

IN GOOD COMPANY:  
THE INCOMPARABLE LEGEND OF ROBERT COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

*Keywords: Robert College, reputation, education, cultural capital, social capital*

Robert College, an elite private high school in Istanbul, has become a legend within Turkish society, often being cited as one of the most prestigious, most expensive educational institution in the country. Every year, tens of thousands of Turkish teenagers attempt to enter the school; approximately 200 will be accepted.

The present study will examine how the position of incomparability attributed to Robert College is employed by former students as a defense against challenges to both the school itself and their own identity. I will also explore the issue of how Robert College students' perception of the institutional legacy is internalized as constitutive of their own identity and outwardly represented as a source of social or cultural capital. In order to do so, I will take as a theoretical background the types of capital outlined by Bourdieu and I will use the social interaction analysis of Goffman to examine the way in which the presentation of the school and identity performed by former students during interviews depends on or refers to a shared knowledge/acknowledgement of what alumni consider to be Robert College's 'legendary' reputation.

## ÖZET

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Robert Koleji, itibar, eğitim, statü, kültürel sermaye, sosyal sermaye*

İstanbul'da bulunan seçkin bir özel lise olan Robert Koleji, Türk toplumu içerisinde bir efsane halini almış olan, ülkedeki en prestijli ve en pahalı eğitim kurumlarından biri olarak gösterilen bir okuldur. Her yıl on binlerce Türk genci bu koleje girmeye çalışmaktadır, bunlardan sadece 200'ü başarılı olabilecektir.

Bu çalışmada, Robert Koleji mezunlarının, Robert Koleji'ne atfettikleri "kıyas kabul etmezlik" özelliğini, okulu ve kendi kimliklerini korumak için nasıl kullandıkları incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, Robert Kolejlilerin, okulun kurumsal mirasını ne şekilde kendi kimliklerinin esası olarak kabul ettikleri, ve bu mirası dışarıda sosyal veya kültürel sermaye olarak nasıl temsil ettikleri araştırılmıştır. Bunları yapabilmek adına, Bourdieu tarafından hatları çizilen "sermaye çeşitleri" teorik temel olarak alınmış, Goffman'ın sosyal etkileşim analizi ise okulun mezunlarının görüşmeler sırasında sundukları Robert Koleji resmi ve kimliğinin müşterekçe kabul edilen bir Robert Koleji "efsanesi"nin varlığına ne kadar dayandığını araştırmak için kullanılmıştır.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Where did you go to school?” they will ask and though their tone is casual and the mood is light, your answer is of no small importance because, although you are not at a job interview or a professional conference, the discussion of one’s educational background in Turkey can be a shortcut to establishing everything from socioeconomic level to political affiliation and any number of identifying factors in between. The question often arises in the earliest stages of getting to know someone new and, for those able to answer favorably, presents an opportunity to establish, discreetly but firmly, one’s social place.

As an American involved with education in Turkey, I was not at all surprised to hear the question being posed between Turkish friends. I was, however, surprised to learn that the school in question was, as often as not, a high school rather than a university.

For the past five years, I have been teaching and studying in the Turkish national university system, during which time I have learned a great deal about what it means to be a student and an instructor in the country. I have found that, despite being an outsider, I am not exempt from the prejudices and hierarchies of the system; my involvement in the university system has instilled in me an ability to navigate the shorthand of reputations, significations, and expectations that run throughout any discussion of the institutions and human participants that make up the Turkish high school education system. It was this aspect of my adaptation which was one of the most interesting to me, my own internalization of a local educational hierarchy of which I, personally, had never been a part.

My understanding of the reputations attached to local schools has largely been shaped by conversations with friends, students, and colleagues. These individuals, many of whom have graduated from international high schools here in Istanbul, often refer to (or, less frequently, explicitly describe to me) a distinct hierarchy of secondary and postsecondary academic institutions which, with relatively few deviations, forms the core of social and professional stratification in Turkey. I noticed that each school, each name,

had for the student speaking a distinct meaning and though they all shared certain features, each existed independently as a field of its own.

My experience in the American educational system had fostered in me the belief that one's "real" schooling – both in terms of intellectual development and social capital – began at the university level. Transplanted into the Turkish context, I had trouble fully comprehending the importance students, parents, and teachers alike placed on the high school one attended. To a large degree, this discrepancy between the American notion that education begins at university and the corresponding Turkish belief that a good high school is the first step to success stems from fundamental differences in the organization of the two educational systems.

While high school enrollment in the United States is primarily based on geographic proximity, matriculation to most major high schools in Turkey is based on the results of standardized exams administered nationally each year. Similarly streamed merit-based institutions do exist in the United States, of course, and as is the case with their Turkish counterparts, the names of these schools are widely-recognized and well-known. There is an important difference between the two systems, however: while a relatively small percentage of American students will attend or even apply to the prestigious schools found in the US, the high school entrance exam system used in Turkey represents a near universal experience for middle and upper middle class students. This shared experience of examination and high school enrollment cements their active participation within the hierarchy of institutional reputation and creates an environment in which the status and quality of elite schools are discussed and negotiated in a market of public opinion.

In Turkey, the reputation associated with a high school and the social recognition that it entails are crucial components of an institution's ability to perpetuate its own standards. Because local high schools are largely comprised of students who have all scored similarly on the exams, the schools themselves occupy a more or less objective position within the ranks of student achievement. This positioning, in turn, allows high schools to maintain reputations of quality and achievement based on the success of the students they admit each year. Reputation can therefore be seen as an issue of central importance to students: when selecting their high school, they must necessarily compare

and consider the reputations of institutions to which they've been exposed; when discussing their schools later in life, they must recognize the usefulness and limitations of their own high school's reputation. Listening to the accounts of friends and acquaintances, I became increasingly interested in not only their personal experiences with local and international education but also the way they represented their educational background, particularly with regard to those students who had attended prestigious high schools in Turkey. I recognized that in discussing their schools, students were often both acknowledging and perpetuating an existing reputation and I wondered about the extent to which they were aware of their dual role as consumers and transmitters of institutional reputation.

The present study examines this tension by analyzing how graduates of top high schools discuss, explain, and represent their own academic background. Endeavoring to understand the social positioning that these alumni associated with their school, I found it necessary to consider both the content of these narratives and the verbal and nonverbal cues used to convey each participant's unquestioned beliefs – or, as Bourdieu has called them, *doxa* – regarding the reputation of the institution in question. In an attempt to gain a fuller picture of a specific site, I sought to interview graduates of a single high school whose reputation would be locally acknowledged as one of the best.

In addition to the private and state-run schools teaching in Turkish, there are a number of foreign high schools to be found in Istanbul that take, variously, French, German, or English as the medium of instruction. Locally, the schools often have reputations for providing a more disciplined environment and structured curricula that are often referred to as being (somewhat nebulously) “better” than those of their Turkish counterparts. Since admission to both public and private high schools is currently based on the results of standardized national tests which rank students based on the number of questions they answer correctly, it is possible to compare the schools in terms of the quality of students admitted. Because this placement is ostensibly merit-based, matriculation to a top-ranked high school is often considered the first major step in one's academic career, a transition which in Turkey carries with it all of the weight that acceptance to university does in the US. For this reason, there is intense competition to

enter these top-ranked institutions and nearly all are comprised of some of the most talented students in the country. While all of the country's top schools are excellent, one name in particular comes up time and time again when discussing the very best of these institutions: Robert College.

Robert College (Robert Koleji, or RC) is an English-medium high school in Istanbul that was founded by American educators and philanthropists in 1863. Opened with the begrudging permission of the Ottoman government, the school's original aims were to provide an education equivalent to that found at the best American universities of the time to foreign students and those who made up the Christian minority in the Ottoman Empire (Greenwood, 1965). In 1923, with the official founding of the Turkish Republic, Robert College became a secular institution. The school continued to function as a university until 1971 when Robert College donated its campus and buildings to the Turkish government to facilitate the creation of one of Turkey's first national universities, Boğaziçi University. At that time, Robert College underwent a corresponding change, beginning to focus on secondary education rather than on university education and, that same year, the school merged with the American College for Girls (Amerikan Kız Koleji) to become the co-educational facility Robert College that exists today. Its current location in Arnavutköy is the former site of the American College for Girls (Freely, 2000).

