

GLOBAL PROFESSIONALS IN TURKEY:
PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONALS WITH MBA DEGREES

by

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: global professional, globalization, MBA, flexibility, distinction.

The existing literature of social sciences contains a nebula of arguments regarding professionals of global capitalism. These arguments underline the emergence of a new class by applying various concepts among which I prefer to use global professionals referring to this new structure. This thesis aims to ground this concept on a stronger basis by concentrating upon the interviews conducted with the professionals in Turkey who studied MBA in the United States of America. Based on these interviews, the study primarily focuses upon how global professionals experience and express their MBA education in particular and their whole career trajectories in general. In addition, this present study discusses how the informants present themselves as distinctive professionals and individuals by positioning the discussion within the framework of culture of global capitalism literature. In this sense, this research aims to contribute to the literature that tries to move away from a reductionist approach which sees the global professionals as a homogeneous entity.

ÖZET

TÜRKİYE'DE KÜRESEL PROFESYONELLER: MBA DERECELİ PROFESYONELLERİN KİŞİSEL ANLATILARI

Görkem Aydemir

Kültürel Çalışmalar, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2010

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Ayşe Öncü

Anahtar sözcükler: küresel profesyonel, küreselleşme, MBA, esneklik, seçkinlik.

Mevcut sosyal bilimler literatüründe, küresel kapitalizmin profesyonelleriyle ilgili bir çok argüman yer almaktadır. Bu argümanlar, son derece farklı kavramlar üzerinden yeni bir ortaya çıkışını vurgulamaktadır. Bu yeni oluşuma işaret etmek üzere, kullanılan kavramların arasından küresel profesyoneller kavramını kullanmayı tercih ettim. Bu çalışma, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde MBA okumuş Türkiye'deki bir grup profesyonelle yapılan mülakatlara odaklanarak küresel profesyoneller kavramını daha sağlam bir zemine oturtmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma, öncelikli olarak Türkiye'deki küresel profesyonellerin MBA öğrenimlerini ve daha genel olarak kariyerlerini nasıl deneyimledikleri ve algıladıkları üzerine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bunun yanısıra, çalışma, görüşülen kişilerin kendilerini seçkin profesyonel ve bireyler olarak sunuş şekillerini küresel kapitalizm kültürüne odaklanan mevcut literatür çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu araştırma, küresel profesyonelleri homojen bir oluşum olarak değerlendiren yaklaşımdan uzaklaşmaya çalışan literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The existing globalization literature contains a nebula of arguments regarding high-educated working class of global capitalism. These arguments indicate the emergence of a new class / elites / strata through various concepts such as global professionals, professional elites, and “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair: 2001). In this study, I have preferred to use the term “global professional” to refer to my specific group. This thesis aims to ground the controversial concept of global professional on a stronger basis by concentrating upon the personal narratives of the professionals in Turkey who studied MBA in the USA and returned back.

In this study, my specific group of research consists of eleven MBA holders who currently work in Istanbul. Through in-depth analysis of their personal narratives, I try to understand how they experience and perceive MBA and their overall career trajectories in very general terms. In addition, I discuss how they present themselves as distinctive professionals by positioning my discussion within the framework of culture of global capitalism literature.

1.1. Situating “Global Professionals”

As has been indicated by many authors before, globalization is a very controversial and complicated concept in the sense that there is a considerable amount of literature discussing its controversial concepts and examining its various dimensions such as economic, political and cultural. Now we know that globalization is not only about production and consumption of commodities and market flows but also about its cultural and personal consequences, production and consumption of various values,

desires and distinctions. In this thesis, I will be dwelling upon just a particular dimension of the latter issues; that's why, I do not get into the discussions of globalization in a broader sense. In the following part, I attempt to give a general theoretical framework regarding the emergence of "global professionals" within the globalized and globalizing dynamics, which will provide a background for the main concerns of the present study.

Richard Sennett makes an insightful critique of 'flexible capitalism' which is commonly associated with economic globalization (1999: 9). Change, flexibility, unpredictability and even chaos constitute the rhetoric of global economy. Under these volatile market conditions, new management and organizational models have emerged in order to structure the institutional and individual actors accordingly so that they can cope with crisis and frequent change, and compete with the other global actors to get integrated. As a result of these features of global economy, rigid institutional and management models are under attack, which has led to the emergence of new institutional model, 'flexible institution' that I have borrowed from Sennett (1999: 9). Sennett makes an in-depth analysis and critique of the culture of "flexible institution" and its personal consequences. Throughout the thesis, Sennett's insightful discussions will constitute my main reference.

Sennett portrays that following the new institutional models promoting extensive flexible specialization, potential of constant change and discontinuity in organizational structure, the contents of the job and skills have also transformed in relation to this restructuring (Sennett: 1999). The new emergent institutional model requires professionals that can adapt themselves to job profiles which are characterized with transferable skills and flexibility. Employees of these kinds of job profiles are expected to have the ability of adaptation to changing conditions and specialization when they are

required to change position frequently. In this sense, they are expected to have the ability to retrain themselves and improve their skills constantly as skills get obsolete quickly because of frequent organizational and technological changes. The authors of critical literature such as Sennett and Aihwa Ong discuss global professionals from a perspective that concentrates upon cultural meanings and personal perceptions. On the other hand, those such as Arif Dirlik and Leslie Sklair prefer to treat them from a more class-based perspective with a more functionalist approach. They prefer to focus on institutional actors and mechanisms. In this research, my critical position will be closer to that of Sennett and Ong in the sense that I will try to concentrate on cultural meanings in a more nuanced way through personal narratives.

The skills and values that the professionals are expected to have and the features of new institutional model are produced and set as global standards by various institutions (Dunn, 2005: 176). Regarding these standards, Dunn quotes from Brunsson and Jacobsen:

Standards generate a strong element of global order in the modern world such as would be impossible without them. People and organizations all over the world follow the same standards. Standards... create similarity and homogeneity even among people and organizations far apart from one another. (Dunn, 2005: 177)

In establishing these standards, production and dissemination of business knowledge play a crucial role. It would be wrong to ground the business knowledge upon globalization as it goes back to 19th century when Taylorism and scientific management emerged. Kris Old and Nigel Thrift identify three institutions that produce and disseminate business knowledge since the 1960s: management consultants, management gurus, and especially business schools (Olds and Thrift, 2005: 272). As a result of the focus of this study, I concentrate upon the role of business schools.

The American business schools now “form the most visible tips of a vast global business education iceberg, one that turns over billions of dollars per year” (Dunn,

2005: 177). Business schools, as producers of business knowledge, constantly produce new knowledge to meet the demands of the changing market conditions. As Olds and Thrift suggest the business schools, especially MBA programs, pursue various kinds of knowledge which covers both functional and organizational knowledge such as finance, logistics and strategic, and knowledge concerned with subjectification such as how to be a global leader (Olds and Thrift, 2005: 273- 274). For instance, Harvard Business School promises the following about leadership on its website:

Leaders have always faced the job of inspiring other while making important decisions with incomplete information. Today's leaders are confronted with challenges and opportunities that have never been more dynamic or complex. Helping individuals effectively understand and manage these forces is a key responsibility of Harvard Business School and its leadership initiative. ... Leadership program readies emerging leaders for managing today's toughest business challenges while illuminating pathways for long-term success. You will learn how to lead under pressure, champion change, build teams and develop effective leadership throughout the organization. ... We foster a global conversation that addresses the challenges of leadership in context—across time and location.¹

In addition to leadership skills, business schools make promises regarding various fields, skills and values that are associated with being a globally competitive professional. For instance, Columbia Business School puts forward the following to attract potential students from all over the world:

Columbia MBA graduates do not just join the workforce—they influence it, shape it and change it for better. ... A Columbia MBA offers you the tools that prepare you to lead and manage in today's ever-changing business landscape. You will learn not just theory but how to apply cutting-edge concepts to real, relevant business problems. And the skills afforded by a Columbia MBA go beyond functional capabilities. They include less tangible but equally important skills like communication, leadership and teamwork. ... The School is committed to providing students with an education that lasts – and evolves—over a lifetime.²

As seen in the quotation above, Columbia Business School highlights the promised skills that will enable the students cope with “today's ever-changing business landscape”; and, more importantly, the education will equip the students with such skills

¹ <http://www.hbs.edu/leadership/>

² <http://www4.gsb.columbia.edu/mba/career>

that, in this way, they learn to develop new skills to survive the changing market conditions.

In this sense, American business schools, which are most advanced in globalizing practices with their extensive internationalization by both setting up new branches or developing programs in other parts of the world and developing their international student profiles (Ong, 1999: 148), aim to produce ‘global professionals’, who is supposed to have a “global vision” rather than local orientations (Ong, 1999: 285). Rapidly increasing number of business schools that offer graduate degrees in international business, by 1990 there were 200 business schools in the USA giving that kind of education to students whose, approximately, 20 to 46 percent of each school were from outside the USA, has an important effect on the behavior and ideology of executives in other parts of the world (Sklair, 2001: 290). This makes American business schools “both a glamorous experience and a chance to earn a prestigious degree that would help secure a good job” for many individuals all around the world. In the next part of the chapter, I will talk about the position and specifics of Turkey within the general framework.

1.2. Specifics of Turkey

Following the military coup of 1980, economic re-structuralization in the way of liberalization and internationalization aimed to reduce the “scope of the state sector and to situate the Turkish economy within the unitary logic of global capitalism” (Keyder, 1999: 13). This aim for “the collapse of national developmentalist practices...and peripheral Fordism which depended for its success on the protection of the national economy” and adopting transnational processes has led to a concentration upon the

transforming Turkey, indeed mostly Istanbul, into an attraction site for foreign investment (Keyder, 2005: 128).

Turkey, like other peripheries of global geographies, has opened its doors to investment in order to become a part of global economy. Istanbul has become the center of this foreign attention. And since the mid-1980s, Istanbul has witnessed the emergence of new professional class who have “adopted the lifestyle and consumption habits of their transnational counterparts” (Keyder, 2005: 124). There is a considerable amount of literature discussing the lifestyles and practices of this newly emerged class. For instance, Ayşe Öncü discusses how the local version of the global myth about the “ideal home” is marketed to the middle class in advertisements by touching upon the social imaginary of middleclass households in Istanbul (1997). In addition, the book by Rıfat Bali (2004) and highly visual work of Meltem Ahıska and Zafer Yenil (2006) offers distinctive discussions and depictions of new lifestyles and tendencies of the middleclass in Istanbul as a consequence of the new economy and new wealth.

This present thesis does not concentrate upon the lifestyles and practices of the new middle class. It is an attempt to understand how “global professionals” in Turkey perceive themselves, how they construct and present distinctions to make and re-make their identities. With “global professionals”, I do not necessarily refer to those who work in different parts of the world by moving from one place to place and/or work for global institutional actors. I refer to those who share similar values or even those having only potential to be a global professional. In that sense, I have decided to conduct interview with those who studied MBA in the United States thinking that MBA programs, especially those in the US, are a part of globalizing project and MBA holders have been exposed to it.

Ozan Zeybek, in his unpublished master's thesis, uses the phrase "magnetic attraction of the center" to discuss the magnetic nature of Istanbul as the center of globalizing economic activities and foreign investment (2007: 34). I borrow the phrase from Zeybek in order to touch upon a different dimension with a similar logic. As can be inferred from the arguments that claim globalization is actually an Americanization (see, for instance, Ritzer), it is not quite possible to talk about a globalization process without concentration of power. United States of America now sits at the top of this power concentration by almost constituting the center of the central economies. That's why, it has some kind of a magnetic attraction for peripheral economies; individuals are also within the scope of this magnetic area. This situation, of course, is not typical of contemporary capitalism at least for Turkey. However, we can suggest that with globalization it has gained new formations. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, MBA programs are in need of constant knowledge production to produce the global professionals demanded by the changing market conditions. In that sense, American MBA programs become the center of globalizing project through various methods. For these reasons, just like those from other peripheral countries of the world, especially new graduates study MBA in the US to guarantee a good job and/or change their career paths.

By interviewing holders of American MBA degrees, I attempt to both unpack this practice by listening to its actors and understand their perceptions of their identities, the distinctions they construct, their self-investigations, cultural meanings, and values they narrate in relation to their MBA-related experiences and being a global professional.

1.3. Methodology

In this chapter, I closely examine the methods of my research. I aim to concentrate upon the methodological choices I have made both prior to and during my fieldwork. This chapter contains not only methodological information but also reflections on the field research, choices and concerns.

The core of this research lies in understanding the cultural meanings and distinctions that the individuals construct and investigate around their MBA experience in the USA. In this sense, my main aim is to understand how the respondents perceive themselves, their choices and actions in relation to their MBA acquisition in particular and their career paths in general. In this trial of understanding, the narratives of the respondents play a crucial role.

1.3.1 The Choice of Site and Respondents

The first decision I made regarding the choice of respondents was to conduct the interviews with the respondents who currently work in Istanbul, that's, who returned back to Turkey. Initially, I had thought to conduct a comparative research by interviewing individuals in two groups, those who prefer to stay in the US and those who have returned. However, I gave up this idea because of two reasons. One of them is related to practical reasons in the sense that some respondents' being in the USA would prevent me from conducting face-to-face interviews, which would create an important difference between the interview settings of the two groups. This difference would affect my analyses as my aim was to make in-depth examinations. The second reason is related to my choice of site. Upon thinking more on the issue, I realized that my concern for understanding is attached to Turkey and the professionals in Turkey. My main focus is upon the subjectivities of global professionals in Turkey; and I chose to analyze the

subjective construction and investigation of the respondents who studied MBA in the US as there is a close relationship between the production of global professionals, knowledge and high education. In addition, throughout my working experience in a head-hunting firm, I have seen that individuals having international MBA degrees, especially those acquired in the US, are regarded as highly qualified and prestigious candidates, and mostly demanded by prominent multinational companies for their executive positions. In that sense, in the research, MBA emerges also as a site through which I tried to reach the individuals that are assumed to be ‘global professionals’ in Turkey. In addition, throughout my working experience and also through my personal relationships with new graduates who try to construct a professional career path, acquisition of top MBA degrees in the US seemed to be a mark of agency and serious initiative to pursue a career at global level. By interviewing individuals who attempted this initiative, I aimed to understand how they perceive and express their decisions, desires and general experiences regarding their MBA degrees, how they position their MBA experience in their overall career and personal tracks, what kind of associations, meanings and distinctions they construct around it, and how all these meanings and distinctions can be associated with global economy and its individual subjects. To find answers for these questions, I aimed to conduct the interviews more of a career narrative rather than leading them with MBA-oriented questions. This kind of structuring created some unexpected dimensions which I dwell upon in the following chapters.

I situated this inquiry in Istanbul and decided to interview MBA holders who currently work in Istanbul. In the Introduction, I tried to elaborate upon the specifics of Turkey in terms of MBA and global economy and the relation between the two. In Turkey, Istanbul was the most suitable choice to conduct my fieldwork as it has been the center of multinational companies that are attracted to invest and open offices in

Turkey since 1980s. Because Istanbul has been the heart of Turkey's integration process with the global economy, it has also witnessed the emergence of new professional class who has "adopted the lifestyle and consumption habits of their transnational counterparts" (Keyder, 1999: 14). In that sense, I thought that Istanbul would be the best venue to search for individuals who studied MBA in the US and currently work in Turkey.

After deciding on the research site in a more general level, more specific questions were to be decided: how was I going to find the respondents? Since I was going to make in-depth interviews rather than trying to reach quantitative and structural generalizations, how and on which ground was I going to choose the respondents? To solve these issues, first I decided to interview with male respondents to control the gender effect. I could have obtained rich research data if I had conducted interviews with both women and men in a comparative perspective. However, this would create a distinct platform which deserves a detailed examination in a separate arena with gender-oriented research concentration. For this reason, I preferred to limit the respondent profile with male individuals; this definitely resides in male culture, but I do not concentrate upon this aspect.

The second issue I decided upon was that I did not want to limit my choice of respondents with a selection based on university, age or sector. That kind of selection criterion would not only limit my analyses with the specifics of that particular category but also make my reach of the respondents practically harder as my preliminary searches through various sources, such as some professional network websites, showed me that selection criteria would highly limit the number. For these reasons, I tried to reach a diversity as much as possible by benefiting the network of each respondent, that's, by applying snowball sampling.

As I have mentioned above, I worked as a headhunter at a consulting firm for one year. During this period, I gained a great number of contacts, which helped me initiate my fieldwork. Through these contacts, I first reached Metin who was one of the candidates for a project I worked upon in the firm. Metin introduced my project to his three friends via e-mail; and in this way, through personal contacts of the respondents, I interviewed eleven respondents starting in March, 2009 until June of the same year.

1.3.2. Specifics of the Respondents

The age of the respondents change from 31 to 28. Four of the respondents studied in Anatolian high schools, and three of them studied in science high schools in Ankara, Balıkesir, Bursa, İzmir and Sivas. Both Anatolian and science high schools are public schools which admit students with central entrance exams; science high schools are known to have highest entrance points, and they are followed by anatolian high schools. Finally, four of them are graduates of private high schools residing in Istanbul. In terms of their high school education, I managed to get a satisfactory diversity although I could not achieve to reach respondents graduated from “düz lise”, those known to be at the bottom of the line in terms of success level. Almost all of my informants come from different layers of middle class. Except for two of them, the parents of all of them reside in the biggest cities of Turkey such as Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara. The occupations of the parents might be regarded as diverse although, as I have suggested above, they come from different strata of middle class. Their mothers are predominantly housewives, except for four whose mothers are teachers and engineers and one whose mother is entrepreneur. When it comes to the fathers, those of four of them are engineers; three of them are doctor, teacher and pharmacist; those of three informants are entrepreneurs, and finally one of them is military officer.

Regarding their undergraduate education, they are graduates of top universities in Turkey such as Bogazici, ITU and Bilkent except for the two who completed their undergraduate degrees in the US. Almost all of them scored in the top 1% in the university entrance exam. As I have suggested above, all of the respondents studied in special high schools public and private which, including the private ones, admit their students through certain selection processes. In this sense, prior to university entrance exam, they had already undergone a selection process.

In terms of their undergraduate majors, there emerged a remarkable homogeneity although I insistently asked the respondents to direct me their acquaintances with diverse educational backgrounds; and interestingly even though they mostly benefit from their high school and MBA networks, the respondents, except for three of them, studied engineering in their undergraduate education. The other three informants are graduates of business administration. This dominance of engineering background will be touched upon in the third chapter with an examination of its effect on their motivations and expectation in starting MBA.

Regarding the sectors they currently work in, I could reach a sufficient level of diversity although their specializations and fields of interest are mostly close to each other, which will also be discussed in the following chapters. Four of the respondents presently work in consultancy sector—one in investment and the other three in management consultancy. Three of them work for telecommunication sector; and two of them who are MBA-holding brothers work for the family business operating in textile; and one of the respondents works for one of the biggest holdings of Turkey operating in various sectors while one of them is a part of private equity. Despite this sectoral diversity with a majority in consultancy, the respondents have quite similar fields of interest which includes general management and business development rather than any

strict specialization such as marketing and sales. The role of MBA in this similarity will be touched upon later in the other chapters.

1.3.3. Methods Used and Field Experiences

Before starting to conduct my interviews, I made an extensive research upon the websites of several top business schools of the world that are located in the US such as Harvard Business School, Columbia Business School, and MIT Sloan. In this way, I aimed to not only obtain information about the details of MBA programs but also understand how the business schools present the programs and what kind of promises they make. I also analyzed several articles on various professional and human resources websites that talk about the place of MBA and international experience in professional careers in Turkey. In addition to these preliminary research materials, as I have hinted above, my working experience in the executive search and selection company enabled me to gain considerable familiarity with the business discourse, market conditions and demands in Turkey. In this way, together with my preliminary researches, I prepared myself to conduct interviews with the informants who are highly integrated with both global and Turkish professional life, and who have also high level of awareness and knowledge about social sciences researches and their methodologies. I will be elaborating upon this issue while relaying my field experiences.

As I have suggested before, I attempted to structure the interviews as career narratives of the respondents with very limited interference. In this way, I tried to lead the informants to structure their own stories and broaden the scope where they can relay their own concerns and perceptions without the effect of my own expectations as much as possible.

For these reasons, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with my informants. The interviews were arranged as one-to-one meetings, in which there was no other person except for the respondent although several of them offered to conduct interviews on phone because of their busy programs. However, I specifically asked them to make them face-to-face as it was important to make the informants feel comfortable to relay their narratives. Interview locations varied from their offices to cafes and restaurants. Most of the informants wanted to meet at public places out of their offices as several of them suggested that they would feel more comfortable in that way. While conducting the interviews, I actually felt the difference that the venue made. The interviews we conducted at their offices generally went in a more serious way and sometimes got interrupted with coming telephones and other employees in the company. On the other hand, those that we made in cafes or restaurants tended to be longer, more friendly and conversational. The interviews lasted, approximately, from thirty minutes to three hours for each.

