the schools on their application lists. Because placement is typically unpredictable, it is important to establish unique advantages for most schools on their application lists. This is manifest in the affective speculations that accompany their description of school locations. Consider Selcan's description of Fatih Terim Anatolian High School, a school they applied to as their seventh choice out of ten:

> We visited Fatih Terim. It's very close to the train station if he decides to use the metro. The building is new, clean, well taken care of. It's big. Our math teacher's son attends Fatih Terim. They said they were happy with the school, so we thought it would be good if that ends up being where he's placed. My sister is a high school math teacher too, see. She also says it's a good school. We were OK with it because transportation wouldn't be a problem and he could take the metro.

Throughout the interview, Selcan brings up how she felt at the moment of decision-making about the prospect of her son being placed in the schools they considered. Locational evaluations shape whether she feels positively or negatively about these future scenarios. These affective responses do more than guide parental decision-making. They help them tolerate the uncertain

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application period and prepare them emotionally for a potential placement in the lesser-ranked schools on their application lists.

In a similar fashion, even when parents do not eliminate schools in "bad locations" from their lists, locational evaluations help parents establish affective distance from these schools. This is especially the case with top schools in some application lists: the affective distance spares parents the disappointment of not being placed in one of their top choices. Consider the following excerpt from Zeynep, who makes significantly negative comments about the location of their top and third choices, after her daughter was placed also into their fourth choice out of five:

> We visited Bulent Ersoy Anatolian High School [their top choice]. I was always asking myself how long she would have to walk, where she would take the bus and get off the bus. What would the commute be like? She wasn't placed in Bulent Ersoy, but we hadn't liked it much anyway. It was a bad location. We didn't like Ahmet Necdet Sezer [their third choice] AT ALL. It had a very small school yard. A very small gym. There was a minibus station in front of it, thirty buses parked at all times of the day. Imagine, thirty drivers milling about the school. I asked myself how she could commute. The school was close to sea buses. She could take a bus to [name of a neighborhood], then transfer to a sea bus. It would be tough. She [daughter] didn't like the idea.

These examples illustrate how parents process the uncertainty of student placements by invoking locational criteria and establishing contentedness with most of the schools on their application lists. Geographic evaluations allow them to experience positive emotions about placement into their lesser choices and negative emotions about placement into their top choices. In this fashion, geography functions as more than an instrument of screening, elimination, and evaluation that sometimes works against and sometimes complement school rankings. It facilitates decision-making under uncertainty.

Discussion

This chapter examined how Turkish parents make school application decisions. The analytical framework is built on the recent sociology of decision-making (e.g., Abend 2018; Bruch and Feinberg 2018; Daipha 2015; Schwarz 2017) with its emphases on the processes, contexts, and instruments of decision-making. Unlike previous research on the topic, I conceptualize school applications as "decisions" rather than "choices" and focus on the emergence of a decision out of a problem situation with a given set of actors and a defined timeline for action. I argue that the words choice and decision ought not to be used interchangeably because they imply separate processes and outcomes. Choice is "picking" a singular option out of multiple alternatives, while decisions may emerge or may not emerge from multiple alternatives. Further, choice semantically has an ill-fit with the case at hand. When students apply to ten high schools, have they chosen ten schools over all the schools in their area, or have they chosen the top school over the rest of the schools on the list? It is much more accurate to speak of school applications as a decision to apply to a set of rank-ordered schools.

The decision-making experiences outlined in this chapter match Dewey's characterization of deliberation as "an experiment in finding out what the various lines of action are really like" (Dewey 1930:190). It begins with a problem "situation" that "presents us with conditions that we experience as a need, a conflict, a deficit, or a lack" (Whitford 2002:340). In our empirical case, the situation calls for putting together an application list. Alternative courses of action are applying to this school or that, ranking this one higher than the other, and so forth. There are multiple objectives: securing high school placement is an overarching goal that teachers often find themselves having to remind applicants, but so is placement in specific schools that appear as

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powerful objects of desire. Deliberation is the process of transforming and reconciling multiple objectives and mentally trying on different courses of action until all aligns.

The chapter illustrates that uncertainty of high school placement made decision-making particularly fraught with risks. This uncertainty is due to the student placement regime's dynamism following a series of political interventions and educational reforms. The chapter then illustrates how various decision-making instruments are deployed to alleviate these uncertainties and reintroduce a sense of stability and predictability to orient meaningful social action. School rankings are the main instrument here: promoted by the Ministry of National Education and popularized by teaching professionals, rankings help decision-makers transform uncertainty of placement into probabilities. Studying school rankings, parents become able to interpret alternative courses of action—moderate, or not too risky. As they feel out their tolerance for different levels of risk, they also form affective responses to different scenarios their children may be placed into in different high schools. Geography is the second criterion employed here: parents evaluate the location of schools under consideration to establish emotional openness to uncertain placement outcomes. The symbolic landscape of districts is the domain from which they retrieve the necessary information to evaluate locational desirability of these schools. This chapter also illustrates how decision-makers form preferences and determine alternative courses of action in the situation/moment. The radical uncertainty of exam performance and student placement renders most pre-formed preferences inoperative (Dewey 1930) and necessitates a judicious openness to situational opportunities (Johnson-Hanks 2005; Wagner-Pacifici 2000).

CHAPTER 4: FUTURE PROJECTIVITY IN HIGH SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

The future looms prominently in high school applications. Chapter 3 illustrated how parents discovered decisions that would increase their children's odds of being placed into an exam high school. It focused on concerns and objectives regarding a relatively near future where all the eighth-grade students would be appointed to some high school. However, parents consider more than one time period when they make high school decisions: they concentrate on their children's futures as college students, professionals, employees, spouses, and citizens. As Medine told me, "High school entrance exam is the first step for my son to realize his dreams and to secure the profession that will make him happy."

This chapter and the following ones focus on how parents experience and respond to uncertainties about these remote futures as they make high school application decisions. Analyzing school choice narratives and parents' reflections on futures, I report three significant findings. First, I find that future outcomes are not stable preferences or mental images that parents bring into the application period and hold fast onto. Instead, they take shape and gain clarity in the decision-making situation through actions such as conversing, fantasizing, and negotiating. The school application process urges parents to reflect on what their children's future is likely to and ought to be. It requires them to consider which future trajectories they might place their children onto with their present decisions. In that sense, I emphasize the "action" dimension of future orientation and argue that "projecting" futures is part and parcel of school application deliberations (Mische 2014). Secondly, because future projects emerge from social interaction between parents and children, they contain some tension. Parents find their intentions for their children constantly being constrained, undermined, or otherwise influenced by their children's attitudes towards the future

and aptitude for schooling. I outline five interactive processes in which families collaborate, negotiate, reign in, reject, or defer future projects. Parents often struggle with convincing their children to switch their focus from short-term experiences to long-term experiences, illustrating the interactive problem of "coordinating futures" (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). Lastly, future projects reflect institutionalized schemata about social mobility despite the uniqueness of the interactive situations in which they manifest and influence school choice decisions. I distinguish three culturally specific future projectivity that reflects three middle-class subjectivities. These are local, cosmopolitan, and pious projectivity. They capture the primary desires, fears, and expectations Turkish parents express as they orient their educational choices towards uncertain futures.

These chapters also illustrate future projects' role in the deliberation processes. Families begin application deliberation with pictures of the near and far future in their minds. For some, these images are desirable and motivated by positive thought, but other parents also focus on unwanted outcomes. These images allow parents to attach social meaning to different high schools' curricular focuses and social climates. They compare their school options with their perceptions about the kind of school, peers, and cultural environment necessary for their preferred future trajectory. If they recognize a fit, they decide on it. When there is no easy fit between their options and preferred futures, they often disassociate present decisions from future scenarios and deem the future too distant to be effectively manipulated. Overall, projectivity helps parents navigate the horizontal differentiation in Turkish secondary education by associating school types with different future alternatives. It also renders high school transitions socially significant by allowing parents to place them in larger temporal trajectories.

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In previous discussions on effective exam preparation, I introduced the myth of the informed parent who was always alert and easily recognized when a course of action did not yield expected outcomes. Teachers and parents alike praised them for their flexibility and adaptability. Another characteristic of this bilinçli figure is their foresight and capacity to place their high school choices into larger temporal trajectories. Ziynet Hoca told me,

> Some parents pay attention to whom a particular school enrolls and their exam scores. There are also informed parents who look at different things, parents that make up less than 1 percent of them all. These are very informed people. They look at the opportunities that a high school will provide their children with as they make high school choices. [They ask themselves] which universities its students attend once they graduate? Does it have foreign travel opportunities?

As this quotation suggests, Turkish parents hold different future orientations. Many frequently think about their children's futures, but these thoughts differ in their reach, breadth, clarity, contingency, and volition (Mische 2009). As the above quotation shows, people tend to regard those with far-reaching, clear, and agentic projects in higher esteem. They believe these parents steer their children's educational careers and secure advantages more effectively. A long tradition of education research tests these assumptions in the US context. Education attainment research examined whether student and parents' expectations and desires about the future impacts educational and socioeconomic outcomes (Alexander and Campbell 1964; Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Frye 2012; Kao and Tienda 1998; LeTendre 1996; Morgan 2006). Many report significant effects of educational plans independent from other factors like curricular track, aptitude, parents' education, and race (Alexander and Cook 1979; Vaisey 2010).

Yet the simplicity of empiric instruments used in this type of research does not lend itself to discovering complex theoretical insights about how future orientations shape educational processes. Much of this research is motivated to test the mechanisms proposed in the Wisconsin

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model of status attainment (Sewell and Hauser 1972; Haller and Portes 1973). According to this model, families' socioeconomic origin and students' mental ability impact academic performance, which shapes how significant others view and what they expect of students (Kerckhoff and Campell 1977). Feedback from significant others shapes students' own ambition levels and effort, directly shaping educational and occupational outcomes. Many test this model by conceptualizing future plans as the level of educational aspiration and measuring it through the reported intent to complete a specific level of education (e.g., Sewell et al. 1969; Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Kao and Tienda 1998; Qian and Blair 1999). They measure occupational aspirations by the social status index score of the occupation that study participants say they desire (Griffin and Alexander 1978; Sewell et al. 1969; Yuchtman and Samuel 1975). However, because these research designs try to capture complex future orientation and thoughts through singular survey items, they raise more questions than they answer. For instance, researchers debate whether to assume reported levels of aspirations are "motivators" of action or whether they reflect identity narratives about morally adequate and ambitious people who hold education in high esteem (Alexander and Cook 1979; Frye 2012; Kao and Thompson 2003). Many (Vaisey 2010; Kao and Thompson 2003; Young 2004) also point out that aspirations and expectations are often used interchangeably, conflating foresight with ambition. Such research designs neglect to see that predicting and desiring are two different modes of future engagement (Brannen and Nilsen 2002).

In contrast, researchers working in developmental psychology and life-course fields underline that "plans" are not the only way of engaging with the future. This distinguishes them from educational research. Although this scholarship frames long-term planning as a "skill set" that impacts life outcomes (Nurmi 1991), as Johnson-Hanks (2005:364) argues, "intending to do something is a special case of intentionality, the general class of cognitive states that are about

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something, such as wishing, believing, and detesting." In a study about Norwegian teenagers' future imaginaries, Nilsen (1999) illustrated this sensitivity by distinguishing references to dreams and hopes from plans. She contends that dreams do not demand commitment from the dreamer and are unbound by time and space. In contrast, "hopes" typically have space and time associations but communicate uncertain possibilities. Plans have set time horizons and convey a sense of control. In subsequent publications, Brannen and Nilsen (2002) elaborate on different attitudes towards the future as something ignored (the model of deferment), something that is contingent and reworked (the model of adaptability), and something that is meticulously planned (the model of predictability). Others argued that whether the youth aspire or live in an "extended present" is intimately linked to the opportunity structures in post-welfare states (Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Devadason 2008; Zipin et al. 2015).

The following chapters contribute to this scholarship by examining the future imaginaries of parents and the family unit, rather than the youth. In eighth grade, most children's lives are still surrounded by families where their parents are involved in many decisions about them. Drawing on parental interviews, this chapters highlight how parents switch between hopes, dreams, and plans as they try to make the future more tangible through the present decisions they make as a family. These shifts render it impossible to empirically answer questions like whether they have realistic or unrealistic plans, or whether expectations or ambitions have a greater influence on educational decisions because they dream and plan and reach towards several mental images and discourses about the future while detesting others. The best we can do is understand how parents create something that looks like a plan out of vague hopes and fears through the feedback they receive from their children about their interests and academic aptitudes. This interactive approach differs from the psychological perspective in that rather than seeing future orientation as having

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stable and individual traits, it accepts it as emerging from a series of interactions within the families and between families and actors in the educational field.

Future Projectivity in Turkey

Educational decisions emerge from "retrospective/prospective processes" by which families "draw on previously collected 'stocks of knowledge,' or 'typifications' of possible paths of action while 'fantasizing' in relation to the developing act in progress" (Mische 2009:696). Even our fantasies are shared in that they are shaped by resources (e.g., repertoires of action, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital), values and frames (Small et al. 2010) that originate in social class experiences and aspirations. Of course, social class experiences are not monolithic: in much of the modern world, the middle classes are characterized by fragmentation. The wide range of middle-class subjectivities reflects differences in structural locations, social mobility histories, status group memberships, and consumption and distinction practices (Ayata 2002; Karademir Hazır 2014; Öncü 1999).

In the Turkish context, parents' future projections at moments of high school transition coalesce around three main types of middle-class aspirations and corresponding positional advantages in society: local middle classes, transnational middle classes, and religious middle classes. These are future-facing, aspirational categories as well as experiential categories that reflect the history of social class formation in the country. Historically, the Turkish middle classes were a small, elite group of state-educated civil servants (military and bureaucracy) that occupied an interim place between the state-sponsored capital owners and working-class manual workers. During the 1980s and 1990s, the professional, managerial, and entrepreneurial sections of the middle class grew in size through structural changes such as the expansion of higher education, growth of the service sector, and the entry of foreign capital and consumer goods into local markets

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(Ayata 2002; Emrence 2008). In this period, sections of the professional and managerial middle classes became "transnational middle classes" (Derne 2005), tasked with providing "the expert knowledge and skills needed for the operation of multinational organizations and the maintenance of global networks of production, consumption, and bureaucracy" (Yemini and Maxwell 2020:33).

The emergence of a transnational Turkish middle class parallels the trends in much of the Global South, including South Korea, Egypt, and India (Derne 2005; Koo 2016; Schielke 2012). In all these contexts, the transnational middle classes differ from locally oriented middle classes in their employment patterns, value orientations, self-conceptions, and consumption habits (Üstüner and Holt 2010). Not only do they vary qualitatively, but they actively pursue distinction through these cultural practices (Luisa Méndez 2008; Savage 2000). The social status of the old middle classes was tied to the prestige of public education and employment on the one hand, and the display of modernity through conspicuous consumption of consumer goods on the other (Liechty 2003; Schielke 2012). The transnational middle classes, on the other hand, distinguished themselves through the display of "cosmopolitanism" as cultural capital (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Weenink 2008). In the Turkish context, these groups—typically referred to as "new" middle classes (Arat-Koç 2018; Karademir Hazır 2017)—have pursued symbolic distinction through elite educational credentials (Üstel and Birol 2009), spatial separation (Ayata 2002; Richer 2015), and more recently, by "birth tourism" and American citizenship (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016).

What perhaps distinguishes Turkey from much of the Global South is the further differentiation between the country's religious and secular middle classes and their rivalry over public hegemony. Scholars associate the formation of a religious middle class in Turkey with various transformations: capital accumulation by conservative provincial business owners after the neoliberal restructuring of the economy and their subsequent investments in education, the political

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vacuum left after the oppression of leftist movements with the 1980 coup, the rise of political Islam, and the successful mobilization of Milli Selamet Partisi in the cities (Göle 1997; Karademir Hazır 2017; White 2011). This emergent group cultivated a different type of middle-class subjectivity through embodied practices of piety, political activism, and consumption of "Islamic" consumer goods (Karademir Hazır 2017).

These three middle-class subjectivities are associated with different social mobility schemata that reflect a unique constellation of resources, objectives, and tastes. These mobility frames come in handy when parents encounter the pronounced horizontal differentiation of Turkey's secondary education. Curricular differentiation and status hierarchies pose an important dilemma to families: how to choose among culturally different but similarly highly ranked exam schools. The following chapters will illustrate how social mobility schemata helps parents associate school types with different projected futures, allowing them to choose the options with the closest fit to their preferred futures.

Local Projects

It is high school application week, and I am stationed in the student counselor's office at a private middle school not far from Kavak. I have been there since the morning, observing parents come in with application lists in various stages of completion and receive solicited or unsolicited feedback from the counselor about the schools on their lists.

When a man and two boys enter the room, the student counselor greets them with a loud, commendatory voice. "Our star student! Congratulations. You seem to be in good spirits?" As the group shares a laugh, the man comments that his son's gait has become more confident since he received the exam result. When the group is seated across from her desk, the counselor asks, "Well, where are you thinking of applying?" The student, Salih, answers, "We are thinking of AFL" [the

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acronym of Istanbul's top science high school]. The counselor's exclamation, "Stop it, really? You deserve better than AFL," is met with surprise and awkward silence. "Why would you say that?" The father inquires after a beat. "I am jesting, of course. But you know Istanbul Erkek High School has a higher percentile. That's why I said that." Salih states that while they considered the matter lengthily, they decided against Istanbul Erkek because of its German-language preparation year. "I heard the same thing from another parent who visited Istanbul Erkek High School yesterday. Is Istanbul Erkek's principal trying to chase students away? What has he been saying?" The father replies, "I think he has a point. He says that their system is different, and their priorities are different. They are not preparing students for the college examination system in Turkey. He is saying it as it is. He says that they can send their students directly to German universities, but if they want to study in Turkey, they will need private tutoring support for at least a year. AFL's principal said the opposite; he said that they prepare their students for here." Salih supplements his father's explanation. "AFL seemed appropriate because I want to study medicine in Turkey."

Salih's family represents the locally oriented Turkish middle class who see themselves as competing in a nationally bounded educational field and seek advantageous positions within this field. Future projections of these families typically involve high-status professions and attending prestigious universities. They pay attention to what sort of high school experience is conducive to placement in a prestigious university program in Turkey and make their high school applications accordingly. The status culture in which they participate revolves around quantifiable measures of academic success. They evaluate schools according to admission selectivity, university placement rates, and STEM performance. Most of them believe that the highest ranked programs/schools are the best options and prefer science high schools to Anatolian, Imam Hatip, and vocational high schools.

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What are Local Projects?

Parents who see their children as competing in a national education field have future projections with two main themes: institutionally specific college goals and taste for the STEM fields. These are the "hopes" they enter deliberation with, and before we focus on how they transform these hopes into actionable plans, we ought to understand their significance. Higher education is the next transitionary point for incoming high school students. Due to its temporal proximity, many parents begin high school applications with some sense of what they want for their children's higher education. As they verbalize these "hopes," they casually switch between wanting and predicting.

> She wants to be a teacher. I met someone who studied child development at Bogazici and opened a daycare. I immediately told [name of daughter] about her, and she loved the idea. I have a special sympathy towards Bogazici. I think Bogazici gives you a lot. Partially because of the peer environment. If she gets a good score, she can use that score to get into Bogazici, but will she become a teacher? I don't know. She gets along very well with children, though. (Ayşe)

> Where do I see him in five years? He wants computer engineering now so he might do that. I see him studying computer engineering, probably at ITU. I don't think he would be able to get into Boğaziçi. (Zehra)

These institutionally specific hopes are attached to real socioeconomic concerns. Parents perceive differences between universities regarding the signaling power of diplomas in job markets. They speak of these symbolic differences as well-known facts and believe that enrollment at a prestigious university will have serious benefits. For example, Oğuz tells me that he does not expect or wish her to "become very successful, do these marvelous things, have a career, become a manager or have everything laid out for her." His only hope is that his daughter has a job that she would like to do in the future. However, he believes that "schools with a tradition" are necessary for this dream. To substantiate this conviction, he relays a recent conversation with someone who worked in a hiring department. "He said that they pick universities these days. I

asked him how. He said that the new hires must be a Bogazici alumna." Oğuz found this practice unfair because he believes that not being a high achiever in high school and missing a spot at Bogazici University does not mean people do not acquire on-the-job experience and skills after graduating from a lower-tier university. However, he thinks that preference for undergraduate institutions like Bogazici is unavoidable. "They are selected based on a label. That's the way things are in Turkey." Later, he comes back to this topic and requests me to collaborate with his view. "You must be aware of it too. Once you finish your school or post-doc and return to Turkey, you will look for a job. When you say that you are a Bogazici graduate .... or, when you become a manager in the future, you will look differently at candidates who came from Bogazici University. It will always be an advantage."

Other parents mentioned the symbolic power of a Bogazici degree too. For example, Meltem believed that Bogazici or ODTU were the only national universities that granted degrees with a strong signaling effect.

> They must go abroad and put it in their CVs to be noticed. Unless they do that, their CVs are disregarded. Or they must graduate from Bogazici or ODTU like you did. They will look at their CVs then.

The specificity of these aspirations alludes to very real socioeconomic consequences of college degrees and the much-examined preoccupation of Turkish middle classes with symbolic distinction (Oncu 1999; Ayata 2002; Karademir-Hazir 2013). Academic qualifications from specific universities are important measures of symbolic capital that middle-class parents recognize as legitimate *and* attainable for their children. The search for respect often finds its way into conversations about the future. For example, when I ask Sare, a Kavak mother who believes her son can become an engineer, what she would like her son to have when he is thirty, she replies that she wants her son's merit to be recognized. The distinction comes up in my interview with

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Hilal as well, when she substantiates their preference for a selective science high school over a private school that she believed to offer an otherwise quality education.

> One day you may encounter … I mean, you can't always explain everything to people. For example, when they ask me about his placement now, I say the school's name, and they are like, "Ohh, that school is … he must have gotten a good score." But if he had gone to [name of the private high school], it's private. You pay to go there. It wouldn't be the same thing; you know what I mean? They wouldn't say, "he got a good score but...." You would have to explain it. See? Or his university. People pay attention to the university you end up going to.

Parents like Hilal are aware that school brands were part of the middle-class status culture and enjoy it when their children's schools distinguish them from others. After placing their son in a well-known science high school, Hilal received many congratulatory phone calls from parents "in the know"—and she emphasized not everyone belonged to this group—who told her it had been their "dream school."

Field of study and occupation is another dimension of local projects. Turkish university applicants are not only placed at universities but also in particular departments within, so people make career choices in stages. Students who enroll at science high schools implicitly commit to applying to science programs at college. Tenth grade students in Anatolian and Imam Hatip high schools must choose a concentration from among humanities, STEM, foreign language, or general studies.[1] At the end of twelfth grade, they take the corresponding sub-test at the university entrance exam and apply to programs in those broad fields of study. Within this time horizon, the decision of occupational choice must occur within five years from eighth grade graduation.

Most local projects revolve around STEM professions. About half of all interviewed parents mentioned medicine or engineering as the fields their children are interested in pursuing

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[1] Science high school students can only receive a STEM-focused education, whereas social science high school students can choose between humanities and general studies.

or the fields they would like their children to pursue. These reports are not surprising given the status of these professions. Engineers have a special status in the ideological trajectory of the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Göle (1997:55) calls engineers the "agents of social and economic development" and examines how engineers' political ideologies have shifted to illustrate elite and counter-elite formation in Turkey. Elsewhere Göle (1993) notes that engineers have replaced bureaucrats as the ruling/political elite in the second half of the twentieth century with their increased representation in the political system. One outcome of this transformation, she argues, is the Political Science Faculty of Ankara University losing its former prestige while technical universities like ITU rise in popularity. Engineering remains a popular and prestigious profession in Turkey. In a 2019 national survey on occupational status and work life, Sunar (2020) found that engineering and medicine were among the five professions that survey respondents most frequently cited as professions they would like to go into if they had to do it over again. Other popular answers were working as teacher, lawyer, and police officer.[2]

Families with local projects displayed both expressive and practical preferences for engineering. Some considered engineering a good fit with their children's personalities and interests. They created individualistic accounts for how and why they hoped their children might go into an engineering field. These ranged from pleasant discoveries about innovative traits to interest in technology.

> In terms of occupations, I think he could study engineering. I would have loved for him to go into medicine, but I don't think he will. Maybe computer engineering, or a new field that'll emerge by that time. Like robotics and so forth. He is interested in those things. He must be involved in something contemporary. He is not a monotone kid who could do ordinary things and say, "Let me become a doctor." (Sare)

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[2] Sunar (2020) argues that what these popular professions had in common are workplace authority, public employment opportunities, high social status, above-average income, and technical skill prerequisite.

When he was only 3-4 years old and didn't know much about occupations, he said he wanted to understand how computers worked and how engines worked. He would point and ask. I said it was mechanical engineering, so he started to say he wanted to be a mechanical engineer. (Piraye)

Others verbalized utilitarian motivations for wishing to see their children go into engineering and medical programs. Job opportunities and income were the most well-cited reasons among them. Still, they distinguished lucrative engineering fields from others. Civil and electric engineers had a reputation for being unemployed while software engineering was associated with secure employment, just like medicine.

She is smart. Instead of studying riffraff like media, she could become an engineer. She would make better money. Even engineers are starved in Turkey, but she does not have to do engineering work if she studies engineering. She can work as a manager at a bank or a company when she graduates. (Mehtap)

We had a guest last night. He graduated from electrical engineering and has been looking for a job for the past two years. He is working as a waiter. What can my son do? He can find some position if he becomes a doctor or a lawyer, as long as he graduates from a good school, and only then. (Cemile)

These excerpts illustrate that parents consider basic economic needs, such as stable employment and sustenance, directly related to occupational trajectories. They associate access to these scarce resources with STEM careers and the prestige of one's academic institution but realize that academic performance is a key facilitator. The institutional specificity of these plans attests to public education and higher education's inadequacy for social class mobility in contemporary Turkey. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the uneven expansion of Turkey's secondary and tertiary education has created various hierarchies. Since the 2000s, higher education participation has become a mass phenomenon in Turkey.[3] The net enrollment rates of eighteen-year-olds in tertiary

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[3] According to Trow (1974), higher education expansion has three stages: the "elite higher education" stage when gross enrollment rate in higher education is less than 15 percent; the "mass higher education" stage when the gross enrollment rate is between 15 percent and 50 percent; and the "universal higher education" stage when the gross enrollment rate is over 50 percent. According to the World Bank data, higher education

education increased to 48.5 percent in 2018, indicating that about half of the population at eighteen years of age enrolled in a higher education program.[4] Although university education became more common, graduation from older universities established in the elite stage of higher education is more profitable both economically and symbolically. This stratification of institutional hierarchies reflects global trends where expansion introduces new bases of differentiation and maintains the "positional" quality of education (Trow 1973; Lucas 2001). High profile research universities confer status through student selectivity and research performance in the global higher education field, while mass institutions give diplomas that are continually devalued in employment markets (Alon 2009; Brown 2000, 2003; Marginson 2006; Smolentseva 2017).

Many of the interviewed Turkish parents are conscious of these qualitative differences between universities. They hope their children get into a high-status program in a high-status university due to the decreasing value of credentials in the mass stage of higher education.

Coordinating Futures Within the Family

Parents often have outlandish dreams and hopes for their children's futures. They have substantial influence over realizing these dreams due to the typical power imbalance between parents and children. However, coercion within the family often backfires as adolescents gain independence, and many parents find this method morally abhorrent. Without coercion, translating hopes and dreams into plans and projects requires substantial, within family coordination.

Families resolve these coordination problems in different ways. In a descriptive study on parental involvement in education, Edwards and Alldred (2000) create a two-by-two matrix to illustrate the range of arrangements between parents and children regarding the latter's educational

gross enrollment rate of Turkey in 2018 was 113 percent, including students enrolled in remote education, associates, and post-graduate programs.