Today Robert College is one of the most prestigious academic institutions in Turkey. Included among the school's alumni are scientists, authors, politicians, businessmen, and other successful graduates who have established a reputation for themselves both in Turkey and abroad. Tuition at the high school for the 2012-2013 academic year averages 38,000 Turkish lira, or \$21,000.<sup>1</sup> Each year, Robert College accepts approximately 200 new students and although these students will come from every corner of Turkey to attend the school, those from Istanbul represent an overwhelming majority. Admission to Robert College is highly competitive and has for years been based in full or in part on the results of various entrance exams. Students hoping to attend the school must score phenomenally well on the high school entry exams: 1 or 2 incorrect answers can knock a student out of

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the tuition information provided by Robert College and found online at the Robert College website ([http://portal.robcok.k12.tr/UserFiles/Documents/OKUL\\_ÜCRETLERI\\_TABLOSU\\_2.pdf](http://portal.robcok.k12.tr/UserFiles/Documents/OKUL_ÜCRETLERI_TABLOSU_2.pdf)). Accessed 23 June 2012.

the range necessary for consideration.<sup>2</sup> For the 2011-2012 academic year, the group of students accepted to the school represented the top 0.3% of test takers.<sup>3</sup>

The school's high academic standards are established but the exact contents of Robert College's reputation with regard to the local and international perception are somewhat more difficult to dissect. Its founding and early management by Americans have given the school a specific international affiliation which seems to have been at times encouraged and at times downplayed, often reflecting the shifting national attitudes to the US itself. At the domestic level, the minimal disturbance the school has experienced throughout the political turmoil of the successive coups seems to further underscore its existence in a realm of exception. More recently, the high tuition rates, diminishing scholarship awards, and an increase in the number of 'legacy' families<sup>3</sup> have been cited as evidence of a tendency within the school to reproduce a narrow subgroup within Turkish society. And while all of these ideas no doubt play a role in the development of the Robert College image, their combination is not completely sufficient to encapsulate the entire reputation of the school itself.

While the reputation of the high school was always of central importance to me, my earliest research questions were somewhat wider in scope. Arising from my interest in the reputation that graduates associated with their own schools and my curiosity about how high school and university reputations interacted, my original research questions were all informed by my curiosity about the interplay between educational level, reputation, and location. I initially decided to interview former students from Robert College in order to compare the way in which they described their high school and their universities. My goal was to examine the personal ranking or ordering that such students applied to their educational sites to determine whether school reputation or degree level was more important in their representations of themselves. Did the name Robert College denote a sign(al) that could only be interpreted by Turks? Did university prestige supercede that of one's high school? These questions seemed to arise directly from a consideration of the

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<sup>2</sup> Ashaboğlu interview, 9 March 2012.

<sup>3</sup> This information was taken from Robert College's own published admission statistics, found online at the Robert College website (<http://portal.robcol.k12.tr/tr/Default.aspx?pgID=127>). Accessed on 5 April 2012.

types of narratives that Robert College students used to describe, represent, and conceptualize their own educational backgrounds.

In designing my original research plan, I did not hope to arrive at an objective evaluation of either the status of Robert College or of the opportunities that it extends to former students. Instead, I was interested in examining the way in which former students themselves recalled the school, particularly with regard to the way this high-status high school was incorporated into their own perceptions and (re)presentations of themselves and their academic background. Growing out of my interest in the way students of top-tier schools recount their academic experiences, I hoped that my research would be able to look at the way Robert College students describe (and, by extension, conceptualize) the variety of educational institutions they have attended.

Because the initial aim of my research was to compare students' conceptualization of Robert College with their conceptualization of their university, I started by investigating the way Robert College students prioritized the various statuses of their educational institutions and by further attempting to determine whether or not their personal hierarchy reflected the local or regional status values to which they had been exposed. Based on my own international perspective, I suspected that students whose education and/or professional advancement had taken place in Turkey would be more likely to consider Robert College to be their primary academic achievement and, conversely, that former students who had attended university abroad would be more likely to view their highest level of education completed as most important, regardless of the status of that institution.

I originally designed my research with the aim of learning about the way that graduates of an elite Istanbul high school conceptualized and mentally ordered or ranked their educational networks. I quickly encountered a problem, however. In the course of carrying out my interviews, I began to recognize that the underlying assumption which lay at the heart of my earliest research questions – that one's high school and university, despite differences, were institutions capable of being compared objectively – was problematic. Participants dutifully answered all of my questions about both their shared high school (Robert College) and their various universities but their responses were so different as to ultimately prove incomparable. There was an emotional register to the high

school narratives that was wholly absent from the more factual information given about their time at university; the schools were not presented as two different levels of education but as two completely different types of experience.

In formulating my research question, I had made the assumption that the individuals I spoke with would be able (and, in fact, would not find it difficult) to compare their high school with their university as distinct sites of instruction. I recognized, of course, that there would be differences between the schools and the level of education they received there but the two experiences did not seem incomparably different. While conducting my research, however, it became clear that my research question itself was fundamentally flawed. When I asked how his university classmates compared to those from his high school, one participant brushed my question off: “It’s like comparing apples and oranges.” This was an analogy that I would ultimately come to extrapolate as being applicable to my initial consideration of Robert College and the universities students attended afterward.

As I observed the phenomenon across interviews, my interest increasingly began to shift. My initial interest in the types of schools participants had attended gave way and I found my attention focused almost exclusively on Robert College, a school which alumni seemed to consider somehow beyond comparison. While I was still curious about the way the reputation associated with one’s educational background was represented, I found my thoughts (and my questions during interviews) centering more and more on the specific site of Robert College.

The fact that Robert College was the institution that all of the interview participants had in common encouraged and facilitated this shift in my examination. Because they were all able to refer to a shared school experience, my conceptualization of the space was most detailed, with a myriad of accounts that resembled, repeated, and, on occasion, contradicted one another. In this way, the narratives themselves were responsible for furthering my interest in the school as was my observation of an emerging theme within the interviews: despite the various attitudes and opinions offered up by my participants, all of the former students mentioned or alluded to the well-known reputation of Robert College.

In one of my earliest interviews, a participant introduced – and repeatedly used – a word that would come to shape my entire conceptualization of both the school and my research.

“Mentioning RC – *which is a legend* – has some register with people who come from more ‘middle class schools.’” [emphasis mine]

This word, ‘legend,’ and others like it appeared frequently in my discussions with former students, often standing in for an explanation that the participants themselves seemed reluctant or unable to provide. The idea of legend started to take over my analysis and I wondered just how much it was offered as an explanation for the school and how much it was used as a concealment. I wanted to understand how Robert College students’ perception of the institutional ‘legend’ was internalized as constitutive of their own identity and outwardly represented as a legitimate source of social or cultural capital. In order to do so, I have examined this concept of ‘legend’ associated with Robert College more closely. What did alumni think were the components of the ‘legend’? To what extent did they recognize the regional limitations of the ‘legend’? More significantly, how did they consciously or unconsciously perform this ‘legend’ through their personal presentation in social interactions? I sought to answer all of these questions by studying how the status associated with Robert College appeared in former students’ (re)presentation of themselves and their educational background.

The descriptions that I found in every single interview indicated a fundamental difference in the way alumni thought of their education. The differences, however, were not based on the specific institution that a participant had attended for university as I had initially expected. Instead, former students’ way of speaking and their discussion of their experiences led me to believe that they tended to consider their universities to have been a necessary step, something that had to be completed in order to transition into a career while they tended to think that attending their high school, Robert College, had been a privilege and an opportunity for personal growth and development. In a sense, attending university was portrayed as an external legitimization of their status or ability whereas attending Robert College was an internal development experience responsible for actually shaping the students into the individuals they became.