Because of the loosely structured nature of the interviews, the informants generally felt very free to move from subject to subject throughout which they told about their various experiences and views while there were also several of them who were quite strict in terms of the content in the sense that they preferred to mention only about their professional experiences and choices like more of a detailed resume. However, as I have told before, most of them told me all about their educational lives, desires, expectations and disappointments with very little guidance.

I contacted the informants via e-mail; and almost all of them replied my messages quite quickly. In addition, none of my interview offers were rejected on the contrary to my initial expectations that it would be hard to arrange interviews because of their intense programs. Many of the respondents were very friendly; all of them used

familiar form of address while I used just the opposite as I felt the presence of some kind of a hierarchy. This hierarchy might result from the fact that, in the first place, I am younger than all of the respondents, and I was there as a student for my master's thesis. Additionally, and may be more importantly, I was not a part of their professional life.

Another important issue that attracted my attention throughout the interviews was their high awareness of the research I was conducting. In the first interview, for instance, I was trying to structure my interviews through various trials and I attempted to ask questions about his family, where he lives, and his leisure activities. He did not want to give detailed answers, and directly told me in a mocking way whether I was doing profiling. At that point, he drew a clear-cut line between his accounts of business and private; and he did not tell anything about his out-of-work life. As another example, during the interviews, a few respondents reminded me of some of my questions that I had not asked up to that time, which shows that they expect to hear particular kinds of questions about which they were right. As I have noted before, I tried to lead them to get into a self-investigation by thinking upon their expectations, desires and disappointments. Several of the respondents told me that I had made them investigate themselves by using the very same term. This level of consciousness and knowledge about the research method I used inevitably led me to get concerned about the level of constructed-ness of their narratives.

Another important point is that I share a common language with my respondents. In every interview, once they learnt that I speak English and am a graduate of some schools with them, they felt the comfort of using a semi-English language with a great number of professional and neoliberal jargons. This factor had both advantages and disadvantages. As an advantage, for instance, they were quite comfortable with sharing their experiences and views. It was also quite easy for me to understand them as I am

very familiar with professional terminology because of my working experience. However, as a disadvantage, especially during the analysis process, it has been really hard for me to put a critical distance between me and their narratives. While writing my analyses, I have realized that I frequently end up with using their concepts instead of questioning them.

CHAPTER II

BECOMING A 'GLOBAL PROFESSIONAL': MOTIVATIONS

2.1 Introduction

Aihwa Ong depicts two kinds of optimizing technologies that neoliberalism applies to. One of them is “technologies of subjectivity” which operate upon a set of knowledge and expert systems to induce “self-animation and self government” so that citizens can make decisions and compete in unstable market conditions (Ong, 1999: 6). She suggests some of these optimizing techniques include “the adherence to health regimes, acquisition of skills, development of entrepreneurial ventures, and other techniques of self-engineering and capital accumulation” (Ong, 1999: 6).

As American business schools become global sites for the acquisition of global professional skills, they have attracted attention in the sense of being remarkable actors that, as Ong suggests, “shape a new kind of subject, a neoliberal anthropos who is primed for employment in knowledge-driven markets” (Ong, 2006: 140). These business schools, Ong points out, attract especially the elites of Europe, Japan and the developing countries who consider an American business degree a desirable experience and guarantee of a good job when they return back and a means to a possible international career trajectory (Ong, 2006: 150).

I generally agree with these arguments regarding the relationship between American business schools and production of global professionals. However, this present study, especially this specific chapter, is an effort to capture how MBA holders perceive their MBA decisions and how they position their MBA degrees in their career and life trajectories. Although I cannot come up with structural arguments because of

the scope of my research, I will also try to contextualize their MBA narratives within their career and educational trajectories and also within the process of becoming global professionals. In this contextualization and analysis, my main focus will be on the diversities and commonalities of their individual perceptions, expectations and ways of differentiating themselves in relation to their MBA degrees in particular, and their whole professional and educational background in general. In this sense, my aim, by going beyond the depiction of MBA as a mere utility to purchase a global level job and status, will be to explore the complex associations, connections and subjective investigations that the respondents narrate regarding their MBA experience. As I have suggested before, I tried to conduct the interviews as their career narratives which the respondents relayed along a storyline rather than leading them with MBA-oriented questions. In this way, I tried to understand where they place their MBA experience in their whole career narratives, what kind of meanings and relations they construct and mobilize around MBA. In this process, my main theoretical framework will be, by mostly giving reference to Richard Sennett, “the culture of the new capitalism” as Sennett’s book title refers to; that’s, I will be examining the narratives of the respondents almost along a career path, by putting their MBA experience at the center, within the frame of being a global professional. By doing my analysis along a path, from their motivations of getting an MBA to their current experiences and perceptions, I aim to show that there emerges a path and a trajectory with, of course, subjective variations and exceptions where MBA constitutes neither the beginning nor the ultimate point of the process of being a global professional although it definitely plays an important role. In the first part of the chapter, I will discuss the commonalities and diversities in the motivations and expectations that they have narrated regarding their MBA plans; then I will be looking at the “flexible institution” of global capitalism, by

benefiting from the analyses of Sennett and Arif Dirlik, which illuminates the respondents' motivations and desires regarding both their MBA decisions and their career plans in general, and also the production of distinctions which will be analyzed in the final part. The final part of the chapter mostly covers the respondents' narratives after the acquisition of MBA which will reflect how they distinguish themselves as "global professionals" from their others, although they never use this term, what these distinctions are, and how they position their MBA degrees in this distinguishing process.

In the interviews, as I have noted before, I have tried to concentrate upon how the respondents perceive their professional careers on the axis of their MBA experience. In this sense, it is important to examine and understand how they narrate their motivations in starting MBA degrees in the US and expectations from this undertaking.

2.2. Why MBA?: Motivations and Expectations

Eight of the eleven respondents have engineering undergraduate degrees, and as a result, they practiced engineering and imagined themselves as engineers or at least in relation to engineering through various internships and course projects. A considerable number of them even worked as engineers for a while after their graduation. Many of the respondents having engineering backgrounds expressed that they considered getting an MBA degree, especially from an American program, as a door opening to alternative career paths other than engineering. Ömer, for instance, who is a graduate of mechanical engineering, worked as an engineer at an international automotive company for about two years after his graduation. Although he had a keen interest in automobiles and mechanical engineering since his high school years, Ömer decided not to pursue his career as an engineer as he got disappointed with both his position and the company:

To be honest, mechanical engineering did not answer my expectations. The *broader*³ the education is, the more specific your field of work has to be. The things done in practical field do not arouse my interest much as I had expected to produce the car itself rather than changing the detail at the tip of something. ... I was not content with X [the firm]⁴, and the work I was doing. The *scope* of the work is too narrow, and also there is so much hierarchy. Your zone of influence is too narrow. They *prescribe* you to, for instance, check something of something. In addition, the firm, in terms of its management, does not value human resource ... That's, in such a setting, it was not much possible for me to motivate myself and stay there longer.⁵

Hence, Ömer decided to make MBA applications for the aim of learning “business” as he did “not know anything about marketing, sales, finance”; the only thing he knew, he suggests, was engineering. According to his plans, this would lead him to new career trajectories, which eventually came true.

In a similar manner, Mehmet wanted to get an MBA degree in the US as a result of his serious concerns about an engineering career in Turkey. Mehmet, after his graduation from a reputable American high school in Turkey, continued his undergraduate education in the USA, and studied computer engineering. After his graduation, he started doing computer engineering at an American company. Contrary to Ömer, he was content with engineering which was quite satisfactory for him in terms of its “scope” and prestige:

I was doing engineering there, computer engineering. I liked it, the things I did were nice. I was managing a whole project. It was not just doing the tip of something and then being forgotten. I had chance to do some of the things I liked. ... I did not have any concerns regarding doing engineering in the US because it was very sufficient for me there.⁶

³ The words written in italics refer to the English words used by the respondents.

⁴ The brackets refer to my explanations.

⁵ Açıkçası makine mühendisliği çok fazla beklediğim gibi çıkmadı. Eğitim ne kadar broadsa çalıştığım alan da o kadar spesifik olmak zorunda. Pratik alanda yapılan şey de ilgimi çeken bir şey değil çok fazla çünkü bilmem nenin ucundaki detayı değiştirmek değil ben arabanın kendisini yapacağım sanıyordum falan gibi bir intibaya kapılmıştım. ... Ben Otosandan da memnun değildim, yaptığım işten hem yapılan işin şeyi küçük scope'u hem de çok fazla hiyerarşi var yani etki alanınız çok dar. Size prescribe ediyorlar işte şuna bak falan diye. Artı şirket yönetiliş itibariyle insan kaynağına çok fazla değer veren bir şirket değil. ... Yani o ortamda benim motive olup şey yapmam uzun süre kalmam mümkün değildi. Ömer

⁶ Ben orda mühendislik yapıyordum, bilgisayar mühendisliği. Seviyordum, yaptığım işler güzeldi. Komple bir proje yürütüyordum. Al şunun ucunu yap sonra seni unuttum gibi bir durum yoktu. Sevdiğim

Thus, he stayed in the US and worked as an engineer for about seven years. However, he always planned to return back to Turkey as he wanted to be close to his family and friends. He establishes an explicit connection between his return plans and MBA decision:

The reason of MBA is my desire to return back to Turkey. I became an engineer; when I look at my engineer friends in Turkey, they did not have attractive lives at all, at least then. There we... I don't want to be arrogant but, engineers were respected greatly; we were doing nice jobs there. Here, for instance, one of my friends worked at X [firm name]. Neither his salary nor the esteem he received and the alternative job opportunities was attractive. He also went to the USA and studied MBA; and he is very happy now. I had seized the situation in Turkey so much so that I considered that I would not do engineering on returning back. That's why, I wanted to get MBA. Actually I did it solely for *title*. I thought I could do my own job, set up something and would have more possibilities.⁷

This quotation reflects how Mehmet observes the engineering career in Turkey and differentiates it from the one in America through his personal experience. He clearly underlines his major expectation in getting an MBA degree in the sense that he could open up career trajectories alternative to engineering by benefiting from its "title" when he was back to Turkey.

In some of the accounts that suggest a plan for deviation from engineering path, the desire for management positions instead of operational ones, like engineering, appears as a significant point to note. For instance, Erhan starts to visualize himself as a manager after he has seen the possibility of alternative paths an engineer might follow:

Towards the last year of university, I thought of being open to other opportunities. ... There you see that people have become bankers after graduating from

bir şeyler yapma fırsatım oldu. ... Benim Amerika'da mühendislik yapmama gibi bir kaygım yoktu çünkü o orda benim için çok yeterliydi. Mehmet

⁷ MBA'in sebebi Türkiye'ye dönme isteğimdi. Mühendis oldum, bakıyorum Türkiye'deki mühendis arkadaşlarıma... hiç cazip bir hayatları yoktu en azından o zaman. Biz orda, ukalalık olmasın ama, mühendisler el üstünde tutuluyorlardı, güzel işler yapıyorduk orda. Burda mesela bir arkadaşım xx'te çalışıyordu. Ne aldığı maaş ne gördüğü rağbet ne de alternative iş imkanları cazip değildi. O arkadaşım da Amerika'ya gitti, MBA yaptı, şimdi çok mutlu. ... Türkiye'deki durum bana o kadar işlemiş ki ben de dönünce mühendislik yapmam diye bir kaniya kapılmışım. MBA'ı de o yüzden yapmam istedim, yani tamamen title için yaptım aslında. Kendi işimi yaparım, başka bir şey kurarım, olanaklarım daha fazla olur diye düşünüyordum. Mehmet

engineering. Especially when the graduates attend the career meetings and stuff, you start to see the possibility of alternative paths, or those who proceed on the marketing path after engineering. There the mental world starts to widen approximately around 3rd and 4th years. At least I knew that I wanted to slide to the managerial side. While studying my undergraduate degree, I wanted to get an MBA because there was a quasi-impression that doing an MBA after engineering would be good as I was going to be a manager; but I had no idea how this would be.⁸

As seen in the above account, Erhan mentions a change in his career plans in the later years of his undergraduate education as a result of university career days in which various companies make their presentations usually with a few employees who are the graduates of that university and thought to have “ideal” careers. In these career days, the graduates tell about their career paths and give suggestions to the students; thus, the companies use these organizations as a kind of recruitment tool. Erhan highlights the role of these career days in changing his career plans in the sense that he starts to imagine alternative career paths as he has seen their examples. Efe, in a similar way with Erhan, comes to know the presence of these alternative trajectories through university career days:

I did not have such a thing that I would definitely work as an engineer; I just wanted to have a good position and a job having a good income. The banks used to come and make recruitments; I was open to each of them ... There were many career days at the university, many companies were coming. And those coming people naturally affect you. You see that a person having graduated from the same university a few years ago makes a presentation to you from a good company and at a good position. Consequently you want to be like them. For example, which companies were there then? For example, there was XX.... they were coming and making presentations. Thus, you naturally come to wish to work for that company.⁹

⁸ Son sınıfa doğru diğer fırsatlara da yavaş yavaş açık olmayı düşündüm. ... Orda işte görüyorsunuz insanlar mühendislikten çıkmış bankacı olmuşlar işte. Bilhassa mezunlar kariyer toplantılarına falan gelince ha başka yollarında mümkün olduğunu görmeye başlıyorsunuz. Veya işte mühendislikten çıkmış pazarlama şeyine gitmiş yoluna gitmiş. Orda birazcık daha zihin dünyası açılmaya başlıyor 3te ve 4te diye düşünebilirim. Yani en azından yöneticilik tarafına kaymak istediğimi biliyordum. Yani ben üniversitedeyken MBA yapmayı istiyordum. Çünkü hani bir şekilde işte yönetici olacaktık ya güya işte mühendislik üstüne MBA yapmak iyi olur gibi bir şey vardı düşünce vardı. Ama nasıl olacağı konusunda hiçbir fikrim yoktu. Erhan

⁹ Yani şey illa mühendis olarak çalışacağım diye bir şeyim yoktu. Yani iyi bir şirket iyi bir pozisyon iyi bir getirisi olan bir iş olsun. Hatta işte baya bankalar gelip alım yapıları bizden ben hepsine açtım yani. ... Bir sürü şey oluyordu çünkü okulda kariyer günleri, bir sürü şirket geliyordu. O gelen insanlar tabi sizi etkiliyor. Bakıyorsunuz hani sizin okuldan birkaç sene önce mezun olmuş birisi iyi bir şirkette iyi bir pozisyonda size sunum yapıyor. Dolayısıyla onlar gibi olmak istiyorsunuz. Atıyorum hangi şirketler

Efe, after his graduation, starts to work at a company where he has to deal with a wide range of work in addition to engineering; and this situation has made him realize that he has an interest in finance and he can develop himself in that field. Efe explains the reasons of his interest in the following way:

The field I like is finance. Maybe it is because you do not deal with dirty stuff and machines. Most probably, it has happened in a natural way that I saw, in terms of both development area and income, the people in finance have higher salaries when you compare.¹⁰

As seen in Efe's account above, to work as an engineer requires one to deal with the structural details of a production process; and, as discussed in Mehmet's and Ömer's cases above, many of the respondents have underlined that their engineering experience in Turkey has limited them to a very narrow scope of the overall production process; and that engineers mostly have to proceed on a very long career path to reach the management positions. In that sense, I find useful to review Ömer's accounts regarding his engineering experience and its relation to his MBA decision:

I was not content with my job; both the *scope* of the work was too small and there was too much hierarchy, which means the zone of influence was too narrow. They *prescribe* you to, for instance, check something of something. You check and show it to your manager and then show it to his manager etc. ... The things done in practical field do not arouse my interest either as I had expected to produce the car itself rather than changing the detail at the tip of something.¹¹

Ömer's discontent with the narrow "scope" of the work and the presence of chain of command without much involvement in decision making process indicates his desire for

vardı o zaman? Yani mesela XX vardı....işte geliyorlardı tanıtım yapıyorlardı. Dolayısıyla hani aaa ben bu şirkette çalışmak isterim oluyorsunuz yani. Efe

¹⁰ Yani sevdiğim alan, finans. Belki biraz oldu yani biraz daha böyle kirle pasla makineyle uğraşmıyorsunuz falan dermişim de..herhalde biraz da doğal oldu yani hani baktım orda hem belki gelişme alanı olarak, bu maddi getiri olabilir atıyorum yani, alınan maaşları falan kıyaslırsanız finasta insanlar daha yüksek alıyor. Efe

¹¹ Memnun değildim yaptığım işten hem yapılan işin şeyi küçük scope'u hem de çok fazla hiyerarşi var yani etki alanınız çok dar. Size prescribe ediyorlar işte şuna bak falan diye. Bakıyorsunuz müdürünüze gösteriyorsunuz onun müdürüne gösteriyorsunuz falan filan. ... Pratik alanda yapılan şey de ilgimi çeken bir şey değil çok fazla çünkü bilmem nenin ucundaki detayı değiştirmek değil ben arabanın kendisini yapacağım sanıyordum falan gibi bir intibaya kapılmıştım. Ömer

taking part in the bigger picture and wider “scope” of work. He wants to take an active role in decision making and the overall project rather than dealing with small parts of the whole work. This desire to take role in the bigger picture is remarkable in Vedat’s case as well.

Vedat’s undergraduate degree is in the field of management engineering which has become remarkably popular in Turkey. During his undergraduate education, Vedat does his internships in various banks in the field of finance, which is not quite an expected internship area for engineering students. The experience he has gained during these internships, he suggests, has enabled him to understand that, just like Ömer, he wants to be one of the major initiators of a project rather than being one of its many actors dealing with small details:

I did my internships at various banks.... and I did not like it much, I did not continue from there. At any point of my life, I did not continue from there. Well, it was too surreal to me. For example, we are doing a job right now, that job is seen as a single number on a single line; that much investment has been made, that much money has been made, that much ... this business is profitable or not. I like the stuff behind it much more. In the end, that number can be put there or not; rather than keeping its accounts, I want to write that story. That’s, I like opening the way. Somebody can keep its history behind.¹²

The desire to be more of an entrepreneur and, as clearly expressed by Vedat, author of the whole story could be considered together with his desire to gain the ability to think with global “criteria sets”. As seen in Vedat’s account below, it is narrated in connection with the overall experience to be gained abroad:

I wanted to get an MA degree abroad and understand how the life abroad was. I wanted this very much from the start. ... Trying to understand how the world in general sees the life. For example, you are doing a business, while doing a business, for instance, you have subalterns and superordinates etc. Some kind of work is being done in some way. Most of the time, you do not know the answer of

¹² Bankalarda yaptım stajlarımı hani... çok sevmedim, hiç ordan devam etmedim. Hayatımın hiçbir yerinde ordan devam etmedim. Yani bana çok sürreal geldi ya. Mesela şu an biz bir iş yapıyoruz, bu iş bir satırın üzerinde bir adet rakam olarak görünüyor. İşte bu kadar yatırım yapıldı, bu kadar para kazanıldı, bu kadar...işte bu iş karlıdır, değildir. Yani ben onun altındaki bütün işleri daha fazla seviyorum. Sonuçta rakam oraya gelebilir, gelmeyebilir bunun hesabını tutmaktansa o hikayeyi ben yazmayı istiyorum, arkada birileri hesabını tutsun. Ben yolu açmayı seviyorum yani. Arkadan birilerini tarihini, tarihçesini tutsun. Vedat

the question whether that business should be done in that way. People say that they have 15 years of experience in a particular sector. Good, but is your company at the top of that sector for 15 years? Possibly not. Maybe there are things that they have done wrong and maybe you have learned to do these things in a wrong way. That's why, I thought that I should learn how people see a particular work or the necessary *criteria set* to do a work from somewhere impartial. Life goes on somehow and things are done. However, you should measure how things should be done with something. It is very similar with this: I am a bit interested in the sea and water sports. For instance, while sailing you do not realize that you are drifted on the water. Only a person ashore can notice this or you can notice it if you know from where to look or use related tools. Otherwise, there is always the feeling of constant drift. I wanted to go there in order to understand what kinds of *criteria set* I should have about the drift issue, how to make decisions according to criteria rather than emotions and how the world looks at things.¹³

In Vedat's case, international experience, specifically American experience which is equated with the overall world outside of Turkey, emerges as a dominant motivation source in getting an American MBA degree. With his sailing experience he implies that being stuck in local experience might be both limited and limiting, and also has the risk of being "wrong", emotional and, in a way, irrational, as it lacks the necessary "criteria sets", since the local does not stand at the top. From Vedat's point of view, if a firm is not at the top of that sector, they are probably doing something wrong. Then, inferably, he assumes the presence of "correct" and globally valid "criteria sets" applied by the top firms of the world which are mostly American; and this way of thinking automatically makes America having as the best place to learn these "criteria sets". He equates America with the world, and sees it as the source of ultimate knowledge which will

¹³ Ben yurtdışında master yapmayı ve yurtdışındaki hayatın nasıl bir şey olduğunu anlamayı çok istedim. Bunu başından beri çok istedim ... Dünyanın genel olarak hayata nasıl baktığını anlamaya çalışmak. Yani mesela bir iş yapıyorsunuz, bir iş yaparken atıyorum altınız var, aslarınız var üstleriniz var falan filan. Bir işler bir şekilde yapılıyor. O işler hakikaten öyle mi yapılmalı sorusunun cevabını birçok zaman bilmiyorsunuz. İnsanlar diyor ki ben bilmem ne sektöründe 15 yıllık tecrübeliyim. Güzel. Ama bilmem ne sektöründe sizin firmanız 15 yıldır o işin en tepesinde mi? Belki değil. Belki onların yanlış yaptığı bir şeyler var ve belki siz o işleri yanlış yapmayı öğrendiniz. O yüzden ben dedim ki olabildiği kadar bunu ben gidip tarafsız bir yerlerden insanların bir işe nasıl baktıklarını veya bir işe bakılması için gerekli kriter seti, criteria set nedir, o criteria seti öğrenmeliyim olabildiği kadar. Yoksa hayat devam ediyor işler yapılıyor. Ama öyle mi yapılmalıyı bir şeyle tartıp koymanız lazım. Yani bu şuna benziyor. Ben biraz denizle falan da ilgiliyim. Yelkencilik yaparken şey var mesela suyun üstünde sürüklendiğinizi çok farketmezsiniz. Bunu ancak karadan bakan birisi farkeder veya siz ona nereden bakacağınızı bilerseniz ilgili cihazlara bakarsanız sürüklendiğinizi farkedersiniz. Yoksa hep gidiyormuşsunuz gibi bir hissiyat vardır. Ben sürüklenmeyle sürüklenmeme konusunda önümde ne tip criteria setler olmalı, nerde neye göre yani birtakım duygulardan çok kriterlerle karar almayı anlamak için ve dünyanın nasıl baktığını anlamak için aslında oraya gitmek istedim. Vedat

enable him, he believes, to look at things through “impartial” lenses. In that sense, international experience, mostly equated with Western, especially American, experience—none of the respondents have considered the East, plays a very significant role in their MBA decisions; in many cases, MBA is considered as a door opening to America, the West. In the later parts of the thesis, I will discuss in detail how they position Turkey and the USA in relation to each other.