[4] Source: OECD (https://data.oecd.org/students/enrolment-rate-in-secondary-and-tertiary-education.htm).

experiences. These are: active children with involved parents, inactive children with involved parents, active children with uninvolved parents, and inactive children with uninvolved parents. Reay and Ball (1998) similarly focus on the roles assumed by parents and children but examine the dynamics of school choice decision-making. They distinguish between families with "personal" and "positional" styles of interaction. Within the personalized families, communication is democratic and children's opinion carries the same weight as their parents. The aim is to reach consensus. Yet most typically, families illustrate "positional" styles of communication where one person emerges as an educational expert and their opinion overrides others. In working-class families, this tend to be the child via their greater proxy to the educational field as an active student. In these families, parents defer to the child's judgement and recognize their autonomy. In middle-class families, it is often one of the parents who assumes the role of the educational expert and tries to guide the children to the best alternative. They use impression management and strategies of persuasion to sway opposing opinions.

While Reay and Ball (1998) examine how family dynamics determine school choice, this chapter extends their findings by considering how families coordinate their expectations from long- and short-term futures during high school applications. Tavory and Eliasoph's (2013) distinction between time horizons provides a useful conceptual framework to understand how these future imaginaries with varying "distances" to the present intersect in familial decision-making. Drawing on Husserl's (1991) phenomenology of time-consciousness, Tavory and Eliasoph (2013) distinguish protentions, trajectories, and temporal landscapes. Protentions represent actors' relations to the immediate future. They are typically taken for granted, anticipating what comes next in the sequence of events that actors have already entered (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). In contrast, trajectories are larger time frames that involve a beginning,

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middle, and an end. They involve narratives and projects that actors feel they direct through intentionality, volition, and resourcefulness. The final time orientation are plans and temporal landscapes that capture events sequenced in a naturalized, automatic sense, such as Mondays being followed by Tuesday on the calendar, or sixth grade being followed by seventh grade, and so forth. Actors rarely feel they need to show much volition to move along a temporal landscape— time just takes them there.

This is an elaborate classification, but there are some problems with its applicability to the present study. We could say the end of middle school and the beginning of high school constitutes a temporal landscape because the progression is taken for granted in a universal education system. But most Turkish families view it as a "project" because high school application is mandatory and student placement is not automatic. Referring to it as a project might confuse it with what we have been referring to as "future projectivity," particularly with regards to the alternative trajectories that involve specific degrees and higher education institutions. The concept of "protention" is typically used for anticipation within a single interactive event, like a conversation (Bourdieu 1998; Garfinkel 1967; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013,). Still, I use it for high school application for students who have taken the high school exam in the absence of an alternative conceptualization.

While high school application represents a short-term future orientation called "protentions" for families of eighth graders, thoughts about college entry and training for specific professions requires people to place themselves into particular "trajectories" (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). The following analysis will illustrate how families coordinate futures by deciding which school to apply to while simultaneously considering what remote future possibilities they might unlock. Different future projects emerge from within-family deliberations about which protention to place onto which trajectories.
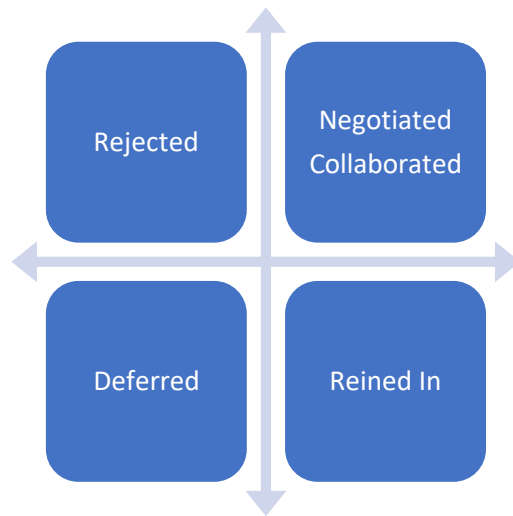
I find that five modes of future projects emerged from parents' interactions with their children: collaborated, negotiated, rejected, deferred, and reined in. In the first type of situation, both the children and parents bring long term occupational interests to the deliberation moment. They "negotiate" or "collaborate" on these interests to align high school decisions with temporal trajectories. In the second type of situation, parents and children decide together to postpone thoughts about occupational choice. They are motivated to study hard and make educational choices that keep doors open for them, but morally object to what they see as overambitious interruptions over an innocuous childhood period. No long-term projects emerge from these interactions and the task is consensually "deferred" to a later time. In the third situation, parents and children hold mismatched orientations towards long-term goals. The child might express interest in a particular profession but may not display the necessary academic aptitude. Parents appear wary of their children's stated goals and try to elucidate realistic plans in these cases. They refrain from engaging in long-term planning and "rein in" their children's long-term interests. However, the dynamic is the opposite in some cases where parents encourage their children to

"take the future seriously." They bring it up in conversations and try to enroll their children in music or robotics courses to discover new interests. Essentially, they try to convince their children to move beyond "protentions" concerning the future. When their children do not respond to these efforts, the resulting projectivity is "rejected." The next section uses empirical examples to illustrate how these modes emerge from parent-child interactions during the high school application period and how it shapes decision-making. Although I use examples from families articulating local projects, similar dynamics are observed with pious and cosmopolitan projects as well.

Collaborated Projects

In some families, students who finish eighth grade have occupational aspirations that their parents respect and share. Their exam performances afford them multiple alternatives and are sufficient to transform these "hopes" into intelligible projects. Parents' main role is helping children discover the most appropriate school alternatives to work towards their future goals. During this process of collaborative deliberation, they construct the future as dependent on access to certain institutional fields. How to get there and what it would look like gains clarity as they verbally establish pathways between now and then. Through this collaborative future-thinking, families can place their next step (the protention) onto a larger temporal framework. Such connections allow parents to feel empowered and purposeful in their choices.

Consider Hilal, the mother of a top performing Kavak student. Hilal's stepson has expressed a vague interest in becoming a pilot or an engineer. She describes him as a self-disciplined student who has always been a little "obsessive" about finishing his homework immediately. During eighth grade, he prepared studiously for the exam without a specific school in mind. Once he learnt that he had only given one wrong answer on the LGS, he started to express

interest in Istanbul Erkek High School. They applied to it, followed by Kabatas High School and Ataturk Fen High School. When he got into Ataturk Fen, their son wanted to reapply to Kabatas High School because it had a higher ranking, but they decided against it.

> My uncle is a former school district director. He advised against it, saying Kabatas is a very serious school. But he said the science high school was pretty good too. If the kid's interested in science, there is no need to transfer. We hear very good things about it from many people. My husband has graduated from [name] University, and he has many college friends who went to high school there. They are very happy about it. So, this makes us feel good about it too. So, we said, kismet. He [the son] has apparently investigated which university programs their graduates have got into. I didn't personally see those lists. He said, "look, they have all got into Cerrahpasa Medical School or studied engineering." That's good to hear too. I mean, he considers, he wants to study engineering. So, our hearts were at peace with the placement.

It is noteworthy that Hilal's son showed interest in higher status professions and could secure placement in high status high schools. This helps the parents give him autonomy, believing whatever choice he makes will put him into a good trajectory. Furthermore, when I probe why they did not apply to private high schools, I notice that their son's preference for selective public schools aligns with their preference for a future trajectory with the smallest economic and political risk. One of Hilal's husband's friends encouraged them to apply to Robert College over the summer. However, they dismissed the idea, thinking their son is too laid-back to fit in with the typical crowd who attend there. Further, she underlines that many of their acquaintances turned away from private schools because of economic reasons. "You know the value of dollar has gone up so much. Tuitions skyrocketed. It's not like the past anymore. So, people are being cautious." They also turned down a scholarship offer from a private school called "Nun" because they consider its affiliation with the government too risky. "We didn't even go in for an interview with them. Because of ideological reasons. We are not against the current government, we support them. But we don't know what is going to happen in the future. We don't want him to get into trouble. You know what I mean, because they look at your kid's CV and background for hiring."

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Hilal's case exemplifies parents who accept their child's occupational interests and use this as a guide to apply to or accept placement in a science high school. During these deliberations, they invoke and evaluate various future "images" and past evidence of higher education transitions to create clear and coherent educational projects for their children. When these families collaboratively coordinate short-term choices with long-term aspirations, they often create projects with substantial clarity, volition, contingency, and reach (Mische 2009).

Negotiated Projects

In some households, projectivity involves more negotiation than collaboration. It is characterized by attempts to persuade one another about occupational aspirations or certain high schools. The interactive problems they face are determining which long-term trajectory to pursue and how to synchronize this with alternative protentions. Yet it is not always the longer-term goal that determines the shorter-term choice. Sometimes, a family member who prefers a school option creates rhetorical pathways from it to an agreed upon "future outcome" to convince the others of this option's merit. In that sense, the projected future becomes the means of choosing the desired school. In households where members negotiate future projects, there are often disagreements over school options that might prematurely commit students to a certain trajectory instead of expanding their horizons. Some parents try to dissuade their children from pursuing vocationally specific schools to retain flexibility about occupational choice.

Take Funda, who negotiated both high school and occupational options with her daughter. Funda takes her daughter's interests and skills as well as the condition of the labor market to pick a "smart" career track for her.

> My daughter has mathematical intelligence. She has both linguistic, interpersonal, and mathematical intelligence. Her teachers always commended her for this, and we have always told her, "Study medicine, save yourself." Her grandparents still pressure her in that

regard, but she doesn't want medicine at all. She wants to study engineering. But you know, there are too many mechanical engineers and electrical engineers these days. Everyone seems to graduate from those departments. But computer engineering is in demand, so I always try to direct [name of daughter] towards that.

When her daughter took the entrance exam and received a competitive ranking, they considered the science and Anatolian high schools in the districts closest to them. Funda already had in mind ÇAPA Science High School, which she had been loosely interested in since her daughter had started high school. She liked that it was located right next to ÇAPA, an old and established research hospital. She saw the high school's affiliation with the hospital as constituting a pipeline into the medical profession. She spoke of the school having good academics and placing its students at top universities. Having decided that they would rank ÇAPA as their top option, they considered whether their second option ought to be a higher ranked Anatolian high school with a longer commute or an Anatolian high school in their district. They compared their record of placing students into medical programs. When they saw that the nearby Anatolian high school placed 70 percent of their graduates into a medical program, it convinced them about the school's quality and their daughter's prospects. But they found their daughter insistent on the school with the longer commute. It took both parents to convince their daughter of the appropriateness of the closer high school for her college aspirations.

> We reminded her that she would need as much time as she could with the college exam ahead of her. She cannot waste time on the road. She would need to wake up very early to catch the school bus and get home late. But she would be more comfortable if she went to this school.

The family also considered whether different high school types would facilitate her daughter's access to the professions they were interested in.

> We knew that ÇAPA was a science high school. [daughter's name] wasn't keen on it much because she did not want to study medicine. She wants to become an engineer. But science high schools are also inclined to engineering, so she said "maybe." About the Anatolian high schools, we pointed out the students placed in engineering and medical programs and told her it was a good choice.

Some families with local projects argue over choosing social science and technical high schools. Mische (2009) suggests that people typically view future possibilities as expanding in youth or at the beginning of a new career; however, Turkish parents typically associate high school choice with the contraction of future possibilities to the curricular specificity of Turkish high schools. It makes them wary of educational choices that will be irreversible in the long run.

Take Ayfer, a mother whose son's interest in history and public service made him interested in attending a social science high school. Ayfer and her husband were not in favor of this school, and she initially explained their position regarding the school's location and ranking (below their son's). However, as she talked more, she began to elaborate on the future implications of enrolling at high schools with a singular curricular focus.

> I think it is commendable for my son to put his mind to a goal at such a young age. It's beautiful for him to proceed with a strategy. But unfortunately, opinions tend to change after adolescence. Even with a t-shirt he loves at the time of purchase; he might lose interest in two months. That's why I didn't want him to impede himself. Going to an Anatolian high school wouldn't keep him from studying political science. But if he wanted to study engineering, or if he wanted to become a pilot, going to a social science high school would be a serious obstacle.

Parents acknowledge the significance of a young adult whose actions and choices go beyond protentions. However, they believe their choices should keep them in the game without committing to any singular trajectory for as long as possible. To dissuade her son, Ayfer and her husband arranged for him to talk to a former student from the social science high school in question.

> He said, "Sister if you want me to manipulate him, I can manipulate him." I told him I would never harm my son like that. Just tell him as it is, and I trust he will make the right choice. I gave them privacy, and they talked one on one. Apparently, he told my son, "Your ranking is so high, you are ahead of this school by thousands of people. Why would you go there? If you change your mind in two or three years, this decision will have put a roadblock in front of you. You will want to reverse it, but you won't be able to." Afterward, my son came to me and said he had given up on social science school.

Utku was another parent who cautioned his son about the implications of attending a selective vocational school. He had no qualms about his interest in working as an engineer in the defense industry. Still, he was worried that attending ASELSAN, the project vocational school established in partnership with a national defense company, would put him on an irreversible path.

> Out of the 120 students who graduate from that school, probably only one student every three years gets placed into a medical program. They may get the necessary exam score; I don't deny that. But you get shaped in five years. Your path narrows. Your choice narrows. You can say, "I'll study medicine" or "I'll study engineering" at a science high school, or you can proceed to law school from an Anatolian high school, but there are probably not a lot of science high school students who go on to study law. So, when you go to ASELSAN, it means you've made a choice. Your occupation is determined at fourteen years old. You'll focus on electronics.

These observations parallel previous findings from youth research about postponing choices that require commitment (Bois-Reymond 1998) and popularity of reversibility (Vieira 2013). In *Parenting Out of Control*, Nelson (2012) also argues that a prevalent middle-class strategy for managing economic uncertainty was to plan for flexibility. She reports middle-class parents' belief that workers will have to change jobs often in the future. Instead of investing in an educational track that will train their children for a particular career, they sought to develop children with multifaceted skills and abilities. This orientation manifested in their view of the proper role of college as "a time for their children to acquire the necessary cultural and social capital to be able to seize any opportunities for status that might arise" (2012:34). Turkish parents held similar expectations about high school education but experienced the dilemma of raising their children as goal and future oriented while keeping their occupational plans flexible. However, it is interesting that parents typically worry more about high schools specializing in social sciences and vocations than STEM fields. Many believe that going to science high schools will be advantageous to their children by distinguishing them from college friends with little exposure to engineering.

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In contrast, they expect their children to have a change of heart about their career plans after attending a social science or vocational high school. This position reflects conscious and subconscious biases towards non-STEM fields. It also suggests that competitive impulses and positional interests drive future projectivity.

Deferred Projects

While several of the interviewed parents picture precise futures and STEM-focused careers, occupational indecisiveness is another strong theme that emerged from parental interviews. Many parents do not have clear career aspirations for their children, and they typically do not resent their children for not having them either. They believe in self-directedness and allowing children to develop occupational interests in time, towards the end of adolescence. These families have conversations about the future and the advantages of various professions, but they consensually postpone making any plans. Without specific occupational objectives or interests, their future talks involve expressive aspirations such as happiness, independence, and fulfillment.

For example, when I asked Evrim whether her son has any occupational interests, she replied,

> We talk about it sometimes, but he doesn't really. He says, "How can I know what I will do at twenty-five years old when I am fifteen years old?" He says he wants to travel worldwide; he is interested in history. He has dreams appropriate for his age. He doesn't make statements like, "this is what I will do when I am thirty."

This position does not bother Evrim, whose priority as a parent is to help her children become mentally, emotionally, and physically self-reliant. She says,

> You see some kids setting specific goals for themselves, like becoming rich from a shortcut or becoming financially well-off. It is because that's all they hear being talked about at home. "Let's get a good car. Let's get this or that." But they [her sons] must become good people first. They have to become good people who can stand on their own feet. Once they complete their development, they can take care of things money can buy. Maybe they won't live in luxury like those people, but I do not want to compare them with them anyway.

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Furthermore, some parents look down upon economically-driven future goals as greedy and misguided ambitions. When I ask Hatice and Meltem about the future, they express an interest in avoiding social demotion in a hierarchy of class structure (Bridge and Wilson 2015), rather than helping their children up to a higher social class position. They see their interest as humble and moral and associate specific occupational goals with selfish greed.

> We have never dreamed of our children attaining great material sources or social positions. We have no other expectation than them being able to take care of themselves and their families. I would never impose my dreams on my children.

> I want him to be able to sustain himself, to rely on no one else, and to be comfortable. He can do whichever occupation he wants if he has that. It doesn't matter to me whether he becomes an engineer or a doctor or something like that. What's important is for him to look out for himself and be independent. I wouldn't want to wish him to be a doctor for my ego. I don't care about being able to say, "I am the mother of a doctor."

How does this lack of occupational precision impact decision-making in high school applications? Rather than seeking school experiences customized to specific interests, these parents believe in investing in their children's future by helping them get ahead of others at each level of education. For example, when these parents apply to science high schools, they explain this choice with their selectivity and university placement records, not with any specific interest in STEM professions. Oğuz was a good example of this. When I interviewed Oğuz at the beginning of eighth grade, he told me that his daughter had no occupational aspirations. He believed that it was both a generational issue and a developmental issue.

> Unfortunately, kids in this generation have significant uncertainties and problems. They are undecided. Was I decided? Yes, I wanted to become a pilot and be involved in space studies, but it didn't work out because of Turkey's lack of employment opportunities. I used to read science fiction and loved space. But the new generation of kids is bombarded with information. They see things on Instagram and Facebook. They cannot develop a goal. Very few kids have an objective, as far as I can see.

While his daughter wanted to be a doctor for a while, she lost interest in it. Oğuz found it natural at her age. He valued flexibility in career planning but was worried about financial stability.

> My daughter can make mistakes in her occupational choice. She can decide against becoming a doctor after enrolling in a medical school. She can choose to become an artist. This is not a problem for me. If that's her dream, she should pursue it. But my only concern is, and I am taking precautions against this, is that she finds herself at a tight spot economically.

Toprak also played the academic "getting ahead game" without a specific plan. Toprak was a first-generation university graduate from a low-income background. She became a lawyer without any support from her family and took care of them after starting to work. Education has accorded her social mobility, and she believed education was the only way her son would be able to become a self-reliant adult. Her son was one of the top-scoring students at Kavak and dreamed of studying paleontology and traveling to Africa for research. Toprak took this as childish fantasy and compared it with more attainable aspirations. "He does not have a dream of making money, of becoming a doctor or an engineer. He doesn't have a realistic dream. I don't know if it's because of his young age." Toprak believed the paleontology pathway had no clear roadmap. "When I ask, 'where do you study to work as a paleontologist?' He shrugs and says: 'probably the science high school.'"

Toprak did not name specific schools, fields of study, or professions as her goals for her son. Still, her repeated use of the qualified "good" for her aspirations underlines her belief that attending any high school or university or having any job is not sufficient.

> I want him to have a good, problem-free life. I want him to have a promising career. I want him to be successful, and my biggest goal is that he is happy. Just be healthy and happy. […] I always tell him, "If you go to a good school, you can go to a good high school. If you go to a good high school, you can get into a good university. If you go to a good university, you can be employed at an above-average job and make good money. If you make good money, you live comfortably.

When her son ranked in the top 0.8th percentile in the exam, Toprak launched into extensive research about college placements, campus facilities, and extracurriculars for Istanbul's top-ranked Anatolian and science high schools such as Galatasaray, Kabatas, Istanbul Erkek, and Ataturk Fen. She ruled out Galatasaray and Istanbul Erkek as unlikely options given their percentiles and considered Ataturk Fen guaranteed if they applied. While she was inclined to include all these schools in their applications, she worried that ranking Ataturk Fen as their third choice might penalize them if they did not get in the top two. She compared Ataturk Fen's college placement record with Kabatas's popularity and branding (seaside campus) but did not understand why many high-ranked students preferred Kabatas to Ataturk Fen. This confusion made her question the comparative advantages of Anatolian and Science high schools.

> Based on my conversations, I concluded that passing the university entrance exam is guaranteed for students attending Science High Schools. They study for that goal. They do well in math and science courses, and they can get into college, particularly into engineering or medical programs. Students who attend Anatolian high schools need additional tutoring for math and science tests. On the other hand, they get solid foreign language training. So, if a foreign language is crucial for you, you choose Anatolian high schools. If you want a career in Turkey and want to get into a good university, you choose Science high schools.

Interestingly enough, Toprak included both science and Anatolian high schools on her son's application list despite this elaborative reasoning because they had higher rankings than the science high schools they left out.

These examples illustrate that families who postpone plans do not ignore the long-term consequences of high school choice. Parents in these families tend to share other parents' economic concerns and believe accessing high-status schools will increase their children's future socioeconomic status. However, they do not deem occupational goals a prerequisite for being prepared for the future. In the absence of occupational goals aligned with the missions of specific

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school types, they rely on institutional cues of school quality to keep their children ahead of the game. Interestingly, these parents often make similar decisions with applicants interested in STEM fields because they use school ranking to determine the quality of education.

Rejected and Reined in Projects

The remaining future projects emerge from a mismatch between parents and children regarding long-term goals. In rejected projects, parents find their children focused exclusively on the present and the near future, and they feel unhappy about their lack of interest in any specific occupational fields. Their relationship is strained by the parental encouragement to see the future as a project and schooling as part of a sequence of events that extend into adulthood. This type of coordination problem is typical in families with an academically struggling child who applies to local high schools, so I leave further elaboration on this theme to Chapter 7.

In some families, children express interest in highly demanding career fields, but their parents are skeptical about these due to their record of low academic performance. In these situations, parents create contingency narratives where they annotate their children's goals with the necessity of improving academic performance. They reign in what they consider "overambition," which often leads to dramatic confrontations where the child feels slighted by the parents. Some of these parents resist mentally engaging with the distant future altogether and focus on more immediate tasks, like getting into a good school. This disengagement shields them from reckoning with the unlikelihood of reaching these goals.

Take Rabia, the mother of a male Kavak student. Rabia was a very involved mother who made various sacrifices for her children's education. She moved from her own house in a smaller city to a rental in Istanbul so that her older son, a high school student, would not have to stay in

the dorms. She routinely sat down at the desk with her sons when they studied and created handwritten study materials like lesson reviews. About her youngest son's future, she told me,

> He wants to become an engineer to help his father. He is not completely decided, but he brings it up sometimes. His uncles motivate him about it and tell him to continue his father's business. Someone told him to become a lawyer, so he brings that up sometimes: "Shall I become a lawyer?" But he needs to read a lot for that, and he is not keen on reading. I wonder what will happen. The high school period is essential. If he works harder in high school, it will pave the path forward for him.

When I asked Rabia about her vision for her son at thirty years of age, she laughed. "I cannot think that far ahead. Like I said before, I haven't been able to take my mind off their schooling stuff, so I haven't formed those dreams yet." Kübra, another Kavak mother, mentions that her son wants to become a dentist, but she doubts it will happen.

> Dentistry is a nice profession, but I don't know. Will he be able to get in? Will he strike a good high school? That's why I don't want to dream. At this point, it's a bit … I mean I don't think he'll be able to get into an exam school because he cannot score above 400 in mock exams. He has a lot of confidence and often tells me he'll get into an exam school and will embarrass me [for doubting him]. If you ask him, he'll get into Galatasaray high school [chuckles].

Unfortunately, data on the role of future projectivity in these families' application decisions are thin because quite a few of them—including Rabia and Kübra—did not agree to a follow-up interview after their children took the high school exam. In brief conversations in the summer, they told me their children did not get into an exam school, and they were disappointed with the outcome. They had few options and either sent their children to a private high school or a local Anatolian high school that recruited students based on middle school GPAs. They said their school application was a quick, straightforward affair, so there was nothing to elaborate on. Follow-up interviews with the remaining families suggest that their hesitance about making long-term plans during eighth grade continued in the application period. They make almost no reference to specific occupational objectives as they describe how they evaluated their options.

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For instance, Adile considered her son a hard-working student with a "good enough" academic aptitude. Through eighth grade, he did not have any specific occupational interests, and neither did Adile. Adile speculated about his inclinations and strengths and thought his lack of interest in reading or socializing meant he would do poorly in a humanities program. He picked up foreign languages quickly, so that told her something. But she was unwilling to form or express more concrete plans beyond, "Can he do something in the linguistic fields? I don't know, I don't think so. It is tough to say something at this point. Let me say this: I want to see what he does in the LGS to take his measure. It would be inappropriate to comment now." Adile substantiates this hesitance later on in the interview with her short-term focus.

> One of my friends who knew my son was a successful student said he might make a good aerospace engineer. He is afraid of heights; there is no way he could do that. So, I don't know. You bet I will express my opinions when the time comes. I am a curious person; I like to read up on professions. But I don't research anything before its time. Take the LGS. I hadn't read up on the LGS system until my son started eighth grade. I don't know what the university entrance exam is going to be like. I will learn when the time comes—the same thing with occupations.

Adile thought of the future as a sequence of hurdles where influence was unidirectional. Her son's LGS performance and placement into a good high school would impact his future, but doing well at the LGS or getting into a good school was independent of their thoughts about the future. As a result, when they received her son's exam result, they made decisions based on very near-term considerations like the size of the classrooms in private vs. public schools and the likelihood of being assigned to classrooms with students who have similar academic skills. These mothers focused exclusively on protentions and keeping their children in the race by securing the quality of education. What they would do with the resulting educational success was a question they would address in high school.

Discussion

This chapter examined how eighth-grade families craft futures with varying clarities, reach, and volition to guide their high school application deliberations (Mische 2009). It focused on families interested in local middle-class trajectories and aspired to high-status positions in a national field of competition. These families typically want their children to pursue careers in engineering or medicine. These wishes take a "plan-like" character when their children's high school entrance exam scores afford them a wide range of selection. Families can then frame decisions between different types of high schools as a stepping-stone for certain professions. To illustrate these points, I gave the examples of families who selected science high schools for engineering professions and families who avoided vocational and social science high schools to access a wide range of university programs. I also demonstrated that future goals often involve placement in specific universities. By probing families' thoughts about these universities, I found that status distinction and distinction in the employment markets motivated these institutionally specific college goals. These families associated public universities with having a better chance in the job market and strove to choose high schools with a track record of placing students in top programs at public universities. These future orientations led these families to start their application lists with science high schools as their top preferences. However, many of their children found themselves placed in an Anatolian high school in their lower-ranked preferences.

This chapter also demonstrates that invoking the future to guide present decision-making is an interactional task accomplished within the family. Parents and children both bring long- and short-term goals, hopes, and interests to the application process. Based on these initial preferences, they negotiate, collaborate, reject, or defer projects to the far future. These interactive processes create future projects with different amounts of reach, clarity, volition, and contingency. Therefore,

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some parents mention a casual interest in engineering but make application decisions using only school rankings, while engineering aspirations lead other families to seek out schools with STEM clubs or track records of placing their students into engineering programs. These insights suggest that school choice deliberation often crystallizes and clarifies social agents' expectations of the future and helps them establish meaningful connections across time.

Despite differences in mood, reach, and specificity in their future projections, the families examined in this chapter think that their children compete with people of their age in a national field for access to prestigious higher education and occupational tracks. As parents strive to acquire positional advantage for their children in this competitive field, some of them also try to make decisions that orient their children towards Islamic piety. The next chapter focuses on how they incorporate visions of piety with socioeconomic aspirations in high school application decisions.