I discovered that students who had attended Robert College almost without exception considered that school to be a field unto itself, capable of being discussed or described but never fully captured by these attempts. Indeed, for many, Robert College seemed to have a dynamic presence, existing more as an experience or a formative process than it was an institution capable of being compared or contrasted to other such sites. This was not directly stated by any of my interview participants; they seemed to not be cognizant of this discrepancy, a fact which made this observation all the more interesting. Nowhere was the difference in their perceptions of the schools more evident than when alumni attempted to compare their high school with their universities. Interview participants from a range of professional sectors and socioeconomic backgrounds all showed this tendency, describing Robert College with the subjective and emotional language of experience. Discussions of their post-high school colleges and universities, on the other hand, nearly all centered on objective measures of the schools such as the requirements that they encountered in their field of study or the way their departments prepared them for a professional career:

“[Robert College was] fantastic. Simply the best times of my life. So much fun we had. Wonderful education without pushing you to the limits. Fills you up with self-confidence in every respect. Amazing social development opportunity. We really felt that we were privileged and it was true. [...As for my university,] I would describe it as ‘colorless’ after RC. The campus was almost non-existing. No social life. I had a lot of free time but there was nothing to do at the campus other than classes. On the other hand, the education and the professors were quite OK.” (Emre)

“You know how universities in Turkey are actually trade schools, mentality-wise? [My university] was the embodiment of that. It was ironic that I had more freedom of expression in high school than I did in university.” (Gökhan)

Furthermore, the relationship that former students has with the school was not, as I had suspected, as simple as a prioritization of the education at Robert College over that of their later colleges and universities. The truth appeared far more complex, with the differences that alumni referred to being not so much based in status or prestige as they were in degrees of emotional proximity. Former students seemed to feel an emotional

attachment for Robert College that was wholly absent from their accounts of their university experiences. A few of them referred to this emotional connection directly, but an examination of the narrative language and content of the interview answers reveals that even those who did not seem to be aware of the difference spoke of their educational sites in very different ways.

“That’s the worst thing about being a Robert College graduate: it’s downhill after this. [...] You peak so much, you wouldn’t imagine.” (Can)

“The friends you make there are friends for life, hopefully. It happens a lot. My father is also from here and his closest friends are still Robert College friends, which is just... silly sometimes, when I say that to people abroad. They’re like, ‘What? Your high school friend?’ but it’s moreso than your college friends, it’s weird. I don’t know why.” (Ceyda)

Because the interview participants themselves seemed unable or unwilling to make direct comparisons between their high school and their universities, I began to consider in greater depth the conceptualization that these former students seemed to have about the one institution that they all had in common. In an attempt to comprehend the ‘exceptional’ nature of the school, I returned to the information I had gathered in my interviews. I wanted to arrive at the basis for the school’s position of incomparability and I recalled the expression one participant had used to describe Robert College: ‘legend.’ It was a word full of implications: fame, yes, certainly fame, but also history, quality, and renown. Connotations of myth and fantasy could be acknowledged as peripheral but what was central, beyond the reach of positive or negative interpretations, was the idea of recognition.

In this study, I want to understand how the position of ‘incomparability’ attributed to Robert College is employed by former students as a defense against challenges to both the school itself and their own identity. I will also explore the issue of how Robert College students’ perception of the institutional legacy is internalized as constitutive of their own identity and outwardly represented as a source of social or cultural capital. In order to do so, I will consider as a theoretical background the types of capital outlined by Bourdieu

and I will use the social interaction analysis of Goffman to examine the way in which the presentation of the school and identity performed by former students during interviews depended on or referred to a shared knowledge/acknowledgement of what they considered to be Robert College's 'legendary' reputation.

It seems impossible to overstate the role that the Robert College 'legend' plays in the minds of students or the effect that this has on maintaining the institution itself. Because of the differences in the way these former students thought of their educational sites, I recognized that it would be impossible for me to accurately establish their internalized hierarchy of schools as I originally attempted. Rather than allowing this to become an obstacle to my research, I adjusted my focus and began to examine the way that the Robert College 'legend' itself was represented. This investigation raised a number of questions about the state of exceptionalism that Robert College alumni associate with their school. In analyzing the answers given by my interview participants, then, I have attempted to understand 3 basic things: 1) what alumni thought constituted the 'legend' of Robert College; 2) how former students actively reproduce this reputation in social interactions; and 3) the way in which their performances of identity incorporated representations of the social or cultural capital they had gained from the school.

In my earliest vision of my project, I was interested in the way status, defined for my purposes as the social capital inherent in the reputation of a given institution, affected former students' perceptions of both their own relative social position and the quality of their education. I also wanted to observe any possible variations that this internal ordering may have experienced when considered in an international context rather than a local one. As I began to refine my interest and focus exclusively on the 'legendary' aspects of Robert College, however, I started to consider the way in which institutional reputations function within the Turkish educational system and, on a more individual level, the way such reputations and the cultural and social capital they provide are incorporated into graduates' conceptualization of their own identity. Furthermore, I hoped to determine the degree to which the 'incomparable legend' of Robert College is used to secure the personal identity and social advantages afforded to alumni.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In formulating my research questions and analyzing the responses given in interviews, I have attempted to unite practical research methods with the theoretical framework necessary for understanding my participant's own representations and the significance underlying them. The core of my original research comes from my interactions with former Robert College students during interviews: I was interested in the way they represented themselves and their own identities, their high school, and the effect that the school had on their personal and professional lives. Because my research seeks to examine both institutional reputation and the individual representations of that reputation found in the descriptions provided by former students, the existing literature from which I have drawn spans a variety of sociological fields.

Undoubtedly, the most significant theoretical contribution to my research has come from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Although he is a premier critic in the field of the sociology of education, Bourdieu's oeuvre extends beyond a mere examination of the educational system and lays the groundwork for an entire sociological approach which attempts to balance the objectivity of structural analysis with the subjectivity of agent-dependent social outcomes. His major preoccupation with the way in which social classes are distinguished and reproduced led to the formation of what Brubaker has succinctly described as:

“a general theory of the ‘economy of symbolic goods’ and its relation to the material economy – a theory of the production and consumption of symbolic goods, the pursuit of symbolic profit, the accumulation of symbolic capital, and the modes of conversion of symbolic capital or power into other forms of power.” (1985: 747)

With regard to the study of education, the approach outlined and utilized by Bourdieu is quite comprehensive, examining, on one hand, the process and product of the

education system and, on the other, the differences in familial and social background that create disparity between students. Bourdieu's work seeks to expose the underlying processes of legitimacy and legitimization that function within the schools and, more significantly, which extend to the educational system as a whole. He attempts to expose the function of the educational system and, although he considers and discusses elite institutions within the scope of his work, he does not focus specifically on any particular school or social class. Instead, his work primarily centers around educational institutions as sites wherein existing social structures are reproduced and which, therefore, differentiate between students on the basis of cultural and social capital. The schools themselves also work to provide this capital, which is available, to some extent, in every educational institution and at every level although Bourdieu acknowledges that the names and reputations of certain top schools are more valuable, functioning almost as membership cards or certificates that indicate one 'belongs' to a particular group.

In particular, two distinct aspects of Bourdieu's work have been integral to my own research. The first and no doubt largest is the multidimensional nature of power that Bourdieu envisions in his discussion of capital. He acknowledges the influence in of traditional economic capital but goes beyond this to incorporate notions of cultural and social capital. Cultural capital can be thought of generally as the cultural knowledge one accumulates as a result of experience, exposure, and explicit instruction. Social capital is comprised of the resources to which one has access through social contacts or networks. A second analytical tool, the notion of doxa, also emerges as critically important to my understanding of the interview responses given by my participants. According to Bourdieu, doxa is "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu, 2000: 16, as quoted by Deer, 2008: 120). In other words, doxa can be considered all of the beliefs or opinions shared by a group and internalized to the point that their existence is not simply unquestioned but in fact unconscious.

It is Bourdieu's treatment of the different forms of capital and their legitimization and transferability that has been most influential to my examination of Robert College. In examining the way former students represent the school, an awareness of the distinctive

and yet fluid nature of these types of capital has allowed me to recognize the greater personal and social context in which the school is being discussed. Similarly, the concept of doxa proved essential to my analysis of interviews, unraveling not only shared opinions expressed by participants but also the silences or gaps in discussion which indicated a sort of blindspot in their own reflexivity.