Selim, in a similar way, underlines the role of experiencing America in his MBA decision that he had in mind since his high school years:

My desire to go to the US, live there and see that culture was so much anyway. This is surely an important factor. If an equally good school were in Norway, I would definitely not go there. America has a great effect here. In the end, it has the strongest economy of the work; in addition, MBA is originally an American concept. I always thought to make it there.¹⁴

Selim sees MBA as a tool to live and see how things are done in America having “the strongest economy of the world”. In this desire, partly like Vedat, there lies an assumption that American market owns the necessary “criteria sets”, in Vedat’s wording, to achieve success and a strong economy. In this sense, getting an MBA degree in America which has been originally developed by that ultimate source of success seems to be the most appropriate way for success achievement in Turkey as a professional. Thereby, he gets the chance of observing and taking part in the world’s strongest economy while also completing an academic degree which will authenticate his high professional skills with a globally prestigious business diploma.

A remarkable commonality in the above accounts is that their narratives are constructed around a kind agency and decision mechanism in the sense that they explain how and why they decide to get an MBA in the USA to change their expected career

¹⁴ Zaten Amerika’ya gidip görme orada yaşama isteğim de çok fazlaydı benim, o kültürü görme isteğim. O büyük bir etken tabi. Yani aynı derecede iyi bir okul Norveç’te olsaydı Norveç’e kesinlikle gitmezdim yani. Amerika olmasının etkisi var. Sonuçta dünyanın en güçlü ekonomisi, hem de MBA Amerika kaynaklı bir konsept. Yapmışken orda yaparım diye düşünüyordum hep. Selim

trajectories. However, when the narratives are more closely scrutinized, there emerge some moments in contradiction with decision argument. These moments reflect how limited the decision field actually is, and how path-dependent their “choices” are. Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” is quite elucidative to discuss how their “decisions” and desires are produced by their habitus which is defined by Bourdieu as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions that mediates between an individual’s actions and external conditions of production” (quoted from Zeybek, 2007: 92). As habitus is “the generative principle” of one’s desire, tastes, judgments, practices, the desires and decisions I have focused on above should be considered as embedded in external relations and others’ desires and expectations (Bourdieu, 1984: 170).

Metin’s case exemplifies this relation between one’s desires and actions and those of others’. Metin, after graduating from Bilkent University Business Administration program, receives a job offer from Procter & Gamble in which he would be working in the field of finance. However, just before accepting the offered position, he receives an offer from McKinsey which is known to be one of the most prominent global firms that operate in consulting services. Apart from being a global firm, McKinsey is also a globalizing actor. It not only globalizes the firms all over the world by giving them consultancy services in implementing globally valid management strategies but also globalizes its employees by sponsoring many of them to get MBA degrees in top business schools of the world. Metin becomes a part of this globalizing project when he accepts the offered position; after working for a certain period at McKinsey Turkey, he studies MBA at Harvard University with full sponsorship of McKinsey in return for a certain period of compulsory work at the company after completing the degree. By Metin, this situation is depicted as a “standard” process at McKinsey which includes almost all of its employees that do not already have MBA degrees:

This is a standard at McKinsey. After 2 years work, the decision regarding your MBA sponsorship is made. If your MBA sponsorship is given by the company, you apply for the MBA programs. You get admission from one or two of them depending on the applicant. Then you choose one of them; and both you and McKinsey know that you go for MBA in the summer of your third year at the company. You go for a program of one or two year, and you have agreed upon that you will work at McKinsey for two years when you are back. That's, it is actually a seven year package. Work for three years, study MBA for two years and work at McKinsey for two years when you return. At the end of that seven year, the path that you start at the age 22 ends when you are 29. After that point, it is up to you to stay there or leave.¹⁵

As seen in Metin's depiction, he does not refer to any kind of choice or desire of himself in the MBA acquisition process. He just describes a seven years of career package determined and offered by the company; and when I asked him how he decided to get an MBA in the USA, he suggested that it was not a decision, it was just a "path" in front of him. In addition, I would like to underline the subject and tense structures of his sentences. He uses second person subject pronoun in simple present tense, which implies that his doing an MBA was a natural result of the situation he was then in. It was the path which he was led to; and he depicts it as a "standard" "seven year package" which applies almost everyone working for the company. This is an extreme case demonstrating how Metin ends up with an MBA degree in the US as a result of a development program of a company. He opens up a choice field in his decision between the two offers he had received, from McKinsey and Procter & Gamble—another globally competitive firm, after his graduation; and he sees it as the sole and most important turning point in his life:

Sometimes I think what kind of a life I would have had if I had accepted to work in finance at P&G [Procter & Gamble] when I was 22. Everything would be very different. ... I would not study MBA most probably. Would I return back here after

¹⁵ O McKinsey'de standarddır. 2. yılın sonunda MBA sponsoru olup olmadığınız kararınız alınır. MBA sponsorluğunu şirket veriyorsa siz başvurursunuz MBA'lere. 3-4 tane hani zaten top MBA'ye. Onlardan 1 ya da 2'sinden kaçından bilmem kişilere göre değişir, kabul alırsınız. Sonra da bir tanesini seçersiniz ve McKinsey de bilir siz de bilirsiniz. 3. senenizin sonundaki yaz artık MBA'ye gidersiniz. Bir yıllık ya da 2 yıllık bir programa gidersiniz, dönüşte de 2 yıl McKinsey'de çalışacak şekilde anlaşmışsınızdır. Yani 7 yıllık bir pakettir aslında o. 3 yıl çalış, 2 yıl MBA yap, dönüp 2 yıl daha McKinsey'de çalış. O 7 yılın sonunda da o undergrad'de girdiğiniz 22 yaşındaki path 29 yaşında biter. Ondan sonra size kalmış ister çalışın ister ayrılın. Metin

working abroad as an expat for 6-7 year? I would have a totally different life, such a minor decision, such a different life. I do not say it would be better or worse but it would be such a different life; they do not intersect with each other at any point. It is not that I would go for MBA and return back to the same place. It happens to be a totally different life. It feels a bit weird when I sometimes think. ... I guess I have only one critical decision in my career *path*, whether it is McKinsey or P&G? Other than that, I do not see any critical decision. Harvard was so clear or the others.¹⁶

As seen in the above account, his choice range is very narrow in the sense that he sees his decision between two offered positions as the sole moment of critical choice in his career life.

In his overall narrative, although he frequently underlines his achievements and distinctions, he uses the path-dependent scheme I have mentioned above. He portrays such a picture that he has a path to follow in front of him and the only thing he should do is to make the best of it as he has a strong faith in the notion that he will get what he deserves if he does his best, which shows his belief in meritocracy that will be discussed later in the chapter.

Salih's story has some common features with Metin's case depicted above although the actors are quite different. As opposed to the globalizing project of the global firm that we have seen in Metin's case, in Erhan's case, we see a family business which tries to become a part of the global economy by applying global standards and sponsoring its future executives for their MBA education in the United States. Ahmet and Erhan, two brothers, are encouraged and sponsored by their father, also the owner of the family business, to study MBA in the US and, then, come back to Turkey and work for the company. Ahmet, the elder brother, wanted to continue his undergraduate

¹⁶ Bazen şeyi düşünüyorum ama 22 yaşında P&G finansa girseydim nasıl bir yaşamım olacaktı. Her şey çok farklı olacaktı. ... MBA muhtemelen yapmayacaktım. Ne bileyim 6-7 sene expat yurtdışında dolaşip buraya mı dönecektim? Çok bambaşka bir hayat oluyor aslında ne kadar küçük bir seçim. Ne kadar farklı bir hayat. Daha iyi ya da daha kötü manasında demiyorum ama ne kadar farklı bir hayat oluyor yani hani bir noktada keşişmiyorlar. Ordan MBAYe giderdim yine aynı yere dönerdim değil. Bambaşka bir hayat oluyor. O değişik geliyor bazen. ... Bir tane herhalde kritik kararım var benim kariyer pathimde. İşte McKinsey mi P&G mi? Onun dışında ben çok fazla kritik karar da görmüyorum. İşte Harvard'a gitmek çok netti veya diğerleri. Metin

education in the US, and he was encouraged by his family. When he wanted to study MBA there after his graduation as he wanted to stay in the US longer, he met the same encouragement. Ahmet suggests that this encouragement and sponsorship refers to the investment his father made on him as he, even from his childhood on, was disciplined to work for the family business; that's why, he suggests, he did not imagine any alternative future plan until he started to study MBA. During his education, he started to imagine alternative career path and wanted to gain working experience in the United States for a few years. However, this plan of Ahmet's was discouraged by his father as he wanted him to work in the family business; and he returned back. The younger brother, Salih, has a more path-dependent story as his brother opened and cleared the MBA path before him. For him, MBA and studying abroad was almost the only and the natural end after completing his undergraduate degree. When I asked him why and how he decided to study MBA in the United States, he answered in the following way:

I don't know, I was always planning it, and I went when the time came. It is like asking why you entered ÖSS [University Entrance Exam], it is like everybody was taking the exam so did I. Well, I do not know, actually I have not questioned much. Shall I say it has been thought, planned for years, and inured without evaluating much with its advantages and disadvantages? What would I do instead? Would I go for the military service? What else can you do? Do not go at all; start working at the family business directly, why not? You will work at the family business for 30-40 years anyway; it does not make any difference to start working at the age 22 or 24. But, have an advantage, develop yourself more. Getting an MBA degree is even required now. In the past, a university degree was a requirement. Master degree is a very normal thing.¹⁷

In the above account, it is almost explicit that he has not thought of this question before as this idea of studying abroad and getting an MBA degree is internalized as a natural and logical path by him without much thinking upon its reasons. He equates it with

¹⁷ Bilmem hep planlıyordum yaşı geldi gittim. Neden ÖSS'ye girdiniz gibi bir soru, yani mezun olurken herkes giriyordu üniversiteye ben de girdim gibi. Next logical stepti yani o. Ya bilmiyorum aslında ben sorgulamadım hani zaten yıllardır düşünülmüş, planlanmış oturup da artıları ile eksileriyle değerlendirilmeye gerek olmadan kanıksanmış mı diyeyim? Başka ne yapacaktım? Askere mi gidecektim yani. O da var yani ne yapacaksın? Ha yani hiç gitme ordan çıkıp direkt aile şirketinde çalışmaya başla neden olmasın? Zaten 30-40 sene aynı şirkette çalışacaksın ha 22 yaşında başlamışsın ha 24 yaşında başlamışsın yani bir artın olsun kendini biraz daha geliştir zaten master yapmış olmak artık gerekiyor bile zaten yani eskiden üniversite gerekiyormuş master çok normal bir şey. Salih

taking university entrance exam which is taken by almost every highschool student today. Ahmet, his brother, thinks that it was a natural and necessary path for Salih as he was expected to work for the family business, which is the case now, just like himself and as he constituted an exemplary figure for both Salih and their parents.

From this point on, I would like to underline the role of habitus and initial capitals that the respondents have in their MBA ‘decisions’. Although I specifically used the word ‘decision’ in my questions in the interviews, several of the informants, at certain points, interrupted that some of their actions were not products of an intentional decision mechanism especially while we were talking about their college and major choices for their undergraduate education. Above examples, the cases of Metin and Erhan, reflect how their starting of MBA has directly been led and structured by globalizing actors. Their social and economic capitals, both initial and acquired, seem to play an explicit role in their educational and professional paths. This determining role of habitus can be seen in the accounts of other respondent accounts although it is not that much apparent as it is in Metin’s and Salih’s cases.

When the motivations of the respondents and how they come out with the idea of studying MBA are looked at closely, it is possible to see that the career days and MBA seminars in the universities have a significant role as they enable the respondents gain familiarity with market demands and various programs of business education. As I have noted in the introduction of the thesis, these organizations is a part of production and globalizing project. However, what I would like to point out now is related to a different dimension in the sense that MBA does not constitute either the starting point or the ultimate point in becoming a global professional. Every respondent, of course, has different socializations, capitals and subjectivities although there are some common actors and structures in their subjection processes. One of these commonalities is, as I

have suggested above, the role of certain globalizing career organizations that take place especially at the top universities of Turkey to attract successful graduates. For instance, Erhan underlines how his career plans changed as a result of career days that the student club that he was a member of organized. Through these organizations in which he had the chance of meeting prominent executives of Turkey, he began to think about alternative career paths, which eventually led him to the idea of getting an MBA degree in the US. In a similar manner, Efe, in the career days organized at Istanbul Technical University, had the chance to listen the career stories of new graduate professionals working for the multinational companies in Turkey, and he “wanted to be like them” and started to think about alternative career paths to engineering. When he started to think about studying MBA in the United States to create these alternative career paths, he attended MBA seminars organized by American business schools at various universities so that he could learn about the promises of MBA programs and application procedures.

There are several respondents whose initial social and economic capitals enable them to have the idea of MBA earlier. In addition to most explicit examples of Ahmet and Salih, Selim, for instance, has this idea even during his high school years as his broader network coming from his initial social capital familiarized him to the career paths that several of others came to know in their undergraduate years. Selim suggests that one of his cousins who studied MBA in the United States after completing his engineering education at Boğaziçi University, just like Selim, was an ideal profile for him; and he, from the very beginning of his education, planned to follow the very same path.

With these examples, I tried to argue that both initial and acquired capitals of the respondents play a significant role in their getting MBA degrees in the United States.

While some of them have the idea of MBA since their highschool years or internalize and naturalize this idea as the only choice because of their initial social capitals, some of the other respondents come to meet the idea of MBA during and even after their undergraduate educations. However, from the interviews I conducted I reached such a view that their social, educational, economic and cultural capitals have a very determining role in this process. Before starting the interviews, for instance, I had expected that at least several of the respondents would posit learning foreign language as a major motivation to study MBA in the US. Only Efe underlined his foreign language concern in studying MBA; however, before applying the MBA programs he had to start a master's program at Boğaziçi University to improve his English knowledge by studying one year of English prep school as he had to have a certain level of English both for the application process and to get admission. In this sense, the applicants of MBA programs in the US have to have a certain level of educational capital.

2.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how desires and expectations of the respondents are produced by the dynamics of their habitus. Although they portray some kind of a choice field such as their wish to change their career trajectories, there is a remarkable internalization and path-dependency both in their desires and even in some cases, such as Salih's, in their overall MBA decision.

CHAPTER III

MBA AND BEING A GLOBAL PROFESSIONAL

3.1. Introduction

The respondent narratives contain the reflections upon their expectations and desires regarding their overall careers, and the distinctions they present as global professionals. In this chapter, I will try to scrutinize these expectations, desires and distinctions in relation to their MBA experiences by mainly benefiting from Richard Sennett's insightful discussion of the culture of global economy and its personal consequences. This chapter will also take a closer look at the way the informants speak from a common rhetoric as global professionals and how they position Turkey and the USA in relation to each other.

3.2. "Flexible Institution" as the Ideal: Worker more of an Entrepreneur

As explored in the motivations part, a considerable number of respondents having engineering backgrounds decided to get an MBA degree in the US so as to create alternative career paths other than engineering; and the most remarkable reason for their unwillingness for an engineering career is their desire to have a wider control and role in the overall production process. This desire seems to have a direct effect in their contentment with their work as has been pointed out in Ömer's case. He decides to leave his position at Ford Otosan as he has not been satisfied with the scope of the work he has been "prescribed" to do and with the company's management style

I was not content with XX [the firm], and the work I was doing. The *scope* of the work is too narrow, and also there is so much hierarchy. Your zone of influence is too narrow. They *prescribe* you to, for instance, check something of something. You check and show it to your manager, then his manager etc. ... The company does not have the culture of managing that *talent*. There is not such a thing as presenting a faster career *track* and *challenging*. They have the mode of just having

the given task done. ... The job did not *challenge* me much and I did not have much *upside*. If I had stayed there, I would become a chief in ten years.¹⁸

Ömer's above description of the employer firm almost defines the bureaucratic institutional model of pre-globalization which are defined as very different from the "flexible institutions" associated with global capitalism. This study does not focus on institutional actors and changes in that scope; however, I would like to touch upon these two different institutional models to see how the former and its associations are regarded as almost backward and unprofessional by the respondents while the latter is characterized as developed and ideal. Just like modern society, our professionals are "in revolt against ... the rigid forms of bureaucracy [which characterize Fordist institutions] as the evils of blind routine" (Sennett, 1999: 9).

As I have suggested in the introduction, Sennett's concept of "flexible institution" and his critical perspective will constitute the frame of my examinations. Sennett benefits from Weber's analysis of the militarization of civil society at the end of the nineteenth century in his analysis of bureaucratic institution of pre-globalization. He depicts them as "corporations operating increasingly like armies in which everyone had a place and each place a defined function" (Sennett, 2006: 20). Just like Ömer suggests above, each worker's task is defined and clear-cut; they are "prescribed" to do their pre-defined tasks. As Sennett suggests, in the bureaucratic organization, "effective power is shaped like a pyramid" (2006: 29). In this pyramidal hierarchy, the worker is not allowed to step out of his/her defined function as it is seen in Ömer's case: "One year later of my entrance, I started to experience a few small *issues* with the bosses; I was receiving some feedbacks as why I had done some tasks without asking them and so on.

¹⁸ Ben XX'den memnun değildim yaptığım işten hem yapılan işin şeyi küçük scope'u hem de çok fazla hiyerarşi var yani etki alanınız çok dar. Size prescribe ediyorlar işte şuna bak falan diye. Bakıyorsunuz müdürünüze gösteriyorsunuz onun müdürüne gösteriyorsunuz falan filan. ... o talentı manage etme kültürü yoktu şirkette, biz size daha hızlı bir track kariyer planı sunalım, challenge edelim gibi bir şey yoktu. Verdiğimiz işi yap modundalar. ... yani hem iş beni challenge etmedi çok fazla hem upside'im yok yani. Orda bekleseydim 10 senede şef olacaktım. Ömer

I was good at my work, but I was not allowed to do something extra”.¹⁹ This situation limits the scope of their work while also condemning them to repetitive tasks, thus boredom.