CHAPTER 5: PIOUS PROJECTS

In 2017, the alleged spread of atheism and deism among younger generations became a hot topic in Turkey. Over the next two years, conservative newspapers like Yeni Şafak published several op-eds by religious intellectuals and divinity school professors who used anecdotal evidence to contend that deism was rising among adolescents from conservative families.[1] President Erdoğan, the Minister of National Education, and the President of Religious Affairs denied these as fearmongering rumors. Still, public intellectuals kept the issue alive through television appearances and newspaper articles.[2] The secular news media also widely covered a Konda survey in which the company reported a moderate decline in the percentage of respondents who self-identified as religious ("a person who strives to fulfill religious obligations") and fasted during Ramadan between 2008–18.[3]

When I interviewed Derya in 2019, she mentioned declining religiosity and unorthodoxy as important considerations in school choice. Derya worked as a Turkish teacher at a private middle school famous for the staff's active promotion of religious practices through mentorship, extracurricular activities, and close supervision of gender relations between students. In response to my question about which high schools their middle-school students often ended up attending,

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[1] See https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/faruk-beser/genclerimiz-neden-ateist-ya-da-deist-oluyor-2037330 and https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/faruk-beser/deizm-yayginlasiyor-mu-2041863 https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/iki-buyuk-tehlike-deizm-ve-ateizm-dalgasi-2045168 and https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/kemal-ozturk/deizmin-yukselisinin-sebebi-nedir-2045196/
[2] See https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/-189362h.htm and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6BwToYRGLA and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64A6ocSUobs https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXjHP_FBSzs.
[3] See https://interaktif.konda.com.tr/tr/HayatTarzlari2018/#7thPage; https://tr.euronews.com/2019/03/19/turkiye-de-deizm-neden-yukseliste-ateizm-deizm-agnostizm-panteizm-ne-demek https://www.cumKübrat.com.tr/galeri/kondadan-carpici-rapor-dindar-gencler-azaldi-1298680/2; and https://m.bianet.org/bianet/yasam/204131-konda-son-10-yilda-dindarlarin-orani-dustu-ateistlerin-artti.

Derya told me that many parents transferred their children to Imam Hatip high schools upon graduation. Still, some reenrolled them at the high school section of their school a few months into ninth grade. These parents complained to her about encountering a cultural shock at Imam Hatip schools. They heard of female students engaging in homosexual relationships, the prevalence of Korean pop (K-pop) music, and "deist conversations."

I was introduced to Zehra by a parent from the private high school that Derya worked at. Zehra was a middle-class mother of three who occupied the same cultural space as the parents who worried about homosexuality, deism, and K-pop. After encountering a headscarf ban in her senior year in college, Zehra had aborted her dream of becoming a researcher, married a surgeon, and devoted her life to the care and education of her three sons. When she closes her eyes and thinks about her sons in their twenties, she pictures them as academics and engineers whose work "benefits" Turkey and the global Muslim community. "I don't want them to become regular engineers. I don't want them to prioritize money." Her biggest fear about their future is that her sons would distance themselves from the values she raised them with. "For example, their daily prayers. I thank Allah that they pray regularly at the moment. But my biggest fear is that they distance themselves from religion and stop praying. I fear them becoming friends with or marrying morally corrupt people and becoming like them."

For mothers like Zehra, desirable future trajectories for their children integrate religious observance with social status and material well-being. As middle-class, Turkish religious parents, they strive to aid their children with attaining college degrees and financial affluence. But they also devote a significant amount of their parental efforts to teaching their children about religion, habituating religious practices like fasting, and having a spiritual orientation in all worldly matters. The temporality of their parental influence and the imminent end of childhood also presents them

with a short timeframe in which they can influence their children's future outcomes concerning religion. As a result, they incorporate present decisions regarding schooling, social activities, and media consumption in the project of raising "religious children."

Schools play an essential role in forming subjectivities due to their institutional power and social density. These parents see high schools as auspicious venues for sustained religious socialization. They approach high school applications as a moment for affective, mental, and practical engagement with their children's futures. This chapter examines how a desire to realize what I call "pious projections" drives high school decisions among Turkish parents.

Pious projectivity is common in the sample. Most interviewed parents identify themselves as believers and hold religious values in high regard. The prevalence of religiosity in the study parallels general trends where 34.3 percent of the Turkish population self-identified as a believer, and 62 percent said they strived to fulfill religious obligations. In comparison, less than 5 percent identified themselves as a non-believer or atheist (Konda 2007). Nevertheless, participants put varying emphases on religious observance when they describe their personal lives and parenting. Many do not put raising religious children at the center of their parental identity despite personally identifying as religious or believers. They do not mention religious concerns shaping their school choices if they do. However, piety enters the school choice decisions of parents who associate cultural continuity with social closure and who see most public schools as culturally foreign. It leads them to pronounced choices like applying to Imam Hatip high schools and more inconspicuous practices, like eliminating districts with secular reputations from consideration.

Understanding pious projects and their role in school choice decisions provides a new perspective on how Turkish families navigate broader sociocultural trends regarding religion. Since the 1980s, religion's role in public education curricula has progressively increased (Kaplan

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2006), culminating in the JDP's controversial policy of "raising a religious youth" (Gençkal Eroler 2019). Although the Turkish state's "assertive secularism" (Kuru 2009) has continued to be prevalent well into the 2000s, excluding religious subjectivities from places of education (Akbulut 2015; Gökarıksel 2009), JDP has largely de-secularized the state and the society over the past fifteen years (Şar 2019). Like the state's position on religion, social class's relation to religiosity has also been complex and contradictory. Political economists and sociologists have observed the emergence of a new conservative bourgeoisie in Turkey in the post-1980 period (Buğra 1998; Buğra and Savaşkan 2014) whose capital accumulation intensified during the JDP period (Balkan et al. 2015). However, religious observance maintains an inverse relationship to education and socioeconomic status despite the increasing representation of religion and religious subjectivities in business, bureaucracy, and society (Konda 2007). This fact poses a problem for the future projects of families who seek to cultivate religious subjectivities while maintaining or improving social class positions through education. To the extent that families view schooling and specific educational sites as a threat to piety, they invoke pious projections to protect their children from foreign cultural influences. Overall, pious projects help parents find a meaningful way forward as they encounter cultural and socioeconomic uncertainties regarding the future.

What are Pious Projects?

Pious projections are constellations of parental aspirations, goals, and fears regarding their children's religious lives in the future. Pious projectivity is a reflective mode of parenting preoccupied with reproducing religious subjectivities intergenerationally. It seeks to bring together—and strike a balance between—worldly and otherworldly manifestations of virtue and success. It involves occupational aspirations but makes a point of articulating Islamically appropriate career trajectories.

Piety (taqwa) is an Islamic concept that refers to being mindful/fearful of Allah in everyday conduct by doing what pleases him and refraining from that which displeases him.[4] Muslims cultivate piety through fasting, veiling, praying, and abstaining from alcohol and pre-marital relations. Parents who strive to build pious futures for their children expect them to follow ritual prayers, adhere to rules regulating gender relations, and embody traits like generosity and charity. Below are some expressions of these preferences:

> Whenever I talk to my child, I always tell him, "In the future, you or I can advance to a very good position academically, or materially, but what will save us are the spiritual ["manevi"] actions we do in this world." I always told him, "I'd rather you be a shepherd who has spirituality, than a spiritually empty employer or professor. That would be worth more in my eyes, and in the eyes of Allah." (Süleyman)

> Of course, he shall enjoy life within the boundaries of Islam, but if he becomes someone who is not mindful of his elders and his juniors, it would not be nice in my eyes. I would be upset. So, for example, if he becomes a very accomplished surgeon but looks down on his patients or doesn't fast in Ramadan … I would be distraught. I wouldn't be impressed at all. (Emine)

These parents view religious piety as a fluid set of dispositions and behaviors that are highly adaptable to the social environment rather than a fixed set of beliefs or convictions. They recognize that children are social agents upon whom the family only exerts limited influence for a limited amount of time. They expect their children to encounter different lifestyles and ideas that go against the norms they establish and view childhood and early adolescence as a crucial period of cultural formation.

> You often run into drunk people on the streets in Istanbul. I have made an example of them a few times to my son. Their clothes were tattered, and they were drinking. When we saw them, I told him, "See, alcohol is such a bad thing. It puts people in this [destitute] position." Because he might imitate something he sees in a TV show or the lifestyle of a friend at school. We talk to him now because they are under our control now. Afterward, in the college period, their actions become a bit independent. (Esat)

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[4] See https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-ethical-worldview-of-the-quran.

The most important thing is moral values and family values. Because at some point, you will lose control. Especially when they change environment. For example, this year, a private tutoring center entered our life. Before that, our [Kavak] neighborhood had always had children from families we were regularly seeing. Our school was composed of children from the community. But when he went to the private tutoring center, his environment changed a bit. Children adapt to new environments quickly. We always tell him to hold onto his values, to resist conformity. If you think something wrong is being done, do not join it to have your friends accept you. (Sare)

They mention peers with different lifestyles and dominant cultural norms in institutionally bounded spaces as typical sources of deviation from pious projections. They experience substantial anxiety about their children succumbing to "external" social influences instead of staying true to the familial culture of piety.

We cannot raise children who stand tall and say, "this is who I am, my character. As long as you do not intervene in my character, I will walk this path with you as friends." We are incapable of bringing up children with this kind of self-determination and the willpower to say, "I am Muslim. My Muslim identity requires this, my friend, and you have to stop here." We are incapable of this education, and we are unsure of our children's willpower, so we want them to remain in the bell jar for a bit longer." (Derya)

I would be afraid of him losing his direction. To be frank, I wouldn't like him to have friends who drink. We know that alcohol is the origin of all evil. If you drink it, you are a potential criminal in my eyes because you can be easily influenced to do things. In my eyes, you're a potential criminal and a sinner. (Sevde)

Mental images of these future scenarios are powerful motivators because of the feelings they evoke. Parents presently experience worry and anticipate feeling sorrow, disappointment, and alienation if their children do not strive to fulfill religious requirements in the future. In response to this perceived susceptibility of piety, pious future projects involve control over children's mobility across social, cultural, and physical spaces. For example, Zehra believes that her son's enrollment in the IB program of Kartal Imam Hatip might facilitate studying abroad. Still, she states she will not let him travel without getting married first. "If I send him abroad, I will probably find a wife for him before he can go. Because he is a good-looking boy, he attracts attention. I wouldn't want him to stray away." For some parents, control attempts result in negotiations over

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occupational plans. When Yıldız's son received an offer from an agency to act in a television show, she did not want him to go into acting because "actors are required to do things that are inappropriate for Muslims." Yıldız convinced her son to postpone acting until after college by giving examples of famous actors who only performed in drama clubs while at school to keep him from going down a path that she disapproved. "Of course, I don't want him to act after school, either. But this is better than to say acting is Islamically inappropriate," she explained to me.

Like parents with local projects, these parents see high-status professions as desirable destinations. Frequent references to medicine, academic work, and engineering attest to pious projects' embeddedness in a general aspirational culture that defines middle-classness through specific educational and occupational credentials. What distinguishes them from local projects is the reframing of high-status occupations as charitable work in the pious imaginary. Parents juxtapose pursuing professional careers for worldly, personal, and—by implication—immoral ends with doing it out of a desire to serve the community.

> I would like him to be an academic rather than a CEO at a company. May he be in a position where he contributes. I want him to become an academic, so he can contribute, not because of the prestige. (Zehra)

> Anyone can do trade. Money-making should not be the priority of life. For example, I think being a doctor is beneficial to people. People make dua [prayer] for you. You treat a sickness. Likewise, engineering. [You create] employment. My husband runs his own business, and he employs five people. He is benefitting them, isn't he? He pays them on time. They sustain their families in return, and they make dua for him. That's one type of service. (Rabia)

These parents framed work primarily not as a source of individual enrichment but as the responsibility of religious citizens to the society.

> I have two daughters. I graduated from Bogazici University. If I did not work and raised children from home, instead when they asked me, "Mom, you went to the best schools but are not working. Why are you always at home?" I wouldn't have an answer. As Muslims, we must contribute, be helpful, and work. (Betül)

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Central to these mothers' perspectives on socioeconomic attainment is the politics of representation for piety. They see occupying positions of respect and doing "justice" to these positions as resisting widespread bias against new middle classes (Karademir Hazır 2017; Öncü 1999) and religious conservatism (Sandikci and Ger 2010; Üstel and Caymaz 2009). This is why Funda tells me her biggest dream is for her daughter to acquire the "Nobel prize as a hijabi." This is also why Emine wants her son to see that "a most excellent surgeon can emerge from among people who pray daily prayers." These aspirations reveal the "hidden injuries of class" (Sennett and Cobb 1972) experienced by parents with a religious subjectivity in Turkey. Although the targets for political and symbolic exclusion shifted under the JDP rule, these parents continue to feel its effects. They transfer the burden of representation to the next generation and see it as the price of their greater inclusion. Consider the following excerpt from Ayse:

> My children will always encounter people from a particular milieu in their professional life. They will need to associate with them. When the other kids see me with my headscarf at my children's private school, they are astonished. I may be the only woman in their lives who wears a headscarf. I think it is valuable for them to see some mothers wear headscarves and that they can get along with or befriend these women's children. I hope my children will be successful in their work lives, but I also hope they become the good kind of religious, not the kind that makes people hate religion. May they say about my children: "They keep their promises" and "they are honest."

Value transfer and religious socialization are core concerns for religious Muslim parents worldwide (McGown 1999; Zine 2008). Moral panic about secularization has always been a part of Turkey's Islamist intellectual and civil society movement.[5] However, it has gained traction in recent years due to the JDP government's policy on gender, reproduction, and family, which perpetuates a discourse of "family in crisis" and propagates Islamic creeds as remedies (Kocamer 2018). This rhetoric gives salience and moral urgency to traditional hadiths and Quranic verses

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[5] See http://www.rusencakir.com/Din-elden-gidiyor/6594.

that emphasize children's "terbiye" (education) and warn against being distracted by worldly pleasures.[6] Parents examined in this chapter feel the moral imperative of introducing their children to Islamic ethics and piety. As they pursue this task through preservation, persuasion, and representation, high school transition presents an essential opportunity for realizing their aspirations.

Pious Projections in High School Choice

Future-oriented thought and action are salient during life transitions. The beginning of high school is one such moment, with old peer groups, teachers, mentors, and school climates being replaced. The high school period promises new opportunities and new challenges for parents who wish to raise pious children. To give their children prolonged religious socialization during adolescence, they typically prefer "norm-enforcing communities" (Coleman 1987; Morgan and Sørensen 1999) and schools that uphold values they teach at home.

Sociologists have traditionally studied racial and class-born cultural mismatches between schools and families (Bourdieu 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Carter 2003; Lareau 2011). They found that school communities often pressure students from minority cultures to assimilate to dominant cultures at schools (Gibson 1988). The students respond to this challenge by rejecting the dominant culture, becoming cultural straddlers, or assimilating entirely into the school culture (Carter 2006). Religion is another source of cultural difference that some students must navigate (Sarroub 2013). Research on minority Muslim students who attend public schools in North America found that these students experience conflict between outlooks, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs valued in their home communities and schools (Sarroub 2013; Zine 2008).

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[6] The Directorate of Religious Affairs publicizes these teachings through various magazines. Two articles on these topics are illustrative: https://dergi.diyanet.gov.tr/makaledetay.php?ID=4665 and https://dergi.diyanet.gov.tr/makaledetay.php?ID=23644.

Wary of a similar culture clash, some interviewed parents believed their children might become socially marginalized or adopt behaviors that they considered Islamically inappropriate in public schools. Dating was a big concern. For example, during an application appointment at Derya's middle school, the student counselor told a mother solemnly, "Given our student's character, I would advise you to send her to school in a sheltered setting. I did not share this with you earlier because I did not want to worry you, but there have been a few things she got mixed up in last year. She is a beautiful girl. Boys go after her a lot, and she enjoys the attention." Heeding the counselor's advice, the mother promised to try and convince her daughter to apply to all-girls high schools.

A prevalent choice among parents with pious projectivity was selective Imam Hatip schools. They saw Imam Hatips as norm-enforcing institutions that would provide religious socialization and help their children enter prestigious professions. The Göktürks were one such family. The Göktürks' son Ali took the high school entrance exam in 2018. He received a good score and ranked within the top five percentile nationally. The school search started after they received the score.

> We wanted him to get a religious education. I always told him, "You can go to a Quran course after you are done with the exam." He did not want that. He didn't want to go to an Imam Hatip school either. We had almost accepted that he would not get any serious religious education.

Respecting their son's preference, the family eliminated Imam Hatip schools and applied only to science and Anatolian high schools in the first round of applications. They used percentile criteria to determine a consideration set, geographic criteria to eliminate schools with a long commute, and percentiles again to rank their preferences in the application list. When Ali got into an Anatolian high school in Kavak Middle School's district, they were happy with the result because the school's percentile ranking was very high. However, during the elective transfer week

that followed, Emine's husband heard about an exam Imam Hatip school that opened in their area

a few years ago. They visited the school and talked to the principal. The experience left a positive

impression on all three of them.

> Everyone was so kind and welcoming. The facilities were beautiful. I liked that it has made quite a name for itself in such a short time. The principal even told Ali, "Maybe you won't be able to get in after all. The last student we admitted in 2018 was in the top five percentile, and we expect it to be more competitive this year."

In addition to the school's selective enrollment record, the Göktürks were impressed by the

rigor of the curriculum.

> The principal told us the Ministry has three levels of science coursebooks, and they will follow the most advanced one at their school. He said it would be the same textbook as [name] Science High School. They would have the same number of hours for STEM courses.

Emine drew a direct link between the school's STEM focus and her son's occupational

aspirations.

> Ahmet wants to be a software engineer. He is earnest about it. This school has a lot of achievements in this area. They have awards in robotics and coding. I was happy to learn about these.

However, an equally influential aspiration in their decision-making is the cultivation of

religiosity. As Emine explains the difference between the typical science school curriculum and

the Imam Hatip curriculum, she emphasizes,

> The only difference will be that they will have three religion courses. One of these is Arabic, which is a world language. I think Arabic is beautiful; I'd love Ali to speak it. The other class is Quran exegesis … I mean, this is a good class without a doubt. We always wanted our children to have a good life here and in the afterlife. We think it necessary to have both.

While these religious courses cater to pious projects' intellectual dimension, ritual prayers

represent the practical one. Emine emphasizes the role of community in embodying piety as she

expresses her enthusiasm for Imam Hatip teachers' mentorship.

I feel like Imam Hatip will lift some of my burdens. At the moment, he and I are too chummy with each other. I constantly remind him, "Come on, it's time for prayer. Let's go pray." But I have a feeling that everything will get into a routine there. He'll have teachers whose very job is this. They are the best at what they do.

Other parents who sent their children to Imam Hatip middle or high schools also made similar comments about the role of peer culture in perpetuating religious practices.

It is a school where they can acquire moral values. I mean, they develop these morals in the family, I believe in the priority of the family for that, but I think school is where they maintain it. Because families like us send their children there. (Zehra)

I wished for her to go to an Imam Hatip school because it would be an all-girls school and because of the headscarf. I don't know how many hijabi friends she'll now have [in the Anatolian school she got placed into]. I don't know what the friend circle will be like. (Funda)

Parents with pious projections also filtered out schools occupying specific physical and cultural spaces. One manifestation of this was leaving foreign private high schools out of consideration. The chapter on cosmopolitan projections explains that some parents see these schools as desirable but financially out of reach options. In contrast, few parents with pious projects mentioned them as a potential option. They only offered their thoughts on them at my prodding. Just like the Imam Hatip choice, foreign private high school avoidance stemmed from a preference for norm-enforcing schools.

I wouldn't like to send my child to a place like Robert because it's a mini-America. I wouldn't want my child to study at a school like that. Why? Because we are trying to give our children particular values. [….] I read about the background of these schools. American College, Robert College. These are espionage schools. They aim to cultivate a specific type of mentality and conscience. (Selcan)

They have a different worldview than me, the families [of children attending Robert College]. I think they only consider this world, not the afterlife. My impression is that they are not living for both worlds. It may be a wrong impression, but it is my impression. So that's why that school scares me. I am afraid that it will change my daughter's worldview. (Funda)

Some parents followed pious projections during high school applications by avoiding districts and neighborhoods they found too liberal. In Chapter 3, I presented Rose, a neighboring district of Magnolia known for its entertainment economy and leftist politics. It was typical for Kavak parents to avoid schools in Rose. They cited concerns with after-school socialization in bars and profiled students attending these schools as potentially harmful influences. Consider Esat's case. When Esat's son ranked in the 7.4th percentile, Esat and his wife initially constructed an inclusive application list with schools from three neighboring districts based on their similarity to their son's ranking. However, upon speaking to the private tutoring center counselors, they removed some schools in Rose out of concerns with piety.

> Rose is a bit … we are a bit more conservative. They have different worldviews than us. I have nothing against people, but because their lives are somewhat different, we didn't want to run into any trouble with my son.

İlkgül's experience was very similar to Esat's. Before the eighth grade, İlkgül made many attempts to steer her daughter into conservative social settings, such as when they almost transferred her from Kavak to an Imam Hatip middle school. When I interviewed İlkgül in the fall of 2019, she told me that she graduated from an all-girls high school. She has "always" been surrounded by "conservative people who have never had boyfriends, people got married and had normal families without having gone out much." She wanted her daughter to get into an all-girls high school as she did as a precaution against dating.

> I wouldn't say I like co-ed education; I think we need to take precautions. I was very happy at a girl's high school. You don't have a care in the world. Yes, you crush on boys or your male teachers. We had a teacher who got married and brought his wife to school. We were devastated. But it was just platonic. When boys and girls mix, things become raucous.

When I interviewed İlkgül the following summer, her daughter had ranked in the top eighth percentile. Upon receiving the exam result, her husband printed out a list of all the Anatolian high schools in Magnolia and the neighboring districts to determine "the ones her [their daughter] could

get into with her percentile." İlkgül and her husband wanted to apply to two all-girls high schools and an Imam Hatip high school because they were not co-ed, were very close to their home, and enrolled students in the 10–12th percentiles. But their daughter did not want to go to an Imam Hatip high school and found the all-girls high schools' buildings too old. When they ruled out these three schools, the consideration list had about ten remaining Anatolian and science high schools. Given that application lists have ten slots, they did not have much room to eliminate any of these options and only had to determine how to rank them.

At that stage, piety and locational reputations influenced their decision-making. The parents had a strong preference for schools in the Magnolia district and were suspicious of Rose schools. "Allegedly there are beer houses around high schools in Rose. Weird things are happening around them." They rank-ordered schools in Magnolia and Rose separately according to their percentiles and put all the Magnolia schools at the top. As a result, they had a less selective high school from Magnolia ranked above more selective high schools in Rose. When they went to submit their application at Kavak Middle School, the student counselor warned them about this.

> We put the ones in Rose below [name of school], but it was pointless. We weren't supposed to do that because the student counselor pointed it out [to husband and daughter]. But we prefer [name of school]. I don't want the others. The ones in Rose are both farther out, and I mean ... as I told you, there were things I wouldn't have felt good about.

İlkgül had reservations about the cultural environment at even the Magnolia high school that they ranked as their top choice.

> I used to take the girls to a math tutor in that area. We used to walk around as we waited for them. It has lots of musical courses and stuff like that. The students there resemble college kids. They are so free ... we found that weird for high-school-aged kids.

But she applied there anyway upon her daughter's insistence because the odds of her daughter's placement there were low because of her ranking. İlkgül's experience illustrates children's agency in the high school application process and how this agency sometimes hinders

choosing schools parents deem compatible with pious projects. Chapter 4 examined the family dynamics of future coordination using examples from families with local projections. Yet similar dynamics shape high school decisions in all families. Because these dynamics are discussed extensively in the previous chapter, the remainder of this chapter will focus on a different type of coordination problem that characterizes pious projectivity specifically. It is the task of choosing an option that will protect their children against religious, political, and economic risks at once.

Pick Your Poison: Balancing Religious, Political, and Economic Security

Families with pious projects face a myriad of ambiguities during the high school application process due to their class positions, political subjectivities, and cultural identities. Having had their economic privileges and social status improve substantially over the past several decades, many pious parents feel the pressure of adopting secular social groups' education strategies and moving into educational sites that did not use to cater to them. The experience of Islamist mobilization, political exclusion, and capital accumulation has created a sense of intra-class competition and a dedication to maintaining (and furthering) their newfound advantages against the secular elite under the JDP. Sending their children to elite public and private high schools appears to be the most socioeconomically sensible choice because of their history of elite training. Yet these parents worry about leaving culturally "safe" social sites and imitating the "other milieu" (öteki cenah) because they associate this with the possibility of their children becoming alienated from them. Imam Hatips and conservative private school options also have their caveats. Many of these families have witnessed graduates of Imam Hatip and Gulen private schools face discrimination due to their school affiliations, so they associate these schools with political insecurity.

The difficulty of balancing future economic well-being, political security, and cultural continuity leads parents to make diverse schooling choices. Some prioritize political and financial safety in their application decisions and apply to secular schools but are worried about their children distancing themselves from religious practices. Some feel confident that the selective Imam Hatip schools they consider will facilitate religious acculturation and socioeconomic attainment, while others choose Imam Hatips for their climate but cannot shake off the feeling that they compromised on their academic and socioeconomic ambitions.

Whatever school option they eventually decide to pursue, it is essential to acknowledge that these interpretations emerge from engagements with future possibilities within the social networks of the families of eighth graders. For instance, Suleyman first became aware of Kartal Imam Hatip many years ago when a coworker he respected told him his eighth-grade son planned to apply to it. When his son took the high school exam, Suleyman began to investigate Kartal and a few other selective Imam Hatip high schools. But his other contacts claimed a disconnection between Suleyman's long-term occupational goals for her son and high school preference.

> People around us typically perceive that Imam Hatips cannot give you much academically because there are too many courses. They think Arabic is too challenging, so students fall behind in other classes. We have been told that if our goal is to get into a sound engineering or medical program, we cannot reach that with an Imam Hatip school.

However, Suleyman thought the alternatives (science and Anatolian high schools) did not accommodate his multiple priorities as a father.

> One of the biggest problems in Turkey is that many schools only try to excel academically, and others only claim to enhance the pupils' social development. But they ought to strive towards both. From our perspective, Kartal Imam Hatip's biggest advantage is that it offers academic, social, and spiritual opportunities. As long as the student is motivated, Kartal takes him forward.

One warning Suleyman did not dismiss was the political risk of Imam Hatip school enrollment.

> I mean, are these risks in Turkey? They are. Of course, political conditions change swiftly in Turkey. Is it possible that a new government is elected to office in the future, a different "thought structure" prevails, and these schools are closed? Yes, it is a possibility, even if it is a small possibility.

Suleyman said this was a risk he was willing to take through conversations with his son, who "sometimes changed his mind."

> I often told my son, "I would rather you become a shepherd with spirituality than an employer or a professor without one. You would be more dignified in my eyes and the eyes of Allah."

Suleyman's risk tolerance was greater than many parents who put a lot of stock on piety but applied to secular high schools. These parents framed Imam Hatip enrollment as a heedless decision considering Turkish politics' volatility.

> You know, we have experienced July 15th events recently. Until July 15th, it was a privilege to study at that faction's schools [referring to the Gulen schools]. We all had a consensus that they gave good education in their schools. But right now, being even distantly affiliated with those schools, having had the slightest connection with them causes serious trouble for a person. People are apprehensive about these things. (Sedef, Middle School Principal)

> My husband is an Imam Hatip graduate. We haven't sent the kids to Imam Hatip in case the country's conditions change and they get affected the same way he did. My husband suffered a lot. He couldn't become a district governor or an administrative law judge despite getting top scores. (Adile)

> Yes, Imam Hatips are doing well now, but this is Turkey; you don't know what will happen. If you go into government, you can get promoted with an Imam Hatip degree and have a good station, but anything can change within the blink of the eye. (Medine)

These parents believed that attendance at Imam Hatip and political and economic risk were intimately linked. For instance, Medine told me,

I wouldn't want my son to go to an Imam Hatip school because he will be a breadwinner. He is going to be responsible for a family. I want him to have a bright future. Why shouldn't my son be a scientist of the future? Why shouldn't he serve humanity?

The economic risks parents verbalize are multifaceted, but access to high-status professions occupies a big part of the equation. Pious parents often combined an individualist and competitive rhetoric with an altruistic one to rationalize professional aspirations. The latter emerged most strongly when parents talked about owing achievement orientation to a monolith religious community competing against a monolith "secular" community.