Bourdieu's work on social theory and the French educational system has been invaluable in helping sociologists to conceive of the non-academic role that such institutions may play as sites that confer upon students a seeming legitimacy of cultural and social capital and, in so doing, reproduce existing social structures. Criticism of his work is also plentiful, however, with authors focusing on a number of alleged shortcomings ranging from the vagueness of his writing to the lack of substantive support for his social theories and analytical approaches. The concept of habitus, a system in which agents develop the unquestioned beliefs that make up doxa, has been called "inherently ambiguous and over-loaded" by some researchers (Nash, 1990: 446) and accused of being theoretically incoherent by others, including Sullivan, who ultimately argues that "the main use of habitus is to give a veneer of sophistication to empirical findings" (2002: 150). Writing in 1985, Brubaker responded to contemporary and future criticism of this sort by warning that such interpretations would result from an overextension or misunderstanding of the concept:

"The linked concepts of structure, habitus, and practice are not intended to constitute a theory, and it would be unfair to evaluate them by criteria we use to evaluate theories. They are metatheoretical notions, designed to focus attention on the kind of conceptual framework that is required of any adequate sociological theory, namely one that incorporates dispositional as well as structural concepts." (1985: 760)

Critics examining Bourdieu's work on the education system have tended to concern themselves more with the empirical aspect of his studies. Many of these have observed that his work is restricted to an examination of the system in France and that different national and cultural contexts will yield different (though not necessarily contradictory) results. One

of the most outspoken critics of his work, Margaret Archer, has argued that there are significant limitations to the application of Bourdieu's theories:

“His aim, especially in *Reproduction*, is to formulate universal propositions which specify the generic conditions of cultural transmission in any social formation. Such is his overt intention: my argument will be that this ‘logic’ of cultural reproduction, which is advanced as being universal, is in fact covertly dependent upon the structure of French education – and consequently cannot be universalized.” (1993: 225)

In his look at the applicability of Bourdieu's theories to the educational system in the UK, Robbins underlines the fact that Bourdieu provides a method or system of analysis, not a prescriptive application of particular findings. He countered Archer's accusations by noting that Bourdieu's other publications acknowledge both the applicability and the limitations of his work in other contexts:

“A key text of this period – ‘Condition de classe et position de classe’ (Bourdieu, 1966) – argued explicitly against the structuralist attempt to extrapolate institutional patterns or patterns of social behavior across cultures on the grounds that these patterns were reflections of the dispositions of the observers and insufficiently recognized that particular structures are the constructs of social agents working within their discrete cultural contexts.” (Robbins, 2004: 422)

Indeed, rather than universalizing generic conditions of cultural transmission as Archer claims, such work seems to have encouraged the opening of the field of sociological investigation to allow for the study of different regional contexts.

In recent years, many sociologists have used Bourdieu's descriptive research methods as a point of departure for their own investigations of the way in which education (and particularly elite education) functions within the lives of participants. By applying his attention to consumption choices and indicators of social mobility to their own studies of the social and cultural capital available to students and graduates of educational institutions, these later researchers have attempted, in a sense, to apply Bourdieu's

conceptualization of the French educational system to their work on other distinct contexts. Very frequently, the contexts under examination are national in scope.

The application of Bourdieu's methods to other national or regional contexts has generally centered on explicating the way in which elite education extends opportunity to graduates and/or on analyzing the socioeconomic status of those students who attend such schools. Researchers in the US have studied the occupational advantages and projected earnings for students of top universities in order to better understand the type of quantifiable benefits that are associated with elite education (Karabel and McClelland, 1987; James et al., 1989). A similar examination carried out in South Korea sought to track the professional positions occupied by graduates of that country's best colleges and found that institutional social capital did play a role in both the level of position that graduates obtained and in the way in which they were able to enter such jobs (Lee and Brinton, 1996). Further local studies of the way in which schools affect the formation of social capital have recently been published on Poland and the Czech Republic, where researchers considered social connections in relation to occupational incomes (Buerkle and Guseva, 2002). Another recent study examined the way social capital was accumulated at 4 different schools in China and ultimately proposed that schools' ability to engender the formation of social capital should be included in an assessment of their effectiveness (Ross and Lin, 2006).

While works that consider the influence of education on students' later success generally examine colleges and universities, those that discuss elite boarding or prep schools at the high school level provide a more immediately relevant parallel with my own work. Sociological examinations of these types of schools are fewer in number and often reflect an interest in the experience of attending the school (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009) or in the way such environments encourage the development of particular traits (Howard, 2005). In considering the type of lifelong advantages that elite schools provide their students, Zweigenhaft has written on how the college trajectories of prep school students differ from those of their public school counterparts (1993), an aspect of elite education which is often discussed (albeit less directly) in studies of university admission procedures (McDonough, 1997; Karabel, 2005).

Unfortunately, most of the works written on elite boarding and prep schools refer exclusively to those schools found in the United States. While these studies offer plenty of invaluable insight into the workings of educational institutions in that context, their application to the Turkish educational environment is somewhat limited. The differences between the educational systems in these countries are significant and the role of education within Turkish society is not entirely comparable with that of the American system. Rutz considered the unique position of Turkey at some length in his book *Reproducing Class*, which considers the role of education in legitimizing the rise of a new middle class in Istanbul (2010). This book provides an excellent overview of the Turkish high school entry examination system and the aspirations involved for parents attempting to get their children into the best foreign high schools in Istanbul. Because it takes a general observation of the system as a whole, however, it does not consider any of the high schools in depth and is therefore unable to consider the way that the reputation of a specific school functions within society to perpetuate its institutional status.

The Turkish educational system offer a distinctive context for study with regard to high school matriculation as it represents a heavily centralized distribution of students that still retains a great deal of selection on the part of students and their families. An understanding of the conditions of selection, evaluation, and admittance are vital to any researcher hoping to explain the way that institutional status and reputation function within the later lives and self-identification of Turkish students.

With regard to evaluation, it all begins with a test: the high school entrance exam. The format and conditions of the high school entry examinations have changed significantly over the years, as has the length of time for which students attend these schools. My interview participants who had attended Robert College in the 1970s recalled taking school-specific entrance exams, enabling them to apply directly to the school of their choice. Later this was replaced by a system in which Turkish students were given two exams, one of which allowed them to enter public high schools and the other which allowed them to compete for places in private high schools. It was at this time that the exams were standardized and began to be administered nationally. Perhaps the most significant recent change in the high school education system took place in 1997, when

grades 6-8 were combined with elementary education, creating an 8-year block of compulsory education and establishing a high school duration of only 3 years (plus an additional year of preparatory school). As a result of this decision, the age of students taking the tests was raised from 11 to 14. Following the lengthening of compulsory elementary education, a series of tests were given annually for 3 consecutive years. This format, too, has recently been changed and for the moment high school entry is based on the results of a single exam administered in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Despite these changes to the format and the demographic, the test experience itself has remained relatively stable. Nationwide, a test is administered to middle school students. In addition to answering basic questions on a variety of academic subjects, students are required to submit a ranked list of their preferred high schools. The students' raw scores in terms of the number of questions answered correctly are tabulated and the results are used to rank all of the students. Each high school then fills their enrollment quotas by beginning at the top of the performance list and accepting the highest-ranked students who have requested admission to their school. Published school rankings provide information on the score of the lowest-ranked individual granted admission to a particular school, effectively announcing that school's 'minimum standard.'

Robert College is consistently one of the top-ranked schools in the country, enrolling a student body that represents the very best of the over 1 million students that take the high school entry exam each year. The school's position in the local hierarchy of education is reflected in the numerous works that have been written on its history, educational mission, and impact on its surroundings, both local and national (Fincanci, 1983; Freely, 2000; Greenwood, 1965). Accounts of the school invariably focus on its local reputation, an aspect which can be problematized by the American involvement which in many ways forms the core of its local distinction.