Benefiting from Weberian analysis, Sennett underlines the argument that “the person who makes a life career in such an institution [bureaucratic institution] lives in an ‘iron cage’”, and he uses an analogy to clarify this point that “the lived time in a fixed function organization is like slowly crawling up, or down, the stairs in a house you have not designed” (2006: 31). A slow career progression is set for the worker; and the worker can proceed on this defined path through long-term patience and obedience, which is not compatible at all with the culture of the new capitalism. The bureaucratic institutional model requires the workers to learn “the discipline of delayed gratification” and wait for a future reward such as, as Ömer suggests, being a chief after a 10 year of period (2006: 31). Ömer is not content with that idea of “delayed gratification”. However, as he himself depicts, there are employees who favor the stability and longevity that bureaucratic institutions offer, which is called as “the gift of organized time” by Sennett (2006: 36):

There were those who prefer a life more of a public officer style. Going to America is a risk anyway. You spend a lot of money; you do not get your salary; you take the risk of returning back without finding a job there and so on. There are people who do not want to take these risks; and as they have *low-risk mindsets* they are happy in that way. They are still there, and waiting to become a chief although they started working at the same time with me. Some of them have become chiefs and so on; but they do not complain about their lives as this situation gives them the *comfort* they want. It gives what they want in the sense that you have the job guarantee, your monthly salary is definite, and you do not have to put some extra effort.²⁰

¹⁹ Girdikten bir sene sonra falan patronlarla falan da ufak tefek issue’lar yaşamaya başlamıştım, bazı şeyleri işte yok bana sormadan neden yaptın falan tarzı feedback’ler alıyordum, iyiydim işimde ama ekstra bir şey yapmama izin verilmiyordu. Ömer

²⁰ Daha memuriyet tarzı bir hayatı tercih edenler vardı. Amerikaya gitmek nerden baksan bir risk para harcıyorsun, alacağın maaştan oluyorsun orda gidip iş bulamayıp geri dönme riskini alıyorsun falan bütün bu riskleri almak istemeyen insanlar var ve onlar low risk mindsetinde insanlar oldukları için mutlular yani. Hala ordalar hala şef olmaya çalışıyorlar benimle aynı dönem girdikleri halde bazıları oldu falan. Ama hayatlarından şikayetçi değiller çünkü istedikleri comfort’ı o onlara veriyor, iş garantin var aydan

In relation to the depiction Ömer expresses, Sennett suggests that bureaucratic institution makes the worker sense the life as a linear narrative without much risk and up and down. As Ömer suggests above, the worker of bureaucratic organization finds “comfort” in stability and relatively high guarantee of job. Ömer distinguishes himself from those still working at the firm in question, that’s those in favor of bureaucratic institution, in the sense that he takes risks and does not, in a way, take refuge in an institution offering security and stability while stealing from one’s job satisfaction. Selim, in a similar way, prefers to take “risk” and try new opportunities instead of getting involved in a long career path predefined by the institution:

I like the job I am doing now. There are a few things I want to do. In Turkey, there are opportunities for those who want to do new things and take risks. In that respect, it has satisfied me. ... I am not such a person that prefers to work for three years, become a chief, then manager, and then work for the assistant general manager position.²¹

As also seen in Selim’s above account, they promote a kind of organization that offers its employees more authority and autonomy—which characterize the flexible institution of global capitalism that I am going to dwell upon now.

The rhetoric of flexible institutional model of new capitalism and its features are worth a detailed analysis with a historical concentration upon new market conditions and governing mechanisms of global capitalism. However, within the scope of this present research, I have to limit my analysis with the key features of the institutional model in question so as to underline the parallelism between the new desires and promoted organizational models of companies as the institutional actors of global

aya maaşının ne kadar olacağı belli, 6’dan geç çıkmam gerekmiyor hani ekstra bir efor sarfetmene gerek yok o anlamda onların istediklerini karşılıyor. Ömer

²¹ Şu anda yaptığım işi seviyorum. Birkaç yeni bir şey var yapmak istediğim. Yani Türkiye’de fırsatlar var yeni bir şeyler yapmak isteyen, biraz daha risk almak isteyen insanlar için. O açıdan beni çok tatmin etti. ... Yoksa ben işte 3 sene çalışayım şef olayım, şeften sonra müdür olayım, sonra genel müdür yardımcılığına oynayayım, onu seven bir insan değilim. Selim

capitalism and the desires, expectations and rhetoric of professionals as the individual actors of the new economy. As my concentration is upon the narratives of individual actors, my brief analysis of key perspectives underlying the new flexible institutions will constitute a reference point for my further examination.

Sennett summarizes the features of modern flexibility in three elements: “discontinuous reinvention of institutions, flexible specialization of production, and concentration of power without centralization of power” (1999: 47). “Discontinuous reinvention of institutions” refers to the issue mentioned above in the sense that institutions must be open to reinvention and “re-engineering” through looser networks because of the significant place of “change” in modern market conditions. In a way, as Sennett suggests, “the organization must prove to the market that it is capable of change” (1999: 51). The second element, “flexible specialization of production”, refers that the institutions try to “get more varied products ever more quickly to the market” (1999: 52). Sennett further indicates that this form of production “requires quick decision making, and so suits the small work group; in a large bureaucratic pyramid, decision making can slow down as paper rises to the top for approval from headquarters” (1999: 52). In this sense, the shifting demands of the outside conditions remarkably affect the inside structure of institutions. Then, when the bureaucratic barriers are removed as Sennett suggests, how do big global institutions work and maintain their integrity under such turbulent market conditions? Sennett’s third element, “concentration of power without centralization of power” which he borrows from Bennett Harrison, explains this question in the following way:

It complements the power to reorganize an institution top-down into fragments and nodes in a network. Control can be exercised by setting production or profit targets for a wide variety of groups in the organization, which each unit is free to meet in any that seems fit. (1999: 56)

As the above quotation suggests, in the flexible organization, the workers are given more autonomy as the tasks and projects are assigned to functional teams. Although the profit targets are pre-set, they are more or less autonomous how to reach these targets and to complete given tasks. In that sense, as Sennett also suggests, challenging the old bureaucratic order and offering more autonomy to the workers do not mean that there is less institutional structure; it remains “in the forces driving units or individuals to achieve; ... domination from the top is both strong and shapeless” (1999: 56). As has been hinted in the introduction of the thesis, the flexible institutional model is promoted and re-produced by various institutional and individual actors such as global companies, business schools and global professionals. As a result this promotion and re-production, it is possible to notice a certain rhetoric which is also predominant in the narratives of the informants. Throughout this chapter, I will try to touch upon this common rhetoric.

In the following part of the chapter, I will be taking a closer look at the respondents’ priorities in their job decisions, how and under which circumstances they find pleasure in their jobs, their ideal job profiles by relating them to the institutional model of the new capitalism previously analyzed. I am going to analyze these issues under two subheadings: “Autonomy” and “Professionalism”.

3.2.1. Autonomy

As has been pointed out above, in the flexible institutional model, the employees and small units are supposed to be given more authority and assigned to tasks having broader scopes in order to increase the production speed to catch up the changing market conditions. This increased autonomy and initiative also contribute to the integrity of the fragmented organization in the sense that, as Dirlik suggests, giving more autonomy and initiative to the workers produces greater satisfaction, obedience

and efficiency by making them feel they have a greater role in the decision making process (2005: 298). In this way, it produces employees who “find pleasure in work rather than working to find pleasure” (Ong, 2006: 2). The following depiction of Vedat’s excitement with his current project reveals how he finds pleasure and satisfaction in his work because of its “scope” and the “autonomy” given to him.

When Erhan introduced me and my study to Vedat via e-mail, Vedat replied with a message starting with the very following sentences: “First here comes a bit advertising: I hope your internet connection speed has increased at Sabancı University (where I am a graduate student). As Telcom, now we are providing your internet connection through our own infrastructure. That’s why, this e-mail reaches you at speed of light!”. A few days later, to make the interview, Vedat and I met at a café named Kitchenette, which is very popular among business elites of Istanbul, located in the plaza he works in; after a few general words regarding our meeting Vedat suddenly started to tell about the work he was then conducting with the same enthusiasm in the e-mail. He even talked about the technical details of the project he had undertaken, how he was involved in every step of the process, and how he was excited with the project’s future results as he was starting up a business from scratch together with his team. While he was telling me all about his project through his analyses and charts, it was impossible not to see the excitement and enthusiasm in his voice and eyes; and this picture continued later throughout the interview. He clearly showed and emphasized his excitement and attachment to his work in the very instant we started to communicate although we had not mentioned anything about his professional life and my study.

Vedat’s remarkable excitement with his current job seems to be closely related to the “scope” of his work that has been mentioned. He is fascinated by initiating a project, handling its challenges and being responsible for all of its processes:

I want to do this work, it is very exciting. ... This job is very pleasant for me. You know there is a kind of *entrepreneurship* in me, doing what is non-existent, *start-up* etc. It is a very great *challenge* and a big project. ... I had the chance of working in the feasibility stage of this current job. The story of this project starts from a beginning like whether we should do cabling or keep using X [a firm]. To be one of those starting this project from scratch gives me an incredible pleasure. What we are talking about is, for instance, about digging somewhere and cabling. The men we meet, the scope of the work, the people we are in contact with motivate me a lot. That's, it is a story that I enjoy very much.²²

As Vedat himself calls, we can deem his current work as a story of which he wants to be the author instead of being one of its characters. He frequently uses the words “excitement” and “enthusiasm” for dealing with all of its processes no matter how minor it is. Just like an author working upon even the tiniest details of his/her story, Vedat underlines the pleasure in carrying out the technical stuff of the project as he gets his hands on it from scratch. In that sense, as he himself also expresses, he desires to act like more of an “entrepreneur” rather than a worker. Vedat's case has been one of the most striking examples of the internalization of the work being done, the emotional attachment being established. Vedat's portrayed excitement and personal satisfaction is so strong and dominant that it gives such an impression that he is working just for his own satisfaction, which almost covers the source of this satisfaction, its initial and preferential goals and forms of power it applies.

The broader level of authority Vedat owns enables him to find pleasure in operational details about which he would be complaining if his position had a repetitive and narrow scope with less authority as it is in Ömer's case. Ömer is discontent with his job at his first job mostly because he wanted to have more “authority” in the production

²² Ben bu işi yapmak istiyorum yani çok heyecanlı bir iş. ... Bu iş benim için çok keyif verici bir iş, benim açımdan. Hani ben de biraz daha girişimcilik falan da var ya entrepreneurship falan işte var olmayı yapmak, start-up falan filan. Çok da büyük challenge ve büyük bir iş. ... Şu an uğraştığımız işin fizibilitesinde çalışma fırsatım oldu benim. Yani biz işte kablo çekelim mi yoksa X'i kullanmaya devam edelim mi falan gibi bir işin başlangıcından başlar şu an yaptığımız işin hikayesi. Şimdi burayı sıfırdan kuran insanlardan biri olmak bana acayip büyük haz veriyor. Yani ne bileyim konuştuğumuz şey atıyorum bilmem nerde bilmem kaç km kazı yapacağız ve kablo sereceğiz. Tanıştığınız adamlar, uğraştığınız işin ölçüğü. Muhattap olduğunuz insanlar. Beni acayip motive ediyor. Eeee....yani...hakikaten...oldukça keyif duyduğum bir hikaye. Vedat

process of the project he was involved in instead of being “prescribed” what to do. Before starting his job, he had thought he was going to “produce the automobile itself rather than changing a detail in the corner of something”. That’s why, Ömer could not satisfy his entrepreneurial character, and decided to obtain a different specialty by getting an MBA in the US through which he expected to be recruited by an institution applying flexible management models of the new capitalism.

Regarding the respondents’ identification themselves with their works and prioritizing professional satisfaction in their job choices, there emerges a striking commonality in their accounts. While relaying the story of their job changes, preferences and choices, the informants, except for Efe, have not even mentioned the words “salary”, “money” or any other related term although work is primarily and originally an economic activity. As has been hinted before, the values of global capitalism discipline the subjects to identify themselves with the work, and to see the work as a way of self-realization through various mechanisms. In this way, absolute subjection to the system is aimed to be constructed. That’s why, the terms related to material income do not have any place in the rhetoric of the new capitalism. Supporting this argument, as far as I have observed in the headhunting company I worked for, the salary happens to be the last step of the recruitment process. The candidates are not supposed to bring forward the salary package before talking about the content of the job position and the career promises it makes. The otherwise is considered to be “unprofessional” and “improper”.

In addition to that particular common feature, the narratives of the respondents share some other rhetorical commonalities. As I have shown in the quotations by typing them in italics, the respondents use considerable amount of English words and even phrases in their accounts. This can partly be depended upon the fact that they have spent

a long time abroad and studied programs taught in English. What I aim to underline is that they use almost the same words in English such as “challenge”, “scope” and “vision” which constitute the most commonly used words of contemporary professional life. In addition to these English words, the narratives are almost dominated by the words such as “motivation”, “pleasure”, and “risk” which are almost the key words of the values of global capitalism. As I have suggested before, the rhetoric of the informants will be underlined throughout the thesis as it is reflective of the discourse of contemporary global capitalism which is constantly re-produced and disseminated.

3.2.2. Professionalism

“Professionalism” emerges as a remarkable concept that has been frequently used by the respondents as a distinguishing feature for both the employees and institutions. Many of the informants seem to associate professionalism with rationality which includes impersonality and meritocracy although they do not exactly use these concepts. Their understanding of “professionalism” and its associations emerge from the source of their positioning Turkey and the USA in relation to each other.

Metin’s following comparison is exemplary of the associations that I have mentioned above:

The *business life* in America is generally more attached to capitalist principles. The *share-holder return* is considered more. *Maximization* of the company value is prioritized. It is easier to say in American that we should fire 500 workers in order to *maximize* the company value. However, in Turkey, social and human aspects are more cared. Hence, I do not want to make generalizations but the *corporate life* in America is, so to speak, *to the point*, professional, and really more capitalist.²³

²³ Amerikadaki business life gerçekten hani genel olarak bakarsak kapitalist prensiplere daha bağlıdır. Yani daha fazla share-holder return’e önem verilir. Yani gerçekten şirket değerini maximize etmek daha önemlidir. Yani tamam biz bu şirketin değerini maximize edeceğiz ama 500 kişilik de işçi çıkarmamız lazım çok rahat denebilir Amerikada. Ama Türkiyede biraz daha fazla sosyal tarafına, insani tarafına da bakılıyor. Dolayısıyla Amerikadaki corporate hayat hani çok genelleme başka alanlarda yapmak istemem ama tabiri caizse to the point’tir, profesyoneldir ve gerçekten daha kapitalisttir. Metin

A remarkable tendency in the above quotation is that professionalism and its associations are connected with the level of capitalism. America is depicted as “more capitalist” because of its stronger “professionalism”, impersonality and sense of “corporate culture”. In that sense, Turkey is following from behind on the path of capitalism. When it becomes as professional as America, this will show us that it has become more capitalist. As it is seen in Selim’s following account, “professionalism” is depicted as something to be developed and reached in the course of time: “Professionalism and stuff, these things have not developed much in Turkey yet; however, I do not make it a problem. If you expect to see the professionalism of America here, it means that here has become a mature market just like there. Then, you cannot find these opportunities”.²⁴ Although Selim is in favor of this “undeveloped” professionalism in Turkey, he sees it as a lack, as a missing part of the whole. In that sense, Turkey’s business life is regarded as somehow backward and outmoded compared to that of America which is more developed and closer to the ideal model.

As it is also seen in Metin’s account above, a professional organization and its employees put the company’s privileges and profit beyond everything, which is a result of strong corporate culture being established as Dirlik suggests. If the organization manages to establish a strong corporate culture, it can give the highest priority to its corporate advantages without dealing with any issues outside of the corporation and its advantages. In order to achieve it, as Dirlik suggests, emergence of subcultures and personal advantages have to be eliminated. The sole concentration of the corporation must be upon the achievement of corporate targets. In that sense, impersonality has a vital importance to prioritize the corporate advantages. Selim, for instance, defines

²⁴ Profesyonellik odur budur, tabi bunlar Türkiye’de çok gelişmedi ama ben onu da çok mesele yapmıyorum. Amerika’daki profesyonelliği beklesen burası da Amerika gibi oturmuş bir piyasa olur, o zaman da bu fırsatlar olmaz zaten. Selim

professionalism with lack of personal relationships among employees which requires the employee to position himself/herself at equal distance to everyone:

There working relations are not considered as personal. Here, it is just the opposite; if you make good friendships, you work well here. In America, it is not very much the case. There is not much difference between X and Y companies. You are supposed to stand at the same distance to everyone in the name of professionalism. I believe that I have that professionalism as a result of the long years I lived there.²⁵

Selim distinguishes himself and American working life from Turkey's "non-professional" actors both institutional and individual in the sense that he has gained that professionalism which is a sign of developed business life and high level of capitalism.

Bora, in a similar way, makes a comparison between American professionalism and Turkey's business life on the basis of impersonality:

The working experience I have gained in America has taught me that there is a clear-cut line between working life and personal life. I am talking about this with a few friends having returned like me. For me, the work is at work; I shout, quarrel and *argue* at work as it is about work; however, after the work is done, everything gets calm. That's, I do not personalize the issue and approach my work emotionally. But the experiences are different here. Here people are social in that sense. Working life and personal relations are more integrated. If you happen to dispute with someone, it lasts for a few days. You learn that kind of things there.²⁶

Bora expresses that, as a result of professionalism that he has learnt in the US, he manages to prioritize the "business" and corporate advantages and put a clear-cut line between his personal relations and business targets. In this way, he even normalizes to quarrel for the sake of "business" as, he suggests, he does not reflect it on his out-of-office relations. Ömer, in a more apparent way, posits professionalism and

²⁵ Orda iş ilişkileri çok fazla kişisel alınmaz. Burda tamtersi iyi arkadaşlıklar kurarsanız iyi çalışırsınız burda. Amerika'da bu fazla yoktur, X şirketi ile Y şirketi arasında fazla fark olmaz. Profesyonellik adına herkesle aynı mesafede olmanız gerekir. Amerika'da uzun yıllar kalmanın getirdiği etkiyle bu profesyonelliğin bende de olduğuna inanıyorum. Selim

²⁶ Amerika'daki tecrübelerim işte iş yaşantısıyla kişisel yaşantının birbirinden kesin çizgilerle ayrıldığını öğretti, bunu birkaç arkadaşım ile konuşuyoruz benim gibi dönmüş olan, benim için iş işte ben bağırır çağırır kavga ederim, argue ederim şey yaparım iş konusu olduğu için ama iş bittikten sonra her şey süt limandır yani kişiselleştirmem olayı duygusal olarak yaklaşmam işime. Ama burdaki tecrübeler daha farklı, burda insanlar sosyal o anlamda. İş yaşantısıyla kişisel ilişki biraz daha geçkin birbirine. Birisiyle tartışmışsanız o birkaç gün sürüyor. Bu tarz şeyler öğreniyorsunuz orda. Bora

impersonality as a point to be reached for the sake of liberal values of equality and meritocracy:

According to the work settings I have observed, the people are generally digging a pit for each other, the collaboration is very *limited*, and there is so much gossip. In Turkey, this is generally the case in big companies and so on. All of these things are existent in America too, but they are more limited as people do not bring their *personalities* in. even if you argue in a meeting, you do not personally argue. When the meeting is over, you can shake hands. In Turkey, people get offended; but in America such things do not happen, they are childish. Here they put such criteria as I do not work with this guy because of his being religious and so on. This is a serious thing, a problem in Turkey, and this should be overcome in a very very short time.²⁷

As seen in Ömer's account, the impersonality side of professionalism has a dimension of liberal values in terms of multiculturalism, ethnicity, religion etc. This dimension within a broader perspective will be discussed in the next chapter. However, at this point, I would like to underline how the values of flexible capitalism and liberal ethos are set in their minds as the ultimate criteria – remember Vedat's motivation of studying in the US that he wanted to learn the criteria set for business— for development both economically and socially; and they position Turkey on a development path by applying this criteria set as the valid unit of measurement. In this study, it is not possible for me to analyze all the mechanisms that instill these values and the liberal ethos; however, later in the study, I will try to discuss the role of MBA and America in this acquisition of values through the perceptions and depictions of the respondents.