When my son started high school, the coefficient rule was still in place, so I couldn't bring myself to harm him. I thought I mustn't. I still believe this. Why? Because we do not start this thing from the same lane as the other milieu. They are always one step ahead. They've taken care of everything: they don't have economic vulnerability; they are more involved in education. My kid is always starting the race with a disadvantage; why should I let him suffer more? A Muslim should always do the best and achieve the best. (Nuran)

Look, white Turks study very hard. Seriously hard. They have only one or two children, and they make enormous investments in them, whereas we cannot even fill Imam Hatip schools. The quality of education is subpar. The other milieu ["öteki camia"] has the best schools, still to this day: the best private and the best public schools. They are in good places and prepare their children incredibly well, while we give up on academic success so that they learn their religion. (Betül)

The twin priorities of the piety project pulled these parents in two separate directions, one being elite public and international schools, and the other Imam Hatip or low-tier private high schools catering to religious families. This dilemma created tense negotiations within families where family members pitched alternative options to each other as the most religiously appropriate but academically and economically safe—although not always the most optimal—decision.

Tuba thought being "close to Quran" and being surrounded by "religious people" was essential for her daughters' upbringing. When Tuba's oldest daughter started high school, she insisted on choosing an Imam Hatip high school, but her husband did not share her convictions.

He did not know as much about the school settings. I am a middle school teacher, so I always see students transitioning to high school. He used to ask whether Imam Hatip is a must. Then we saw that there were project Imam Hatips in Istanbul, and they are better than other schools. The teachers were more involved. So, he didn't say anything after that. But when my daughter wanted to transfer from Kartal Imam Hatip to Haydarpasa, he did not object at all. He said it was a good, well-established school and told me not to insist otherwise.

In some families, these dynamics were the reverse and parents took on the responsibility of advertising the academically and professionally sensible options. Such was the case for Canan, an upper-class mother who graduated from a top-tier Imam Hatip school, enrolled her older son in another, and aspired to send her younger son to one. However, since her son began to go to an Imam Hatip middle school, his grades began to slip and he lost interest in schoolwork. Much to his mother's dismay, he seemed singlehandedly focused on religious pursuits, like aiding the Imam at a local mosque and performing the call the prayer. When her son ranked in the top 12th percentile in the high school entrance exam, he was disqualified from attending any selective high schools. He insisted on exclusively applying to local Imam Hatip schools, but Canan put her foot down and applied to some Anatolian high schools along with several Imam Hatips. She also told him she would enroll him at a private high school if she were unhappy with the placement result. Canan thought she was acting on her son's material interests because his choices and inclinations were tipping the scale too much towards religious endeavors and further away from socioeconomic status attainment. This disagreement turned into an argument over appropriate career goals during a trip to a prospective high school.

> **Canan:** He decided to become an Imam. We tell him that even if he wants to become an imam, he must have a second profession. You cannot count on this country's future. You must be well-equipped and have a profession. It's not clear what this society will bring in tomorrow.

> **Esma:** What do you mean by that?

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Canan: You know divinity schools have been closed in the past. In the future, one day … I don't know. When we visited [name of Imam Hatip school], the principal also mentioned this. He said, "Unfortunately, people who have failed in other things become Imams in our society. We must appoint Divinity School professors to historical mosques as Imams." My son has a great talent for drawing too. We tell him he shouldn't waste this talent. We tell him he can be an architect, design a mosque, and lead the congregation there, but he doesn't listen to us.

These empirical cases illustrate how uncertainty and future consciousness become embedded in school application decisions by pious parents. In *Risk: A Sociological Theory* (1993), Niklas Luhmann associates uncertainty with the idea of future loss. He names it "risk" when social agents regard a possible future loss as a consequence of their decisions and "danger" when they consider the potential loss to be caused by the environment. The double pursuits of piety and academic achievement in contemporary Turkey typically follow the pattern of avoiding danger and accepting the risk. While parents consider different sources of disruption to their pious projects, they ask themselves what they can bring under their control and mitigate in the future. Families who think it dangerous for children to associate with nonreligious schoolmates believe the potential outcomes of these associations put piety beyond their reach. They consider they can mitigate the "risk" of academic failure in Imam Hatip or religious private high schools through personal work ethic. Remember Suleyman's statement: "As long as the student is motivated, Kartal takes him forward."

In some cases, perceptions of risk and danger are the reverse: pious parents who rationalize their Imam Hatip school avoidance with the possibility of a political backlash seek to avoid the "dangers" induced by a volatile educational field. If such danger materializes, their children might suffer academically or socioeconomically despite their best efforts. The secular school option is only acceptable because these parents maintain that the family is the primary site for pursuing the piety project. For instance, Sare has applied exclusively at Anatolian high schools because "I think

religious values are given in the family. We send our children to take Quran lessons at the mosque in the summers just like the typical family."

These examples show that future projection during high school applications involves risk encounters that are analytically different from risk calculations. Rather than establishing possibility distributions for different outcomes and choosing the safest route forward, families evaluate what uncertainty a particular school choice is likely to involve and which uncertainties they feel most well-equipped to minimize. This observation has important implications for how we think about educational decisions as "social class strategies" (Ball 2003). Although I did not specify which social class origins the examined families belonged to and which social class destinations they aspired to, it is clear from many of these quotes that socioeconomic objectives motivate much of their schooling efforts. Families settle on specific social class strategies through prospective and interactive decision-making processes in which transforming uncertainties into risks plays a paramount role.

Discussion

Change in the socio-cultural environment is an essential dimension of high school transition that parents heed closely. This chapter demonstrated how the imperative of school transition challenges some parents to make choices about the slightest degree of cultural change while participating in a middle-class status culture that revolves around educational prestige, selective high schools, and professional careers. Many parents who wish to raise pious children feel the need to shield their children from people, schools, and occupations they associate with defying religious requirements.

This sensitivity leads many but not all to prefer schools in familiar neighborhoods and schools with a religious ethos. This chapter introduces many empirical examples to illustrate the

several ways parents create trajectories in which specific high school choices increase or endanger the chances of a pious and socioeconomically comfortable future. These associations led many to eliminate entire high school types or locations from consideration and substantially reduced their school options. While selective Imam Hatip schools relieve for some the tension between worldly and otherworldly aspirations, this dilemma persists for many even after they commit to a choice.

These insights have important implications for the scholarship on parental school choice. Although this scholarship has mainly focused on how academic quality, status ideologies, and racial bias might shape parental decision-making, cultural sociologists in the field have recently drawn attention to how school choice becomes embedded in identity narratives. Cucchiara and Horvat (2014) framed school choice as a "consumption" act through which parents express and enact specific identities. Perhaps the best-documented example of this is the "against the grain" commitment of some white middle-class parents to the urban public schools and the power of the "liberal urbanite" moral identity in shaping their choices (Crozier et al. 2008; Cucchiara and Horvat 2014; Cucchiara 2013; Kimelberg 2014; Raveaud and Van Zanten 2007). Observers of this trend draw attention to the "web of moral ambiguity, dilemmas and ambivalence" that parents experience as they try to "perform the good/ethical self while ensuring the 'best' for their children" (Crozier 2008:261). They show that white middle-class parents' "risk" perceptions usually stem from racial and socioeconomic anxieties. The analysis developed in the present chapter strengthens the arguments about the complexity of moral commitments in parental school choice through the illustrative examples of parents navigating a different educational context. While the history of race and class relations defines how American parents negotiate their moral commitments, Turkish parents articulate theirs in response to a battle over the soul and mind of the nation (Kandiyoti and Emanet 2017).

CHAPTER 6: COSMOPOLITAN PROJECTS

When I meet Ayse at a cafeteria for the second time, her daughter had just gotten accepted to a foreign private high school as her two elder siblings before her did. Before we start the interview, Ayse asks me several questions about how long I have lived in the USA and how I went to study there. After listening carefully to my answers, she tells me that she had been trying to motivate her two elder children to study college in the USA but neither of them was partial to the idea. Her oldest (now in college) had done short internships in three different countries but wasn't interested in a longer-term trip. "Kids who attend foreign schools typically go abroad but mine have a different mind. When my son was younger, he used to say he was going to attend Oxford. When I ask about it now, he retorts, 'Oxford what?'"

This chapter focuses on the third and the last type of future projectivity that emerged from interviews with Turkish high school applicants. It examines a shared set of goals, reasonings, and application choices associated with cosmopolitan projects, which I define as the familial enterprise of preparing a child to live, work, and get schooling in a global society. I first became aware of the prevalence of this orientation through specific communications about my identity with people in the field. At Kavak Middle School, several students gingerly approached me to inquire about how I came to attend an American university. Like Ayse, several parents wanted to know which high school and undergraduate institutions I attended and how I secured funding. They shared their thoughts about international education's costs, requirements, and value without prompting. Some, like Evrim and Suleyman, requested that I stay after an interview for their children to meet me or practice speaking English with me. I even received a phone call from Haluk, who requested that I advise his older daughter about graduate school applications in the USA. For many of these people,

I was a former Turkish student who went through similar educational transitions as their children, and they saw my experience as a potential model to learn from. As their children took the entrance exam and these families began to apply to schools, I further saw how they used the high school transition to articulate and put into motion various cosmopolitan projects.

This group of students and families' specific priorities and their impact on high school application decisions are the primary focus of this chapter. As Chapter 4 illustrates in detail, the entry of transnational corporations and global financial capital into Turkey in the 1980s has transformed the country's social class structure. The popularity of cosmopolitan projects is due to the increasingly transnational nature of professional labor and middle-class subjectivities in Turkey (Ayata 2002; Emrence 2008) and growing discontent with the JDP government and the economic crisis Turkey has been going through.[1] In a 2020 survey on Turkish Youth by SODEV, 62.5 percent of the respondents aged 15–25 reported they would resettle in a foreign country if they had a chance (SODEV 2020). Similarly, 47 percent of the respondents in a 2021 Metropoll survey said they would like to live or study in a foreign country (Metropoll 2021).

Given the prevalence of these aspirations in the general population, it is essential to understand how Turkish parents prepare roadmaps to global citizenship and cosmopolitan identities through specific educational choices. These strategies are vital tools for social class reproduction and mobility within changing social structures and require close examination (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2017). A burgeoning scholarship on international schools explores by whom and how these schools are selected in Sri Linka, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Israel, and England (Alfaraidy 2020; Bailey 2021; Maxwell and Aggleton 2016; Yemini and Maxwell 2020; Wettewa 2016). These empirical studies typically use critical frameworks that view cosmopolitanism as a new type

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[1] See https://t24.com.tr/haber/yurtdisina-goc-eden-genclerin-sayisi-yuzde-70-artti,940107.

of cultural capital implicated in global stratification processes (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Weenink 2008).

Cosmopolitanism is an "'intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences" as well as "a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures" (Igarashi and Saito 2014:224). These competencies are acquired with social, cultural, and economic capital and are necessary to occupy global positions of power. Using Bourdieu's cultural capital analogy, Igarashi and Saito (2014) distinguish forms of cosmopolitanism. In the institutionalized form, cosmopolitan capital includes academic qualifications like international baccalaureates, or diplomas from globally renowned universities. In the objectified state, it is foreign commodities and cultural products. In embodied form, it is an individual's disposition and ability (e.g., linguistic) to engage with foreign cultures.

This chapter will develop two main arguments about Turkish parents' pursuit of cosmopolitan projects using this framework. First, I will argue that these parents instinctively approach high school application as a medium of capital conversion (Bourdieu 1986). They spend economic and academic capital in exchange for cosmopolitan capital for their children. Depending on the value of their capital reserves, they select between schools that promise cosmopolitan capital in different forms and values: Foreign private schools and top public schools offer institutionalized capital, the most valuable form of cosmopolitanism, at the highest cost. These schools bestow internationally recognized diplomas and almost guaranteed fluency in a foreign language, opening the road to international education at the undergraduate level. Anatolian high schools with foreign language immersion programs offer foreign language acquisition, i.e., embodied cosmopolitanism, in exchange for no fee and lesser academic capital since they recruit students from lower-ranking percentiles than do foreign private high schools. Their diplomas are not recognized internationally,

and graduates must show proof of admission by a Turkish university program for their application to international universities to be taken under review.

Furthermore, this chapter will illustrate that the most common choice for middle- and upper-middle-class Turkish families with cosmopolitan projects is to select Anatolian high schools. Although they believe foreign private school graduates have better prospects of going abroad and doing it earlier, they view Anatolian high school enrollment as a more "flexible" and an economically "safer" educational investment. Without giving up on cosmopolitan aspirations, they contain its economic risks through locationally and temporally specific projects. Specifically, they construct a preference for graduate-level, foreign education and tuition-free European universities.

These projects contrast with upper-class Turkish parents' strategies observed by Balta and Altan-Olcay (2017) in their study of transnational mothering. The families examined in this chapter come from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds. They all have at least college education and work in senior or managerial positions in national companies. However, they are not a very transnational group. None of them have degrees from foreign private high schools or foreign universities. Only one of them has lived abroad for an extended period and few have worked in companies with transnational ties. Their primary reference sources for other countries are touristic or short work trips and acquaintances who worked or lived abroad. These shared experiences suggest that cosmopolitanism is an aspirational idea for families interested in giving their children privileges they did not have rather than protecting or reproducing what they already have.

Cultures of Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is a specific outlook and set of dispositions emerging from globalization and global encounters. It requires physical mobility, the capacity to consume and interpret different media, food, etc., curiosity, and openness to appreciate rather than judge different customs (Szerszynski and Urry 2002). Alternative perceptions of cosmopolitanism emphasize different dimensions of this formulation: some people express awareness of global connectedness, others see cosmopolitanism as a mindset of "openness," while others see it as a set of competencies to successfully inhabit positions of competitive advantage in the global world (Szerszynski and Urry 2002; Weenink 2008).

For many Turkish parents, global connectedness is a reality that presents new moral obligations and opportunities for cultural exchange. They believe in the virtue of exposure to different (implied European) cultures for character development. Consider the following excerpts by Eda and Esat:

> She wants to live abroad for a little bit. Maybe work for the Turkish embassy or a company with foreign connections. It could be customs or international trade. She wants to work in those sectors. She wants to expand her horizon by seeing those places' customs and traditions. (Eda)

> I traveled abroad to many countries, but I did not live there. It would be nice for my son to live there and see the life there. It would be good for improving foreign languages. And also, every society has its own culture. American society is … I am not saying it's a society to imitate, but many things like life and technology take shape there. I would like him to see America and be able to look at things and comment, "this is how things are done in the USA, in Europe." (Esat)

Other parents offered instrumentalist narratives about preparing their children for employment in multinational companies by obtaining foreign language proficiency and internationally recognized credentials. Their cosmopolitan projects involved making choices that would earn their children positional advantages in global hierarchies of education and labor.

Since we moved to Turkey [from Germany], my husband kept telling my daughter, "You will study in Germany." He imposed it on her all the time. Both of them think that the worst German university is equal to the best Turkish university. (Sevim)

Waning trust in public institutions and the political establishment exacerbates the perception that Turkish institutions occupy a lower status in global hierarchies. The importance of trust is evident in the distribution of cosmopolitan aspirations among political party supporters. According to SODEV's 2020 Youth Report, 74.4 percent of PRP voters wish to live abroad, whereas 47.3 percent of JDP voters do (SODEV 2020). Some of the interviewed parents brought up cultural alienation, political corruption, and economic crisis under the JDP rule as the basis of their cosmopolitan future projections. They conceived of going abroad as an escape from declining economic conditions and an oppressive political climate. Evrim was a middle-class mother who spent most of her adulthood working as a clerk at a trade association. After retirement, she got involved in municipal politics as a People's Republican Party member. She explains how her outlook about going abroad has changed recently:

Until a few years ago, I never wanted my children to go abroad. I traveled abroad myself. I saw how those people lived. I know that Turkish immigrants living abroad typically have very low levels of education. I have been to England. I have been to Switzerland. I have a lot of friends in Germany, and I witnessed their lives too. Those kids are usually trained in vocational schools, they don't have higher attainment. So, I hadn't an interest in seeing my kids going abroad. But in my last travels, I saw that the average person on the street looked so comfortable, so content. They respect each other. Over the past couple of years, when I saw how education and healthcare in our country changed, I began to fail to see a future for my children here, especially if you are a political opponent, if you are not a part of the system….

Selcan, a Kavak mother, held a similar view about the country's future. She believed that even though she struggled to raise an intelligent child with integrity, she thought these qualities were generally unwanted in the country. "For the first time I have started to feel a desire and a

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wish to send my child abroad because I expect nothing [good] out of here. I don't have faith. I think he ought to leave."

From Fantasy to Project: How Cosmopolitanism Becomes a Part of School Application Decisions

While many expressed a vague interest in their children traveling internationally, few parents made active plans to increase their children's cosmopolitan prospects by putting the acquisition of cosmopolitan cultural capital—particularly foreign language proficiency—to the forefront of high school application decisions. Consider Eda, an upper-middle-class Kavak parent. When I interviewed Eda before her son took the entrance exam, I asked her where she pictured her son in ten years. Her answer was:

> I think he'll be a successful businessman. He would be working for a private company with international connections and partnerships. He would know at least two foreign languages. He knows English now, but he'll have to learn a second language.

Academic performance is key to parents' capacity to shape high school application decisions around foreign travel objectives. Despite cosmopolitanism's centrality to Eda's future dreams, it did not reappear in Eda's recollection of their high school application experience when I interviewed her in the summer. Their entire focus had been on getting her son into an exam school with a ranking of 10th percentile.

For several parents, cosmopolitanism remains an idea they entertain for the distant future rather than a possibility they work towards. This is due to cosmopolitanism's contradictory nature: "education systems operate as central institutional mechanisms that legitimate cosmopolitanism as a desirable attribute of the person living in a global world, while distributing this universally desirable attribute unequally within a population" (Igarashi and Saito 2014:223). Opportunities to pursue cosmopolitanism are not very common in Turkish education. Only a handful of high

schools teach a curriculum that views students as potential global citizens, rigorously teaches foreign languages, and establishes pipelines for overseas college education. Many students' exam scores are not high enough for a school that promises institutionalized or embodied cosmopolitan capital. Students must rank in the top 1st percentile for a shot at public schools offering international diplomas and using a foreign language education medium. They must rank in the top eighth percentile to attend an Anatolian high school that provides a foreign language preparation year.

Having established the infrequency of practical engagement with cosmopolitan futures, the rest of the chapter will illustrate how families accomplish this through high levels of motivation and academic performance. These stories will suggest that cosmopolitanism might offer a chance for distinction and upward social mobility for aspiring families that public school attendance no longer does in Turkey.

High School Choice with Short-Term Cosmopolitan Projects

Turkish parents articulate cosmopolitan projects with two primary time horizons: undergraduate education vs. graduate education and work. Planning for undergraduate education abroad was the exception among the middle- and upper-middle-class families interviewed for the study. It happened in rare cases when a student had such exceptional academic performance that their family could reasonably expect to receive economic, institutional, and cultural support for going abroad during college.

One example was Tansel, a parent who joined the study through one of the Facebook groups on the high school entrance exam. Tansel and his wife were primary school teachers in a small Anatolian city. When their daughter Ece began to perform outstandingly in mock LGS

exams, her parents thought she might have a chance of correctly answering all the questions at the real LGS exam.

> We began to consider what we would do in that situation. There is a science high school in our town, but neither of us wanted to send her there. Do you know the stereotypical perception that everyone has, that good students should become doctors? We never thought that way. She wants to be a scientist. She wants to become an academic. We think she can go to a good university abroad, a world-famous university. We want her to learn a foreign language. We want her to enjoy life. We were thinking of Galatasaray High School if she got an outstanding result. Galatasaray, Istanbul Erkek, and Robert College.

The schools he names all offer institutionalized cosmopolitan capital. Galatasaray is a public high school that follows a mixture of French and Turkish curricula and confers the French *Baccalaureate* to its graduates. Istanbul Erkek is a public high school that follows a blend of Turkish and German curricula and confers the German *abitur* diploma. Their third preference, Robert College, is a private high school that follows a mixture of Turkish and American curricula. All these schools offered career advising services to apply to foreign universities and had a track record of placing their students there.

When Ece received her exam score, the family found that she was disqualified from Galatasaray and Istanbul Erkek high schools because she answered a single question incorrectly. Her ranking at the top 0.11 percentile was sufficient to get into Robert College, but Robert College rejected their application for financial assistance. Tansel considered selling their car to pay for the first year's tuition but eventually decided against it. Tansel's plan B was Kabatas Erkek High School, the third-ranked Anatolian high school in Istanbul after Galatasaray and Istanbul Erkek. Still, his wife favored a private high school that offered a full scholarship. From his wife's perspective, the campus facilities were superior to Kabatas, where female dorms were under renovation. However, equally appealing was the prospect of placement into a foreign university at the end of high school.

There was a gentlewoman there who took care of the foreign affairs there. She was also responsible for the international diplomas conferred by several other schools. She told us, "I read Ece's materials and saw her exam performance. She is a good student. She will achieve many good things at our school, and she will get a chance to go to the most respectable universities of the world with a full scholarship." In a sense, she convinced us.

Nonetheless, choosing the private high school over Kabatas was difficult because the family interpreted it as giving up a school with higher academic quality. Tansel mentions both the admission policy and university placement record to express the lower academic standards at the private high school they selected.

There weren't any students who got into good engineering programs in Bogazici or METU. There was no medical school placement. I remember being surprised that a student who graduated at the top of their class got into a teaching program.

Tansel worried that their daughter would not be exposed to advanced instructional materials due to the students' general academic level. However, the school's foreign education pipeline swayed their opinion. They learned that over half of their students went abroad. The school had an office specifically for providing guidance and resources for foreign college applications. The family also compared the foreign language offerings at the two schools.

We were impressed by their English education. Math, physics, chemistry, and biology classes are taught in English for four years. They have Spanish as a second foreign language. Kabatas also has English but only during the prep year. The weekly number of English classes is twenty during the prep year, but it is reduced to four hours starting in the ninth grade. The English instruction they offer remains at a basic level in comparison.

Like Tansel, Rüya and her husband had a strong dedication to cosmopolitanism. The abundance of their twins' academic capital allowed them to form an undergraduate education plan. Rüya and her husband were well-compensated engineers who sent their twins to a private school with a robust German language emphasis. They reasoned that with the prevalence of English in social media and popular culture, many children would be able to pick it up quickly. Only a second foreign language would give their children a competitive advantage in the long run. By the time

their twins graduated from middle school, they already knew German at the intermediate level. After visiting Germany on a school trip, the siblings began to voice interest in studying engineering at a German technical university. One twin answered all the questions right in the high school entrance exam, and the other only had one incorrect answer. They both entered Istanbul Erkek High School, the top-ranked high school in the country. Expecting to receive an abitur diploma upon graduation, the twins embarked on a short-term cosmopolitan trajectory.

Every year, only a small minority of exam takers rank in the top one percentile to qualify for public high schools like Istanbul Erkek to make financially affordable, short-term foreign education plans. For many not among this top-ranked minority, another alternative pathway to foreign undergraduate education is through private high schools like the Italian *Galileo Galilei* and the French *Notre Dame de Sion* and *St. Benoit.* While these schools charge hefty tuition fees and use exam criteria for admission, their school percentiles are comparable to public Anatolian high schools ranked in the 2nd–9th percentile. With their lower academic premium and higher financial price, these schools facilitate short-term cosmopolitan projections of the economically well-off. Still, they are rarely feasible options for the middle and upper-middle class. Caught between economic limitations and cosmopolitan aspirations, these families make long-term projections instead.

High School Choice with Long-Term Cosmopolitan Projects

It's a warm, late-September morning when I ring the bell of Zeynep's apartment with a bag of warm tahini pastries in my hands. The previous week, Zeynep had called me a few days after an interview to tell me that she had invited over three of her friends whose children took the entrance exam last June. They had all agreed to an interview about their experiences. The apartment smells of freshly brewed tea and food when Zeynep invites me in. Zeynep's three friends

arrive a few minutes after me. They make jubilant jokes as they enter the living room and settle in. When Zeynep leaves to check on the tea, one of the women turns towards me. "Apologies for the schmooze. We tend to get away when we get together. We are here for a job, though, so let's perform our duty." As I introduce myself to them as a sociology Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago, Zeynep comes back into the room. She points out, "She graduated from Bogazici University." Hülya asks, "We ought to hear how you went overseas too! It may be useful for our kids."

As Zeynep's friends narrate their high school application experiences and corroborate each other's stories, the centrality and elusiveness of cosmopolitan projects to their educational plans are revealed. The four women were stay-at-home mothers who met each other when their children attended a public primary school in an affluent neighborhood in the Rose District. After primary school, their children's paths diverged: Zeynep and Hülya sent their children to private middle schools. Hülya's decision was born out of her regret that her family had not made sure she received foreign language training when she was a student. Not being able to speak English fluently frustrated her during international travels. She sent her daughter to a school that taught German and English, believing that two foreign languages provided a safety net for employment. When Hülya's daughter began to study for the high school entrance exam, she began to express interest in going to a foreign private high school.

> She insisted she wanted to study in France, that she wanted to go abroad. Initially, we thought this was a good idea. I felt that if she could receive the necessary exam scores to get into a French high school, we could enroll her in any school. There was no harm in her aspiring to St. Joseph. I thought a French high school would be good since she wants to go to college in France. But then we reconsidered it. We thought we would not be able to afford this financially. I mean, paying for tuition for four, five years, and then sending her abroad again for another four. We decided against it because we don't know what tomorrow will bring. We explained this to her, and she accepted it.

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Instead of a French high school, Hülya decided to send her daughter to a private high school that taught German and English as a foreign language but taught main courses in Turkish.

> We pay almost as much as we would pay a French high school now. But like I said, when it's time to go to college, French high schools offer no college prep, whereas this school offers rigorous entrance exam preparation. We want our daughter to study in Turkey. Maybe later, conditions may change, and I may like to send her abroad, but we would be making an informed decision based on [our situation] then.

Hülya's narrative reveals the dilemmas of globally aspiring middle- and upper-middle-class families. Turkey's economic crisis poses a danger to pursuing short-term cosmopolitan projects by eradicating middle-class families' trust in the continuity of their financial means and confidence in long-term plans. Like families in Chapter 4 who chose Anatolian and science high schools over vocational and social science high schools, these parents wanted to maintain flexibility by making reversible choices.

Consider Defne, another friend of Zeynep. When Defne learned that her son ranked in the top 0.11th percentile in the high school exam, she and her husband thought he might qualify for Istanbul Erkek High School. They attended a tour for prospective students.

> At the end of our visit, my husband and I asked each other: "Do we really want all of this?" Because my son does not have a firm conviction about studying abroad. He can go after college for an internship or a master's degree. My husband has connections in Germany, so we expect we will be able to send him there at any point he wants to go. But if he studies at a school that grants an abitur diploma, it means closing the Turkey chapter. If you try to apply to universities in Turkey, the last two years of high school will be incredibly hard because you are trying to upload things the others have learned over four years. It would be confusing to refamiliarize yourself with something you have already learned in the German language. So, we decided that Istanbul Erkek was too much for us.

These families believe that foreign language proficiency is a flexible skill their children can use whenever a financially feasible opportunity arises. In contrast, schools with a foreign curriculum require a financial commitment to send students abroad at a fixed transitional point in

their lives with the high cost of preparing for college in Turkey. Zeynep also made a point of this during her explanation for why they eliminated foreign private high schools from consideration.

> My daughter's score was enough for the Italian high school. Ok, fine, but there is a logic in foreign private high schools. I have friends whose children attend Robert College, Italian, and Austrian High Schools. All the courses in Italian high school are taught in Italian. If one is going to receive a college education in Italy after high school, it makes sense to study in that school. [...] But it would be tough for me to send her to the US or somewhere else for college. [I told her] "I would prefer you to go to college in Turkey and study at a good public university. After you graduate, you are free to go wherever you want to do your master's or get your PhD. I did not pay for primary school, and I did not pay for middle school. If I can keep my money in my pocket in high school, I'd like to. If you can get into a public university at college, please do so."