Although Bourdieu discussed legitimization within the educational system as an extension of hegemonic power (particularly that of the dominant social classes), the juxtaposition of international power and influence that occurs at Robert College seems to complicate this paradigm by multiplying the number of agents. Because of this, Bourdieu's description of the legitimizing nature of the educational system takes on a special

significance with regard to my examination of Robert College. The school is unique in the sense that Robert College, unlike any institution considered in Bourdieu's research or that of the other national investigations, is a school shared between the Turkish and American governments. The school is accredited by both the Turkish Ministry of Education and the New York State Association of Independent Schools, and could therefore rightly enough be said to serve two masters. While the practical matter of combining these two curricula and requirements have been sorted and are actively mediated by the school's administration and staff, the liminal position that the institution occupies raises a number of questions about the way in which it has gained legitimacy in the minds of all those who have come into contact with it. Problematic issues of cultural hegemony or cultural legitimization within international schools have previously been explored by researchers including Altan-Olcay (2008), who has examined the way that students of American colleges in the Middle East must constantly negotiate and re-negotiate what it means to be 'American.'

Although each of these critical strands have informed my vision of my research, it is the matchlessly practical approach outlined by Erving Goffman that has been the most useful in helping me to unite such theories with my execution of the empirical aspect of my study. Particularly in his essay "On Face-Work" (1955), Goffman presents a way of analyzing personal interaction which uses instances and rituals from daily interpersonal exchanges to reveal the readings and interpretations that underlie all social interaction. The core of his analysis is based on understanding the relationships between three basic components of social interaction: *face*, *line*, and *face-work*. According to Goffman, *face* can be thought of as one's social value or image of himself in relation to social attributes or positioning. *Lines* are the patterns "of verbal or nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (1955: 5). The two concepts thus can be seen to be mutually indicative, since *line* is the outward manifestation of one's *face* and one's own reading of the *faces* presented by other participants. When the *line* presented by a participant in a social interaction fails to maintain consistency with the *face* he has claimed for himself, he and the other participants will perform *face-work*, actions or behaviors meant to bring his image back into harmony with his *face*.

Because my analysis made use of both the narratives that my interview participants provided and an awareness of the social contexts in which such answers were given, Goffman's discussion of the concept of social *face* was revealing. A consideration of the interaction rituals which that author outlines not only supported me in the interviewing and research stages of my project, it also helped me to unravel the multitude of meanings that ran beneath my social exchanges with former students/interview participants. By considering a specific knowledge of the Robert College 'legend' to be a constituent of each participant's social *face*, I was able to anticipate and interpret their use of social *lines* and to reconstruct the identity each participant had created for him/herself. Several of my most significant observations from interviews were the result of participants shifting *line* or changing *face*, actions that indicated that they may have had difficulty in reconciling their current social presentation with their own self-identification. Beyond this, comparing the different presentations of a single participant allowed me to create "theory" vs. "practice" comparisons (e.g., comparing a participant's answers in the interview to the non-verbal social representations they used in the real world); these comparisons, which could be understood only through the type of analysis discussed by Goffman, ultimately proved to be much more dynamic in juxtaposition than either would have been alone.

My research will differ from that found in the existing literature by considering a specific site, Robert College, and by attempting to unravel the various components that contribute to the legendary Robert College reputation. While the scope of my investigation is quite limited, the contribution this research will make to the field lies not only in its investigation of the site but also in its qualitative approach to comparing the educational experiences of students and, more broadly, considering the self-reflexivity with which they conceptualize their institution's reputation. In conducting my research, my own idea of the project was informed to varying extents by the regional or studies which have preceded my work. Much of the research available in the literature, however, deals exclusively with the quantifiable aspects of the success that so often accompanies the graduates of elite schools. My reading of Bourdieu has given me an interest in both the socially-mediated symbols of non-economic capital as well as in the way that a personal assessment of one's own social

and cultural capital are a necessary prerequisite to their creation of an external representation of themselves. Put more simply, I wanted to find out how much of one's social persona is based upon his own belief in the strength of the networks and institutions to which he is connected.

My research provided the opportunity to bring together Bourdieu's theories of cultural and social capital with Goffman's discussion of *face-work* in an attempt to discover how the theoretical concepts are manifest and displayed in day-to-day social interaction. The site-specific nature of my research makes it unique within the study of high-status schools, as does my qualitative focus on the way former students reproduce and relate the institutional 'legend' of Robert College. While the existing literature on elite education, international schools, and the Turkish educational system have all combined to provide me with a solid background in the field, my fundamental research questions on the representation of the Robert College reputation and the way in which alumni interact with this reputation arise from a gap in the literature that I hope to fill with my own research.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **Participants**

Due to the qualitative nature of my research topic and my desire to focus on the narrative aspects of alumni accounts, my primary material for analysis came from a series of interviews conducted with former Robert College students as well as staff members currently working at the school (like most of the Turkish faculty members, they were also alumni themselves). I originally hoped to compare their educational sites and thus during the interviews I asked participants to describe both their high school and their universities in terms of their experiences, their classmates, and the effect that each institution had had on their personal and professional development. Recognizing that both international experience and the amount of time that had passed since attending Robert College could affect participants' recollection of their experiences, slightly different interview questions were created to explore the differing relative positions of school personnel, recent graduates, and graduates who were mid-career.

Locating interview subjects began with speaking to my own personal contacts from Robert College. These tended to be my peers, who had largely graduated from high school between 2001 and 2004. Because of our existing personal relationship, these participants were extremely helpful and often went out of their way to put me in touch with classmates in order to help me expand my network of contacts. I recognized, however, that to get a fuller picture of the way that the institution's reputation was conceptualized or utilized by alumni in different stages of their lives, I needed to speak with a wide range of former students representing different academic 'generations.' In order to do this, I began to seek introductions to alumni from earlier graduating classes. Initially, I tried to avoid speaking with those former students who were currently working in the educational system (at any level) in order to get honest opinions that were free of the self-consciousness that such a professional engagement may foster. As my focus shifted from the comparison of different educational sites to a more in-depth examination of the Robert College legend, however, I

felt that these reservations were no longer necessary and I began to interview contacts in these fields. Ultimately, this proved to be a valuable decision, as several of my key participants came from the education sector.

In considering the part Robert College plays in alumni's conception of their complete educational background, I aimed to reach graduates who went on to pursue a variety of educational and professional experiences. Interview subjects were chosen that represented different academic generations, with the most senior participants being those who had graduated in the 1970s and the most recent graduates having finished high school in the mid 2000s. In total, 16 former Robert College students participated in my research. Professionally, the former students who participated in my research can now be found working in a vast array of fields, from finance to academics to technology. Some have founded their own companies, others work in the public sector, and a few others hold entry-level positions at small local businesses. The range of personalities, interests, and professional achievement is wide. In most cases, the only thing participants have in common is the fact that they are all alumni of Robert College. A table detailing each of my participants, including information on their graduation, later education, and present sector of employment, can be found in the Appendix.<sup>4</sup>

It must be noted that because of the personal reference-style selection method that I used to locate participants, the population of students that I interviewed was far from random. Although the group branched out into a variety of fields and sectors and the interview participants themselves represented a wide range of academic backgrounds, socioeconomically the group was largely comprised of middle and upper middle class students who had been living in Istanbul prior to their enrollment at Robert College. I attempted to correct for this imbalance by seeking students from underrepresented demographics when asking participants for further contacts. Time after time, however, I found that very few interview participants were able to provide these contacts. They either did not know of any classmates that fit the description or they had lost contact with these classmates. In considering the demographic characteristics of the Robert College student

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<sup>4</sup> The names and identifying details of all participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

body, however, I began to wonder whether my inability to access members of these groups was a shortcoming of my research or whether it was merely a reflection of the school's overall composition. Statistics provided by Robert College show that the vast majority of students currently attending the high school come from Istanbul (833 from a total student body of 1018)<sup>5</sup> and that less than 25% of all students receive financial aid<sup>6</sup> to help them afford the annual tuition, currently averaging 38,000 Turkish lira, or \$21,000.