In the respondent accounts, impersonality is closely associated with being rational, result-oriented and to the point. Ömer now works as a consultant, and he has emphasized in the interview how hard it is to explain their projects to the clients as, in

²⁷ Gözlemediğim çalışma ortamları olarak baktığım zaman insanlar genelde işte birbirinin kuyusunu kazan kolaborasiyonun limited olduğu dedikodu falan yapılan. Türkiyede öyle genelde şeyler o kurumlar büyük şirketlerde falan ortamlara baktığın zaman. Amerikada var bunların hepsi var ama daha kısıtlı çünkü insanlar personalitylerini masaya getirmiyorlar. Sen bir toplantıda tartışsan da sen kişilik olarak adamla tartışmıyorsun çıkınca da el sıkışabiliyorsun. Türkiyede küser insanlar. Ama amerikada böyle şeyler olmaz, çocukca böyle şeyler. İşte o adam dinci ben çalışmam onunla diye işe alırken kriter koyarlar falan bu tip şeyler. Bu ciddi bir şey türkiyeye ilgili bir sıkıntı ve bunun çok çok yani çok çabuk aşılması lazım. Ömer

Turkey, he suggests, the companies are obsessed with the manner, way of expression rather than the rationale in what's said:

While doing a project in America, clients give you *input*; they say it is very good for something they like, and ask why we do not look at it from that perspective if they do not like it. Sometimes you convince them why you have not looked at it from that perspective; if you cannot, you do it that way and so on. Here, their *contribution* is very *limited* as a man at a certain position does not necessarily have it as he completely deserves it. Most of the time, he takes that position by waiting. When you tell that man that we are doing this in that way, he feels need to *contribute*. But you say that milk is white, he, on the other hand, says soil is brown. You communicate in this way, got it? ... In decision making processes, decisions are made objectively there. In America, you check the numbers, when the *integrity* of the numbers is confirmed, you say yes, these numbers are correct and that's why, we are making this decision. Here you have to explain why you have not chosen B instead of A again and again.²⁸

Ömer promotes a kind of scientific rationality based on calculations and “objective” results that favor ultimate profitability of the institution; and he sees a remarkable deficiency in “Turkish” business life in terms of rationality and objectivity. In that sense, he distinguishes himself from the others in Turkey who do not have the knowledge and experience of this rational professionalism. He connects this deficiency with the lack of meritocratic business culture which evaluates the employees in terms of talent and success. He, again, criticizes the bureaucratic institutional model, which makes Turkey's business life deficient and backward, as it evaluates its employees on the basis of the time they have spent in that particular institution rather than their merits.

Meritocracy is another element that professionalism is associated with and one of the most remarkable values that modern capitalism rests upon. I would like to examine how the interviewees see meritocracy as an element of their ideal job profile,

²⁸ Amerikada proje yaparken müşteri sana input verir, beğendiği şeye çok güzel olmuş der, beğenmediği şeye şuna şu açıdan neden bakmadınız der bazen ikna edersin neden öyle bakmadığına edemezsen de yaparsın falan. Burda mesela contributionları çok limited çünkü bir mevkideki adam illa o mevkiyi çok iyi doldurduğu için gelmiyor yani orda beklemiş gelmiş genelde öyle oluyor. Orda beklemiş gelmiş bir adama da sen biz bunu böyle yapıyoruz dediğiniz zaman contribute etme ihtiyacı hissediyor. İyi de seni diyorsun ki süt beyazdır, o da toprak kahverengidir diyor. Böyle bir iletişim kuruyorsun anladın mı? ... karar alma aşamalarında orda alışıyorsun kararlar objektif alınır amerikada rakamlara bakarsın rakamların integritisini şey yaptıktan sonra konfirme ettikten sonra evet bu rakamlar doğru biz buna bakarak şunu kararı alıyorum. Burda o A'yı seçsen de neden B'yi seçmediğini defalarca anlatman gerekiyor. Ömer

thus the flexible institutional model. They posit it as a target that “Turkish” business life should reach in the course of its capitalist development. Vedat, for instance, expresses his fascination about the meritocratic culture in the US:

The corporate-ness I have seen there is different. It is nice to see the corporate-ness of the fact that we have actually seen what you did at this and that place and written these things somewhere behind and you get promotion unexpectedly at those times when you say who cares what I am doing. ... In truth, it was very surprising for me to see that somebody from afar was following what I was doing. People sit and write down things, someone evaluates this, other evaluates that; and then, you see it somewhere that they establish some committees and examine that behavior and think about what kind of work can be done with that behavior. That’s, somebody has cared and worked upon by thinking that your reaction somewhere is actually an *extraordinary* reaction and it needs to be promoted. Can I explain it? Somebody studies you as a *case study*. Corporate-ness is a bit related to this.²⁹

Vedat is fascinated with how employees are “studied as a case study” so as to reward talent and success. Meritocracy, in that sense, takes form as an impersonal judgement upon individuals; and it is regarded as a sign of professionalism, which, Vedat suggests, is not that distinct in Turkey’s business culture. America, again, is positioned as the ultimate point of meritocracy which Turkey must struggle to reach.

Meritocracy is indeed a highly complicated concept which Sennet analyzes in a comprehensive way. I would like to touch upon his analysis as it will be quite elucidative in the following part of the chapter. In the first place, Sennett looks at meritocracy from a historical perspective; and elaborates upon how military institutions discovered talent and started to prioritize it over “class and cash” with the emergence of professional soldier having “special prestige” (2006: 110). The same structure began to be applied in other institutions of the society, and lastly the business. Today, modern business, Sennett suggests, “obsessively test and measure employees in the workplace,

²⁹ Orda gördüğüm kurumsallık daha farklı bir şeydi. Yani kimin umrundaki benim ne yaptığım dediğiniz anlarda çat diye alakasız bir şekilde promosyon aldığınız ve biz sizin şu şu şu yerlerde yapmış olduğunuz şeyleri aslında gördük, arkada yazdık biz bunları bir kenara kurumsallığını görmek güzel. ... hakikaten benim yaptığım işi çok uzaklardan birinin takip ediyor olduğunu görmek bana çok şaşırtıcı gelmişti. Yani insanlar oturmuşlar yazmışlar, o onu değerlendirmiş, bu bunu değerlendirmiş, bunu sonra bir yerlerde görüyorsunuz birtakım komiteler oturmuşlar o davranışı incelemişler, o davranışla aslında ne tip işler yapılabilir diye biraz bakmışlar. Yani sizin orda vermiş olduğunuz tepkinin aslında extraordinary bir tepki olduğunu ve bunun promote edilmesi gerektiğini birileri oturup dert etmiş, üzerinde çalışmış anlatabiliyor muyum yani bir case study olarak birileri arkada sizi çalışmış. Vedat

in order that talent be rewarded and, more consequently, failure certified and so legitimated” (2006: 110). In that sense, Sennett calls the judgments of ability as “Janus-faced”: while highlighting and distinguishing the ability, they are, in this way, locating and excluding lack of ability (2006: 113). Sennett benefits from Bourdieu’s concept of distinction to explain the connotation of the Janus-faced activity further:

The sociologist Bourdieu calls this Janus-faced relationship “distinction”, the mass disabled or penalized *tacitly* as educational, work, and cultural institutions confer elite status *explicitly*. For Bourdieu the real point of distinction is to create a mass in shadow, by putting a spotlight on the elite. My own view is that the spotlight shows a confused scene. This is the subtle aspect of the meritocratic talent search – the illumination and definition of talent itself. (Sennett, 2006 114)

His comparison meritocracy with craftsmanship is elucidative in explaining the subtlety of talent search in the flexible institution. In craftsmanship, Sennett suggests, it is possible to judge how well the worker performs by looking at the concrete results of his/her labor; however, the flexible institution is chasing for something quite intangible no matter how objective and solid tests and on-the-job evaluations might seem (2006: 114). In this sense, as Sennett asks, how can an autonomous act, or, for instance, leadership be quantified? We are not measuring a specialized knowledge acquired through time and experience as in craftsmanship; “cutting-edge firms and flexible organizations need people who can learn new skills rather than cling to old competencies, the dynamic organization emphasizes the ability to process and interpret changing bodies of information and practice” (2006: 114). Sennett calls this particular talent as potential ability. In the following part of the chapter, I will take a closer look at how the respondents distinguish themselves from their others, the distinctions they mobilize and where they position their MBA related experiences in distinguishing themselves as global professionals. I will also try to touch upon the relation between the needs of flexible organizations and the produced distinctions by tracing out the position of MBA and its associations.

3.3. Distinguishing Oneself and the role of MBA

When one looks at the job adverts, there emerge a few common qualifications that are required by a great number of companies. Below are two exemplary job adverts for general application released by one multinational and one local firm on a popular recruitment website. I would like to underline that these adverts are for general application not for a specific job position, which shows that these two firms require all candidates to have the listed qualifications:

The advert given by the multinational firm which is quite well-known and operating in 28 countries:

Qualifications:

The candidates should

... be university graduate

... have an excellent command of English

... acquire XX [the company name] values and competencies

The advert given by a local holding:

General Qualifications:

University graduate

Excellent level of English knowledge

Excellent command of MS Office applications

As seen in the adverts above, being a university graduate and knowledge of English as foreign language are the two major qualifications required as the basic qualifications for the candidates to apply; they are not posited as distinctive qualifications.

I do not have the necessary data to make a structural argument regarding the changes in the scheme of distinguishing qualifications in Turkey's business life. However, as underlined in Sennett's argument above, the flexible organization of the new capitalism is in need of employees having high "potential ability" rather than "acquired" competencies and knowledge such as a professional specialty and foreign language acquired through university education. In this sense, I suppose it is possible to suggest that university education and acquired competencies are not distinguishing

qualifications; the employees, in the new market where the organizations must prove that they are flexible and where a different kind of talent is promoted as a way of distinction, must acquire certain talents to be distinct and competitive; and high potential ability, in that sense, seems to be the major distinction as it indicates the ability of continuous acquisition of new abilities, thus new distinctions; and Sennett's concept of potential ability is quite illuminating in understanding in what ways our global professionals distinguish themselves and where they position their MBA related experiences in this process. I am going to make my analyses under two subheadings: "Potential Ability" and "Accumulation of Social Capital".

3.3.1 "Potential Ability"

As Richard Sennett underlines, in knowledge-driven modern economy, "the shelf-life of many skills is short" (2006: 4). The knowledge, competencies and skills become obsolete in a very short time with the global economy in frequent reengineering and updating as a result of rapid technological innovations and changing business knowledge. Under such volatile market conditions, as suggested before, flexible institutions have to catch up the speed of the market. In this catching up, the companies have to upgrade the employees' skills and knowledge through various training programs and performance evaluations while, on the other side, privileging employees who have the mental life of "moving from scene to scene, problem to problem, team to team" in parallel with the organizations' changing strategies and structures (2006: 121). This type of mental life requires the employees to be in "pure process" which is called "liquid modernity" by Zygmunt Baumann (Sennett, 2006: 122). Hence, continuous learning and improvement skills emerges as a significant element to create distinctions in order to be privileged by the flexible institution.

It is interesting to note that, as seen in the motivations and expectations part, none of the respondents has suggested any reason related to self-development and/or learning regarding their MBA decisions although getting an MBA degree automatically involves a kind of knowledge accumulation as it is an educational program. However, the mostly common motivation to broaden their career alternatives and, thus, work for the flexible institutions which would not be met by an engineering career in Turkey, necessitates for them to adopt continuous learning and improvement skills in the acquisition of which MBA in America plays an important role no matter how irreducible to MBA it is. This role is quite subtle and indirect as it is concerned with developing skills rather than any specialization. On the websites of various MBA programs, for instance, accumulation of skills to compete in the global market are highlighted rather than knowledge accumulation. For example, the following quotation has been taken from the website of Babson College where Vedat has taken his MBA degree:

Babson's suite of graduate programs will give you the confidence and tools to compete in a competitive global market. Here you will develop the skills to see the working world not from a single perspective, but from a multidimensional viewpoint. Learn to see every challenge as an opportunity and develop the ability to capitalize on it.³⁰

As seen in the quotation above, challenge is depicted as an “opportunity”, and the professionals are promised to acquire necessary skills to learn and take advantage from it. In this way, continuous learning and refreshment of competencies are guaranteed through every experience and challenge the employees face. In a similar manner, on the website of Harvard Business School (HBS), where Metin and Erhan got their MBA degrees, experience is highlighted as an invaluable element of one's career; and HBS promises the acquisition of the talent of learning from any experience on any path; this

³⁰ <http://www3.babson.edu/babson2ndgen/Graduate/>

talent is not limited to any specialization, any context or any duration: “Although there is no substitute for experience, the education students receive at HBS helps them make the most of that experience, providing a solid foundation that serves them for a lifetime, no matter what path they choose to follow”.³¹ MBA programs, although they also pursue functional knowledge from finance to logistics and also organizational and strategic knowledge, make their most distinct promises in terms of talent accumulation which are time-less and place-less and which will enable them reproduce their existing professional skills while accumulating the changing ones. Now, I will try to take a closer look at how continuous learning and the role of “experience” and “challenge” emerge in the interview accounts.

3.3.1.1 Learning through experience and Rhetoric of “Challenge”

Many of the interviewees have highlighted their expectations from the employing firms to provide a work setting where they can learn a lot, upgrade their skills, and where their labor force are managed accordingly. He expects from the company to invest upon the talents of its employees; the otherwise generates discontent and boredom. Ömer uses the term “challenge” just like many of the other respondents. As it is highlighted on the MBA websites, challenge is closely associated with learning and self-development. The employees want to take over challenging projects to learn more; they want their existing knowledge to be challenged to get into the new areas they do not know. Vedat, for instance describes, his current position as a very “challenging” project where he can learn a lot and get excited:

Very challenging job, an incredible experience, what ever you do at that stage. Things cannot be done on time; everybody shouts at each other; the behind is

³¹ <http://www.hbs.edu/learning/>

doom. I have seen it too. It is a great experience, you learn a lot. ... I have never felt that I get that much excited with it but it is a really very exciting feeling.³²

As seen in the quotation above, Vedat is fascinated by the experience and knowledge he has gained no matter how stressful and chaotic the work setting is as it “challenges” and pushes the borders of his existing experience and knowledge. This significance and priority attributed to continuous learning and improvement renders accumulation of experience an invaluable asset for their professional career; and a wide range of experience, not just in professional and technical sense, is promoted and welcomed by them. For this reason, the accounts of many respondents displays a remarkable tendency of self-disciplining to take pleasure in their work as it, in one way or another, opens a way of gaining some sort of experience, thus learning and improvement. Mehmet, for instance, almost forces himself to think positively about his job by considering the experience he gains although he does not like his position, at Istanbul Office of McKinsey, at all:

I do not like my job at all and am not doing it with enthusiasm. If my company culture increases, my view might change. It might change if I work for a different, harder and more *challenging* client. ... Nevertheless, I can experience various fields and companies now. I have done *marketing*, I will do *operations* too. When you think about it, it will be a very good experience; it will be very good for me, probably.³³

Learning through experience is also a tool used by MBA programs. Although many MBA programs do not put certain amount of professional experience as an application requirement, they try to choose students from various countries who have professional experience as the programs aim to set an international environment for the students to

³² Çok challenging bir iş, acayip bir tecrübe. Yani o evrede her ne yaparsanız yapın. İşler yetişmez, herkes birbirine bağırır çağırır arkası kıyamettir yani bunun. Onu da gördüm. Çok büyük tecrübedir, acayip fazla şey öğrenirsiniz. ... Bunu beni bu kadar heyecanladıracağına ben hiç hissetmiyordum ama bu hakikaten çok heyecanlı bir his. Vedat

³³ İşimi kesinlikle isteyerek, severek yapmıyorum. Şirket kültürüm artarsa belki görüşüm değişir. Belki daha farklı bir müşteriye, daha zor, daha challenging bir müşteriye gitsem değişebilir. ... Yine de şimdi daha değişik alanları, şirketleri de görmüş oluyorum. Marketing yaptım, operations falan da yapacağım. Düşününce çok güzel bir tecrübe olacak, yani o yüzden benim için iyi olacak herhalde. Mehmet

benefit from each other's experiences. The case method, which was introduced by Harvard Business School and is commonly used by MBA programs, is a remarkable example of the importance that MBA programs give to learning through experience. The website of Harvard Business School describes the case method in the following way:

The case method is a powerful interactive learning process that brings the complex and dynamic realities of business analysis and decision making into the classroom. ... Case studies replicate actual business situations and are taught so that students must work together to make difficult decisions under typical management conditions, including a lack of complete information, complex trade-off situations, and time pressure. ...The case method provides students with the transcendent skills, insights and self-confidence required to meet the interdisciplinary demands of real business situations.³⁴

The quotation above depicts an environment where a microcosm of business life is created so that students can develop the ability to capitalize upon their experiences and challenges through which they can resist the short life of professional skills.

Erhan describes the case method of HBS where he has got his degree in the following way:

You gain something. You discuss cases. Nobody teaches you. Case discussion is an interesting experience as, you do not directly learn something, but your perspective broadens as a result of that discussion; that's the teaching method. That's, you are supposed to learn something without being aware of it.³⁵

He finds hard to define what he has learnt through this method as what is given is not knowledge, it is defined as "perspective" and "vision" by most of the respondents. Just as is Sennett's concept of "potential ability", "vision" is a very subtle concept which involves various associations and elements both professional and more general senses. From these elements and associations that the respondents connect with the concept of "vision", I infer that "vision" of the respondents and Sennett's "potential ability" are

³⁴ <http://www.hbs.edu/about/>

³⁵ Bir şeyler kazanıyorsun. Vaka tartışıyorsunuz. Yani birisi size ders öğretmiyor, o vaka tartışmak enterasan bir tecrübe çünkü direkt olarak bir şey küt diye öğrenmiyorsunuz belki ama tartışmanın neticesinde sizin perspektifiniz genişliyor yani öğretim metodu o aslında. Yani bir manada farketmeden bir şeyler öğreniyor olmanız lazım. Erhan

quite similar in terms of meaning. In the next part, I will try to examine the concept of “vision” and its associations that the respondents make.

3.3.1.2 “Vision”: “Multidimensionality” and International Experience

Many of the informants highlight that they have gained “vision” and perspective as a result of their MBA experience; and they present it as a distinction in various ways by underlining its different dimensions. One of them is related to multidisciplinary and non-specialized knowledge that they gain through their MBA degrees. In the first place, I would like to give examples from informant accounts that depict the multidisciplinary and non-specialized nature of MBA education. Selim, for instance, suggests the following: “It is a program based on conveying basic concepts, a multidisciplinary thing. It achieved very well, whether you have an idea about these disciplines, whether you can understand general concepts”.³⁶ Erhan, in a similar way with Selim, highlights the non-specialized nature of the program, and describes the perspective it offers:

You use it in the projects you are doing, whether consciously or not. Getting an MBA, at least to me, now I sometimes think I don’t benefit from it, how can I say, it does not offer you a new *profession*, it is not like being a doctor or lawyer. It is not like you learn something that you don’t know how to do. Instead, I think, it enables you to look at something through *frameworks* and broaden your perspective. In that sense, it is different from *professional schools*, it does not give you a craft, but teaches you to look at things in a better way, gives you a perspective rather than a *profession*. Both experience and approach, we can say that it broadens your way of looking.³⁷

³⁶ Temel konseptleri aktarma üzerine kurulu bir program, multidisiplin bir olay, bu disiplinler hakkında bir fikrin var mı, genel kavramları anlayabiliyor musun, onu çok iyi yaptı. Selim

³⁷ Yaptığımız projelerde de kullanıyorsunuz yani bilerek veya bilmeyerek yani MBA yapmış olmak aslında en azından bana, belki ben yararlanadığımı bile düşünüyorum şu anda, böyle nasıl diyeyim yeni bir *profession* vermiyor, bu böyle avukatlık ya da tıp gibi değil. Yapmayı bilmediğiniz bir şeyi yapmayı öğreniyorsunuz gibi değil. Onun yerine birazcık daha olaya frameworklerle bakmayı işte birazcık daha perspektif geliştirmeyi falan sağlıyor diye düşünüyorum. Yani o manada bir professional schoollardan ayrıldığı nokta o, size bir zanaat altın bilezik vermiyor da bazı şeylere daha iyi bakmayı öğretiyor, bir perspektif veriyor bir *profession*dan ziyade diye düşünüyorum. Hem deneyim hem de yaklaşım, bakış açımızı genişletiyor diyebiliriz. Erhan

As has been suggested in the previous part of the chapter, MBA programs use professional experiences of the students and specific case studies as a means of education instead of lectures that aim to relay knowledge and information. For these reasons, as Erhan suggests, MBA programs aim and promise to enable the students to gain some kind of an internalized experience and knowledge, what they call “vision” and/or “perspective”, which can be associated with the “potential ability” that Sennett suggests.