Foreign private high schools that Zeynep and Hülya mention cost up to 150,00 Turkish liras a year. Many of the middle- and upper-middle-class parents in this study could at best afford to pay this tuition at an unreasonable personal cost. To mitigate the potential economic cost of cosmopolitanism, they planned to invest in foreign language acquisition and postpone travel plans till after college.

These families also attempt to make cosmopolitanism affordable through locationally specific plans. Although many believe the idea of studying in the USA is interesting, they think that studying in the USA is too expensive.

> Education in the USA is costly. My husband's brother lives there. They have lived there for forty years now. Their children went to school there. It was super expensive. (Zeynep)

In contrast, they find education in Europe—Germany in particular—more attainable. They frame the choice between high schools with a German or English language focus as a choice between studying in Germany and studying in the USA in the future. Consider the following calculation by Rüya's husband Mert:

> When you get an abitur diploma from Istanbul Erkek, you can study engineering at Munich, and that's completely free if you can afford living costs. Munich Tech is Europe's best engineering school. It is equivalent to MIT in the USA. If you graduate with good grades from Robert and get accepted at MIT, you will have to pay 150,000 dollars a year. If we

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can't find funding, or if he doesn't get admission from MIT, this will all have been for nothing. He would have to take the university entrance exam here to see if he could get into Istanbul Technical University.

Parents like Bilge and Rüya are conscious of their social class positions and use terms like "salary worker" and "white collar" to emphasize the limits of their disposable incomes when it comes to investing in their children's education. Their narratives about income-appropriate pursuits of cosmopolitanism illustrate how upper-middle classes distinguish themselves from upper-class parents and their social reproduction patterns.

> When we sent our children to a private primary school, we didn't send them to a school with people with very high incomes. We are white-collar people, and the other parents were white-collar too. Do you know how private school folks take their children to ski in Switzerland during winter breaks? We have no such opportunity. But their school came up with this lovely idea: they took the students to ski in Bursa for a very reasonable fee. Yes, it wasn't the Alps, but it cost me less than what I would have to pay if I took my two kids to Bursa myself. (Rüya)

> We would have to sell all we have to have them study there [in Robert College]. What's the use of that? You can find other solutions. I thought of these as well. It was too expensive. We have friends like that. They spend all their income on these types of schools, then badger the kids about it. They torture both themselves and their children. One of them enrolled both of her children at Robert, which I find absolutely pointless. It doesn't make sense for a salaried worker to pay 114,000 liras a year for a school. (Bilge)

The alternative "solution" that Bilge has found was applying to two elite Anatolian high schools with a German preparation year. She frames this decision as a steppingstone for financially responsible cosmopolitan projections:

> We wanted Cağaloğlu and Kabataş High Schools. Of course, Istanbul Erkek also offers German education, but she knew she couldn't get in there. We wanted Kabatas so that she would have the German Ecole, the German discipline. Germany is close, and its medical schools are good. We could send her on an exchange program or something. Also, our tutor's daughters study in Germany. We thought she could visit them and stay with them sometimes. It's better suited for our means. We thought if she went to public school now, we could afford education in Germany for a while. Apparently, education is free there.

Despite their elusiveness, cosmopolitanism and studying abroad are salient themes in these parents' high school application narratives. They inhibit a social world in which these experiences

are common whether because they have family who live there or friends who sent their children abroad. Even though they may not enroll their children at foreign private high schools, sending their children to selective Anatolian high schools with an English immersion year allows them to think of themselves and their children as working towards that potential future.

Discussion

This chapter examined how families make high school choices to facilitate their children embarking on a cosmopolitan future trajectory. Due to the study sample's socioeconomic characteristics, the difficulty of cosmopolitanism emerged as a strong theme in these analyses. I showed how families for whom foreign travel and education were elusive goals created temporally and spatially specific projects to address this difficulty. Specifically, I illustrated that longer time horizons and countries with tuition-free higher education allow middle- and upper-middle-class families to incorporate cosmopolitanism meaningfully into their high school application strategies. This analysis extends recent Turkish scholarship on social class strategies by linking cosmopolitanism and transnationalism not only to the anxieties of the upper classes (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2017), but also to the aspirations of middle classes. Altan-Olcay and Balta (2016:2) argue that Western consumption styles are "no longer enough for claiming distinction" in Turkey and show how parents seek a new institutionalized basis for distinction by acquiring US citizenship for their children. Their argument builds on the implied discrepancy between the value of institutionalized vs. embodied and objectified cosmopolitan capital. The present chapter shows cosmopolitanism becoming embedded in social mobility strategies of middle-class and upper-middle-class families through academic achievement and access to graduate education in affordable European countries. In that sense, it focuses on the other side of this social competition and distinction story by examining how middle-class Turkish parents play "catch-up" with the

upper classes by selecting high schools that offer foreign language immersion. The resulting "ubiquity" of foreign language fluency is perhaps part of why upper-class families seek distinction through citizenship acquisition.

Furthermore, the chapters on local, pious, and cosmopolitan projects offer several empirical and theoretical insights into how imagined futures shape high school choices. Empirically, these chapters highlight the diversity of middle-class cultures, aspirations, and strategies and outline the affinity of different high school types with various future projects in Turkey. Science, Anatolian, Imam Hatip and foreign private high schools differ in their curricular focus, medium of instruction, selectivity, and cost. Families transform these academic differences into differences in social function by creating compelling associations between school types and sociocultural destinations. Though these associations are not original or random, parents' interpretive work plays an essential role in strengthening, institutionalizing, and legitimizing them.

Theoretically, these chapters demonstrate how time-consciousness is coordinated and negotiated during educational decisions. The centrality of future projects to high school applications illustrates that school options are not valued in and of themselves but because they contain specific future possibilities. In education circles, the Latin phrase *Non Scholae Sed Vitae Discimus* ("We do not learn for school, but for life") is often expressed to highlight the future-facing dimension of schooling. Yet long-term goals and considerations are neglected in most scholarship on primary and secondary school choices as factors driving decision-making. Although college and work may seem like remote time horizons for high school applicants in some educational settings, families who encounter unstandardized and differentiated educational fields draw on specific future imaginaries to guide school selection. Each of these three chapters elucidates a different dynamic involved in future projectivity. Chapter 4 examined how future

projects take shape from the interactive coordination of multiple time horizons within the family. Chapter 5 showed how parents balance future political, economic, and moral dangers by framing some of them as "risks" that can be tamed. The current chapter illustrated how parents remain committed to a specific future project against unfavorable odds by manipulating temporal horizons and spatial specificity. These three dynamics suggest that future projects are not mere verbal gestures or practical choices but interactive and interpretive tasks for families to perform.

CHAPTER 7: LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

On a hot, late July day, I visit Kavak Middle School to observe the second round of high school applications. Only a handful of people are present: vice-principal Tarik, student counselor Merve, Turkish language teacher Ceren, the school secretary, and the janitor. I find them chatting and smoking at the pavilion where they spend most of the day together. Whenever a parent shows up to submit an application, the vice principal goes to his office with me in tow, and as soon as the parent leaves, he goes back to the schoolyard to join the rest of the staff. After a few trips between the pavilion and the office, I spot Gülşah in the hallway. Gülşah was a parent I interviewed in May, a few weeks before the entrance exam. She seems short of breath and agitated as she approaches us with another woman and two young girls. After exchanging greetings, Tarik Hoca leads them upstairs back to his office. Once everyone is seated, Gülşah tells him that her son was not placed anywhere. Her friend's daughter is placed in one of the district's local Anatolian high schools, but she is not happy with it either. They would like to apply to other local Anatolian high schools.

Fanning herself with a piece of paper, Gülşah exclaims, "What a predicament! They had claimed everyone would be placed into a school by their homes, but we weren't placed in any school. What happens if we don't get placed at this round either?" The vice-principal explains that there are two more rounds of applications at the end of which the public school district will assign the remaining students to the schools with open seats. This placates Gülşah a little. She says, "Well, that's something, at least. If nothing else works, I'll have to move my son to our hometown and have my father-in-law put him through private school…." Sitting up a little in her chair, she continues, "Suppose the kids aren't placed anywhere, they [the district] wouldn't ask them to be homeschooled, would they? My son would never graduate then. We could never convince him to

study if he is at home." The vice-principal brings up the procedure again: only the students who have not submitted any applications would fall out of formal schooling. Since Gülşah's son has applied to high schools, the school district will assign him to a school.

This passage about Gülşah and her friend illustrates a side of high school applications that previous chapters haven't yet discussed: the limited agency of families who, instead of "choosing" schools, have their children "sorted" into them. Of course, the Ministry's placement criteria restrict school options for all applicants. But students applying to exam high schools are only restrained by their exam scores, while local school assignments are restrained by middle school GPA, residential zones, and the capacity to only name three schools of the same type in the application list. Although there is no automatic enrollment for local schools and students are required to name their preferred local high schools, these restrictions make most families feel like they have little control—if any—over where their children will be assigned.

This chapter examines the application decisions of families whose children have not qualified for most exam schools. I continue using the term "decision" while acknowledging the many academic, procedural, and economic restrictions they face in this process. These families share similar educational and socioeconomic aspirations as those applying to exam high schools but experience unique uncertainties and challenges. As the passage about Gülşah illustrates, there is a chance that their children might be left out of formal schooling. They fear the homeschooling ("open education") route because they see it as an unofficial conclusion of their higher education aspirations. A second uncertainty unique to the local application experience concerns whether the student will be placed into the academic or vocational school track. Like open education, many view the vocational school track as an impediment to their college plans. As they struggle to make schooling choices that will keep their college plans alive, many are frustrated by the lack of

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cooperation from their children, co-parents, schoolteachers, and the Ministry of National Education.

Local High School Application is a "Classed" Phenomenon

When Gülşah and her friend leave vice-principal Tarik's office, I walk out with them. We run into Kübra, the head of the school's Parent-Teacher Association, outside the school gates. Having interviewed her before, I know that Kübra is a middle-class, stay-at-home mother. Both she and her husband are college graduates. Gülşah is also a stay-at-home mother but has a vocational high school degree. Her husband works in retail sales with a primary school degree.

The group greet each other as we approach Kübra. They begin to talk about how their children have done in the high school entrance exam. Like Gülşah and her friend's children, Kübra's son did not get into an exam high school. He was assigned to a local Anatolian high school, but the commute was long, and Kübra and her husband decided to enroll him at a private high school in their neighborhood instead. Upon hearing the name of the private high school, Gülşah says, "It's too expensive there. They ask for 20,000 liras." Kübra tells her they got an offer for 15,000. "You have to haggle a little bit." The women then begin to talk about vocational high schools. Kübra advises them not to send their children to vocational high schools, saying, "It will ruin their future." Although neither of the mothers had applied for a vocational high school at Tarik Hoca's office, they jump to its defense. Gülşah's friend says there are high-quality vocational schools and argues that Dalyan Vocational High School trains students for "popular occupations of the future." Kübra shrugs noncommittally. "Maybe so, but will the kid want to pursue that career? It depends on their interests." A few weeks later, Gülşah's son enrolls at Dalyan Vocational when the Public School District rejects their application to the local Anatolian high schools again.

This encounter illustrates that local high school applications are a classed phenomenon. Middle-class and working-class students often attend vastly different high schools despite performing similarly at the high school entrance exam (Figure 18). Like Kübra, middle- and upper-middle-class parents of low-performing students tend to "exit" the public school system upon receiving their high school entrance exam scores. Many consider exam schools the only acceptable public-school option and pay a minimum of 15,000 Turkish liras a year for private school tuition to keep their children on the college track. Unlike them, working-class families have no other option than to send their children to the local high schools they are assigned. Given JDP's vocational education policies, they are frequently assigned to vocational schools against their will.

These differences have consequences for college enrollment prospects because vocational school curricula are not designed to prepare students for the university entrance exam. Boudon (1974) distinguishes social class's primary and secondary effects on educational attainment. Primary effects are the social class factors that boost academic performances and allow students from privileged backgrounds to have a broader range of educational options (like continuing on to higher education, enrolling in high quality schools etc.) In contrast, secondary effects are "expressed via the educational choices that children from differing class background make within the range of choice that their previous performance allows them." (Jackson et al. 2007:212).
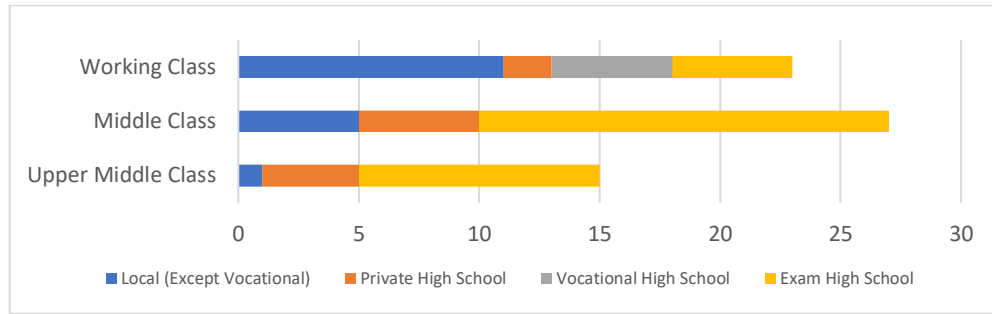
Figure 19 Average LGS Exam Score by Parents' Level of Education in 2020
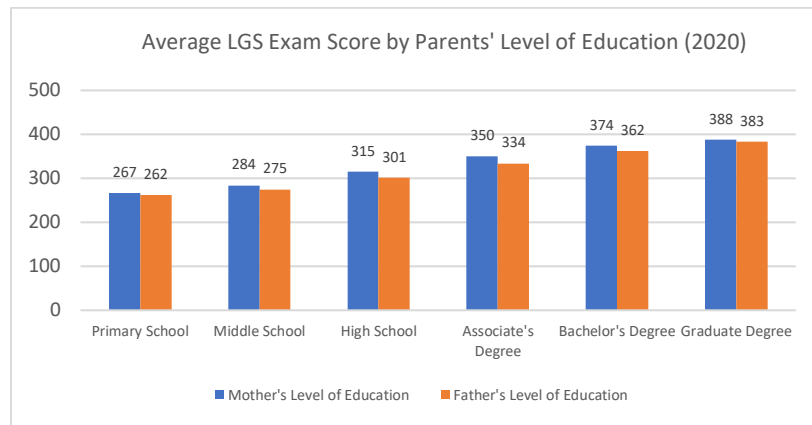
In the Turkish context of high school transition, we observe both primary and secondary effects. According to the Ministry of National Education, parents' level of education has a significant association with students' exam scores (M.O.N.E. 2018a, 2020b). In 2020, there was a 121-point difference in the average exam scores of students with mothers who have a primary school diploma and students with mothers who have a graduate school diploma (M.O.N.E 2020b). The difference was 128 points in 2019 and 60 points in 2018 (M.O.N.E 2018a). Student exam scores were similarly associated with fathers' level of education. Enrolling at exam high schools is also associated with parents' level of education. In 2018, children of women with a primary school degree constituted 60 percent of all students who took the entrance exam and 40 percent of

all students placed into an exam school (M.O.N.E 2018a). Similarly, children of men with a primary school degree constituted 44 percent of all exam takers, but 24 percent of those placed into exam schools. While primary school graduates seem to be the largest parent group, their children are consistently under-placed in prestigious public schools. Again, this could be a primary or a secondary effect: Exam schools admit only students with a high score, but some working-class students avoid them despite having good exam scores (Çelik 2018).

Parents' education impacts track placement, too (Table 5). On average, children of parents with lower levels of education are more likely to attend a vocational high school than children of parents with higher levels of education (Ministry of Development 2018). Years of schooling is not the single factor here: graduates of two-year, higher education programs granting vocational associate degrees are more likely than general high school graduates to send their children to vocational high schools. Several groups stand out for their aversion to vocational education: parents with a general high school, bachelor's, and higher degrees. These findings are consistent over time. E.R.G. (2012) analyzed data from 2005 and found high parental education was associated with placement in selective and academic high schools. They report that children of people with a bachelor's degree constituted 10 percent of all high school students but 68 percent of all science high school students. Children of people with a primary school degree constituted 32 percent of all high school students but only 3 percent of all science high school students. Contrary to students at these two ends of the distribution, children of people with a high school degree constituted 20 to 35 percent of the students in all high school categories. Factors other than parental education likely created school enrollment differences among parents with a high school degree.

Table 5 Parental Education and Attendance at General and Vocational High Schools

	Mother's Level of Education		Father's Level of Education	
	% Of those whose focal child goes to a general or Imam Hatip high school	% Of those whose focal child goes to a vocational high school	% Of those whose focal child goes to a general or Imam Hatip high school	% Of those whose focal child goes to a vocational high school
No education	57.3	42.7	54.8	45.2
Middle school, primary school or below	57.7	42.3	54.4	45.6
Vocational high school	33.4	66.6	58.1	41.9
General high school	86.7	13.3	73.7	26.3
Vocational Higher Education	53.6	46.4	58.2	41.8
4-Year Degree or Above	72.7	27.3	74.4	25.6

Source: Ministry of Development (2018)

These population-level trends suggest that the social class differences in the high school application experience of the parents in this study are not a product of sampling bias but reflect broader stratification patterns. More importantly, it allows us to establish local high school applications as a common working-class experience and a less common middle-class experience.

The Working Class and School Choice

Existing research on working-class families demonstrates that many factors constrain their agency and control over where their children go to school (Burgess et al. 2011; Denice and Gross 2016; Fong and Faude 2018; Patillo 2015; Reay et al. 2001; Reay and Lucey 2003). Scholars argue that disadvantaged families have an "experiential knowledge of being chosen, rather than choosing" (Patillo 2015:41). This lack of choice is partly due to geographic factors: affluent districts have more high-performing schools than poor districts (Burgess et al. 2011; Denise and Gross 2016). Minority and working-class students typically live closer to low-performing schools because of socioeconomic/racial segregation, discriminative funding, and teacher allocation policies (Burgess et al. 2011). Geographic mobility perpetuates these differences. Affluent and middle-class families routinely relocate to areas with high-performing schools (Holme 2002; Lareau and Goyette 2014). In contrast, residential choices of working-class families often reflect the need to meet necessities like safety, proximity to childcare, and quality of housing units (Rhodes and DeLuca 2014). Transportation and commute also restrict these students' "pool of options." Disadvantaged families do not typically send their children to schools in other areas because they are less likely to have cars and more likely to have "caregiving responsibilities, unpredictable or rigid work schedules" (Patillo 2015:56).

Organizational arrangements in school districts also impact how much control working-class parents have over their children's school assignments. For instance, whether student admission is centralized or not is an important factor. With decentralized student admissions, parents must devote a lot of time and effort to gathering information about the admission requirements of different schools. They must follow multiple application deadlines, prepare documents, and track numerous placement decisions (Denice and Gross 2016). Restrained by time,

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work, and other responsibilities, working-class families may acquire imperfect information about admission criteria or may refrain from applying to schools their children are eligible to apply to (Patillo 2015). Early registration deadlines impose another barrier to accessing desirable schools in some school districts (Fong and Faude 2018). When school districts establish deadlines months before the beginning of a school year, families who know the registration deadlines and where their children will reside next year are more likely to apply and enroll in a preferred school. Working-class families often may not have sufficient residential stability to engage in months-long planning. By the time they make an application, most seats in popular schools may be taken.

Some scholars contend that social structures impact working-class school choices by imbuing these families with unconscious biases, tastes, and attitudes (Gambetta 1987; Reay 1997; Reay et al. 2001). These unconscious influences tend to make actors choose from a smaller set of alternatives than they objectively have access. These scholars underline psychological and cultural processes of self-exclusion where working-class students and families are concerned. In the first Turkey-based examination on high school choices, Çelik (2018) argues that social class identity and "habitus" drive working-class students with good marks to choose vocational high schools. He reports that high-performing working-class students justified their "choice" to forego general high schools by their lack of fit with what they perceived to be the "scholastic" and "hardworking" environment in these schools. He argues that some working-class students "retreat" to "familiar fields when they anticipate potential incongruences between their own habitus and the structures of a new field" (2018:134).

The present chapter demonstrates that external factors rather than psychosocial biases constrained the choice experiences of the working-class families who participated in this study. These families did not self-eliminate their children from academic tracks because they saw these

schools as culturally foreign. On the contrary, families of students from all levels of academic performance had a strong preference for Anatolian high schools. They only applied to vocational schools when their applications to Anatolian high schools were rejected.[1] Furthermore, the chapter demonstrates how new rules of local high school applications substantially reduced their access to the academic track and diminished the experience of "choosing." Among these rules are residentially determined attendance zones, a priority of placement based on middle school GPA, and school type restrictions in applications. Combined with the limited social and cultural resources they commanded to prepare their children for the exam adequately, these organizational factors stripped them of feasible opportunities to put their children onto upward social mobility trajectories.

Giving Them a Better Chance at Life

Educational achievement has a specific meaning for the mothers under focus in this chapter. Many have high school degrees or less and feel that they "missed out" on attending university. Some of their parents forbid them while others got married or started working at a young age. For instance, Dilara had a very restrictive father who accompanied her to and from school throughout high school. She was only allowed to socialize with her friends at her house. When she was admitted to a teaching program at Boğaziçi University, her father told her he was

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[1] This study draws different conclusions about working-class school choice than Çelik (2018) because of differences in the groups under study. Çelik focuses on a specific working-class group: students who attend vocational schools despite acquiring a high exam score. He reasons that they must have made a conscious decision to attend a vocational school when they could have gone to a general high school with these exam scores. His analytical approach presumes control over the placement outcome and sets out to explain it. In contrast, this chapter focuses on the high school application experiences of a more academically diverse working-class sample and finds lack of choice the most prevalent working-class experience. The differences could also be due to locational differences: Kavak Middle School was located in a middle-class neighborhood in a central district where educational ambitions might be more common than at the disadvantaged district where Çelik conducted his research.

tired of escorting her to school and told her not to enroll. Fatma's father and mother-in-law similarly prevented her from going to college when she got married at a young age. Olcay, Duru, and Cemile took the university entrance exam but did not get into the programs they applied to.

Not going to university was a common experience in the late 1990s and early 2000, when most of the interviewed mothers were coming of age. Between 1995 and 2001, only 9 to 12 percent of the age cohort received higher education. Even high school graduation was not common enough to be of little value. With only 37 to 44 percent net enrollment rates, finishing high school was sufficient for many mothers to find stable employment in clerical work and preschool teaching. However, high school education has become universal, and almost half of the age group started to attend university in the two decades since they were of college age. By the time of this research, the interviewed mothers had come to regret not attending college.

> My mom asked me whether I would like to enroll at a tutoring center to prepare for the university entrance exam or take a computer course. Computers were becoming popular then. I was an intern and chose to take the computer course because I made money. I didn't think about college. But if I knew what I know now, I would have gone to college. (Buket)

> I worked in the logistics sector for fifteen years. I learned all I know on the job, and I believe I learned well. But when it comes to your earnings, your hard work is not reflected in the earnings. There was no college program for my work, but many people came into our department after graduating from economics and management programs. They don't have our practical skills, but they are better-compensated. [….] I do not want my son to make the same mistake as I did. I could have attended college [but haven't]. (Olcay)

Their regret over not attending college drove their determination to be invested in their children's schooling. For some of them, college meant acquiring knowledge and a social circle of well-educated people. It also represented better earnings as workers, financial independence to terminate an unhappy marriage, salary work, social status, and paid annual leave.

> I have always told my son how important it was to get an education in Turkey's conditions. I said, "you see your grandfathers' situation. Yes, they both have their own business, they have a good income. But they cannot spend time with their families on Sundays. They never take a day off during national or religious holidays." (Dilara)

Some people don't go to school but enter business and start making good money. These are bad examples. I always tell my son, whenever he argues with his dad, I say: "How about you acquire such status that your dad buttons his jacket out of respect for you?" He likes that thought. He asks, "What should I become then?" I tell him to look it up. He could be a second Tayyip Erdogan. He could be a judge, a district attorney. (Sultan)

While these mothers valued college education highly, they often failed to secure critical actors' "cooperation" with putting their children onto a college track. Their (ex)spouses were not very involved in the children's schooling. Some of them explicitly wanted their children to enter the workforce after middle or high school (e.g., Dilara's co-parent), or were neglectful and not present (e.g., Halime, Cemile, and Hasret's, co-parents). These fathers communicated different expectations and set different standards for their children, which undermined the mothers' message about the importance of schooling. Fathers' lack of involvement meant that mothers struggled with establishing authority and keeping their children accountable for schoolwork. It also meant that they had to negotiate intensively to enroll their children at tutoring centers or non-local "good schools."

The mothers also struggled with convincing their children that schooling should be seen as a series of strategic actions that constitute a particular trajectory. Tavory and Eliasoph (2013:909) argue that anticipating and cooperatively organizing potential futures is a central problem in all social interactions. For mothers, what their children do during the eighth grade has a temporal trajectory and is "a part of an unfolding process with a beginning, middle, end" (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013:911). But their children often focus exclusively on making the most of the present experience and neglecting the future. Take Hasret, who frames exam preparation as a future investment:

I am trying to help him as much as I can. I can't personally help him with classes because he is in eighth grade, but I am trying to get him tutored. I am trying to persuade him to do something for his future. But I don't think I am being very effective.

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Like Hasret, Gülşah put a lot of effort into showing to her son that getting into the high school he wanted was contingent on what he did at present. Her husband disapproved of her methods but did not offer an alternative.

> I yell at him sometimes. He infuriates me so much. He doesn't study! He doesn't study but he says, "I'll attend [school's name]." When I yell at him, he claims I am looking down on him, that I am comparing him to others. His father is super critical too. "You mustn't yell at or hit children. That's not how you discipline a child. Let him be. He'll find his own path."

The discrepancy between these mothers' expectations and their children's low motivation and performance frequently strained their relationship. After months of tension and fights, many of the mothers expressed emotional fatigue and were resigned to their children's resolution to not study for the entrance exam or raise their school grades.

> Given the number of students who'll take the exam, I don't believe my son stands much of a chance. There are oceans between him and his competitors. (Olcay)

> I do not have high expectations from him, to be frank with you. (Dilara)

While they do not hold their breath for the high school entrance exam, they tend to frame their children's experience as a rebellious phase that they are likely to leave behind. They are all tentatively hopeful that their children might begin to take school more seriously in high school.

> I stopped nagging him. His father said he will find his own path someday. A friend of mine who teaches at a high school said the same thing. She said male students tend to put themselves together in high school. (Gülşah)

> You gain experience with age. Maybe she will tank this exam, but she'll realize she did not put in enough effort. Perhaps she will study harder for university in high school. (Leyla)

> I never used to get good grades. But what happened? I got honor's certificates in high school. I got into college [but didn't attend]. Maybe my son will go through a similar experience. I don't want to throw away his chance by sending him to a vocational school. (Sultan)

When the high school application period rolls in, these mothers' task changes from insisting on studying to managing their children's track placement. Specifically, they seek to give their children a second chance to reconsider their school-related apathy. They believe that attending a general high school will buy them enough time for developmental maturity to kick in and recommit their children to school. Their reasoning is not unfounded: early tracking of students is associated with greater social class inequity in educational achievement (Van de Werfhorst 2019). Wherever students are sorted into different educational tracks and programs from an earlier age, their social class disadvantages are magnified (Gamoran and Mare 1989; Oakes 1994). Placement in an academic high school track increases educational opportunities for students who perform poorly in middle school because future-oriented thinking rises with age (Nurmi 1991). The onset of puberty is a period of emotional, social, and biological turbulence where compliance with adult expectations may not be high on children's agenda. But as students enter adolescence, they become more capable of managing their emotions, setting goals, and making responsible decisions (Shubert et al. 2020). We can also expect general high school attendance to increase classroom engagement through positive peer effects (Burdick-Will 2018). Being exposed to a pro-school peer group would give low-performing students another chance to change.