I anticipate that the overrepresentation of students from middle and upper middle class families may have affected the type of answers that these alumni provided in a few key ways. Because this research focuses on the reputation, status, and recognition of an elite foreign high school in Istanbul, interview participants from a middle or upper middle class background may have had a disproportionately high number of social or familial contacts to the school, allowing it to take on a proximity and/or an importance that is not representative of that experienced by Turks from other economic classes or geographic regions. In addition to this, these students may have been more likely to come from RC legacy families and to have been raised with a stronger sense of belonging with regard to the school. This may have further served to familiarize them with the school's 'legend' at an earlier age, thereby allowing them a greater degree of comfort in speaking about the school, both in interviews with me and in their daily lives. On the other hand, the greater degree of international mobility that members of this class enjoy may also have affected the way they conceptualized both Robert College and the regional limitations to the school's reputational currency. While all of these are valid considerations, the student population statistics available all seem to indicate that the demographic profile of my interview participants offers a fairly accurate representation of the Robert College student body, complete with whatever internal biases and demographic tendencies are to be found therein. The information that I gained from these interviews is thus neither comprehensive nor entirely limited in terms of its usefulness in the exploration of my research questions.

## **Interviews**

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<sup>5</sup> Taken from the school's website (<http://portal.robcok.k12.tr/tr/Default.aspx?pgID=127>). Accessed 5 April 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ashaboğlu interview, 9 March 2012.

Gathering information from these participants was done through one-to-one interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted in person here in Istanbul although some responses also made use of instant messaging or email when scheduling or geographical constraints proved otherwise insurmountable. Differences can be seen between the interviews done in person and those submitted electronically in both the tone and the content of the answers provided. While the personal interviews were informal in tone and often quite nostalgic in content, the answers I received to my emailed questions were generally (although certainly not always) more impersonal and factual. This discrepancy may have resulted from the independent nature of the email correspondence; writing out answers to my questions alone in a remote location may have prevented participants from “re-living” their experiences. Without the embodied interest that arises naturally from a face-to-face conversation, it may have seemed awkward or even unnatural for email respondents to engage in more descriptive or emotional responses. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the few email interviews that did result in more detailed and introspective answers came from my own personal contacts, people who knew me personally and were therefore able to recognize my engagement with the topic.

Each interview was unique and the tone and the dynamic of my interaction with each participant varied quite widely. There were key topics that I made sure to cover during each interview but often the context and the amount of attention spent on a given topic reflected the atmosphere of the interview. Some questions I didn't have to ask because my participant introduced the topic on his/her own. Others I asked about but recognized that they failed to capture the interest of my participant, who I allowed to answer briefly and without much follow-up. Email interviews, of course, were not subject to the same luxury of flexibility although in analyzing the answers that participants provided to my questions, I was similarly able to recognize the aspects of my research which interested or bored these people. A sample of the questions which were emailed to participants and which formed the basis of the face-to-face interviews have been included in the Appendix.

The questions I asked participants were originally designed to elicit descriptive, personal responses and in my early interviews focusing on each graduate's complete educational background, I attempted to examine both Robert College and any other

institutions (universities and graduate schools) in a balanced way. The questions asked in both face-to-face and email interviews were similar although there were slight differences in the tone and type of questions asked to participants in order to reflect their differing graduation years and, thus, the differences in their current professional positions, social networks, and general life experiences. Because one aspect of my original analysis was meant to compare the amount of information and detail provided in response to questions about their educational experiences at all levels, all of the questions asked about Robert College were mirrored by similar questions about the individual's other schools. This was done in an effort to prevent the interview from giving any unfair attention to Robert College since doing so would compromise my results by encouraging alumni to more heavily emphasize their high school experience. The degree to which this effort was successful is not entirely clear, however: while their responses were disproportionately RC-centric, it is difficult to say that this aspect of their narrative definitely reflects their own valuation, since most participants recognized that it was their having attended Robert College that served as the basis for their involvement in the project.

Interviews conducted in person were usually quite casual in tone and I was glad to see that the participants all seemed relaxed and comfortable discussing their educational background with me. Many of the interviews were conducted in the participant's office or place of business and the rest were done at cafés chosen by the participants. In the majority of cases I had never met the interview participants prior to our interview, although we had been in touch through email or telephone for some time. The questions generally began with factual demographic information about the participant's family and career in order to make them comfortable and allow them to get used to the interview format before transitioning into the more subjective questions with which I hoped to obtain more personal, descriptive answers.<sup>7</sup> As they moved into more individual narratives, I began to

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<sup>7</sup> There were several notable exceptions to this, however, wherein interview participants themselves began to discuss Robert College right away, often through the use of institutional legend or rumor. My favorite example of such occurred when a former student sat down and immediately began talking about the school: "Friends of mine told me that on Wall Street, among the employees of Wall Street, the highest number of high school graduates are from Robert College. So Robert College is the number one high school in Wall Street, in the US." (Can)

notice strongly divergent conversational styles on the part of my participants. While most gave answers that involved some degree of retrospection or self-awareness, some seemed to simply abandon themselves to nostalgia, recounting episodes or events with little or no critical commentary.

I was particularly interested in learning how my own position as a researcher would affect the descriptions offered by former students since there were two seemingly opposing factors at work. On one hand, the interviews were primarily conducted locally, in Istanbul, and the criterion for speaking with these participants was their having attended Robert College. Either of these factors might have encouraged a tendency to highlight that school as being most important in their internal conceptualizations. On the other hand, however, as they were being interviewed by an American MA student with no personal experience with secondary education in Turkey, I was interested in seeing how much (or how little) they felt the need to explain the reputation of their high school, Robert College. Very few of the participants asked questions about my research and I found myself wondering whether this was due to my own previous explanation of the project (“I’m looking at Robert College alumni to learn about their high school and post-high school education”) or, as I suspect, to their lack of surprise that a researcher would be interested in Robert College and her students.

Email correspondence and telephone conversations were conducted in English, as were the interviews themselves. This was not a conscious decision on my own part so much as it was a ‘natural’ continuation of my English-medium conversations with Robert College alumni friends. Although my own Turkish is passable, the superior English language skills of Robert College students are among the most notable practical advantages of a Robert College education. The impact that the use of English may have had on my interview participants is difficult to determine although I suspect that the effects were somewhat mixed. Conducting the interviews in English, my mother tongue, may have afforded me a level of familiarity with the school environment and its students that, as a foreigner and a non-Robert College graduate, I would not have been able to reach otherwise. On the other hand, my use of English may have made other participants feel themselves at a disadvantage.

When I designed the email option for interviews, it was primarily intended to be used by those participants who were outside of Turkey during my fieldwork, either because they were involved in international graduate programs or because they had permanently relocated abroad. As my circle of contacts widened, however, I noticed that a few Istanbul-based alumni who had expressed a willingness to participate in my research seemed to prefer email for answering my questions. Very few of these participants offered an explanation for their preference; those that did often cited impossibly busy schedules as an impediment to our meeting for face-to-face interviews. While looking over the responses that I received by email, however, I sensed in a few participants, particularly those who had finished a shorter high school program in the 1970s, a discomfort in using English. Responses from these alumni were generally short, answering the question asked without further elaboration, and there were several basic mistakes in grammar. One contact who I interviewed in person even went so far as to tell me that the boys who had attended Robert Academy felt quite intimidated when the school was combined with the American College for Girls:

“The girls had much better English and we [the boys] were definitely aware of that. We were kind of self-conscious. And the girls from those years still have better English.” (İzzet)

This confession opens the possibility that some of my interview participants who chose to answer questions via email may have been self-conscious or uncomfortable using spoken English to express themselves. If the interview language was, in fact, problematic for them, it may have affected their ability to accurately describe their experiences, a fact which I had to consider when analyzing the answers these individuals provided.

## **Fieldwork**

Although the (re)presentations that former students provided in interviews formed the cornerstone of my research, I attempted wherever possible to try to compare the narrative accounts which participants offered me with other, perhaps more objective representations of themselves that were circulated in contexts other than that of the researcher-participant interview. By considering both the personal claims made about their

use of the Robert College name and the unacknowledged employment of that reputation found in other representations, I had the opportunity to perform a more dynamic analysis, one that was based on recognizing that alumni's actual trade in reputation and status symbols often stood in contradiction to their statements about the appropriateness of such usages. Interestingly, whenever I was able to observe these alternative representations, they almost unanimously agreed with or resembled one another, even when the narratives given during the course of the interviews did not.