Through this vision/perspective/potential ability, the informants suggest that they learn how to look at an issue from several perspectives which is in complete harmony with the requirements of flexible institutional model:

Above all, it makes you gain the ability of thinking in various fields. You can think about more than one issue simultaneously, I am talking about business; it makes you more *well-rounded*; you automatically think about both finance and operation and so on.³⁸

In addition to the ability to look at things from a multidimensional perspective, Bora further suggests that the experience he has gained in his MBA educations enables him to question every issue through which he gains the ability to improve his skills and knowledge in a self-developing manner, which is again closely related to the idea of potential ability:

In terms of vision, MBA programs have the vision brought by people coming from different countries. Being *challenged*, and forced to think in a different way, the ability to approach everything with a doubt; in the end you start to think about things whether I am mistaken or not. You gain some sort of competencies both in terms of knowledge and practice. It might be different competencies, those things.³⁹

³⁸ Her şey öncesi sizi şey yapıyor farklı konularda düşünme yeteneği bence kazandırıyor. Aynı anda birden fazla farklı konuyu birazcık daha iş anlamında söylüyorum bunu daha well-rounded yapıyor sizi otomatikman yani hem finansı düşünüyorsunuz hem operasyonu düşünüyorsunuz falan filan. Bora

³⁹ Bu vizyon olarak bu farklı ülkelerden gelen insanların getirdiği vizyon var MBAlerde de bu var. Challenge edilmiş olmanın, farklı düşünmeye zorlanmış olmanın, her şeye biraz daha acaba diye yaklaşabilmenin acaba yanılıyor muyum olabiliyor sonuçta öyle düşünmeye başlıyorsunuz. Birtakım yetkinlikler kazanıyorsunuz. Bilgi anlamında olsun, işte pratik anlamında olsun. Farklı yetkinlikler olabilir bunları kazanıyorsunuz. Bora

He underlines how individual are forced to think in a different way in MBA programs. Many of the respondents, like Bora, present the distinguished way of thinking, questioning manner, rationality and the flexible competencies as distinctions they have gained through their MBA experiences. Ahmet, as another example, depicts these distinctions in the following manner:

A person having a good MBA degree can at least look at things around his/her from a particular framework and perspective apart from success or failure at work. At least he/she can have this competence. If you are working at McKinsey, these competencies might be normal to you. However, if you work somewhere more ordinary, you can see that the perspective you have which is normal to you is actually a distinction. Why do not these people have it? Look the man has 25 years of experience, but I have the perspective that he does not have with 3 years of experience. You know that. You feel that difference.⁴⁰

Ahmet considers that the perspective and vision he has gained distinguish himself from those who lack them no matter how much experienced they might have.

Another dimension that the respondents relate to “vision” is international experience and cultural flexibility they have gained. Arif Dirlik suggests that “managing cultural differences” emerges as a necessity in flexible institutions of global capitalism as the contemporary global age is characterized with constant flow of people, capital and commodities (2005: 287). In a simplest way, multinational firms have offices in different parts of the world employing various professionals from different countries and they have to work together. In addition, these companies have to develop strategies for different localities, which requires an extensive cultural understanding. For these reasons, global actors need to hire professionals having the skills of “managing multicultural differences” in order to show high performance and adaptability in a work setting which is flexible in many senses.

⁴⁰ İyi bir MBA yapmış bir insan, iş yaşamında başarı başarısızlık dışında en azından etrafındaki şeylere belli bir çerçeveden, bakış açısından bakabiliyor. En azından bu yetiye sahip olabiliyor. Siz şimdi McKinsey’de çalışıyorsanız bu yetkinlikler size normal gelebilir. Ama siz daha sıradan bir yerde çalışıyorsanız, sizde normal olan bakış açısının aslında farklılık olduğunu görüyorsunuz. Bu insanlarda bu niye yok, bak adamın 25 yıllık tecrübesi var ama ben 3 yıllık tecrübeyle bu adamın sahip olmadığı bakış açısına sahibim ve biliyorsunuz yani bu var. Bu farklılığı hissediyorsunuz. Ahmet

MBA programs, in order to produce professional who can handle and manage cultural differences, attach remarkable importance to offer the students an immensely international setting through various means such as students from different parts of the world and rich case studies of diverse contexts. Vedat, for instance, describes a method which Babson College uses to increase the ability to manage different cultures:

The *multicultural* structure of the school, and for example at the end of the every first year, it is organized... about 30 people are brought to a country and stay there for one week. It is a course, and students talk to the prominent figures of that country about the problems, advantages and disadvantages of doing a business there. When you think about it, it is a very costly course. Get on a plane in America, go somewhere in the world, stay there for a week, talk to people and stuff... Make a research about the country and so on, it is a different structure.⁴¹

In this way, the program aims to instill cultural understanding in students through enabling them learn about and interact with different cultures as much as possible so that they can broaden their vision and use this international experience in their professional careers. For instance, Efe distinguishes himself as he does not experience any problems in his interactions with foreign investors as a result of the experience he has gained in the US:

Now we are talking with a great number of foreign investors, both from America and Europe. You...very easily...well you don't have any problems in terms of, how can I say, both experience and knowledge, what they want and expect. International experience, especially in our department, can be more beneficial. Our director has also international experience.⁴²

⁴¹ Okulun hani multicultural yapısı mesela ne bileyim okuldan her sene birinci sınıftan ikinci sınıfa geçerken bir eee şey yapıyor. Bir ülkeye gidilip o ülkede yaklaşık 30 kişi bir hafta kalıp o ülkenin ileri gelenleriyle konuşulup ve o ileri gelenlerle işte o ülkede iş yapmanın dertleri, tasaları, artıları, eksileri nedir ne değildir falan filan mesela bu bir ders. E bunu düşünürsen aslında baya pahalı bir ders. Amerikadan atla bir uçağa bilmem nereye git, bir hafta kal, onunla görüş, bununla görüş, bir şeyler...ülkeyle ilgili bir şeyler araştır falan filan biraz farklı bir yapı. Vedat

⁴² İşte şu anda biz bir sürü yabancı yatırımcılarla görüşüyoruz. Amerika'dan olsun Avrupa'dan olsun hani çok rahat onların birçoğu zaten veya hani o zorlanmıyorum şey açısından ne derler tecrübe olarak veya bilgi olarak yatırımcıdan ne istiyor ne beklerler. Zaten yurtdışı tecrübesi hele hele bizim bölümde daha da şey faydası olabiliyor zaten direktörümüzün de yurtdışı tecrübesi var. Efe

Efe points out that the vision he has gained through his international experience enable him to better understand the foreign investors, which, in this sense, distinguishes him from the others.

3.3.2. Accumulation of Social Capital

I am going to discuss this part by referring to two aspects of it: prestige and network. Several respondents present these two aspects as the distinctions that MBA offers to them. When I have asked them about the advantages of getting an American MBA degree, Erhan, for instance, has underlined its prestige together with two other advantages: “Thirdly, how can I say, you have a branded diploma in the end, a diploma which you can use while applying for a position and which will seem nice in your *resume*”.⁴³ As a graduate of Harvard Business School, Erhan admits the prestigious status of having a degree from one of the most prominent universities of the world. In terms of having a prestigious diploma, the ranking of the university seems to play an important role. Bora, for instance, who is a graduate of Columbia Business School, underlines that he would not get an MBA degree if he did not get admission from one the few top universities he applied. Those of the informants who got their degrees from the Ivy League schools highlight the importance of having a prestigious diploma.

Those who did not get their degrees from the top ones also underline the distinctive nature of having an American MBA degree. Ahmet even posits this distinction as one of the reasons of his studying MBA: “The MBA was a very prestigious thing, it was a fashion, and I wanted to do it too”.⁴⁴ From his suggestion, it is

⁴³ Üçüncüsü de o da bir şey yani nasıl diyeyim neticede markalı bir diplomanız oluyor. Yani bir işe başvururken falan kullanabileceğiniz, yani resumenizde şık duracak bir şey. Erhan

⁴⁴ MBA o zaman çok havalı bir şeydi, modaydı o zamanlar, ben de yapayım dedim. Ahmet

possible to infer that having an American MBA degree is not as distinctive as it used to be. Efe expresses the same concern:

Maybe as the number increases, for example, 5-10 years ago while the number of MBA holders was quite limited, now the number is much higher. Therefore, maybe, this effect is getting weaker and weaker. You know people say, “I have an MBA too”, maybe it is more frequent now. ... We can say the same thing for the international experience too, because a great number of people have international experience now. It is not much of privilege now; of course, it has some advantages but, especially when you look at our position, a lot of people have MBA and international experience. Definitely it has benefits, but these benefits are on the wane. Compared to the past, I don’t actually know what replaces it.⁴⁵

He relays his concerns regarding the decreasing prestige of having MBA and even international experience. He grounds this assumption on the fact that the number of people having the same degrees is constantly increasing; and, as Bourdieu also suggests, when the rarity of something decreases, its prestige and distinction start to fade away, which eventually leads to new “reconversion strategies”, in Bourdieusian way; that’s, in Efe’s wording, something new and rare replaces the former one.

Another aspect of the social capital accumulated through MBA degrees in the US is related to network. The importance of networking seems to be accepted by all of the respondents as they have all suggested that one of the major issues that can be expected from an MBA degree in the US is the global network it promises. For this reason, business schools want to have an extensive alumni network to attract students. Harvard Business School (HBS) is known to have the largest alumni network expanding all over the world; and the school uses it as a marketing tool for its MBA program. Metin as a member of HBS alumni network highlights its significance:

⁴⁵ Bunun belki de sayı arttıkça yani atıyorum bundan bir 5-10 sene önce MBAlı sayısı çok daha azken şu anda çok daha fazla zaten dolayısıyla bu etki belki de daha da azalıyor gitgide. Hani ne derler aa MBA benim de MBAim var falan oluyor gibi geliyor artık eskiden biraz daha ... Hatta aynı şeyi yurtdışı tecrübesi için de söyleyebiliriz çünkü hemen hemen şimdi birçok kişinin yurtdışı tecrübesi var yani. Çok fazla bir ayrıcalık değil yani, muhakkak getirileri var ama yani özellikle işte bizim pozisyonumuza baktığınız zaman işte hemen hemen doğru kişide bir şekilde MBA olabiliyor, yurtdışı tecrübesi ama muhakkak bir faydası var bu fayda gitgide azalıyor. Eskiye oranla bunun yerini ne alıyor açıkçası onu da bilmiyorum. Efe

I have this, for instance, Harvard *alumni*; and I have also McKinsey *alumni*. I can communicate with a number of Harvard graduates in Nigeria, for instance, about an *opportunity* there by searching both databanks. When an issue comes to me about Turkey, I generally reply them. Even if one of them does not reply, another one definitely does. For instance, a friend of my friend might be from Nigeria. It is a great advantage, global.⁴⁶

This distinction of having a global network, however, causes a disadvantage in terms of local network in Turkey where personal relations, as the informants themselves suggest, characterize Turkey's professional life. Ömer's case underlines the disadvantage of this situation in a very clear manner. Throughout the time he spent in the United States, he was away from the business life of Turkey; and this situation prevents him from accumulation of contacts which seems to be vital for career development in Turkey. Ömer, for instance, suggests that he could find a job by using his old Robert College contacts when he was back from the US. In this sense, the loss of network in Turkey because of being distant is pointed out as a disadvantage that living abroad brings in.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, by starting from their motivations of studying MBA in the United States and continuing to their post-MBA experiences, I have tried to make an analysis along their career paths in a similar manner with the storyline their narratives have. By doing so, I aimed to show that MBA is not a starting and ultimate point in the production of global professionals. Their reasons of getting MBA degrees, their career expectation and desires, and the ideal job profiles in their minds seem to reveal that we are talking about a long process rather than a specific point although we know that MBA programs contain very serious globalizing projects. Their desires, values and

⁴⁶ Yani bende şurda var işte McKinsey...Harvard alumni. Bir de McKinsey alumni var da o yüzden. İkisi...ikisinin veritabanına girip mesela şu an Nijerya'da Harvard mezunu birkaç kişiyle e-maileşip Nijerya'daki bir opportunity hakkında yazışabilirim yani. Genelde bana da geldiğinde Türkiye'yle ilgili bir konu, cevaplarım. Mutlaka biri cevaplarsa biri cevaplar. Benim bir sınıf arkadaşımın arkadaşı Nijerya'dır. Yani o çok büyük bir avantaj, global... Metin

expectations are structured and produced by various mechanisms and institutions such as career days at the universities and the employing companies. Additionally, by discussing the distinctions they present, I have tried to show the close relation between them and the values of the new capitalism while also trying to suggest that the MBA experiences of the respondents cannot be limited to the degree itself. They should be considered and discussed together with their associations such as America and international experience.

CHAPTER IV

BECOMING A “NEOLIBERAL ANTHROPOS”⁴⁷: MBA AS A “LIFE EXPERIENCE”

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will try to scrutinize how the informants present themselves as distinctive individuals in relation to their MBA related experiences. In my analysis, I will be using “neoliberal anthropos”, borrowing from Ong, as a definitive term as there emerges a dominant neoliberal ethos in the way the respondents distinguish themselves; and I will try to trace the role of their MBA and American experience in their positioning Turkey and themselves as an “us” in relation to the USA.

4.2. “Tomorrow’s Turkey (Yarının Türkiye’si)”

As opposed to the Turkish managers in Meltem Yılmaz Şener’s article who define themselves as “world citizens” rather than Turks, several of my respondents have underlined their sense of attachment and responsibility for Turkey (2007: 130). Erhan, for instance, suggests the following regarding his return to Turkey:

It will be a bit cliché but Turkey has given me all the things I have now. How happy am I if I can give something back to Turkey. It is a bit like this, how can I say, it was a part of something very natural; it was not like a decision. We always thought we would go, study for a while, work and then return back to Turkey; and, happily, it happened so. In fact it was not even a decision.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, pg. 140

⁴⁸ Valla bu birazcık geyik olacak da yani bana sahip olduğum her şeyi Türkiye verdi, işte ben de Türkiye’ye geri bir şey verebiliyorsam ne mutlu. Yani o yüzden doğal olarak benim ülkem burası. Birazcık şey gibi nasıl diyeyim o çok doğal bir şeyin parçası gibi geldi aslında karar gibi bile gelmedi. Gitcez işte birkaç sene bir dönem okuyacağız çalışacağız sonra Türkiye’ye geleceğiz diye hep düşünmüştük ve çok şükür bu da gerçekleşti. Aslında o karar bile değildi. Erhan

He highlights a sense of responsibility for the future of Turkey, which stems from an emotional attachment to Turkey. As a result of this attachment, he plans to quit his professional career after working for a certain period of time, and wants to do some public work such as attending think-tanks and spending more time at Turkish Education Foundation of which he is already a member of. He is currently one of the two founders of civic platform called “Tomorrow’s Turkey (Yarının Türkiyesi)” which consists of an e-mail group and a website for the present.

Vedat who is a friend of Erhan is also a member of this civic platform, “Tomorrow’s Turkey”. Vedat describes this group in the following way:

We have some concerns such as how Turkey’s tomorrow should be and so on. We will have some trials to make it have some political aspects. We have some on-going activities oriented to thinking upon the country’s future with the person who has introduced you to me [Erhan]. There we organize some meetings. We are actually talking about a structure consisting of only an e-mail group and website for the present. But what is happening? What are we doing physically? We are making some meetings; we have invited for instance Umut Oran [a politically active businessman], Mahir Kaynak [an author, economist and journalist], Ruşen Çakır [a journalist] and Cüneyt Sel, prior Undersecretary of Treasury, to these meetings.⁴⁹

They plan to expand the activities of this group; and I observe that they are actually doing it. I have become a member of this e-mail group after conducting interviews with Erhan and Vedat. So far, they have developed the content of the website to a great extent; and the frequency of the e-mails has increased. In these e-mails, they mostly share the media news that they find interesting, and sometimes send comments about them. The website of the group is quite interesting. Apart from news bulletins, there is a part titled “Who are We? (Biz Kimiz?)” and another one, “Manifesto”, through which

⁴⁹ Biz işte Türkiye’nin yarımı ne olmalıdır gibi bazı işte birtakım dertlerimiz var. İşte bunun siyasi birtakım taraflarının olması için birtakım çabalarımız olacak. İşte sizinle beni tanıştıran kişiyle de ortaklaşa yürüttüğümüz bazı işler var bu ülkenin geleceğine kafa yormaya yönelik. Orda birtakım toplantılar düzenliyoruz. Şu an için bir mail grubu ve bir websitesinden oluşan bir yapıdan bahsediyoruz aslında. Ama ne oluyor şöyle şeyler oluyor fiziki olarak ne yapıyoruz? Birtakım toplantılar yapıyoruz, o toplantılarda ne bileym işte oraya Umut Oranı çağırdık, Mahir Kaynakı çağırdık, Ruşen Çakırını çağırdık, işte Cüneyt Sel, eski hazine müsteşarı, onu çağırdık falan filan. Vedat

they relay their major targets and ideology. I would like give a few quotes from this website.

In “Who are We?” part, they define themselves in the following way:

We are more than 100 people having opinions and suggestions for Turkey. Since 29 May 2009, we think, speak and correspond for Turkey. Both we are very different from each other, and we have a common ideal that brings us together. Yes, we are different from each other. We live in Istanbul, Chicago, Dubai, Tokyo, Bursa, briefly in far and wide of both Turkey and the world. Some of us are entrepreneurs, some are professionals, some are academics and some are bureaucrats. Our age is generally around 25-40 although there are those of us who are younger and more experienced. We have joined Tomorrow’s Turkey through various ways—sometimes a friend’s advice, sometimes a *forwarded* interesting essay, and sometimes a round-table meeting; but we have a common ideal bringing us together: Tomorrow’s Turkey’s becoming a richer, freer and stronger country.⁵⁰

As seen in the quotation above, they underline their youth, and the civic nature and everyday-ness of their activities. They try to instill their concern for the future of Turkey in their modest activities by producing some kind of awareness, discussion arena, and social consciousness and responsibility.

In their “Manifesto”, they address themselves as the actors who can realize the ideal Turkey, and below is the profile of these actors:

Who will realize the ideal of freer and stronger Turkey? [...] We think that the educated human resource of Turkey – especially those below 40 years of age—is capable of realizing this goal. We believe that a Turkey-centric and solution oriented transformation that entrepreneurs, professionals, academics and public officers having both global level knowledge and love of country will put forward will contribute a lot to the construction of Tomorrow’s Turkey.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Biz, Türkiye için fikri, görüşü, önerisi olan 100’un üzerinde kişiyiz. 29 Mayıs 2006’dan beri çoğalarak Yarının Türkiye’si için düşünüyor, konuşuyor, yazıyoruz. Hem birbirimizden çok farklıyız, hem hepimizi buluşturan ortak bir idealimiz var. Evet, birbirimizden farklıyız. İstanbul’da, Chicago’da, Dubai’de, Tokyo’da, Bursa’da, kısaca Türkiye ve dünyanın dört yanında yaşıyoruz. Kimimiz girişimci, kimimiz profesyonel, kimimiz akademisyen, kimimiz bürokrat. Yaşlarımız genellikle 25-40 arası, daha gençlerimiz ve daha tecrübelilerimiz de var elbette. Yarının Türkiye’si’ne çeşitli yollarla katıldık – bazen bir arkadaş tavsiyesi, bazan forward edilmiş ilginç bir yazı, bazan bir yuvarlak masa toplantısı. Ama hepimizi buluşturan ortak bir idealimiz var: Yarının Türkiye’si’nin daha zengin, daha hür ve daha güçlü bir ülke olması. <http://www.yarinenturkiyesi.org/biz-kimiz/>

⁵¹ Peki, bu daha zengin, daha hür ve daha güçlü bir Türkiye idealini kim gerçekleştirecek? ... Biz, Türkiye’nin yetmişmiş insan kaynağının –özellikle de 40 yaş altı kitlenin- bu hedefi gerçekleştirmeye muktedir olduğunu düşünüyoruz. Hem küresel kalitede bilgiye hem de ülke sevgisine sahip olan girişimcilerin, profesyonellerin, akademisyenlerin ve kamu görevlilerinin ortaya koyacakları insan odaklı, Türkiye eksenli ve çözüm merkezli bir dönüşümün Yarının Türkiye’si’nin inşasına büyük katkıda bulunacağına inanıyoruz. <http://www.yarinenturkiyesi.org/biz-kimiz/>

The actors who can realize the ideal Turkey are defined as people having diverse occupations such as entrepreneurs, professionals, academics and public officers. However, in this occupational diversity, there are two common features required: having global level knowledge and love of country. The profile is young, high-educated patriots who have the energy and motivation to contribute to the development of Turkey and become a globally competing and integrated country having a strong economy and libertarian values.