Working-class mothers know that age, peer groups, and institutional cultures impact educational behavior and performance. The following sections will demonstrate that given this knowledge, their experience of local high school applications is not a choice from among alternatives but a struggle to keep one's child on a college and upward mobility trajectory. I draw on Daipha's conceptualization of decision-making as a "fundamentally practical activity that relies on available heuristics, and symbolic context of action—to fashion a provisionally coherent solution to routine and nonroutine challenges." (Daipha 2015:197). Using this framework, I

illustrate that working-class Turkish parents attempt to solve the practical problem of securing college attendance prospects within a policy context that restricts their access to the general education track. Almost all of them initially prefer general schools over vocational schools. But the public school district repeatedly rejects some of their applications to Anatolian high schools during the application period. These families encounter vocational school propaganda while occupying this vulnerable position and are sometimes persuaded to apply. These observations suggest that their application experiences constitute uneasy settlement into options determined for them by the highly competitive and meritocratic high school admission system.

Binding Rules and Limited Options

I visit Hasret, a divorced and unemployed working-class mother of two, for a follow-up interview in late July in her apartment. Hasret's son got into a maritime vocational high school despite her preference for an Anatolian high school. She looks somber as she directs me into the living room and fills me in on their application experience. She tells me about what she heard through the grapevine. "Apparently, a lot of the local Anatolian high schools are going to start double shifts this year because of the high number of students. I heard Necmi Duman has increased its quota from 260 to 400." Soon after she tells me this, a news channel in the muted living room television begins to cover a story about Anatolian high schools' failure to meet demand. Hasret turns up the television volume and we watch the news together. The news anchor reports that Anatolian high schools in many cities are oversubscribed, whereas Imam Hatip schools admit fewer students than their capacity. "See?" Hasret says as she lowers the volume again. "It is just what we've been talking about."

Since the JDP has come to power, their position on Imam Hatip and vocational high schools has attracted criticism from media outlets. Critics accused the government of disproportionately

investing in these schools at the expense of general high schools. When the Ministry of National Education changed the entrance exam and high school admission rules in 2018, critical newspapers argued that the supply of Imam Hatip schools surpassed the demand. They framed this as the JDP compelling students to attend Imam Hatips against their wishes.[2] To ward off criticisms about lack of voluntarism in high school placements, the Ministry of National Education increased quotas of Anatolian high schools[3] and reported that 91.9 percent of all students in the local school system got into one of their top three choices (M.O.N.E 2020a). This report suggested that the student placement mechanism was responsive to true preferences. Still, participant observation and interviews with parents illustrate that application lists contain selections adapted to organizational constraints over parental decision-making.

The first of these constraints is the school type restriction. According to the High School Application Guidebook, applicants can name only three schools of the same type in local high school applications. When I ask Olcay to describe their application process, the first thing she brings up is this rule.

> I mean, there is a restriction. You are limited. You can pick three of this, two of those. Your list cannot be all composed of one type. It makes no sense to me, but this is what you are told. In the end, we ended up applying to only two schools. Imam Hatip, Anadolu and Vocational schools are not really alternatives. They are very different, so it makes no sense when they say, "You have to choose from this AND from that."

In response to this school type restriction, some parents only apply to three or fewer schools (all Anatolian). Others fill in all five slots in the application list to increase chances of school placement but hope vehemently they are not given the vocational and Imam Hatip schools they included on their list. These families fear that if they only apply to general high schools, their

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[2] Cumhuriyet, "AKP'liler de Imam Hatipleri Istemiyor" August 16, 2018.
Birgün, "Nakil de Çözüm Olmadı" August 14, 2018.
[3] Cumhuriyet, "MEB'den Anadolu Liseleri için Kontenjan Kararı" August 5, 2018.

children will not get into any school and will automatically be enrolled in the open education program. The open education program in Turkey is very similar to homeschooling. Open education students constitute one fifth of all high school students (M.O.N.E. 2020c). They take regular exams to graduate from high school without receiving instruction in a formal school setting.

Leyla's story demonstrates how low general high school quotas, school type restrictions, and the threat of open education drive families to make choices they otherwise wouldn't. Leyla is a divorced, working-class mother. Her daughter did not get a high score in the LGS and had to go through the local school application process. In the first round of applications, they applied to three local Anatolian high schools but were not assigned anywhere. In the second round, they applied to a vocational high school along with two of their initial choices. Her daughter got into the vocational school. As she relays her story, Leyla tells me that she included the vocational school in the application list unwillingly.

> I heard something that worried me a lot. I was visiting a friend. My friend's sister was there too. She'd brought one of her close friends. I asked that girl about school. She said she was enrolled in open high school. She said she started high school last year, but she wasn't placed anywhere. I was shocked. I was like, "How did this happen?" And she said it just did. It freaked me out so much. I started to think of my daughter. I thought, "vocational or not, she should be placed somewhere."

Residential addresses and catchment zones also constrain local high school applicants. Local schools are color-coded on the application website: schools with the green label are schools whose catchment zone the applicant falls into, schools with the blue label represent schools with neighboring zones, and the schools with the red label are the rest of the schools. Applicants are required to name three schools from their catchment zone before naming a school from a neighboring zone.[4] Even if they put a blue or red labeled school in their fourth slot, it is almost

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4 Ministry of National Education, 2020. "Ortaöğretime Geçiş Tercih ve Yerleştirme Kılavuzu 2020" Accessed on April 22nd, 2022, at:

impossible to be placed into them because the first appointment criterion is falling into the school's zone.

School staff regularly supervise parents to heed catchment zones. Consider these fieldnotes about an exchange I observed during an application appointment at Kavak:

> The mother reads school names from a list on a paper, and vice-principal Tarık Hoca selects them on his computer. All the schools she names are Anatolian high schools. When the mother names the third school, Tarık Hoca interrupts and tells her that the top three choices should be from her residential zone. He continues, "If you want to apply to an Anatolian high school from the neighboring area, you need to put a vocational high school from your area in your third slot. You cannot apply to four Anatolian high schools." The mother frowns and says, "Suppose we put down a vocational high school on the third slot. What if they place him there?" Tarik Hoca replies, "Well, that's the point: directing students to vocational high schools before they can enroll at a school in the neighboring zone." In the end, the mother applies to only two schools. Both are Anatolian schools from her area.

Naming only two schools illustrates how few feasible alternatives this mother had. This experience stands in stark contrast to applicants to exam high schools who typically fill all the slots in their application lists. This amounted to five slots in 2019 and ten in 2020.

Another factor that restricts options is public school districts prioritizing students with higher middle-school GPAs in local high school appointments. This practice makes some local schools renowned for only admitting students with a GPA of 90 or 95 out of 100. In Kavak's district, two local Anatolian high schools were trendy choices because they used to be exam high schools. Although they no longer admitted students based on exam scores, they were still academically selective. Rumors of these schools' GPA requirements circulated among parents. Attracted by their reputations, some parents applied to them regardless of their children's GPA. Other parents avoided them strategically to increase the odds of placement. But using GPA as a

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https://www.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_07/16114210_OrtaoYretime_GeciY_Tercih_ve_YerleY tirme_KYlavuzu_2020.pdf

screening heuristic lowered the number of feasible options for these parents. Take Olcay, who said:

> Our tutoring center printed out a list and gave it to us. It was a list of schools my son could get into. If you apply to schools that look for a 98 GPA with an 89 GPA, you will likely be disappointed. I didn't try anything of that sort. The tutor explained to me from which GPA range the schools on the list enrolled students last year and pointed out the schools that would mean pushing hard. I immediately eliminated them, and voila, we were almost down to a single option.

Similarly, when Dilara went to Kavak, the teacher she met named the local schools he had a shot at with his GPA. Cemile's son's tutor also gave them the names of the local Anatolian high schools that admitted students with similar GPAs to him. The "feasible" options they have are often fewer in number than what they are allowed to put on the application list. As a result, they do not have a chance to weigh the pros and cons or use elaborate screening and evaluation instruments to make an informed decision among alternatives. Although a lack of options is common among local applicants, they respond differently. Some displayed a relaxed, almost tauntingly blasé attitude in the exit interviews:

> I mean, with higher-ranking schools, you would look for one that you like, but we had to pick from among very few schools because my son's ranking and exam scores were so low. There were some [exam] schools in outlying districts, but I did not want to send him there. So, we applied to the schools that were closest to us. It wasn't difficult. It was straightforward. (Dilara)

> I haven't done extensive research. We weren't even in Istanbul at that time. I did not visit the schools or consider which one was better. In my eyes, our options all had roughly the same quality. His GPA is evident. His exam score is clear. You can picture which schools are possible. There is a school called []. It admits students with a GPA of 94/100. I wouldn't try to get in there. We had about three or four options. […] So, it was a really easy, relaxed time for us. There wasn't much of a trouble. Maybe it was easy because we've resigned ourselves to it. (Olcay)

The tone in both these excerpts contradicts the substantial emotional and practical investments these mothers have made in their children's eighth-grade education and exam preparation. They spoke from a place of disappointment and resentment towards their children

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rather than the Ministry, as it was the children who refused to heed their repeated counsel. This disappointment made them frame their children's academic performance as the primary cause for their limited decision-making despite the mounting evidence about the role of organizational arrangements.

Other parents expressed more anger about local high school applications and organizational restrictions as they made decisions. For instance, Leyla thought that school-type restrictions took away her liberty to choose and put her in a corner. She felt revulsion:

> Honestly, this is the first time I admit this, but this new [placement] system is disgusting, too, after all. Do you know why? You are applying to neighborhood schools. There are good local schools in your area. [But] you must choose [sic] two Anatolian high schools, then an Imam Hatip or vocational high school. I mean, but I won't? What are you going to do about it? I won't go there? I am not going to send her to an Imam Hatip school. I am saying this even though I am a former Imam Hatip student. My child is not cut out for it. Imam Hatip education is not easy. So, are you going to force her to do it? I've been so irritated. You don't want to choose, but you must choose.

Two decades ago, Reay and Lucey (2003) interviewed about 500 inner-city children in London (UK), about their transition from primary to secondary school. They found that working-class students typically "accepted" the only feasible option available to them "rather than choosing one school among many" (Reay and Lucey 2003:125). Two decades later, working-class families in Turkey exercise similarly weak agency due to various structural constraints over their decision-making. Interviews and school site observations contradict the celebratory tone of the Ministry of National Education as they report most local high school applicants are placed into their top three choices. Throughout this section, I try to demonstrate how "being placed in top three choices" does not mean much when local applicants tend to submit three or fewer choices. Most applications for local high schools consist of schools named out of necessity rather than a desire.

But these observations raise some questions: Why does the Ministry of National Education constrain access to general education to this degree? Why do so many rules around local high

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school applications deprive applicants of voluntary choices in practice? And what kind of power is exercised to direct and coerce these families to vocational high schools? The following section demonstrates how the Ministry of National Education seeks to "manufacture consent" (Burawoy 1979) as it restricts access to general education. It employs various actors and agencies within the Ministry bureaucracy to promote vocational education as a realistic/pragmatic strategy for skill development and secure employment. By framing vocational schools as an attractive alternative to the college "track," the government attempts to serve the industry's labor demand without provoking the anger of families/potential voters. To this end, it mobilizes the social influence of public-school districts, principals, and teachers working on the ground. These promotional activities constitute the "soft power" of the government over eighth-grade parents whom they try to both compel and convince them into the direction of vocational education.

Manufacturing Consent: Promoting Vocational Education to Eighth-Grade Parents

Families encounter many ideas as they apply to high schools. Some of these ideas, such as using school rankings to determine school options or that high school placement is critical for college prospects, are entrenched and taken for granted in the Turkish secondary education system. Others are less so because they are not yet institutionalized. Vocational schools are practical high school options and belong in the second category. Parents contest this idea despite its promotion by the government, public school districts, and teachers. Many of them believe that the vocational track is a valuable feature of the Turkish education system and that students ought to receive vocational guidance from an early age. Nonetheless, few of the interviewed parents—including working-class families—liked the idea of their children attending a vocational high school.

The government frames this general tendency as an obstacle. The first aim of vocational and technical education policy in the Ministry of National Education's "Vision for 2023" is

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"improving the reputation and value of vocational and technical education in society" (M.O.N.E. 2018b). To this end, the Ministry has developed various strategies over the past several years. One of these is to distribute systematic, official information about vocational school programs' content by launching a website called "My Vocation, My Life" in 2019. This website contains handbooks about hundreds of vocational careers and catalogs describing which vocations are up and coming and which are disappearing. It publishes news of innovation from vocational schools around the country and provides a portal for advertising and/or searching for jobs and internships. The government has also partnered with a well-known university (ITU) and company (ASELSAN) to establish high-profile and academically selective vocational high schools.

Kavak Middle School's Public School District mimics these Ministerial efforts by organizing various promotional activities. For instance, they organized a workshop on vocational education in 2019. They invited various stakeholders to brainstorm about reforming and promoting vocational education. Among the attendees were people in direct contact with eighth-grade students and their families, such as teachers, counselors, and middle-school administrators. Every speaker in the opening ceremony argued that the public opinion of vocational schools was problematic. For instance, the school district director said that 70 percent of eighth-grade students in the district "preferred" Anatolian high schools. "It is upsetting," he remarked, that Imam Hatip and vocational schools were undersubscribed when vocational training held strategic importance for national economic growth. But it was possible to battle the negative public opinion about vocational schools. He reported that enrollment in vocational and Imam Hatip schools increased substantially in the district over the past year due to the efforts of middle school counselors. More campaigning was due, he concluded. The next speaker was a representative from Istanbul public school administration. He talked extensively about modernizing vocational school programs to

meet industry needs before bringing the topic back to promoting vocational schools. "We will not allow students to crowd Anatolian high schools. We expect our principals and student counselors to work more effectively in high school choice and career planning." The third speaker was the district governor, who said, "We know that the demand for employees at the public sector is limited. And we know that the private sector's demand for white-collar workers is limited. We cannot employ all these children. We need to focus on changing the way parents think."

This workshop was an important venue for the district officials to offer the Ministry's promotional materials and talking points to middle-school teachers in the area. They asked teachers and counselors to use these rhetorical tools to reframe commitment to general education as unreasonable, closed-minded, and out-of-touch with industry demands. Eighth-grade parents encounter these promotional efforts at their schools when they visit it to submit their school applications or in the hallways of the school district building where they go to appeal a vocational school placement. These encounters urge them to negotiate, justify, and eventually reconsider their preference for general education. Below, I will discuss two vocational education promotions I observed in Kavak Middle School. The first one is a visit from a local vocational school to Kavak where vocational students gave a presentation about their schools to eighth-grade students. The second is the Kavak teacher's counsel to high school applicants and their families. Together, these events illustrate how local organizations and actors help the Ministry manufacture consent for vocational school enrollment by those unable to escape to the private education sector.

The Healthcare Vocational School's Visit to Kavak

Every year, Kavak Middle School organizes activities to teach their eighth-grade students about the high schools in the area. They take their students on a school trip or invite representatives from area schools to introduce their schools. When these events occur at Kavak, all the eighth-

grade students attend them. In contrast, when the school organizes trips to high schools, teachers select fewer students to participate because the school does not have enough buses and teachers to spare. Student counselors plan these events and supervise the trips, but the principal also makes recommendations about the frequency and destination of the trips.

I learned from Kavak's student counselors that the public school district expected them to use these school trips to promote vocational schools and influence their students' school applications. Yet Kavak's student counselors were hesitant to fulfill these expectations because they believed they would be undermining their students' well-being by directing them to vocational schools. They believed that attending vocational schools limited higher education access and channeled their students into low-status, low-income jobs. This meant the two student counselors of the school were inclined to evade vocational school counseling. When they couldn't do that, they curated the experience in a way that made them feel like they were doing "right" by their students. They made sure that their students understood the comparative disadvantages of vocational schools and, if possible, avoided it.

I was made aware of this position in the first week of my fieldwork at Kavak. I sat at the student counselor's office with two student counselors, Serkan and Nesrin. I had arrived at the school late in the academic year and wanted to learn about the eighth-grade activities they organized earlier in the year. I asked Serkan and Nesrin Hoca whether they have been busy lately with exam preparation. Serkan Hoca answered, "Not really. We have already visited eighth-grade classrooms and explained the procedures. We completed exam applications last week. Of course, the Ministry has some expectations. They want us to introduce vocational high schools, but I won't." Counselor Nesrin took over and told me that they had taken their students to two or three schools over the year. They had selected students interested in art to visit a fine arts high school,

but when the art teachers asked their students what they wanted to do in the future, they all said they wanted to become engineers or doctors. She said by way of an explanation, "They are afraid of unemployment." I turned to Serkan Hoca and asked him to tell me more about the Ministry's expectations. "They want us to guide students towards vocational schools because these schools have many empty seats, but they'll have to excuse me. Everyone's child is precious to them, and all my students are precious to me. Why should students that we invest so much in go to a vocational school?"

The following fall, counselors Serkan and Nesrin transferred out of Kavak. Merve Hoca, a new appointee, took over the counseling department. Her position on vocational school promotion resembled Serkan Hoca's. This was evident in the subtle ways she hosted two vocational high schools in Kavak Middle School. One of them was a healthcare vocational school. The vocational school delegates were four students, two teachers, and the principal. They divided into two groups and visited six eighth-grade classrooms to give fifteen-minute presentations. Counselor Merve welcomed and accompanied them to the classrooms. I shadowed Merve Hoca and took photographs of the event as she asked of me.

I did not learn whether it was Merve Hoca's or the administration's idea to invite this school to Kavak. But throughout the visit, counselor Merve pointed out various disadvantages of vocational schools to the students by directing the conversation towards employment opportunities. One classroom visit culminated in a confrontation between Merve Hoca and the vocational schoolteacher. The vocational school students began their presentation with an overview of the programs at the school. They used PowerPoint slides to explain the tasks and responsibilities of midwife assistants, nurse assistants, and healthcare technicians. They talked about internship, curriculum, and admission requirements. They mentioned that extra points are

added to the university exam scores of vocational school graduates when they apply to two-year programs in related fields. The vocational teachers said that their students used to become nurses and midwives upon graduation, but those positions now require four-year college degrees. When healthcare school students graduate from high school, they obtain the title of "assistant" midwives and "assistant" nurses.

When the presenters invited students to ask questions, one student tentatively inquired about school uniforms. Counselor Merve stepped in. She asked the presenters the difference between nurses' and assistant nurses' salaries and asked them to talk about employment opportunities for graduates. The vocational teacher responded to her in a terse tone. "Since the new regulations about vocational schools been put in place and the programs have been reformed, there have not been any new public employment job announcements for healthcare technicians." Upon this answer, counselor Merve turned to the students in the classroom and said, "So the public sector does not employ graduates. There is no employment." The vocational teacher interjected, "The president promised they will recruit assistant technicians in the future. Aren't there unemployed teachers waiting for a public-school assignment? The problem is not endemic to the healthcare sector. Supply surpasses the demand in every sector. But our population is aging, and there will be more people in need of care in the future. So, I think there'll be prospects. Besides, there are always private hospitals." She then steered the conversation to the preferential treatment of vocational students when they applied to two-year programs in their fields. Merve Hoca chimed in again, "But there is no special treatment when you complete that and decide to work towards a four-year degree." The vocational teacher said that those students do not have to retake the university entrance exam to continue onto four-year programs. They can transition after taking a written exam by the university. "This is an important advantage too," she insisted.

When the group returned to Merve Hoca's office, Merve Hoca offered tea. The group started conversing casually about vocational education. A few minutes later, the vocational teacher who addressed her questions in the classroom abruptly turned to her and asked, "Why did you ask about the salary in the classroom?" Merve replied that an essential part of career counseling is informing students about employment opportunities in various professions. Visibly irritated, the vocational teacher retorted, "People put their health in our hands. They entrust us with it. Is salary really such a big issue?"

This exchange demonstrates that student counselors mediate the messages students receive about vocational schools by raising questions about employment, salary, and higher education opportunities. Merve Hoca's interruptions suggested that vocational training is only preferable to general secondary education if students can get well-paying and secure employment after graduation. It also implied that a vocational school degree is insufficient for this and offers only negligible advantages for enrolling in associate's programs in related fields of study.

Parents who listened to the presentation by another vocational school shared Merve Hoca's stoicism about vocational students' higher education prospects. For instance, Olcay told me that the presentation did little to sway her.

> We asked about their college placement rate. It was low. Someone asked whether anyone has been placed in a school like Istanbul Technical University. The answer was "none in the past year." We told them about what we heard: that frequent fights erupted, and the school had a discipline problem. They replied that they were a big school and fights were to be expected. All this was enough to put me off.

Rabia, another parent, was also in the audience, but her feelings about the presentation were conflicted. She respected the work and efforts of the vocational school teachers who were visiting. Like them, she thought students' actions had a crucial role in whether they would attend college.

He [the presenter] said they train technicians … That worried me a little. I mean, instead of a technician … it would be better to get into a good school. But the presentation was nice. The teacher gave a detailed account. His son apparently transferred from a very nice exam school to his own school. He got into an umm … engineering program, I think. With full scholarship. So, he said, "a hardworking student will thrive anywhere."

These recollections highlight that irrespective of social class background, Kavak parents are committed to sending their children to college and assessing the value of vocational education vis-a-vis college prospects. Historically, higher education aspirations have been "manufactured" by governments in various nations (Gale and Parker 2018). Contemporary Turkish parents suffer from no shortage of aspiration. They aspire so much that it is challenging to promote vocational high schools. Because college attendance is such a normative aspiration, representatives of vocational high schools could not explicitly denigrate it. Instead, they underlined the importance of the work undertaken by vocational school graduates ("people put their health in our hands"). They proposed an individualist model of achievement ("A hardworking student can thrive anywhere"). These strategies redirected attention away from organizational factors in higher education placement (STEM-focused curricula, exam preparation activities) and the disadvantages of entering the employment market as a vocational school graduate.

High School Counseling

The student counselor Merve believes that vocational schools are inferior to general high schools. At the same time, she knows that the district has a limited supply of Anatolian high schools. Some Kavak students will not be able to find a seat in an Anatolian high school despite only applying to them and resubmitting their applications over the summer. This created a dilemma for her and the rest of the staff stationed at the school to help guide families: how to make realistic recommendations given stringent quotas. How do they make sure their students are all placed somewhere and protect their best interests at the same time? To solve this dilemma, the staff used

behavioral, academic, and economic filters to determine which families they ought to encourage to apply to a vocational school. These filters were intimately connected to stigmas about students who attend vocational high schools. Multiple people I interviewed described vocational students as daft, dangerous, undisciplined, and disrespectful. They felt contempt and fear towards them.

> When we were students, tramps went to vocational schools. Whenever you had a student uninterested in education, you enrolled them at a vocational school. They would always skip classes or fight. They would defy the dress code. (Leyla)

> Excuse my language but they are a bad lot. Most of them are chain smokers. (Hasret)

These stigmas shaped most interactions I observed at Kavak Middle School during the high school application week. Families understand that whoever is counseling them evaluates their child and decides that a vocational high school is a good fit. But a vocational high school recommendation during application counseling is a personal statement about who they are. In contrast, when parents attend a vocational school presentation, they encounter an impersonal promotion. The message about vocational high schools is communicated to a large group of people, and it is left to the audience to decide the takeaway. Yet personal recommendations often provoke strong emotional reactions from families who are familiar with the stigmas around vocational high schools. Parents tend to see the vocational school recommendation as an insulting characterization of their children's performance and potential. Their innate desire to advocate for their children makes them challenge teachers' assessment to their face, or to the willing ear of the researcher. Take Hasret, a divorced, working-class mother of two. Her son attended a trip to a maritime vocational high school in eighth grade. On the trip, one of his teachers advised him to go there because "he is not likely to complete schooling otherwise anyway." Hasret was gravely offended by this comment.

> What the hell does "You're not likely to complete schooling" mean? Some kids start taking school seriously in high school. My son is not a bad kid. He's been through hell. If he had

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studied just a little bit, he would have done so much better. He took the WISC test when he was younger. He is not unintelligent. I just haven't been able to figure out how to motivate him.

While Hasret opposed the recommendation by underlining her son's untapped potential, Kavak teachers usually use both academic and behavioral observations to decide whether the vocational school route is suitable for a student. When a family approached counselor Merve or Turkish teacher Ceren during the application period, the first question they asked was the student's exam score. They then asked which schools the family was thinking about. Usually after the family named a few schools, the staff asked, "Would you not consider a vocational school?" However, when the student's family or teachers vouched for his good behavior, they retracted this recommendation.

Consider the following excerpt from my fieldnotes: I was in the teacher's lounge with counselor Merve, the PE teacher Toprak, and Turkish teacher Ceren. A middle-aged mother entered the lounge and announced that she was there for high school applications. Merve Hoca asked her son's exam score and learnt that it was 390. She replied, "Then vocational school is a possibility." The mother told her that her son wanted neither a vocational school nor an Imam Hatip school. Merve Hoca asked why he performed poorly in the exam. The mother explained that despite their efforts to get him private tutoring, her son had slacked. When the mother mentioned the possibility of sending him to a private high school, the counsellor and the PE teacher spent some time debating whether private schools are good for students. At the end, the PE teacher said, "I know this student, he had bad luck. He was placed into a classroom with too many misbehaving students. It was impossible to listen to the lecture and take notes in that classroom. Everyone was on their feet or talking all the time. But he is a well-mannered kid." After hearing this character assessment, Merve Hoca said that she was new to the school and her recommendations were only

based on exam scores rather than her acquaintance with students. She began to advise the mother to visit the local Anatolian high schools in the area and to formulate a preference based on the attitude of the administration. A little while later, the mother brought up the topic of vocational schools again to say, "I said my son does not want to go to a vocational school, but I am not very keen on a vocational school either." Merve Hoca replied, "Only psychopaths go there anyway."

This exchange had a few features that ultimately determined the advice that the counselor and the PE teacher gave the mother: Firstly, the mother expressed a strong aversion to vocational education from the beginning of the conversation. She signaled the family's ability to afford private education if necessary. The PE teacher had a favorable opinion of the student in question. While the counselor initially looked at the student's exam score to recommend a vocational school, her recommendation changed upon hearing praise about the student's disposition, the mother's position on vocational schools, and the means to provide private education. Instead of attempting to change the mother's opinion, she strengthened it by using stigmatizing characterizations for vocational students.

However, the mother who entered the teacher's lounge after this exchange was given quite a different recommendation. After she told us that her daughter scored 326 on the entrance exam, Merve Hoca said, "Usually with this kind of exam score, I would tell you to consider a vocational high school, but there aren't many vocational programs for girls. If you come across one, you should apply." The parent replied, "Actually, her tutoring center teachers recommended a healthcare vocational high school in our neighborhood." After hearing this, all three teachers in the room recommended she make this their top choice. Up until this point, the student had been mostly quiet. When she said she was afraid of blood and would rather go to an Anatolian high school, the Turkish teacher Ceren told her,

Heed my advice, my child. This is Turkey. Everyone is after their subsistence here. We do not have the luxury to study whatever we fancy. The reality of the country is not everyone can become an engineer. They need technicians. Decide accordingly. I daresay you will not regret it. Life is a struggle; you'll have to work a lot in the future whether you like it or not. So just enjoy yourself now.

Merve and the PE teacher's advice to the previous family about acquiring general education by any means necessary (including paying for private education) contrasts with Ceren's advice about being a smart decision-maker who does not take up unnecessary challenges. While they framed vocational schools as "where psychopaths go" in one case, within the same hour they tried to convince another student to apply to one. These exchanges show that Kavak teachers give widely different recommendations to high school applicants regarding vocational schools. What is common across all of these interactions is that parents find themselves having to negotiate whether their children are a good fit for a widely stigmatized educational track with few socioeconomic benefits.

The Uncertainty of Upward Social Mobility

The previous sections illustrate the formal and informal constraints over local high school applications. They show that organizational procedures for student placement constrain parental autonomy while institutional actors promote the vocational track to influence parental decisions. These observations suggest that powerful allocative mechanisms determine how working-class students are sorted into secondary school tracks.