In one instance, for example, I had the opportunity to wait in a participant's office prior to our interview and to observe the items which he kept there. On one wall of the small office, a collection of diplomas and professional certificates showcased his educational background. Two columns of frames were visible. Closest to the visitor, his Master's degree from a foreign university hung at the top with the small diploma indicating graduation from Robert College visible just underneath. To the right, his Bachelor's degree from a public university in Turkey and several professional certifications could be seen. Nearby, a coat rack held dozens of name tags collected from Turkish and international trade fairs and expos. The small table on which the receptionist had placed my Turkish coffee was piled high with Turkish-language editions of Forbes and Fortune magazines. When my interview subject arrived and began to talk about the importance of networks, then, I recognized that this was clearly a topic which he had spent quite some time considering.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the real-life representation of another interview subject offered a somewhat different experience. While this graduate had claimed that she very much disliked the "exaggerated" attention that accompanied social recognition of her high school and, furthermore, that she had greatly enjoyed her undergraduate experience at a private Turkish university followed by a Master's degree at a respected European university, the

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<sup>8</sup> At one point during our interview, this participant checked the GPA written on his diploma in order to make a point about his own academic performance. In doing so, I recognized the full importance of its positioning; his action had indicated an awareness of the artifacts on the wall as items to be seen and interacted with, something beyond the realm of simple décor.

educational background section on her Facebook profile listed only Robert College by name.

These multiple displays of personality are, to some degree, contradictory. My findings of differing and distinctive representations actually support the answers that most former students provided in interviews regarding both their acknowledgement of the limitations of Robert College's reputation and their own ability to successfully use this awareness to create social representations that appropriately reflect the different social contexts. By considering not only their narrative descriptions but also their personal use of the school's social and cultural capital, it was possible for me to gain a broader understanding of the way individual graduates embody, represent, and perpetuate the Robert College 'legend.'

### **On the presentation of results**

Although my analysis of their answers naturally incorporated all of the responses provided by each of the former students I spoke with, differences in personality and narrative style made certain participants more "quotable" than others. In the section in which I have recorded my interview results, a few names are found repeatedly while others are almost entirely absent. Recognizing the variability in the enthusiasm with which former students spoke about Robert College is crucial to understanding the way in which institutional reputation is furthered and maintained. None of my participants were very critical or negative in their descriptions of the school or their time there. Some, however, were more enthusiastic, more expressive, and/or more talkative than others. If those moderate responses did, in fact, indicate a somewhat subdued opinion of the school, such moderate thoughts and opinions can easily be lost among the more effusive praise and more hyperbolic accounts of those alumni who feel more strongly. In emphasizing the most dynamic and interesting narratives, then, my research could also be accused of reproducing the legendary aspect of Robert College. Perhaps the only distinction that can be made in this regard is the self-awareness with which I have done so.

#### 4. ROBERT COLLEGE AS EXPERIENCE

In discussing the time they spent at Robert College, many of the alumni that I spoke with were nostalgic, relating their experiences. Many were also reflective about the way in which these experiences had shaped their personal development and influenced their lives. Early in the interviews, former students seemed eager to set the scene by describing the school's atmosphere and the learning environment they had discovered there.

One graduate, Aysel, referred to a pervasive atmosphere throughout the school that seemed based on the knowledge that each student was already exceptional.

“It was a whole different world. New people. And they always made us feel that we were very bright. ‘The chosen ones.’ That was the message given in every class.”

Begüm, another participant, was impressed by the personal freedom that students were given within the classroom. She spoke of her initial transition into Robert College during her middle school years and, although she began attending the school at a relatively young age, she claims to have been very aware of the differences between this school and those she had attended previously.

“I loved the American teachers, the sort of friendly atmosphere of games and songs. You know, it was a different experience. I had been going to Turkish schools all the time, you know, where the teacher's like the sole authority, you cannot talk, you have to get up. I remember we stood [for the teacher at Robert College] and the teacher was like, ‘What are you doing? Sit down.’”

The style of interaction the school fostered between teachers and students was new for many students, as was the more interactive learning environment which several graduates claimed to have encountered for the first time at Robert College. Discussions of the supportive classroom environment appeared frequently in interviews and many former students saw this concept as being inseparable from the idea of a Robert College education. Some interview participants were quite direct in demonstrating specific facets of their education responsible for helping them to develop particular traits. One alumnus who

talked about his experiences in the classroom mentioned the way that students were encouraged to design their own research. Students who would later go into academic fields mentioned this more frequently and some of them credited this independent approach to learning with fostering their interest in their field of study.

“Thinking about, say, the term projects... I worked on different stuff (from writing a computer program for a math course I was taking to building this circuitry in a Science class, etc.) the teachers were very encouraging in the topics that I chose and they didn't really set up any strict guidelines for carrying out the projects, which, enabled me to live and learn.” (Burak)

A similar observation from former student İzzet involved recalling with some fondness the particular mixture of confidence and curiosity that Robert College had impressed upon him. He noted that the support he had received in the classroom environment had been key in encouraging students to become more active in their own learning.

“They always told me there are no stupid questions [...] and even that's a big help. In cultures like ours, sometimes people are afraid to ask questions and it could create lots of problems, both for them and for the organizations they're attached to.”

In asking participants to describe their time at Robert College, a few alumni said that the encouraging classroom atmosphere was complemented by a relaxed atmosphere outside of class, something that participants felt rounded out their development of the personal characteristics which they had come to view as essential. Several people mentioned that the independence that they experienced as students had allowed them to develop personal responsibility and self-motivation.

İzzet, who graduated in the mid-70s, remarked on how unusual this approach was, particularly when comparing the environment at Robert College with that found at other high schools at the time. He noted that most of his Turkish peers would not experience a similar level of independence until university:

“Looking back, I realize that they treated us more like adults than any other school around the country. We were given opportunities and no one was really looking over your shoulder whether you grasped those opportunities or not. We were treated more like college students than high school students. Looking back, I really appreciate that because it gives you the flexibility and it's an early opportunity to become an adult,

really. You're on your own. You could do anything. You could just waste your time or you could use it fruitfully. The choice is yours. And that's something that really only happens when you go to college in a country like Turkey. You're very closely monitored in other schools."

İzzet thought that the environment at Robert College in part encouraged him "to become an adult." His experience was one of having early access to responsibilities and privileges which were not, in themselves, entirely unique. In contrast, several interview participants through that attending the school had enabled them to cultivate character traits which they might not have developed otherwise. The idea that the school's atmosphere had been partially responsible for molding the personality of students was often expressed, with participants in every single interview stating that attending Robert College had been as much a character-shaping experience as it had been an academic one. This was, in fact, one of the indications that would ultimately make me recognize the futility of attempting to compare the descriptions that alumni gave of their high school with the answers provided in response to similar questions about their universities. Despite the many differences among participants, despite a relatively high degree of dissimilarity in terms of age, later education, family background, professional sector, and lifestyle, each of the alumni mentioned the way in which their time at Robert College had affected the development of their personality.

Different aspects of the character-forming nature of the school were discussed by interview participants. Many of these characteristics have their roots in academic development but alumni often referred to the way in which they had carried these lessons into other aspects of their lives. In addition to the informal and supportive attitude that the teachers and administrators seemed to have and the type of characteristics that a Robert College education seemed to support and promote, we have observed that some interview participants credited the overall environment found both in the classroom and outside of it with encouraging within them the development of characteristics such as independence and individualism. Traits such as critical thinking or skepticism were also frequently cited as further examples of characteristics students took from the school, particularly among those who went on to pursue careers in the fields of science, engineering, and academia. Regardless of which specific character traits they chose to discuss, former students seemed to feel strongly that the development of these characteristics or approaches was particularly

notable within them, often claiming that such traits were integral to their own self-perception.

Faruk, now completing a PhD in electrical engineering, observed that his education at the high school had been important in helping him to develop the type of thinking required in his current field.