Their emotional attachment to Turkey and sense of responsibility for its development infer nationalism which seems to be incompatible with globalization and being a global professional at first sight as, for instance, Meltem Yılmaz Şener's article demonstrates "the weakening of bonds that rest on being the citizens of a particular nation-state, while bonds resting on being the members of a transnational class strengthen" (2007: 141). In her article, the respondents define themselves as world citizens rather than Turks. In my interviews, although I did not ask anything about Turkey or their sense of citizenship, several of them emphasized their attachment to Turkey and none of them mentioned anything about world citizenship or their weakening bonds with Turkey. At this point, it becomes necessary to ask whether nationalism and globalization are that much incompatible. Regarding this issue, "Yarının Türkiye'si" suggests "global nationalism" as one of their five principles; and defines it in the following way: "We aim to synthesize global level knowledge with Turkey's practical realities with sense of responsibility felt only for Turkey".⁵² That's, it suggests the integration of the both which aims to strengthen the position of Turkey in the global scale by applying global standards to local context.

⁵² Küresel kalitede bilgiyi Türkiye'nin pratik gerçekleriyle sentezlemeyi ve bunu yalnız Türkiye'ye karşı hissedilen bir sorumlulukla yapmayı amaçlıyoruz. <http://www.yarinenturkiyesi.org/biz-kimiz/>

In addition to the tension/integration between nationalism and globalization, another question might be asked whether we can talk about the presence of high-educated young professionals as “the developmentalist elites” in Nilufer Göle’s wording (1986). She points out the change in social and political roles of the engineers with the military coup of 1980, and discusses the transition from their being “pioneering revolutionists” to “developmentalist elites”. By following Göle’s argumentation, can we talk about a new “historical movement” (1986: 144), similar with the movement of revolutionist engineers before 1980, that is characterized with the presence of a high-educated professional elites who are responsible for leading the social change with civic initiatives and by advocating global nationalism? These questions might be posited for a further research in a different arena.

In the following part of this thesis, I will try to take a closer look at the dynamics of this responsibility and attachment by getting into how they position themselves and Turkey through a neoliberal ethos and rhetoric in relation to their experience of the USA and MBA.

4.3. “Looking from Outside” and Neoliberal Ethos

In the interviews, when I asked the respondents if they had gone into any great transformation, in broad sense, as a result of their MBA degrees as promised on the websites of several business schools, many of the respondents highlighted that they had experienced some significant changes in their life perspectives besides those at professional level, and emphasized another side of the “vision” reflecting neoliberal values. Although it is not quite possible to ground this accumulation solely on their MBA experience, they attribute this change to the period they acquired their degrees, even if not specifically to MBA.

In depicting these changes, many of the respondents have emphasized the role of living abroad, especially in the US, as it has given them the chance and “ability” to look at Turkey from outside in a more “objective” way. Erhan’s following account is exemplary:

It was an advantage to be able to look at Turkey from outside. It was interesting to have the opportunity to make a comparison and to see where Turkey stands in a general whole. In Turkey, everything is so *Turkey-centric*; of course Turkey is an important country but you clearly see that world is not rotating around Turkey. Secondly, Iraq war happened while I was there, and it was interesting to observe the reactions of American society, the starting process of the war and the post-war process.⁵³

The chance of observing Turkey from another country, Erhan suggests, has enabled him to position Turkey in the bigger picture by going beyond, in his wording, a “Turkey-centric” perspective, which, in a way, broadens his “vision”. Ahmet, as another example, presents himself as a distinctive individual for the very same reason by attributing it to his life experience in the US:

There are great distinctions brought by having gone to the US. I think the greatest distinction is this: the ability to look at your own culture from outside by going to a foreign culture. It is impossible for people to understand this. You can look at you religion, culture and personal relations from a western framework. What I have done, and what people can do. [...] There you de-familiarize Turkey. It is a very different thing. I am not talking about knowing and seeing that country; to know it, to share daily life with people there, to buy a car there and etc. You know a culture, then you compare it with your own culture, and you happen to know yourself better. It is an important thing.⁵⁴

⁵³ Türkiye’ye dışardan bakabilmek bir avantajdı. Mukayese imkanı hem genel bir bütünde Türkiye nereye oturduğunu görmek açısından ilginçti yani Türkiye’de her şey çok Türkiye-centrictir ya yani o kadar da Türkiye yani önemli bir ülke tabii de dünya o kadar da Türkiye’nin etrafında dönmüyor onu net bir şekilde görüyorsunuz. İkincisi orda bilhassa ben ordayken Irak savaşı oldu ve Amerikan toplumunun ona tepkileri, o savaşa gidiş süreci, savaş sonrası dönem falan onu gözlemlemek çok enteresan oldu. Erhan

⁵⁴ Amerika’ya gitmiş olmanın getirdiği çok büyük farklılıklar var. Bence en büyük farklılık şu: Bir yabancı kültüre gidip kendi kültürünüze dışarıdan bakabiliyor olmanın getirdiği muhteşem bir şey var. Bunu insanların anlaması mümkün değil. Yani siz dininize, kültürünüze, özel ilişkilerinize dışarıdan, batı çerçevesinden bakabiliyorsunuz. Ben ne yapmışım, bak insanlar neler yapabiliyorlar ... Ordayken Türkiye’yi yabancılaştırıyorsunuz kendi gözünüzde. Bu çok farklı bir şey. ... O ülkeyi tanımak ve görmekten bahsetmiyorum; tanımak, ordaki insanlarla günlük yaşamı paylaşabilmek, araba almak vesaire. Bir kültürü tanıyorsunuz, sonra kendi kültürünüzle karşılaştırıyorsunuz ve kendinizi daha iyi tanımlıyorsunuz, önemli bir şey. Ahmet

Ahmet, like many other respondents, highlights how different and distinct the chance of looking at Turkey from the US as it, he suggests, gives him the ability to interpret Turkey and himself, in a way, objectively and critically; and he posits the international life experience as the requisite of this ability and places it at such a distinctive position that he otherizes those who have not acquired that experience. Ömer, in a similar way, expresses how different his views and way of thinking are, as a result of USA experience, that he cannot communicate with many people around him because of their lack of that specific experience and critical distance. For instance, regarding his political views he suggests:

Especially about political issues, I can *communicate* with my friends that I went to the US together much more easily. I cannot *communicate* many things to many of those having stayed here. We cannot even arrive at the same communication platform with them. Most probably you feel so while I am telling; but it is hard for you to understand without living there. When you go there, you gain the things of looking from outside.⁵⁵

As seen in the account above, Ömer expressly distinguishes himself in terms of his comprehension of Turkey, politics and life in general by attributing his views to his American experience. His neoliberal experience makes him have a partly English and neoliberal language which makes harder and almost impossible for him to “communicate” with his “others”. He explicitly draws the borders of his “others” according to the lack or presence of experience of America as it is seen in that he otherizes me as I have not lived in the US although we have remarkable commonalities in sharing that neoliberal language.

However, it should be noted that the American experience they have persistently underlined does not refer to a living experience necessarily in the US. What they mean

⁵⁵ Özellikle politik konularda, Amerika’ya beraber gittiğim arkadaşlarımla çok daha rahat communicate edebiliyorum. Burda kalanların çoğuna birçok şeyi communicate edemiyorum. Onlarla aynı iletişim platformuna gelemiyoruz bile. Muhtemelen belki sen de öyle hissediyorsundur ben anlatırken. Ama gidip orda yaşamadan anlamamız zor. oraya gidince çünkü dışarıdan bakmanın şeyini kazanıyor insan. Ömer

is another side of the international experience whose professional side has been examined in the first chapter. The international experience which broadens their professional vision now does the same thing for their life “vision”. In that sense, as they distinguish themselves from those who do not have international living experience, the Americans who do not have the same experience are also otherized. Vedat, for instance, suggests the following words regarding his friendships in the US:

Almost all of those with whom I have a friendship in the US and still I somehow keep in touch via MSN or stuff are Americans who have lived outside of the US. You cannot have much communication with those born and raised Americans who have not gone outside of their country.⁵⁶

He elaborates upon his point with some exemplary situations he has experienced to illustrate how they are unaware of the political conjuncture of the world, how they see the eastern countries unsafe in a generalizing way, and how they live in their small worlds and think accordingly. In this way, as has been pointed out before, they present their American experience as a distinctive quality since it has equipped them with a broad international “vision”. This broad international vision has been posited by many respondents as a source of their distinctive ability to comprehend Turkey, politics and life in general. Now, I will try to take a closer look at the various dimensions of the distinctions that they associate with their American and MBA experience. In this analysis, production of “neoliberal anthropos” and liberal values will be quite elucidative.

In the first chapter, it has been discussed how the respondents position Turkey’s business life on a development path at whose ultimate point they place the USA. In a similar way, as they embrace the western model of cultural development, they almost measure Turkey’s socio-economic and political position by setting the US as the unit of

⁵⁶ Benim Amerikada arkadaşlığımın olduğu ve hala bir şekilde yazıştığım görüştüğüm işte msnde orda burda denk geldiğim insanların neredeyse hepsi Amerika dışında yaşamış Amerikalılardır. Öyle yani pure böyle doğma büyüme Amerikanın dışına hiç çıkmamış insanlarla çok fazla muhabbetiniz olamıyor.

measure. In this sense, just as they have done in terms of business life in the previous chapter, they posit the USA as the ultimate point to be led to and target to reach.

Vedat, for instance, underlines the technological deficiencies of Turkey compared to that of the USA. He emphasizes his disappointment with the speed of the internet in Turkey after his return from the USA:

When I have returned back, I have specifically checked the internet and seen that I used there 8 MB but I was not aware of it. When I am back, people have told me to buy ADSL [a brand of internet connection] immediately. I bought it; it didn't work! Such a bad feeling! I asked myself how much my connection speed had been there; I had not wondered it there at all. I checked; as it was 8 MB, how nice it was to watch everything online, watch TV online, and other things. Here we came to 1 MB, I could not watch anything. Now, thank God, we have 4 MB and we can at least watch some stuff; but still it is not at the quality of 2006 when I left, very sad.⁵⁷

As a result of his living experience in the US, he compares the technology level in Turkey with that of the USA; and he feels sorry for Turkey's being behind on the technology path. In the following account of Vedat, the development path on which Turkey is supposed to proceed is seen more clearly:

We say that, let's do these things faster. When the others do them faster, and you run more slowly, unfortunately some of them start to do...for example; India does not become India in vain. Between India and the USA, there are cables of thousands of miles under the water. They move their call centers there. You call a bank from the USA and an Indian answers you back as welcome. This goes on via those cables. There are 15-20 cables, to cable one of them costs 200-300 million dollars. They have 15 of those; you have just one. You should get integrated with the world; and you should do other things for this.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ben özellikle oradan buraya döndüğümde interneti araştırdım, baktım, orda ben 8 mb kullanıyormuşum ama haberim yoktu Ordan buraya döndüğümünden dediler ki abi işte hemen adsl al. Gittik aldık alet çalışmıyor tamam mı? (gülüyor) O kadar kötü bir duygu ki yani, ulan dedim ya benim ordaki şey kaçmış acaba yani hiç ordayken merak etmemiştim. Ordaki hızım kaçmış benim ya falan dedim. Girdim 8 mb kullandığımdan. Ne güzel her şeyi böyle internetten izliyorsun, televizyon izleyeceksen televizyon izliyorsun, bilmem ne yapacaksan bilmem ne yapıyorsun. Burda bir mb'e geldik ben dizileri izleyemez oldum.. Şimdi hızımız 4 mb allaha şükür de bir şeyler izliyoruz ama hala hani 2006'da bıraktığım şeyde değil, kalitede değil iş. Üzücü yani. Vedat

⁵⁸ Biz işte diyoruz ki bunları daha hızlı yapalım, zaten başkaları daha hızlı yapınca sen daha yavaş koştuğun zaman eee içinde bulunduğumuz düzende malesef birileri şey yapmaya başlıyor. Ne bileyim Hindistan durduk yere Hindistan olmuyor. Hindistan'la Amerika arasında suyun altından binlerce mil giden kablolar var. Adam call-centeri oraya taşıyor mesela. Ben...Amerikadan telefon açılıyorsun, bilmem ne bankasına hoş geldiniz. Hindistandaki vatandaş telefonu açıyor konuşuyor. E bu o kablolar üzerinden yürüyor gidiyor. E bundan var 15 tane 20 tane bu kablolardan var yani tanesini bunun çekmek 200-300 milyon dolar tutuyor. E bundan 15 tane var herifte sende bir tane var. Sen dünyayla entegre olmalısın, e bunun için de daha başka bir şeyler yapmalısın. Vedat

Vedat posits integration with the world as a preferential necessity and goal for Turkey to fulfill; and he, in a similar way, positions Turkey on a competition line where she should compete with the global actors, the USA being the leading one. While proceeding on this line, Turkey is supposed to experience the same stages that the USA has already undergone since, as has been suggested before, a particular developmentalist model is adopted which is assumed to be the ultimate and inevitable path. Turkey's getting behind of the US on this path creates an impression on Vedat as if there were a time lag between the two countries. He suggests that, in the US, he has had a better communication with the people older than him:

There you share more commonalities with those at the age of 40 *plus*. For example, you talk about U2 [a musical band of 1980s], you cannot talk about U2 with everyone. These things, you know, in our lives the concept of cassette tapes is an important thing for us. I am sure you remember them laughingly. Our lives passed the stages of, for example, exchanging cassettes, recording them and so on. It was "wow, cassettes of 90 have been released!" and stuff. Regarding the songs that I listened, it has been so long since they consumed them that those who remember them are 10 years older than me.⁵⁹

The similar time lag impression is also apparent in his visualization of Turkey's future; and this visualization is shaped by the current cultural picture of the USA. He considers the future he foresees as the sole option, and he feels apprehension for the coming risks and threats that he has seen in today's US as he highly assumes that the present America represents the tomorrow's Turkey together with its advantages and disadvantages:

For instance, that I don't have any idea about some issues has scared me. I have said if I see this now, it means my children will have this problem in Turkey in a very short time. Among these, the one that has scared me most and about which I still don't know what to do is drug issue. [...] I do not have any about it. Does somebody use it or not? I don't know how this is noticed either; but there it is an issue even in upper secondary school. [...] For example there is a *zone* called *free*

⁵⁹ Ve şey var hakikaten böyle 40 plus adamlarla daha fazla ortak paydan çıkıyor. Mesela işte U2 muhabbeti yapıyorsun U2 muhabbetini herkesle yapamıyorsun. Bunlar biraz ne bileyim bizim hayatımızda kaset kavramı bizim açımızdan çok önemli bir şeydir. Senin çok gülerek andığın şeyler eminim. İşte kaset doldurma birbirinden kaset değiştirme falan filan gibi evrelerden geçti bizim hayatımız. Vay abi 90lık kaset çıkmış vay süper falan. Ya onların içinde dinlediğim müziklerle ilgili olarak da orası o kadar çok olmuş ki onları tüketeli onları hatırlayan insanlar benden 10 yaş büyük insanlar. Vedat

zone, and awareness has been aroused about it there. [...] We don't have such a problem here. Maybe we do, but I don't know about it. [...] There I saw what kind of issues our children might find themselves in. In the end...this...as I have said, I have never had such concerns; I don't know how these things are diagnosed, and I don't know how to *deal* with them. However, I am sure that these things will be somewhere in our lives sometime. You know people say that in our times there used to be and stuff; and I am sure that we will get into these things and will say we didn't have these problems and ask why we have them now. To see these things is thought-provoking and actually a bit dreadful.⁶⁰

His living experience in the US enables him to see the threats and problems of the American society presently lives; and the broader vision he has gained through this experience increases his awareness of Turkey's development and future. His awareness of coming risks and threats causes anxiety in him as he feels he is unprepared for these risks one of which, he underlines, is drug issue. He unquestioningly assumes that this issue will be one of the major problems of Turkey as it is presently a very serious issue in American society and Turkey proceeds on the same path. Vedat distinguishes himself through his awareness of possible changes and the path that Turkey is proceeding on. Now I will be looking at the various dimensions of this distinctive awareness coming from their MBA experience in the US. These dimensions are very much connected with neoliberal rhetoric and "neoliberal ethos", which supports the argument that, as Aihwa Ong suggests, "American business schools are most clearly designed to promote a set of American market values, thus shaping the constitution of a particular kind of educated and enterprising subject" whom, she calls, "the neoliberal anthropos" (2006: 148).

⁶⁰ Mesela bazı şeyler hakkında fikrimin olmaması beni korkuttu. Mesela dedim ki bugün ben bunu görüyorsam demek ki benim çocuklarımın da Türkiye'deki derdi bu olacak yakında. Bunlardan beni en fazla ürküten ve hala ne yapacağımı bilmediğim konu drug konusudur. ... Ya ben bunlarla ilgili en ufak bir fikre sahip değilim. Birisi bunu kullanıyor mu kullanmıyor mu? Bu nasıl anlaşılır bunların da bilmem. Fakat orda orta okula kadar gelmiş bir konudur bu. ... Drug free zone diye bir zone var mesela, onunla ilgili olarak orda bir awareness yaratılmış durumda. ... Bizim böyle bir derdimiz yok. Yani belki var benim haberim yok, onu da bilmiyorum. ... yani bizim çocuklarımızın ne tip konular içinde olabileceklerini gördüm, bizim Yani nihayetinde...bu... yani dediğim gibi mesela bu tarz dertlere düşünmedim ben hiç ve bunlar nasıl teşhis edilir ve bunlarla nasıl deal edilir onları da bilmiyorum. Ama eminim ki bir yerlerde bir zaman bizlerin hayatında bir yerlerde olacak bunlar. Ve hani herkes geriye dönüp bizim zamanımızda falan filan muhabbeti yapar ya eminim biz de orda bir yerlere gireceğiz ve diyeceğiz ki ulan bizim böyle dertlerimiz yoktu şimdi niye böyle dertler var. Onları görmek biraz da düşündürücü ve aslında biraz da ürkütücü. Vedat

4.4. “Cultural Tolerance”

Several respondents specifically use the concept of “cultural tolerance” which, they suggest, has increased as a result of their intense international interaction. Salih, for instance, suggests that he has increased his “cultural tolerance” as a result of his living experience in the US although he does not deny the role of the international environment in the MBA program: “Thanks to it, I can understand various cultures; and I have the chance of looking at the Turkish culture from a distance. By *interacting* with different nationalities, I am becoming a person having an increased cultural tolerance and adaptability in various countries”.⁶¹

In a corresponding way, Vedat contends that he has become more tolerant against social and cultural differences, which he correlates with his American experience:

In America, I liked this very much: I learned to listen to people without sticking to their tone of voice. For example, we don't pay attention to the speeches of people having broken accents. If someone's accent is broken, s/he is thought to be either uneducated or uncultivated etc. I learned to respect people who try to say very beautiful things with broken English; and I am trying to do this in Turkey too. I try to understand, with a great tolerance, what those people with broken accents want to say by thinking s/he did not actually want to say but she might have wanted to say this and so on. As we are trying to establish a Turkey wide network, we meet various kinds of people. Compared to the past, I think that I have more tolerance in terms of those people's problems, concerns, and the way they think. If you ask what America contributed to you, it has made me a more tolerant person.⁶²

⁶¹ Çok farklı kültürleri anlayabiliyorum o sayede türk kültürüne dışarıdan bakma şansım oluyor başka ülkelerde daha çabuk adapte olabileceğim kültürel toleransı artmış bir insan oluyorum daha farklı milletlerle interact ede ede. Salih

⁶² Şeyi çok sevdim ben Amerika'da insanların ses tonlarına takılmadan ne dediklerini dinlemeyi öğrendim. Biz genellikle mesela bozuk bir lehçeyle konuşan insanın ne dediğine çok dikkat etmeyiz. Lehçesi bozuksa adam ya eğitimsizdir, ya kültürsüzdür, ya bilmem nedir...Ama çok bozuk bir İngilizceyle çok güzel şeyler anlatmaya çalışan insanlara saygı göstermeyi öğrendim. Ve kendim Türkiye'de de bunu şu an çok yapıyorum. Bozuk aksanlı insanların ben kendimce çok büyük bir toleransla hakikaten ne demek istediklerini ve aslında kullandığı kelimenin, ya bunu demek istemedi aslında ama şunu demek istemiş olabilir-i çok fazla yaşıyorum. Özellikle de Türkiye çapında şebeke kurmaya çalıştığımız için binbir türlü insanla karşılaşıyoruz. O insanların dertlerini tasalarını ve neye nasıl baktıklarına dair çok daha fazla toleransım olduğunu düşünüyorum eskisine göre. Amerika sana ne kattı dersiniz bence beni çok daha toleranslı bir insan haline getirdi. Vedat

As seen in the quotation above, Vedat highlights his post-MBA/America transformations towards a more egalitarian approach although the concept of “tolerance” involves connotations of hierarchy in itself. It is possible to see the same comparative approach between the US and Turkey which has been discussed before. As a result of his American experience, He suggests that he has learnt to be more “tolerant” against people coming from different backgrounds and socializations that are, he suggests, considered to be inferior by the majority of people in Turkey. In that sense, he distinguishes himself from the majority with the radical changes that his living experience in the US has created in him; and he, in a way, sees his others, the general Turkey, as intolerant and prejudiced against the cultural differences, and thus backward on the development path according to the liberal values for which the US is assumed to carry the banner.