In this last part, I would like to return to the topic of uncertainty and discuss what kind of uncertainties are produced by these arrangements. Parents whose stories informed the previous chapters felt uncertain about how well their children performed relative to their peers. They had to work out how to enroll their children into an exam high school, not just any exam high school but

the best one they could afford. These families had *options,* and their uncertainties concerned how to take advantage of these options. Furthermore, they mobilized future imaginaries to determine which high school option would be good for their children in the long run.

Uncertainty has a different meaning, and imagining the future serves a different purpose for local high school applicants. Involuntary sorting into vocational schools limits their children's college attainment chances and introduces a stressful uncertainty about their potential upward social mobility. This uncertainty does not have the same "risk" quality for them as it does for other parents because they have few, if any, alternative courses of action to choose from. It is experienced more as a danger that they don't know how to mitigate. Thoughts of the future only remind them that the gap between their options and aspirations is difficult to close.

I would like to revisit the stories of two mothers I introduced earlier to illustrate that uncertainty about prospects of upward social mobility defines working-class parents' high school application experiences. Gülşah was the mother who visited Tarık Hoca's office with her friend in the opening excerpt. She had a vocational school diploma, and her husband had a primary school diploma. The family had meager finances and enrolling their son at a tutoring center had been a considerable financial sacrifice for them. But their son did not study much for the high school entrance exam. This frustrated Gülşah because she thought he wasted opportunities that she never had as a child.

> My mom used to deprive us. We did not have a computer or anything. My mother would not let us go out. We would have homework, and we would need to visit the library to complete the homework. But she wouldn't let us go. That's why my son frustrates me so. I was awarded a fellowship. I was offered an internship in Germany. One of my schoolteachers told my parents to send me. My mom refused.

Gülşah hoped her son would have a different, better life story than her by taking advantage of his unique opportunities. When he scored 300 points on the entrance exam, she was advised by

multiple people to apply to a vocational high school. But she did not because her son did not want to go to one, and she had concerns about lack of discipline. When he wasn't placed into any of the local Anatolian high schools in the first round, Gülşah talked to more people. Again, they recommended that she apply to a vocational school in the area. Among these people were Kavak's principal, a friend who worked as a high school teacher, a friend who regretted not sending their children to a vocational school, and a neighbor who sent their children to a vocational school despite being able to afford private school fees.

Gülşah found what they said about college and job prospects particularly noteworthy and emphasized them throughout the interview. For instance, Kavak's principal told her that graduating from college was often not enough to find employment and that having prior vocational training distinguished students when they entered the job market. His argument was credible to her because he did not dismiss or challenge college aspirations. "He said you, university—I mean he can go to college regardless, but there are college graduates who [are] unable to find a job." She also heard from other people that previous vocational training, rather than a postgraduate degree, would distinguish students in the job search.

> My friends whose husbands worked for private companies always said, "Send your children to vocational schools. Graduates of vocational schools find jobs more easily. Companies look for candidates with vocational training." Regular university—I mean yes, he will go to university too, it doesn't mean he won't—but employers look for university graduates with vocational training.

These arguments carried some weight because the people who made them had better education, higher social status, and more money than Gülşah. When people who have "made" it said employers looked for vocational training, Gülşah began to think that sending him to a vocational school did not mean giving up on her son's chances of college attendance and upward social mobility. In fact, they argued, she would be reinforcing his chances rather than weakening

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them. The example of an affluent neighbor sending their son to a vocational school reinforced this idea.

> There is someone who lives on my block. They own the entire apartment building they live in. They told me, "We are doing well but we didn't send our son to a private school. We are very happy with where he goes." I thought to myself if they send their child there, despite being able to send him to the best school, despite being able to pay 100,000 a month to a private school … there must be something there.

Eventually, she included a vocational school on their application list in the third round., and her son was placed there. Gülşah was not resigned to vocational education; rather she developed a preference for it because of the advantages so insistently pointed out to her. Almost everyone in her personal network recommended she apply to a vocational high school and argued that a hardworking student would do well anywhere. Pragmatists argue that most preferences are constructed situationally in response to available means. Whitford (2002:342) points out that "we readily accept that a change in wants will lead people to choose different means but forget that changes in the means available allow people to discover wants of which they were previously unaware." These insights apply to Turkish high school applicants who begin to accept messages about vocational high schools when their initial preferences for general education are denied.

Being able to see college education and vocational training as complementary played an important role in Gülşah's persuasion. She saw an opportunity for upward mobility through vocational credentials, internships, and a college degree. Hasret, another working-class mother with few options, focused on the cultural and social environment of vocational schools as she considered her child's prospects for upward mobility. Her hesitation about vocational schools stemmed from a conviction that general high schools were a better influence on student behavior. A "good life" required being responsible, hardworking, and motivated, and Hasret thought most vocational schools failed to encourage these traits.

Hasret has been in a physically and emotionally abusive marriage until a few years ago. Her two children suffered from the unrest at home and struggled at school. Her son Hakan was an eighth-grade student at Kavak and had recently taken up smoking. He often had disciplinary problems at school. Towards the end of Hasret's marriage, they started having financial problems because of a failed investment. Their apartment was foreclosed. She moved into a rental and did not receive alimony. At the time of the study, Hasret had been unemployed for several months and was looking for a job. She did not like going out because it meant spending money.

Despite financial difficulties, Hasret believed in investing in education. "I always tell my son: there is no alternative to schooling. In a world where even college graduates scramble to find a job, who would employ a high school graduate? Even college graduation is not enough. You need to get a masters, a PhD before you can get a job." Her son did well in primary school, but he struggled in the aftermath of the divorce. In eighth grade, she hired a math tutor and enrolled him at a private tutoring center to improve his grades and prepare him for the high school entrance exam. But he displayed little interest in schoolwork, and her aspirations for him had been humbled.

> Every mother would like to see their children as a doctor or an engineer. I want him to go to a good high school, but I do not think it's very possible under these conditions. I may have to send him to Healthcare Vocational High School. I want him to at least have a vocation. I used to think differently before.

Although Hasret's expectations had been low, her son's exam score (296 out of 500) still shocked her. She made a list of potential schools according to their locations. "Like I have told you before, my son likes to live. He is open to influences. Stuff like smoking. So, I wanted a school in a central location." When she went to Kavak Middle School to apply to local high schools, she named two local Anatolian high schools as her top choices. When she wanted to add another Anatolian high school from a neighboring attendance zone, Tarik Hoca told her that their top three choices ought to be from their own zone. He also said that she could only name three Anatolian

high schools. To be able to put another Anatolian high school in her fourth spot, he recommended that she put a vocational or Imam Hatip high school with a small quota on the third spot. "It has a quota of 80 people. We figured it would be unlikely for him to be placed there. But he ended up being placed there!"

Hasret was not happy with his placement into a maritime high school, recalling that earlier in the year when Kavak students visited this school, one of his teachers advised Hasret's son to go there because he was not "likely to complete school otherwise." Hasret found this statement offensive and thought his teachers wanted to wash their hands of him rather than give him support. When he was placed there, some of Hasret's friends said the maritime career path could be lucrative and tried to talk her into sending him there. But her priority was finding a school that would rehabilitate her son so that he could participate in education and work meaningfully.

> They say it's good. I don't know. They know people in that line of work. One of them is supposedly a machinist who makes 40,000 liras a month. Forty thousand is an amazing salary at this day and time. But he [son] needs to want it himself. He needs to learn to work hard.

On the other hand, her son told her he would not attend the maritime school nor any local Anatolian high school where she might seek to transfer him, finding the latter to be too much work. He wanted to attend Dalyan High School, a vocational school that Hasret thought was full of problematic students. Despite his position on the matter, Hasret considered how she might enroll him at a public or private Anatolian high school. She read an online article that argued that wives of veterans and women who have gone through domestic violence could unconditionally request enrollment at any local school. She called her ex-husband on the phone to tell him that either he enroll their son at a private high school, or she would seek documentation of domestic abuse to transfer him to a general high school. When school started in September, her son refused to attend the first week of classes at the maritime school. Desperate for him to attend school, Hasret

requested the necessary paperwork from social services and visited the public school district. She spoke to a director about the situation. The director told her that he could only transfer her son to another vocational high school. Left without another option, Hasret allowed her son to be transferred to Dalyan High School. However, he continued having disciplinary problems there and was suspended for being found in possession of cigarettes on school grounds. "Dalyan's climate was awful, he got completely lost there," she said. After dealing with these issues for a semester, Hasret enlisted the help of a music teacher and convinced her ex-husband and his family to enroll their son at a private school. "They did not know. They weren't keeping tabs. When they saw him, saw how rebellious he had become, they agreed with me."

Despite her efforts on behalf of her son, Hasret eventually found herself with only two high school options. Both options were vocational schools and perpetuated Hasret's worries about her son. Hasret's experience is illustrative of working-class mothers' lack of social support to address academic and behavioral issues early on, their relentless advocacy to place their children in rehabilitative school environments, and the organizational procedures that restricted their access to these. Hasret's case also demonstrates that parents consider more than official curriculum when they evaluate potential consequences of different high schools. Like Hasret, many mothers believe that being on the path towards a better life depends on more than grades and degrees; it requires a positive attitude towards school and an inclination to respect and follow rules. Most of them think that vocational schools fail to instill these qualities in their students and avoid them.

Discussion

In previous chapters on exam high school applications, we focused on parents who encountered multiple school alternatives. These parents used personal discretion and cultural choice techniques to decide on a "good" course of action. Their options were constrained by exam

ranking and their ability to pay private school fees, but they still influenced where their children would be placed by making choices.

In contrast, the present chapter focused on parents who lacked options and influence over their children's school placement despite being highly involved in their schooling. Their experiences illustrate the gap between parental rationality and governmental rationality on educational transitions. The government promotes and expands vocational schools to limit the number of unemployable students with university diplomas and to accommodate industry demands for cheap and highly skilled labor. Working-class parents seek to keep their children in the race to the top and gain positional advantage by acquiring a college education, even though the number of jobs for college educated workers are limited. The clash of these rationales introduces both formal burdens and informal encouragement in the high school application process for working-class families.

The chapter describes how parents respond to these impositions and their immensely personal and haunting realization that the future they want for their children might be about to escape their grasps. In that sense, this chapter combines a narrative and lyrical account of working-class students' applications to local high schools, from their mothers' perspective. Abbott (2007:70) formulates lyrical sociology as a form of writing that "looks at a social situation, feels its overpowering excitement and its deeply affecting human complexity" and tries to "awaken those feelings in the minds—and even more the hearts—of his readers." The chapter follows this formulation to highlight the affective dimension of local high school applications. It incorporates expressions of hopefulness, anxiety, resentfulness, disappointment, despair, determination, and a solemn sense of parental responsibility. Furthermore, it illustrates that mothers experience these

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complex emotions because local high school applications create powerful uncertainties regarding their children's future.

Yet the chapter makes at least one causal argument about how specific government policies diminish educational opportunities for students from working-class backgrounds. When governments fail to take into consideration differences in opportunity structures as they deploy meritocratic principles, education systems breed inequity. Academically struggling students from middle-class and working-class backgrounds have different opportunity structures in Turkey: the former have access to private schools that keep them on an academic tract, while the latter is confined to the public school system and its offerings. When the public school system counters the private sector's voluntarism with stringent performance criteria, economic resources rather than academic achievement determine access to higher education track. These powerful and inequitable allocative mechanisms have a second problem: they put unrealistic academic expectations on middle-school students by making their access to general education conditional upon exceptional rather than a standard academic performance. Local high school applicants do not have the top exam scores or grades in their year. But even students with GPAs of 85 or higher (out of 100) find themselves being tracked into vocational schools in the current policy environment. Such cold realities increase the pressure on middle-school students to prioritize "testable" achievements over social, athletic, and creative skills.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning, this project aimed to engage with a central question in the sociology of culture and family: How do parents shape their children's social class mobility prospects through distinct parenting styles and cultures? Given education's demonstrated relation to social stratification, I planned to focus on parenting efforts with respect to the education and schooling of children. I had decided to study high school entrance exam as a significant moment in the educational careers of Turkish students, impacting the schooling experiences of cohort after cohort. However, as I planned for this project through 2017 and 2018, it became immediately apparent to me that Turkish students—and by proxy, their parents—compete in the high school entrance exam on a remarkably unstable terrain. The format of the entrance exam had undergone repeated changes since the early 2000s and with it, the criteria for high school placement. The market for exam preparation has been drastically altered by the governing Justice and Development Party who saw tutoring centers as a political threat because of their affiliation with the Gulen movement. Concurrently, the sociopolitical culture in Turkey had undergone significant transformation accompanied by tremendous investment in religious high schools and religious education generally. With these observations, my attention began to shift from social class differences in parental involvement in schooling to familial responses to the challenges and uncertainties introduced by these political changes. The subsequent data collection and analyses efforts focused on interpretive processes and, to a lesser extent, on stratifying processes in education.

As I examined how parents help their children prepare and apply for high schools, three key findings emerged about how they address uncertainties they encounter and how they create

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sensible solutions. First, they embody the "bilinçli" (informed and involved) parent identity that rests on pursuing a customized and flexible exam preparation strategy. This reflexive parenting model is the opposite of blindly imitating what other parents do. Parents who consider themselves "bilinçli" know how and where other students prepare for the LGS exam, but before they adopt these practices, they evaluate their fit with their children's goals, personalities, needs, and skills. In a sense, they display a "subjunctive habitus" (Johnson-Hanks 2005) composed of dispositions uniquely adapted to contextual uncertainties. The discussions about tutoring center enrollments and study material selections in Chapter 2 provide evidence for these arguments.

Secondly, examining the organizational routines adopted by teachers, school administrators, and tutors reveals the role of unembodied forms of knowledge and techniques in processing uncertainties. Cultural forms that facilitate decision-making are different from "heuristics" because they emerge from specific institutional and interactive contexts rather than the general cognitive make-up of the human brain. Chapter 1 illustrated how tutoring centers reduce the number of decisions parents must make by assigning their students study goals and distributing test banks and weekly study plans. Students and parents often reject or modify these prescriptions, but they come in handy as a canvas for their future decisions. School rankings is another "form" that education professionals widely promote as the most appropriate application instrument. Parents use them as a decision-making tool to contain placement uncertainty and construct courses of action that allow them to manipulate risk.

Thirdly, I find that families address at least two types of uncertainties by creating sophisticated future projects. Future projectivity helps families discover low-risk trajectories to avoid their future aspirations being derailed by political events, economic crises, or befriending the "wrong" people. Families transform environmental dangers to risk they can manage through

tools and practices of anticipation. In that sense, projectivity combines risk management with aspiration. Projectivity also helps rationalize school type differences and create meaningful associations between school selection and life-course trajectories. By showing how these reflections and projections help families establish self-efficacy, chapters 4, 5, and 6 call into question the presumption that structural instability and risks impede future orientations, planning, and strategizing. Instead, I maintain that like Dewey (1930) so long ago argued, when encountering problem situations, deliberation begins rather than stops. These insights from Turkish families' encounters with uncertainty and attempts to construct meaningful practices have implications for several fields. The rest of this chapter outlines these contributions.

Implications for Research on Education

This project's first and foremost contribution is offering a fresh perspective on parental involvement in schooling and educational decisions. Existing scholarship on these phenomena typically frame them as strategic actions through which parents pursue competitive advantages for their children (e.g., Brantlinger 2003; Ball 2003; Hamilton et al. 2018; Lareau 1989). This reflects the critical tradition in the sociology of education that explores the links between educational and social inequalities (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Without rejecting the strategic motivations behind families' engagements with schooling, this study engages with the neglected question of how they determine what is "strategic," "sensible," "good enough," or "safe." It illustrates this as a troubling task even for the most well-equipped families due to the uncertainties introduced by the sweeping changes in Turkey's educational field. It shows how families construct sensible approaches to high school transition through encounters in schools, social media groups, and personal networks.

Framing parents' involvement in schooling as encounters with uncertainty distinguishes this study from previous education policy research. Policymakers worldwide tinker with education systems to meet new social needs and better serve older ones. Education researchers have long explored the origins, implementations, and outcomes of curricular reforms and structural transformations. Within Turkey, the neoliberal restructuring of the education system and the switch to student-centered pedagogy have been expansively studied (Altinyelken 2011; Altinyelken et al. 2015; Inal and Akkaymak 2012; Kaplan 2006; Nohl and Sommel 2019). Although parent-centric research is not common in Turkey (except Çelik 2018; Çelik and Özdemir 2022), there is an extensive body of international research that explores how families respond to the introduction of school choice policies (Henig 1990; Pelz and Den Dulk 2018; Renzulli and Evans 2005; Sattin-Bajaj and Roda 2020). These studies typically focus on the "marketization of education" and underline the problematic outcomes that results from the reimagining of parents as "consumers" (Cucchiara 2013; Henig 1995; Gewirtz et al. 1995; Reinoso 2008; Reay 2004). Simply put, they are preoccupied with questions of redistribution and equity.

This project seeks to extend this scholarship by framing familial responses to policy changes as attempts at knowledge and meaning formation (rather than simply strategy formation). It advances a "political epistemology" of parental involvement in schooling (Glaeser 2010) by exploring how families create working knowledge of the education field, its logic, and demands. Glaeser defines political epistemology as an analysis of knowledge formation contained in processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization. Adaptation to large-scale transformations in any given field involves multiple processes of knowledge formation, rejection, and reinforcement. Turkish parents' encounters with radical change and uncertainty in the education field erode the usefulness of much "learned wisdom" and require them to reassess their

situation on a constant basis. This interpretive and deliberative labor they display challenges the presumption that strategic behavior is habitual. Calarco (2014) has recently pointed out that strategic social class practices are more interpretive and situational than current scholarship accounts for. Similarly, I argue that understanding how social actors construct "strategic" knowledge and action in a context of change requires us to shift our analytical focus from durable structure to emergent structures and meanings emerging from problem-solving behaviors in everyday interactions.

Building on these theories and empirical analyses from the previous chapters, we can make two key points about the political epistemology of parental involvement in schooling. First, governments play a paradoxical role in "knowledge formation" by both eroding and promoting institutionalized forms, attitudes, and practices. Education policy impacts families by simultaneously creating and managing practical and epistemic uncertainties about what a situation is and how to best respond to it. These might produce very basic ambiguities such as: Is my child's academic performance good enough? If not, what do I do about it? Also, why should I do something about it? In Turkey, the JDP's efforts to dismantle the tutoring sector and entrance exams have destabilized knowledge about the proper venues and methods of exam preparation. Its aggressive promotion of religious and vocational high schools has eroded confidence that public schools will accommodate all students regardless of academic performance. However, the government has also made suggestions about how to replace this now "outdated" practical knowledge and orientations. These observations call for a closer look at the socio-political processes and practices through which uncertainties emerge and are contained within the educational field.

Second, families create knowledge and meaning in school sites in collaboration with other parents and teaching professionals. These sites and interactions are central to the institutionalization of new forms of knowledge and decision-making techniques. Chapter 1 illustrated Turkish parents learn through social contacts that they can manage uncertainty of effective exam preparation. Chapter 3 similarly demonstrated how families learn to maximize odds of placement into an exam school by paying attention to school rankings. Both observations confirm Calkins' (2019) claim that social actors are highly capable of establishing common frames of reference to coordinate action and address uncertainties even in highly indeterminate situations. They also attest to the importance of access to organizational resources and social capital for families to create local, working knowledge to guide action. These insights show the indispensability of a symbolic-interactionist perspective (Blumer 1986) on how parents create meaning and stability through repeated interactions in the educational field.

Implications for Turkish Scholarship on Social Class and Parental Involvement in Education

Turkey has a strong tradition of social class analysis beginning from historical inquiries into stratification in the Ottoman Empire (Karpat 2008; Mardin 1967; Göçek 1996) and resuming with the emergence of a modern social class structure (Kıray 1999) and its transformation (Ayata 2002; Boratav 2004; Kalaycıoğlu et al. 1998; Öncü 1999). An important segment of this research scholarship examines the "new middle classes" that have emerged over the last couple of decades because of globalization (Harvey 2005), urbanization, and mass higher education participation (Emrence 2008). Scholars observed how the new middle class distinguished itself from other social groups through conspicuous consumption (Emrence 2008) of global products (Öncü 1999), spatial segregation (Alemdaroğlu 2016; Zicher 2015), and dressing styles (Karademir Hazır 2017).

While these works advance our understanding of how social class "identities" and "boundaries" are maintained through spatial, bodily, and discursive practices, a nascent scholarship has begun to examine how they reproduce their social class positions intergenerationally. It draws on previous international scholarship that examines the importance of "the right kind of education" for the middle classes, particularly their upper echelon occupying professional and administrator positions (Lockwood 1995:3). These scholars maintain that the expansion of secondary and tertiary education worldwide has introduced competition and challenged the middle classes' capacity to pass on their privileges, resulting in deep-seated anxieties about downward social mobility (Cucchiara 2013; Nelson 2010; Reay 2000). The "new middle classes" seek to distinguish their children by colonizing the field of education through opportunity hoarding (e.g., Hamilton et al.2018; Lewis and Diamond 2015; Sattin-Bajaj and Roda 2020) and social closure in educational settings like private schools where entry is difficult to obtain (Ball 2003; Coleman 1988; Fasang et al.2014). Further, an important segment of the new middle classes uses transnationalism as a distinction strategy by sending their children to international schools that used to cater to ex-pat families (Ball and Nikita 2014; Koo 2016; Maxwell 2018; Maxwell and Aggleton 2016).

These works inform the small amount of published research on parental involvement and investment in Turkish education. For instance, in their 1993 study of the junior high school exam, Rutz and Balkan (2009: ix) frame participation in the exam as a new social class strategy associated with the "early phase of global integration." They argue that as public high schools lost their "elite-training" function towards the 1980s, Turkish parents began to increasingly shift their focus to the middle section of Anatolian and private high schools. In a second survey conducted in 2009 in Istanbul, Balkan again reports substantial preferences for selective or private schooling among

Turkish middle classes (Balkan et al. 2015; Balkan and Öncü 2018). Although many attended public schools themselves, about half of the parents Balkan and Öncü surveyed wanted to send their children to private primary schools, about one-third wanted to send their children to private high schools, and 70 percent wanted to send their children to either a private, Anatolian, or science high school (Balkan et al. 2015). In a more recent study, Çelik and Özdemir (2022) focus on middle-class families of primary school students and their methods of "social class reproduction" through schooling. They demonstrate that these families "hunt for public schools with a middle-class school-mix" and with the idea of "transforming public schools into competitive academic ones through intense engagement" (Çelik and Özdemir 2022:10 and 12). Their findings largely parallel the previous, non-Turkey-based scholarship on parental school choice and involvement in schooling (Cucchiara 2013; Lareau and Goyette 2014; Posey-Maddox 2014; Posey-Maddox et al. 2014; Reay et al. 2011).

The present study extends this budding scholarship by illustrating the processual, interactive, and institutional context of educational strategizing. Although the arguments are not explicitly constructed around social class analysis (except for in Chapters 6 and 7), several of the findings highlight new directions for research on social class and parental involvement in education. First, the study illustrates that educational involvement is part of an ongoing processes where families constantly readjust their expectations, aspirations, and choices. The families who participated in this research made a series of decisions about where to enroll their children in school, where and how to prepare them for the exam, how to intervene in exam preparation, how to ensure placement at an exam school after receiving their exam results, and how to align school applications with desired futures. The present manuscript shows how tasks, preoccupations, and challenges families face transform through the eighth grade, which is itself only a stage in a

sequence of events beginning in early childhood and extending into the future. The complexity and interdependency of these engagements suggest that "middle class reproduction strategies" go beyond specific school choice decisions and involve routine practices like assistance with homework, coaching about proper classroom conduct, and so forth. Families make several "strategic" decisions from the moment their children are born, and we need more longitudinal or ethnographic research on Turkey to understand how educational projects shift as children age, move between various institutions, and encounter new people and opportunities.

The present study also extends this scholarship by illustrating the role of future projectivity in educational strategizing. While most educational research on Turkish and non-Turkish contexts frame educational decisions as resulting from existing resources and dispositional residue of former experiences (Rutz and Balkan 2009; Çetin 2018), several chapters in this manuscript demonstrate the generative power of imagining, planning, and projecting as well as the indeterminacies created by these acts. For instance, several families without demonstratable "global" or "transnational" education or work experiences incorporated information from the grapevine to construct and pursue cosmopolitan future projects. This defies the common understanding of the transnational education route as a "reproductive" mechanism and demonstrates its potential to be incorporated into social mobility projects. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 also illustrate that Turkish families subscribe to several different educational trajectories rather than pursuing a single "middle class" strategy. Local, pious, and cosmopolitan projects are synchronous future strategies aligned with different high school types that offer qualitatively different cultural capital. The current analysis on families' future projectivity also introduces new lines of inquiry into within-family dynamics of decision-making. The question going forward is to understand the

relations between educational strategies and future projectivity on the one hand, and social class origins and destinations on the other.

The present manuscript also advances our understanding of how the Justice and Development Party influences Turkish families' social reproduction strategies through its cultural politics and economic policies. Over the past several years, scholars have pointed out that the JDP's conservativism and economic policies have been making the transmission of social class privileges and distinctions highly uncertain (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016, 2017; Çelik and Özdemir 2022). They document how secular families discover creative ways of addressing the uncertainty of intergenerational cultural and economic reproduction. To further these arguments, this project demonstrates the mechanisms through which families *encounter* these uncertainties. It illustrates how the JDP's cultural and economic policies create educational policies that rearrange the structure of schooling. Families experience the impact of governmental policy through their routine involvement in the educational field where they are surrounded by professionals. To understand how the JDP's cultural politics impacts the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, we need more research on how organizations like schools mediate this relation.

Lastly, the present study demonstrates that transforming future uncertainties into risks is key to families' capacity for engaging in strategic action. This involves discovering a course of action that will be fruitful in different future scenarios. The carefully crafted "application list" is an insurance against the volatility of the student placement system because it involves schools ranked a few points above and below the applicant's own ranking. With this list, families are able to increase their chances of being placed in an exam high school even though they can't predict which school it will be. From an affective perspective, manipulating risks during ongoing uncertainty requires emotional preparation for several potential outcomes. Chapter 3 shows that

Turkish families prepare themselves emotionally for a range of placement outcomes by underscoring the locational superiority of schools ranked low in their application lists. Supplementary data on schools may not shape the construction of application lists, but it does help families alleviate potential anxieties about being placed in one of their last choices. Being able to transform uncertainties into risks also comes in handy when families find themselves having to navigate more than one type of uncertainty. Chapter 5 focuses on cases where parents face multiple uncertainties about not only economic or symbolic outcomes, but political and cultural outcomes as well. School alternatives do not always offer an escape from several uncertainties at once, so families "in between" choose to avoid "danger" and embrace the "risk" by evaluating which future uncertainties are environmental in origin and which may be contained with individual effort. This allows them to interpret some school options as "safer" bets than others. The manuscript's attention to the non-academic and non-economic risks parents navigate contextualizes educational decisions within the broader parental program of raising moral, happy, and healthy children. However, more research is needed on how socioeconomic pursuits intersect with cultural identity in parents' involvement in education and how families address facing several risks at once.

Implications for Secondary Education Policy in Turkey

Despite various procedural interventions, high school transition remains a highly stressful period for millions of students and families in Turkey. Some of this research's findings might help policymakers make high school transition easier and more equitable for families going through this process.

First, the study calls for a reconsideration of basing student placement on exam rankings. The high school examination system is not merely an instrument that assesses merit and determines who ought to be placed into high quality schools. While it may seem to establish performance

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standards that regulate and contain excessive aspirations, the present study illustrates how it stokes desire for the few schools at the top. This is because of rankings' "reactivity" (Espeland and Sauder 2016). Rankings change the world they seek to describe by compelling people and organizations to act in ways that will improve their rankings. Mau (2020) calls this "the spirit of competitiveness." This spirit leads universities to redirect finances and organizational efforts to issues that impact their rankings at the expense of other things vital to their operations (Espeland and Sauder 2016). Similarly, the present study shows that the entire eighth-grade experience in Turkey revolves around rankings. Schools and tutoring centers sort students into ability groups and administer regular mock exams to reshuffle students between these classrooms. Families try to place their children in the highest ranked high schools.