In Vedat’s account, the rationality factor that has been discussed in the first chapter emerges once again, this time, as the ground of “cultural tolerance” he has gained in the US. The American rationality which Turkey lacks generates a space where, contrary to Turkey, “everything goes smooth”:

I saw how everything goes smooth when people can think rationally with some criteria. I saw how beautiful things can happen where our, in Turkey, nonsense criteria sets regarding your religious background, cultural background can ground on a rational basis there. [...] For instance, we, for years, have been parroting that secularism is like this, head cover is like that, these are masons, those are religious, there are racists and so on; and there I saw that the world is at such a good point in a completely different ground. I saw that how much respect a Jewish that does not come to work on Fridays because of his belief and in return works *fulltime* on Sundays with that stuff they wear on their heads can get. I saw how invaluable his contributions to life are and indeed how invaluable he is, and saw that he has a right to demand a *space* in return of this. That’s why, I saw how artificial and nonsense our struggles are.⁶³

⁶³ İşlerin aslında kayırma ve eee insanların rasyonel olarak belli birtakım kriterlerle düşündüğü evrede işlerin aslından ne kadar yolunda gidebildiğini gördüm. Yani somut bir şekilde işte senin dini geçmişin, kültürel geçmişin ne bileyim bizim saçmasapan kriter setimizin türkiyedeki onların böyle akılla rasyonellikle bir zemine oturduğu yerde ne kadar güzel şeyler olabildiğini gördüm. ... Yani mesela biz yıllardı takılmış plak gibi tartıştığımız şeyler laiklik şöyledir, başörtüsü böyledir, işte yani şunlar masondur, bunlar fasondur, onlar dincidir, bunlar bilmem necidir, bunlar kafatascıdır falan filan derken aslında dünyanın bambaşka bir zeminde ne kadar güzel bir noktada olabildiğini gördüm. Yani adamın

Vedat's above depiction of his transformational experience clearly reveals the cultural hierarchy that he constructs between the US and Turkey; and he considers that on the basis of American social superiority there lies rationality through which he attempts to explain how nonsense some issues in Turkey's present agenda are while, he suggests, they do not cause any problems and dispute in the US. In his accounts, Turkey is portrayed as a country of long-discussed irrationalities and nonsense problems while the US is depicted as a land of rationality in an idealized way. According to Vedat's approach, the value and right to demand a space can be measured with the level of integration with the capitalist value system and the contribution made to it. Vedat, just as the American rationality requires, does not see any reason not to respect a Jewish guy who demands free Fridays for his religious practices in return for high dedication to work full-time on Sundays. In the above quotation, it is possible to see his epiphany-like and transformational recognition of the market rationality which posits to be "tolerant" against the differences that are integrated or have the potential of being integrated into the system.

Vedat, after depicting how he has experienced the above discussed issues and recognized the irrationality of the current debates in Turkey, suggests the following account by suggesting the same rationality for the issues in Turkey:

Compared to when I left Turkey, I was thinking more strongly that head cover should be allowed at the universities when I was back, because it is certain that we cannot gain that girl by pushing her out of the system as she has head cover. If you get her within the system, you may make her think in a different perspective or enable her to establish the life she wants. [There] A great number of Indians, Iranians, Chinese and Jewish that visualize the lives they wish for live as they want. An Indian coming to work with sandals is a part of your extremely important

bilmem kafasındaki zamazingosu neyse o musevilerin kullandığı, o zamazingoyu takip ondan sonra da mesela Cuma günleri adamın kendi inancından dolayı işe gelmediği ama gelip ona karşılık Pazar günleri fulltime çalıştığı bir adamın mesela herkes tarafından ne kadar büyük saygı görebildiğini ve yaptığı işin beyninin ve o adamın hayata kattıklarının ne kadarlı değer olduğunu ve aslında onun ne kadar değerli olduğunu ve bunun karşılığında da adamın kendisine o space'i talep etme hakkının olduğunu gördüm. O yüzden bizim uğraştığımız verdiğimiz kavgaların ne kadar suni ne kadar saçma olduğunu gördüm. Vedat

work; and his wearing sandals does not matter at all. It does not matter at all. These things and the nonsense walls we build are such nonsense and *totally bullshit* stories that you cannot believe. As I said, let that person go to school, let her go to school. Let her become a, for example, computer engineer, let her write codes; or let her sell something. What do you prevent her from education? It drives me crazy! When I am back, this is one of the issues that I am obsessed with the most.⁶⁴

As seen in the quotation above, Vedat suggests that his experience in the US has strengthened his views that promote headscarf freedom in the universities; and his major motivation for this change is closely related with the market rationality having been discussed above. He supports his tolerating views with the argument that tolerating that particular difference is the only way to integrate them with the system; in this way they can have a profession and become a part of the market while it might also create the possibility of changing their views.

The rational thinking which Vedat suggests he has gained through his American experience enables him to interact with people based on “objective criteria” instead of personal and social prejudices, which is, he assumes, “wrong” according to that rationality. He emerges as a “neoliberal subject” who is rational, culturally “tolerant” and sorry for the backwardness of his own country lacking these values. In this superior position, he distinguishes himself through his awareness and ability to find the rational. Presentation of this awareness as a distinctive transformation reflects a kind of self-consciousness which plays an important role in constructing and presenting their distinctions.

⁶⁴ Yani mesela yani başörtüsü tartışmasında türkiyeden gittiğimden çok daha fazla bir şekilde başörtüsü üniversitede olmalıdır diyerek döndüm. Çünkü o kızın başörtüsü var diye o kızı sistemin dışına itmekle o kızı kazanamacağınız kesin, sistemin içine alırsanız belki onun daha farklı bir bakış açısıyla düşünmesini sağlayabilirsiniz veya kendi istediği hayatı kurmasını sağlayabilirsiniz. Bu kendi istediği hayatı kurgulayan bir sürü Hintli bir sürü İranlı bir sürü Çinli bir sürü Musevi bu hayatları istedikleri gibi yaşıyorlar. Yani iş yerine terlikle gelen bir Hintli sizin acayip kritik bir işinizin çok önemli bir parçası ve inanın bana terlik giymesinin hiçbir önemi yok. Hiçbir önemi yok. Ve bunlar ne kadar böyle saçmasapan totally bullshit hikayeler inanamazsınız yani bizim yaşadığımız o saçmasapan duvarlar...yani dediğim gibi ya o kişi gitsin okusun, bırak okusun yani. Ne bileyim gitsin bilgisayar mühendisi olsun kod yazsın. Bir mal alsın satsın yani niye okumasına engel oluyorsun yani bu beni çıldırtıyor abi şu an geri döndüğümde yani en fazla takıldığım konulardan biri o oldu. Vedat

4.5. Self-Consciousness and Exceptional Moments

In the above part of the chapter, I have tried to discuss the cultural flexibility and tolerance that have been underlined as a personal transformation associated with the US experience by several of the respondents. In this part of the chapter, I will try to discuss some exceptional concerns and moments that have emerged in the narratives. These exceptional moments will appear as almost contradictions in the accounts of the respondents who have been portrayed as “flexible” and neoliberal professionals so far.

The narratives of several respondents contain some rehearsed self definitions and categorizations which might be indication of both previous self-investigations and rehearsed narratives as I have suggested in the methodology. As I have interviewed each informant for once, it is not quite possible for me to decide between the two; however, I will try to give some exemplary accounts which reflect a remarkable kind of self-consciousness. For a clearer reflection of the self-consciousness I have mentioned, I would like to quote from Ahmet’s account regarding the transformation he has undergone throughout his life experience in the US:

When you return, you clearly see the differences. [...] You take their good features; and these are generally logic; they are more logical, western culture. It changes your life perspective. Your relations with your friends lacking it change. You become more selective. Of course, you proceed in terms of culture too. You become more elitist. [...] Even if you are brought up by a liberal family, your values become more liberal there. You find Turkey conservative. You have libertarian views. You, of course, believe in capitalist order. I am more liberal compared to people in general; gay rights, women rights, minority rights. This is completely related to the differences you have seen in a foreign country.⁶⁵

Ahmet almost lists the transformations he has experienced with categories and adjectives. He calls himself liberal and attaches all other related features that a liberal

⁶⁵ Döndüğünüzde farklılıkları çok net görüyorsunuz. ... Onların iyi özelliklerini alıyorsunuz ki o genelde mantıktır, onlar daha mantıklıdır, batı kültürü. Hayata bakış açınızı değiştiriyor. Ona sahip olmayan arkadaşlarınızla ilişkileriniz değişiyor. Daha seçici oluyorsunuz. Tabi ki kültür olarak da ilerliyorsunuz. Daha elitist oluyorsunuz.... Siz liberal bir ailede yetişmiş olsanız bile orada değer yargılarınız daha da liberal oluyor. Türkiye’yi muhafazakar buluyorsunuz. Özgürlükçü görüşlere sahipsiniz. Kapitalist düzene tabi ki inanıyorsunuz. Gay hakları, kadın hakları, azınlık hakları insanların geneline göre daha liberalim. O tamamen başka ülkede gördüğünüz farklılıklarla ilgili. Ahmet

might have to his character such as being “libertarian”, and “capitalist”. He gives a very a structured, organized and categorized definition of a neoliberal subject. He is equipped with the neoliberal rhetoric; he knows the values and language of neoliberalism and a neoliberal subject. With his high self-consciousness, he associates his accumulations and himself with this neoliberal rhetoric and values. In this way, while depicting the transformations he has experienced, he almost gives a definition of “neoliberal anthropos”, thus himself. .

Another point that attracts attention in the quotation is that Ahmet uses the second-person singular subject pronoun with simple present tense while portraying himself, which creates cause and effect relation in the meaning that every person experiences the same process under the same conditions. He connotes that he almost inevitably has become, for instance, more libertarian and liberal because of his living and MBA experience in the US; he sees it as a natural process. This attitude of Ahmet’s is quite similar with the issue of path-dependence that has been discussed in the previous chapter regarding their career choices. Just like, for instance, Metin who has depicted his career decisions with the same subject and tense structure, Ahmet uses the same grammatical structure to portray the personal transformations he has experienced.

At some points of the narratives, there emerge some moments where the informants have questioned and created moments of crack within the internalized nature of “flexibility” and neoliberal subjection. Erhan, for instance, highlights the change in his personal priorities as a result of the tension between family and work while working in the US. After his graduation from Harvard Business School, he started to work as a consultant at a company which is known to be one of the major representatives of American working life. In this position, he worked for short-term projects in various parts of the USA, which required him to travel a lot; and he was away from his family

for four days per week. Although Erhan was initially content with this situation as it was not a routine work and enabled him to gain experience in various fields, he suggests that his priorities started to change after his child was born:

It was an interesting place. The first two and even two and a half years was both pleasant and instructive, going to different companies and so on. It was very exciting to work in a company for 3 months, and then, in another company for 3 months; but after 2 years, it started to become tiring because you constantly travel. Then, my routine was to go to New York with the plane of 6:30 or 7 am on Monday mornings, to stay there until Thursday night by working very hard for 3-4 days, and to return home on Thursday evening. I was away from home for 4 days. And constant travel, think about it [...] After our baby was born, this thing, to stay away from home, we said, what are we doing and stuff. Both the tiring nature of the work and the dramatic change of my personal priorities made there unpleasant for me.⁶⁶

Although he was initially content with the “flexible” nature of his job, he started to prioritize other issues which eventually made him quit his job. His promotion of flexible and changing work setting, which constitute the principles of flexible institutional model, seems to contradict with his attachment to his family and need for longterm relationships.

As another example for moments of crack, Bora feels discontentment with the idea of total attachment to the expected practices of the social group he belongs to:

You eat at the Kitchennette because your friends are there. You prefer specific places if you go out at nights, your children have to go to specific schools, you have to buy your clothes from specific stores, I mean, and individuality vanishes. There is a life style that you are expected to obey, because you are you are a member of a specific socio-economic group. I see myself in this as well. I, for instance, living alone everywhere, I moved many times and there was nothing around me. That's why I am receptive to trials, I go there, I enter that place, I leave another, I mean, my notion is rather limited. [...] The class that you are in starts to represent you. I feel quite indisposed from this, sometimes I try to break that circle.

⁶⁶ Orası ilginçti yani. İlk bir buçuk hatta 2 senesi eğlendirici ve şeydi yani hem öğreticiydi hem de çok keyifliydi böyle değişik şirketlere gitmek. İşte 3 ay bir şirkette çalışıp oranın en önemli problemleri üstüne çalışıp sonra 3 ay başka bir şirkette falan baya heyecanlıydı ama 2 seneden sonra yıpratıcı olmaya başladı. Çünkü sürekli seyahat ediyorsunuz yani benim o zamanki rutinim Pazartesi sabahı 6 buçuk veya 7 buçuk uçağıyla NY'ya gitmek işte New Yorkta Perşembe akşamına kadar kalmak ve baya da ağır çalışarak o 3-4 gün. Perşembe akşamı da eve dönmekti yani evden 4 gün uzak kalıyordum. ... Bebekten sonra tabi artık iyice bu olay işte evden uzak kalmak aman ne yapıyoruz falan. İşte hem işin kendi yıpratıcılığı, benim şahsi önceliklerimin ciddi şekilde değişmesi orayı tatsızlaştırmaya başladı benim açımdan. Erhan

For example, I go to "Melekler Kahvesi", students and so, I like those kinds of things.⁶⁷

Bora underlines his self-consciousness in the sense that he is involved in this process. However, he also distinguishes himself with the same self-consciousness through which he feels discontentment with his involvements; in this way, he tries to get free of this invasive attachment “occasionally” through small diversions.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to explore their narratives which remain out of their professional lives by standing closer to their identity constructions. I attempt to scrutinize the personal dimension of the distinctions which they associate with their MBA-related experiences. In addition, I have tried to make my analysis by placing it within the framework of neoliberal ethos. As I have suggested before, this chapter aims to give a general exploration of exceptional and unexpected issues that surface in the interviews by suggesting alternative ways of analysis especially for further research.

⁶⁷ Kitchennette’te yemek yersiniz çünkü arkadaşlarınız ordadır ne bileyim öyle akşamları çıktığınızda belli yerlere gidersiniz, çocuklarınız belli bir okula gitmek zorundadırlar, işte belli bir yerden atıyorum giyinmek zorundasınızdır yani bu şey bireysellik kayboluyor. ... Belli bir sosyal ekonomik grubun parçası olmanın gerektirdiği yani yapmakla belki yükümlü olduğunuz bir yaşam tarzı var. Bunun içinde kendimi de görüyorum tabi. Ama ben mesela birazcık daha ne de olsa her yerde yalnız yaşamış olmanın ben o kadar çok yer değiştirdim ve etrafımda hiçbir şey yoktu. O yüzden daha denemelere daha açığım oraya da girerim buraya da çıkarım yani benim öyle şey nosyonum biraz daha az. ... Ait olduğunuz sınıf sizi temsil etmeye başlıyor. Bundan mesela ben çok rahatsızlık duyuyorum, zaman zaman bunun dışına çıkmaya çalışıyorum. Mesela Melekler Kahvesi’ne gidiyorum, öğrenciler möğrenciler, o tarz şeyler hoşuma gidiyor. Bora

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this research, I have tried to understand the meanings and distinctions that global professionals in Turkey holding American MBA degrees construct around MBA and its associations in relation their careers and identities in general. My aim has been to understand what they perceive and how they construct and investigate themselves instead of discussing the production of global professionals by focusing upon disciplinary mechanisms or making some generalizations regarding their lifestyles and personalities. Having an MBA degree in the US is generally associated with global standards, complete integration with the world economy, and highest professional and management skills. What I have observed so far is that the individuals having these degrees are defined with different generalizations and categories by different groups of people. My experience, even if it is quite limited, in both private sector and academy enabled me to see that they are categorized as high-skilled professional leaders by “capitalist actors of the market” while they are generalized as ambitious careerists by “intellectual minds”. My aim was not a feverish criticism of these categories by claiming to uncover the hidden sides of them in a romanticizing manner. I just attempted to understand their perceptions of their own selves in a more nuanced way.

The MBA holding professionals construct and present their selves through various distinctions; and they mostly position these distinctions around their MBA-related experiences. Although they never calls themselves as “global professionals”, the distinctions they narrate explicitly reflect the culture and values of contemporary flexible capitalism. Today’s flexible institutional model necessitates a professional profile that is characterized with flexibility, potential ability, professionalism, cultural

flexibility and broad vision and network⁶⁸. The informants of this study have distinguished themselves with these very features characterizing a global professional; and they mostly ground these distinctions on their MBA and America related experiences by presenting these experiences as a distinction in itself. The question has been whether an MBA degree in the US constitutes the starting or ultimate point in this construction process or it is possible to position MBA on a longer path. As I listened to their whole career stories from the beginning of their educational lives onwards, I partly captured where their MBA degrees stand in their becoming a global professional. Although it is not possible for me to reach some structural arguments because of the scope of my research, their narratives have shown me that it is a much longer process containing different actors and structures that are determined by the habitus of each respondent. Their motivations in starting MBA degrees in the US reveal that their expectations and career plans are also shaped by the same values that they present as distinctions. They lead their motivations and desires according to the values and culture of flexible capitalism. Through these desires, they attempt to accumulate and/or improve the demanded values and competencies, which eventually lead them to getting MBA degrees in the US; and their initial expectations and desires, which serve as motivations to study MBA, are produced throughout their going through different institutions such as school, family and corporation with different disciplinary mechanisms. Within the scope of this study, it is not possible to discuss this production and disciplining process which would definitely be an interesting issue for further research. However, in this present study, it is important to note that an MBA degree studied in the US does not constitute the sole mechanism that produces a global

⁶⁸ See Sennett's *The Culture of New Capitalism* and *The Corrosion of Character*; and Arif Dirlik's *Postkolonyal Aura*.

professional although it definitely plays a critical role. It is possible to reach such a point from their pre-MBA motivations, expectations and career plans.

Before conducting the interviews, I expected them to talk only about their career plans and professional concerns without leaving the surroundings of their MBA-related experiences. However, in the interviews, I have seen that they have some social and political concerns outside of their professional lives, and especially several of them insistently want to talk about them. These concerns, together with not being directly related to business, are not completely disconnected with their MBA experience as they suggest that they have gained, at least reinforced, the neoliberal values that shape their socio-political concerns and sense of responsibility through their educational and living experience in the United States. In the final part of the fourth chapter, I have limited my analyses with only several possible perspectives of examinations as the focus of my research was on a different field. However, in my opinion, it has unraveled a very important and interesting field which definitely deserves a distinct research. It might be quite thought-provoking to ask whether the global professionals are the new developmentalists of Turkey. The tension or interaction between nationalism and globalization could be explored through “nationalist globalization” discourse that is present on the website of “Yarının Türkiye’si”. Another question might be regarding the relation between globalization and social responsibility. The questions and research points could be increased and diversified with further reading and research.

The narrative analysis I have mainly used in this study has opened a space for me to try to understand the distinctions that the respondents use in making and re-making their identities. Through study of narratives, it is possible to explore the individuals’ senses, constructions and investigations of self and their otherizations. However, as Dicle Koğacıoğlu suggests, by relying only on narratives, it is not possible

to know the actual practices of the individuals as every discursive practice is a construction; and there is always “a lag between doing and saying” (2003: 88). In this sense, conducting participant observation study together with narrative analysis could reveal “the important site in which individuals naturalize effects of most relations of power” (2003: 88). In this way, it would also be possible, for instance, to analyze the practical levels of their escape attempts in constructing distinctive selves in addition to the discursive ones.

As a conclusion, this study can be read as one step in understanding the perceptions and senses of global professionals in Turkey who has experienced a big globalizing project by studying MBA in the United States. Exploration of the distinctions, definitions and otherizations in the process of self-construction and self-investigation seem to be key factors in this understanding. Although this study does not aim to explore lifestyles and cultural practicalities of the professionals, it, nevertheless, gives a vague portrait of the cultural meanings and values that the global professionals in Turkey embrace.

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