However, constantly ranking students and rewarding them accordingly hurt their emotional well-being and self-esteem. Students feel frustrated when they are compared to their friends so openly on a singular metric. It strains their relations with their parents and makes them feel inadequate. Like students, parents experience substantial amounts of stress in this period. They feel guilty for expecting their children to display more self-discipline than their age allows and for asking them to sacrifice their hobbies and social lives. They feel like bad parents for comparing their children with others and making them feel inadequate. Ata described leaving eighth grade behind as a monumental relief. "After he came out of the exam, we sat down, hugged each other, and cried our hearts out. It felt like escaping a mangle or taking off your shackles." In short, placement based on rankings creates desire and despair. It creates winners and losers.

To reduce the strain on students' and parents' well-being, the Ministry of National Education ought to consider holistic evaluation techniques for both student performance and school quality. Chapter 3 illustrates how little Turkish parents actually know about the quality of

education in the schools they apply to. Safety, engagement, interpersonal relations, and staff morale are important predictors of student well-being, but they do not substantially shape high school application decisions in the absence of systematic and reliable data on instructional effectiveness or school climate. Unlike rankings, school climate is not relative: a school with a good climate somewhere does not mean another school somewhere else ought to have a worse climate. This means that the Ministry can improve student and parental satisfaction with high school placement across the board by 1.) improving school climate and 2.) distributing climate data to the public. Local school districts would play a vital role in detecting climate problems in schools and collaborating with the staff to address them.

Secondly, Turkish education has an underinvestment problem that remains unresolved. As the first chapter illustrated, the expansion of secondary schooling occurred in a time when the state began to redirect its resources to the private education sector. This created huge disparities in the instructional quality and infrastructures of newer schools in urban peripheries and older, well-established schools in the urban centers. These disparities influence school quality because physical and technical resources facilitate collaborative and effective learning experiences. High school rankings obscure the difficulty of accessing high quality education by promising families that if their children work hard enough, they might get into a good school. The Ministry introduces sophisticated methods to cut the pie fairly, but the argument that ensues distracts from the fact that the pie is too small to feed everyone. As Sedef Hoca colorfully explained,

> The Ministry is like a mother who reheats the same dish for her unwilling kids. The mother would add some cilantro, and the kids would eat some more of it. The next day, if there are still some leftovers, she would add some tomato sauce, some more oil and say, "see, what a delicious dish." But we are eating the same thing the entire time. Similarly, no matter how much you change the examination system, the logic remains the same: pick and weed out.

If the Ministry allows qualitative differences between schools to persist, demand will continue to coalesce around a few schools, and it will continue to use filtering mechanisms that ironically reproduce the demand it seeks to contain. Addressing underinvestment in public schools ought to be a priority in the battle against "entrance exams."

This research project also invites policymakers to reconsider their commitment to social equity. Carnoy (2019) argues that modern states display an existential contradiction between the democratic principal of equal participation and capitalism's exploitative dynamics. These contradictory tendencies also characterize modern education systems. On the one hand, the state uses the education system to prepare students to occupy different positions in the social hierarchy. On the other hand, the legitimacy of the state and the education system rests on their capacity to give all students an equitable chance to reach the higher echelons of society. Educational equity dictates that social origins ought not determine educational attainment or achievement, the common prerequisites of high socioeconomic status in modern societies.

Secondary education policies in contemporary Turkey illustrate the tension between promoting educational equity and facilitating social differentiation. Developing countries like Turkey engage in "catch-up modernization" where governments consider national economic development the utmost goal as they create educational policy (Aizawa et al. 2018). This involves a commitment to expansion of educational opportunities and creating human capital without losing time with distributional questions. These states tend to neglect asking who takes advantage of the newly created educational opportunities as long as the overall human capital, gross domestic product, and other developmental indexes increase. As I have argued in Chapter 1, the JDP government has increased school enrollment rates by extending compulsory education to twelve years and opening many new high schools. But expansion of secondary schooling did not

democratize access to non-vocational education, or to higher education by extension. Eager to serve industry and business interests, the government seeks to reform and promote vocational training to families of incoming high school students. They contend that improving the country's skilled labor stock is a top priority for the education system.

Of course, one would be remiss to say reforming and expanding vocational education is a problem in and of itself. A robust vocational education system can help students with non-academic interests and skills to meaningfully participate in work and society. Skilled technicians and crafters are an asset to society and improve the general quality of life; who would like to deal with a constantly malfunctioning plumbing system or hop between several salons for a good haircut? Rather, the problem with Turkey's secondary education policies (involving its vocational school promotion) is their concerning neglect of the equity question. In national, city, and district level publications, Ministry of National Education mentions geographic and gender disparities in education more often than social class and ethnic inequalities. The link between socioeconomic origins and educational attainment is not on the Ministry's radar in a serious manner. Nonetheless, Chapter 7 of this manuscript suggests that how the government promotes vocational schools may be strengthening rather than weaking this link. The chapter shows that rules for local high school placement discriminates against students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds by penalizing their educational underachievement more heavily than middle class students.

The second equity problem in Turkey's vocational education policies concerns discrepancy of economic compensation in the labor market. The Ministry bureaucracy pursues a public opinion campaign to increase respectability and status of vocational professions. A public-school principal I interviewed said, "Our people respect doctors more than nurses, they view electrical engineers and electric technicians differently. If we don't start to respect these lines of work equally, it will

be impossible to change negative perceptions about vocational schools." While this humanitarian call for collective respect is attractive, the government and Ministry bureaucracy willfully ignore the fact that cultural stigmatization is only partially accountable for the public prejudice against vocational high schools. Many parents have real economic concerns about foregoing college education for vocational training. Some vocations (like automobile service) do prove lucrative when technical and business skills meet, but many lead to underpaid salary-work at the bottom of the command chain in private businesses. Some of the interviewed parents rejected sending their children to vocational schools because they worked in companies that rewarded higher education degrees in unrelated fields of study instead of job-related technical skills when they handed out promotions.

These insights suggest that promoting vocational education without addressing the strong association between parental education and vocational tracking, or between vocational education and future socioeconomic status undermines schools' contribution to upward social mobility. These associations are not automatic: they are products of specific arrangements that can be intervened in. While vocational training in secondary education may be a necessity as well as a reality in Turkey, the Ministry can do more to promote fairness in vocational tracking. One of these steps might be to never turn away an applicant to general high schools because of educational underperformance. Educational underperformance is an outcome of various social and contextual factors beyond students' control. It is reversible in a supportive academic environment with adequate resources. The high school entrance exam already works as an academic filtering mechanism for high quality public schools. Continuing to use GPA to further regulate student placement will create a rigid educational segregation in the education system. Not only does this extreme form of segregation deepen early childhood disadvantages of students from difficult

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backgrounds, but it also undermines the message that the purpose of education extends beyond getting good grades. Instead, school districts can use data from earlier years' application forms to determine local demand for general secondary education and increase quotas to meet demands. Where this is not possible, lotteries rather than GPA criteria may be used to weaken the link between socioeconomic origin and track placement.

Reckoning with Uncertainties

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the spring of 2020, it introduced new and terrifying uncertainties to school-aged children worldwide. Students' learning environments and preparation for the high school exam has been drastically altered since. I completed this project's data collection by the summer of 2020, so I only witnessed the pandemic's impact on eighth grade Turkish students who were a few months away from the high school exam. However, a conversation with an academic friend with two seventh graders revealed the extent of the pandemic's impact on the incoming cohorts. When my friend shared a social media post about planning to have her twins waive the high school entrance exam, I was curious about her reasoning. After a long time of being immersed in stories of parents who took the exam very seriously, her decision seemed almost daring.

I called my friend and asked to interview her. She told me that online learning had been a disastrous experience for her daughters. One of them did not make any friends in the school they started right before the pandemic and was generally very unhappy. A few months ago, her daughter told my friend that she saw no point to the high school entrance exam and would not be taking it. Upon this declaration, my friend felt like lightning had struck her. Wasn't the exam just something that all children participated in? Was it possible to simply skip it? After confirming that the high school exam indeed was not mandatory, she and her husband did some research on whether they

would have good school options without taking it. They decided that they might send them to the private school they attended before middle school. It would be costly, but she could not bring herself to force the matter onto her daughters. After all, she recognized in their convictions her own cynicism that schools did not teach much. Still, she worried that the girls might be failing to appreciate schools' utilitarian value for having choices in adulthood. As she told me, "It is important for them to plan and to feel responsible. They ought to learn how to instrumentalize their experiences."

Listening to her story, I noticed that her position was not so radical after all. She articulated the same dilemma that came up interview after interview. Most parents' feelings about the high school exam oscillated between invigorated appreciation and cynical detachment through this process. They believed that high school placement matters, but it is not *all* that matters. Suleyman, a father who had been exceptionally hands-on with his son's exam preparation, told me: "It's not a matter of life or death. To use a football analogy, this exam only determines the league you begin with. If you are a good player, you can advance to the European Premier League from a second league team." Notwithstanding the value of quality education, many parents wondered whether a passing moment in the sequence of events in a life trajectory truly warranted this collective attention, anguish, and veneration. Enrolling in a good high school required a lot of work but did not secure a good future by itself. Still, few families felt like they had the luxury to sit out the competition.

My friend's story also reminds us that while this research is concluded, parents continue to encounter new and foreign uncertainties as they try to help their children balance school performance, mental health, and prospects. The COVID-19 pandemic forced my friend's family and many others to reconsider taken-for-granted understandings of what it means to be the parent

of an eighth-grade student and what to expect of them. The world is changing at a dizzying pace, and parents' own schooling experiences and the schooling experiences of older children provide inadequate solutions to the new educational problems they encounter. Today, more than ever, we need more studies about how families find their way forward under ever changing circumstances

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The introduction chapter outlines this project's research design, recruitment strategy, and data collection processes. In this section, I would like to provide some details about the personal aspects of field research and how I managed my relations with interlocutors. With field research, what study subjects communicate to the researcher shapes the understandings they take away with them, and what they communicate depends on their relationship to the researcher. Given the intersubjectivity of the qualitative research enterprise, issues of identity, rapport and trust are central to effective research partnerships.

Negotiating Researcher Identity at Kavak Middle School

Qualitative researchers agree that it is difficult to predict beforehand which researcher attributes will be important to study participants (Weiss 1994). Our social identities involve our gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, nationality, and religion, to name a few. On some of these aspects, we are bound to be outsiders to the populations we study, while we can be insiders on others. Being an insider or an outsider does not determine whether ethnographers can gain access or develop relations that yield candid and detailed accounts of experiences (Bucerius 2013; Weiss 1994). However, the roles that we assume and the role our interlocutors bestow on us in the field shape where we can go, what we can ask, and what we will be told (Snow et al. 1986). I would like to take this time to reflect on how my social identity might have shaped my relations in the field and how I navigated the various roles I assumed or was given by my interlocutors.

In the first few of weeks of my presence at the Kavak Middle School, I had been diligent about claiming the role of a researcher who is curious, respectful, and unbiased. An initial experience with a would-be gatekeeper threatened the integrity of this role at the beginning.

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Having picked Kavak as a potential site for school observations, I found the phone number of the student counselling department on Kavak's website and made a call. After listening to my research pitch, the student counsellor invited me to visit him at Kavak the next day. I arrived at the school to find him away on duty. Disappointed about having made a useless trip, I called the school's religious studies teacher, who I knew through my family, to see if he would meet me. When we met, I told him about my intention to obtain permission to conduct my dissertational research at Kavak. He lowered his voice and leaned forward to quietly tell me that the school's vice principals would not talk to me because of my headscarf. Almost on cue, one man I would later learn to be a vice principal walked by us. The religious studies teacher stopped and told him that I was the daughter of a Divinity School professor at the Marmara University and that I requested their help for a research project. Feeling mortified that my kin relation might define who I was to the others in the field, I jumped to introduce myself using my educational credentials and research interests. From then on, I maintained a social distance to this teacher to avoid a similar situation.

When I reconnected with the missing student counselor, he became my gatekeeper and made my initial introductions to some of the teaching staff. Shortly afterwards, Musa Hoca, a social studies teacher who taught eighth grade, and Merve, the female student counselor, became my sponsors as I spent most of my time at the school with them. As I expected and hoped, my educational background became my relevant attribute for these teachers, helping me establish rapport and trust with them. My alma mater, Bogazici University, is a well-respected public institution and my sponsors made a point of stating I was a "Bogazici graduate" whenever they introduced me to someone new. I would later learn that teachers I hadn't yet met tended to assume I was an undergraduate intern shadowing teachers. However, this association worked in my favor. Most Kavak teachers were used to teaching interns and researchers from education departments

visiting the school to observe their classes. One teacher told me that a PhD student used to video tape his classes. The two of them would go over the footage together to discuss his pedagogy. Their comfort and familiarity with being observed while they worked made them welcome my requests to observe their classes for my research project about the high school exam. This comfort was also visible in the way they managed their classrooms by allowing students to slack or easily raise their voices when frustrated.

As I shadowed eighth-grade teachers in and out of their classrooms and spent their breaks with them, I noticed that politics was a salient aspect of the social interactions in the teacher's lounge. The contested municipal elections of 2019 had taken place a few weeks before the start of my fieldwork and the People's Republican Party candidate for Istanbul won against the JDP candidate by only a few thousand votes. A large television could often be found broadcasting news updates about the aftermath of the elections, and present teachers would make heated comments about President Erdogan. I was wary of being pulled into a political discussion that would introduce political allyship or rivalry into our research partnership. I was particularly anxious about coming across as "pandering" to gain favor. A few times, I was put on the spot by a teacher who directly asked my opinion on controversial topics about religion and secularism. Among these topics were gender segregated universities (a proposal made recently by President Erdogan) and the atheism allegations against Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. As Oakes (2016:197) once wrote, "refusing to answer was exploitative of interviewees and counterproductive in terms of gaining full and honest accounts." Withholding my opinion when directly asked could give them the impression that I did not trust them the way I asked them to trust me, so I gave honest but short answers to these inquiries.

Establishing Trust and Negotiating Researcher Identity During In-Depth Interviews

Politics influenced some of my recruitment experiences and interview dynamics by introducing uncertainty about the "agenda" of my research project. I conducted my fieldwork a few years after the atrocious July 15, 2016 coup attempt, when public trust for strangers was markedly low. Following July 15, many people had security/background checks on them to clear any suspicion of entanglement with the Fethullah Gülen movement. The Gülen movement's alleged tendency for secrecy and the waves of criminal investigations have spread the fear of being labeled a Fethullah Gülen sympathizer or accused of associating with them. This made some parents acutely wary about a research invitation they received on the phone by someone they did not know before. One mother who refused to participate in the study told me apologetically, "My dear, it's not personal. Please don't get me wrong. I don't trust anyone these days. Maybe I am supposed to help a student on this holy day of Ramadan, but I feel uneasy." Similarly, when Emine's son brought home my research invitation letter, she did not want to talk to me because I could turn out to be a "fetöcü" (a label that means "member of the Fethullah terror organization" that has become popular after the failed coup). As Emine later told me, she only agreed to set up an interview when her close friend Hilal called to recruit her for me. After I have stopped making cold calls and began to recruit participants through PTA meetings and other parents, this trust problem went away. Seeing me at the school and being introduced by teachers they knew worked. After my presentations, I was approached by several parents who praised my educational background, public speaking skills, and the importance of doing research on Turkish national education.

Another suspicion about this research had to do with my affiliation with the University of Chicago. Imperial states have a history of using intelligence to control and intervene in colonized

territories (Thomas 2007). As critical approaches to early anthropological research illustrate, the study of the indigenous people by Western scholars helped colonial regimes across the world (Wolfe 1999). In a similar fashion, some of my interlocutors were initially apprehensive about the research becoming "intelligence" that would be weaponized against their country. They politely inquired about whether my advisers or university chose this research topic for me. In these cases, I responded by explaining my personal motivations for choosing this topic and explained my intent to share the research findings with the Turkish public so that they can be used to improve the education system to better serve their children. This must have been effective in alleviating their initial fears because these interviews were as candid, detailed, and forthcoming as the rest. However, these conversations reminded me of the importance of having organic ties to the populations I studied and of the responsibility I held in making the research findings available for their viewing.

Whether a researcher is seen as an insider or an outsider impacts their relationship dynamics in the field. My insider status shifted constantly depending on the people I interviewed and the topic of the conversation. Expectations about what I must and mustn't be in the "know" of was mediated by my younger age, headscarf, marital status, and prolonged residence outside of Turkey. I found that fieldwork was the easiest when I was seen as a "trusted outsider" (Bucerius 2013) because this allowed me the freedom to ask questions about things that may appear natural to them. This was especially the case with questions about parenting. As a younger woman without children who has lived abroad for almost a decade, I did have sufficient distance from the experiences I was inquiring about without being judged. An exception to my status as a "trusted outsider" was my interviews with religious parents. Some religious parents expected me to anticipate their cultural anxieties about secular educational settings without having to verbalize

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them because they saw me as a hijabi woman with a similar cultural background. In these occasions, I addressed their confusion and suspicion at my request for clarification with a sentence like, "I think I have a sense of what you are alluding to, but I want to make sure I do not misunderstand your point or put words into your mouth."

My hijabi identity also influenced parents' understanding of what required "justification" or "explanation" in addition to what required "clarification." For example, on the polarizing topic of religious public education, some parents went out of their way to explain their critical position to avoid personally offending me or having me misunderstand their position. Some prefaced their views with "indisputably religious" acquaintances' opposition to Imam Hatip schools. Oğuz told me, "My sister-in-law prays five time a day, but she opposes Imam Hatip schools. She thinks they do not serve their original purpose. I have different reasons … I think they make students grow apart from science-based education." Others mentioned their favorable position regarding religious practices to establish common ground: "You are a hijabi, of course, but I have also always sent my children to Quranic courses. I like to read the Quran myself." In these rare situations, I reassured them that it was perfectly acceptable to have critical opinions about Imam Hatip schools. These explanations display that despite having generalizing ideas about how a hijabi women might feel about certain controversial topics, these parents were committed to the research and to maintaining a respectful partnership. In fact, they were exceptionally invested in the study and had several interviews with me. Having said that, I cannot say whether they filtered what they shared with me concerning religious education (the social desirability bias), or if their need to avoid misunderstanding resulted in fuller accounts than if I resembled their looks. Because this was a methodological question we cannot resolve without evidence, I refrained from analyzing their views on religious education and focused on other aspects of their educational experiences.

I found myself having to negotiate my researcher role different ways too. This had to do with what some participants expected of me, and what I could give back to them in exchange for their time and collaboration. Parents participated in this study for several reasons. Some were altruistic and saw me as a student in need of help with a school project. Others thought that the high school entrance exam was a problematic practice, and they could help raise awareness about it by participating in this research. Parents with these orientations had expectations from me that I could easily perform by listening, inquiring, respecting, and sympathizing. However, some parents expected me to also assume the role of a social worker or student counselor who could advise them about communicating with their adolescent children. I responded to requests for advice by saying I was not trained or qualified for the task. Although it was humbling having to reject these requests by mothers who already had an insufficient support system, I found consolation in being a "sympathetic listener" to mothers working through difficult parental and material problems. Several mothers returned my expression of gratitude at the end of their interviews. For instance, Sevde told me she felt relieved like she did during a "therapy session."

From a feminist perspective, we can see research participation as a "gift" that obliges the researcher towards the participant (Oakes 2016). I endeavored to "give back" to the study participants as much as I could. Per Turkish custom, I brought sweets to those who invited me to their homes. I paid the bill when we met at a cafeteria. Some parents asked me and my husband to chat with their children to practice English and others asked me questions about applying to post-secondary education programs abroad. I did my best to accommodate these requests at the end of interviews.

Some Notes on Data Limitations

In US-based education research, it is expected to report student demographics like racial composition or number of students on lunch aid to assess what kind of school is being studied, the community it serves, and the common social experiences and challenges of the student body. Such data is typically publicly accessible because American schools are required to demonstrate accountability and transparency to receive funding. In contrast, funding mechanisms work differently in Turkey, and socioeconomic or ethnic diversity is not a defining goal of Turkish public education. As such, demographic data is rarely reported in publications by government agencies or public school districts. From these publications, one can ascertain only particular things: number of schools; teachers, students, and classrooms by sector and level of education; teacher to student ratios; enrollment rates; and number of double shift schools. As a result, I was unable to locate official demographic data about the students in the district and school site in which I completed this research project.

Obtaining publicly undisclosed data through personal networks was also a challenge. When I visited the Istanbul branch of the Ministry of National Education to obtain school site research permission, the director who oversaw my case made an offhanded threat about the Ministry suing researchers who asked questions they did not declare in their application forms. "We have had some bad experiences with people who asked questions that plant certain ideas in people's heads," she told me. This made me hesitant to seek administrative data from Kavak for a very long time, until I was at a point where I wanted to see whether the JDP's attempts to promote vocational and religious high schools might have impacted where Kavak students were placed. I thought placement records from the past ten years would allow me to notice any potential effect. I approached Musa Hoca and the principal separately about it, and they both told me the vice

principal would have the records, "if there were any." The vice principal told me those records were kept by the public school district, not the school locally. When I visited the public school district, I was told they did not have placement data at the school level. Instead, they offered to distribute a survey to the district middle schools—if I designed it—and share the self-reported results from the schools with me. As a result of these experiences and first-hand observations about district schools' data collection, storage, and sharing habits, I did not push to obtain administrative data any further. Instead, any contextualizing information about Kavak and its district comes from interviews, official publications, and secondary sources. The lack of systematic data about school demographics makes it difficult to generalize findings from the Kavak parents when we don't know how representative they are of the specific socioeconomic groups under focus. However, recruitment from the Facebook groups helped me establish confidence that Kavak families' educational involvements are very comparable to experiences of families living in other central Istanbul districts.

APPENDIX B: FEATURED SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Table 6 Sample Distributions

	N	%
Type of Interviewee		
parent	66	78%
middle school teacher or administrator	14	16%
private tutor or tutoring center administrator	5	6%
Gender (Parents)		
Female	60	91%
Male	6	9%
Gender (Focal Children)		
Female	26	39%
Male	37	56%
Both	3	5%
Social Class Location (Parents)		
Working Class	23	35%
Middle Class	28	42%
Upper-Middle Class	15	23%
Middle School (Focal Child)		
Kavak	35	53%
Not Kavak	31	47%
Place of Residence (Parents)		
Istanbul	58	88%
Other	8	12%
Number of Interviews (Parents)		
once	31	47%
twice	23	35%
thrice	10	15%
four times	2	3%
High School Placement (Focal Child)		
science high school	5	8%
exam imam hatip school	7	11%
exam anatolian	20	30%
local anatolian	14	21%
local vocational	5	8%
local imam hatip	3	5%
private	11	16%
missing	1	1%

Table 7 List of Interviewees

Pseudonym	Role	Focal Child Attended Kavak	Social Class	Gender of Focal Child	High School Placement of Focal Child
Murat	private school teacher	-	-	-	-
Sedef	public school principal	-	-	-	-
Ziynet	private school teacher	-	-	-	-
Ziynet's colleague #1	private school teacher	-	-	-	-
Ziynet's colleague #2	private school teacher	-	-	-	-
Didem	private school teacher	-	-	-	-
Oya	private school vice principal	-	-	-	-
Muhammed	public school teacher	-	-	-	-
Derya	private school teacher	-	-	-	-
Melek	public school teacher	-	-	-	-
Hamdi	tutoring center owner	-	-	-	-
Helin	teacher at tutoring center	-	-	-	-
Fatih	private school and tutoring center owner	-	-	-	-
Kerim	former tutor, private school teacher	-	-	-	-
Merve	public school student counselor	-	-	-	-
Mahmut	public school teacher	-	-	-	-
Korkut	public school teacher/part time tutor	-	-	-	-
Musa	public school teacher	-	-	-	-
Sinem	private tutor	-	-	-	-
Nurefşan	mother	yes	working class	female	private school
Nil	mother	yes	working class	male	local anatolian
Mahpeyker	mother	yes	working class	male	local anatolian
Leyla	mother	yes	working class	female	local vocational
Hasret	mother	yes	working class	male	local vocational
Gülşah	mother	yes	working class	male	local vocational

Table 7 (continued)

Pseudonym	Role	Focal Child Attended Kavak	Social Class	Gender of Focal Child	High School Placement of Focal Child
Fatma	mother	yes	working class	female	local anatolian
Doğa	mother	yes	working class	female	exam anatolian
Halime	mother	no	working class	female	private school
Cemile	mother	yes	working class	male	local anatolian
Olcay	mother	yes	working class	male	local anatolian
Buket	mother	yes	working class	female	local anatolian
Nuran	mother	no	working class	female	exam imam hatip
Vildan	mother	yes	working class	male	local anatolian
Behice	mother	no	working class	male	exam anatolian
Pakize	mother	no	working class	female	local anatolian
Hamiyet	mother	no	working class	female	exam imam hatip
Dilara	mother	yes	working class	male	local anatolian
Sultan	mother	yes	working class	male	local vocational
Vera	mother	no	working class	male	local vocational
Kaniye	mother	no	working class	female	local imam hatip
Aysel	mother	no	working class	female	local anatolian
Armağan	mother	no	working class	female	science
Kübra	mother	yes	middle class	male	private school
Reyhan	mother	yes	middle class	female	exam anatolian
Sevde	mother	yes	middle class	male	private school
Toprak	mother	yes	middle class	male	exam anatolian
Hatice	mother	yes	middle class	male	(missing)
Rabia	mother	yes	middle class	male	local anatolian
Esat	father	yes	middle class	male	exam anatolian
Yıldız	mother	yes	middle class	male	exam anatolian
Meltem	mother	yes	middle class	male	private school
Medine	mother	no	middle class	male	exam anatolian
Ayfer	mother	no	middle class	male	exam anatolian
Suleyman	father	no	middle class	male	exam imam hatip
Funda	mother	no	middle class	female	exam anatolian
Ata	father	no	middle class	male	science
Haluk	father/middle school teacher	no	middle class	male	science
Tansel	father/middle school teacher	no	middle class	female	private school
Adile	mother	yes	middle class	male	local anatolian
Zuhre	mother	yes	middle class	female	local anatolian
Hediye	mother	yes	middle class	female	private school
Evrim	mother	no	middle class	male	local anatolian
Fidan	mother	no	middle class	female	exam anatolian
Inci	mother	no	middle class	male	local imam hatip

Table 7 (continued)

Pseudonym	Role	Focal Child Attended Kavak	Social Class	Gender of Focal Child	High School Placement of Focal Child
Zeynep	mother	no	middle class	female	exam anatolian
Sevim	mother	yes	middle class	male	exam anatolian
Piraye	mother	yes	middle class	female&male	exam anatolian
İlkgül	mother	yes	middle class	female	exam anatolian
Zehra	mother	no	middle class	male	exam imam hatip
Mehtap	mother	no	middle class	female	exam anatolian
Betül	mother	no	upper middle class	female	exam imam hatip
Tuba	mother	no	upper middle class	female	exam imam hatip
Bilge	mother	no	upper middle class	female&male	exam anatolian
Rüya	mother	no	upper middle class	female&male	exam anatolian
Ayşe	mother	no	upper middle class	female	private school
Selcan	mother	yes	upper middle class	male	exam anatolian
Sare	mother	yes	upper middle class	male	exam anatolian
Hilal	mother	yes	upper middle class	male	science
Emine	mother	yes	upper middle class	male	exam imam hatip
Oğuz	father	yes	upper middle class	female	exam anatolian
Defne	mother	no	upper middle class	male	exam anatolian
Hülya	mother	no	upper middle class	female	private school
Belen	mother	no	upper middle class	male	private school
Canan	mother	no	upper middle class	male	local imam hatip
Eda	mother	yes	upper middle class	male	private school

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