“Robert College certainly affected my personality. I consider myself to be a skeptic when it comes to most things. I’d like to think about things myself before accepting those as facts. This sort of mentality is important in scientific thinking, where you have gone beyond the reach of most textbooks and the knowledge out there at this level starts becoming more and more questionable. I tend to believe that the education at RC has more or less shaped me this way.”

His sentiment was closely echoed by another alumnus, Gökhan, who felt that this tendency to think critically about the world around him was one of the most defining parts of his personality:

“Obviously the school contributed to my personality and my outlook on life. I question things, at least. That’s the biggest thing I think I learned from RC was to question what’s put in front of you and have your own idea about it, have your own opinion about it.”

Both of these former students spoke of the same trait, skepticism, and claimed that Robert College was responsible for helping them to cultivate it. Interestingly, however, neither was able to tell me in follow-up questions precisely how the school had managed to instill this quality in them. They seemed to feel that, rather than being limited to a certain course or method, the development of a questioning nature was inherent in the educational environment of the school. It grew out of an institutional outlook that was more or less easily identified but nearly impossible for them to define.

Many of the descriptions that interview participants provided about their own personal development credit the school’s atmosphere with helping them to cultivate certain traits. Some alumni further connected this tendency with the cultural exposure they gained from Robert College. Exposure to new cultural artifacts, traditions, and attitudes was cited in a number of interviews as being one of the most important advantages students received from the school. Former students talked about discovering new holidays and celebrations as well as new films, books, and musical genres. Several participants illustrated the

multicultural aspect of their education when they spoke about the school's educational outlook. A graduate named Eda noted with seemingly mixed feelings that much of the school's attitude and atmosphere were rooted in cultural values that were different from those that were to be found in the Turkish schools she had previously attended or been exposed to.

“I think maybe we were influenced by an American culture. There was maybe what we would call as an individualistic approach, more than what you would see in other schools in Turkey, where people act more as a community, let's say, as a student body. We had more of an individualistic approach.”

In making this observation, Eda introduces one aspect of the Robert College legend that must be considered in any examination of the school: the cultural interplay that takes place there. Although located in Turkey, the school was founded by American philanthropic interests and it remains accredited in the United States through the state of New York. Much is made of this association in Turkish circles<sup>9</sup> but the relationship acknowledged by most former students is considerably more complex.

Like Eda, interview participant Can thought that the culture he was exposed to at Robert College was a distinct part of his education there, one that set him apart from many of his Turkish peers and that could not be reduced to the academic curriculum.

*What did you take beyond academics?*

“Self-esteem. Confidence, self-confidence. What else? The ability to mingle with people from other countries, other cultures. You know, we had a gym teacher, our gym teacher was black. Mr. Dave Phillips. Imagine that you have a black gym teacher when you're 11. You get... you know, in Turkey if someone sees a black dude, it's like, 'Whoa! That guy's black!' For me it's not even a big deal because my gym teacher was a black guy. We loved him. We had a guy from Canada, he would talk about Canada all the time. We had a teacher from Australia, we wouldn't understand a word he was saying. An Irish guy, always so Irish patriot, and we were like, 'What's wrong with Ireland and England?' You start asking these questions when you're 13 and if you ask these questions to another 13-year-old Turkish guy, it's like, 'Where's Ireland? Where's England?' Maybe they know where England is but they sure don't know where Ireland is. These are the things we grew up with.”

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<sup>9</sup> As Can was quoted as saying: “[In Turkey,] Robert College *eşittir* America, *yani*. Anything, any connotation that reminds you of the US, as a third world country, belongs to Robert College. Every good and bad.”

Can's focus on the multitude of nationalities represented by teachers at the school seems to argue against Eda's earlier assertion that the culture was specifically American. He further sidesteps the acknowledgement of Robert College's American influence by insisting that the school encouraged students to think for themselves and explore a variety of ideas. He thought that a perfect example of the range of ideas students encountered at Robert College could be found in 2 prominent politicians who had both graduated from the school:

“We had 2 Prime Ministers, as you know, Çiller – the female Prime Minister, the only one – and also Ecevit, the social democrat guy, he's also a Robert College guy. One of them was almost a socialist and the other was a cut-throat capitalist but they were both from Robert College. You can't really explain to people that diversity. The strongest leftist people in politics in Turkey are actually Robert College graduates. The founder of the Turkish Communist Party was a Robert College graduate, as well. Because it's education. Nobody can impose you any values. If you start learning every single value or every single... how you say... wave of interest, paradigm of politics, you just start choosing. You can either be a leftist or a right wing guy.”

Despite this participant's insistence that Robert College provided a space for the open exchange of ideas, the defensive tone he takes in his example alludes to a cultural tension within the school's atmosphere that was addressed, directly or indirectly, by each of my interview participants. Throughout my interviews, I noticed a curious expression that Robert College alumni seemed to use to avoid these connotations almost effortlessly. Rather than saying the school had an American influence or atmosphere, former students remarked that the campus, the classes, the school itself were all simply “not Turkish.” A few used words like “Western” on occasion but by and large the interview participants all – individually but universally – arrived on the expression “non-Turkish” to explain the differences they encountered at Robert College.

When the unique nature of the school was being discussed, examples of cultural exposure or education inevitably relied on creating a distinction between other Turkish high schools or Turkish society in general and Robert College, a site which they presented as being distinctly “non-Turkish.” Such allegations are present in all of the descriptions alumni provided of the school:

Begüm: “It was a different experience. I had been going to Turkish schools all the time, you know, where the teacher's like the sole authority...”

İzzet: “In cultures like ours, sometimes people are afraid to ask questions...”

İzzet: “That’s something that really only happens when you go to college in a country like Turkey.”

Eda: “There was maybe what we would call as an individualistic approach, more than what you would see in other schools in Turkey, where people act more as a community.”

Can: “If you ask these questions to another 13-year-old Turkish guy, it’s like, ‘Where’s Ireland? Where’s England?’”

This construction is fascinating because it creates a distinction not by associating Robert College with another country or culture but instead by negating any similarity between the school’s environment and that of the greater social context of Turkey. In doing so, it manages to retain a Turco-centric perspective by using that country as a standard and, at the same time, to create an easily-defined barrier of difference. By avoiding any comparison or association with other countries, the expression also seems to deepen the aura of exceptionalism found in so many descriptions of the school and her students.

Eda’s observation about the American influence within the school is significant because she is one of the few alumni who openly associated unusual or unique aspects of the school with being specifically American. Far more often, interview participants mentioned or referred to Robert College as having a “non-Turkish” quality and provided a number of examples about ways in which the school differed from more traditional Turkish schools or from Turkish society in general. The type of examples that each participant offered varied but all of them were compared – either overtly or by implication – to the Turkish way. In fact, it was often only by virtue of their difference from the Turkish system that such aspects even became noteworthy.<sup>10</sup> In a sense, then, students seemed to define the reputation or quality of Robert College as much through its difference from or negation of Turkishness as it was through any standalone merit inherent in the school itself.

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<sup>10</sup> Even the classroom furniture was seen as extraordinary: “Single student desks!” one alumnus recounted. “Not shared, like in Turkish schools. Sitting alone, you were individual, independent!” (Didem)

In a study of the way students at American colleges in the Middle East negotiated the labels and connotations that came with the term “American,” Altan-Olcay found that the goal for most students seemed to be finding a usage that preserved the cosmopolitan benefits of the international association but that could be separated or removed from the political actions or landscape of the country. She observed that “the ability to make this distinction work depends on whether this cultural capital can be defined in terms that exclude negative connotations” (Altan-Olcay, 2008: 29).

The shared nature of this re-definition is one that must be considered within the group as a whole but which depends upon individuals for its reproduction in social interactions. Goffman has expanded upon this idea, writing that the *face* maintained by an individual is often representative of not only himself but also the groups of which he is a member: “A social relationship, then, can be seen as a way in which the person is more than ordinarily forced to trust his self-image and face to the tact and good conduct of others” (Goffman, 1955: 42). Because he has a responsibility to maintain *face* for all of his fellow group members in interactions in which he, singly, represents the group, the discussion of potentially contestable topics often results in individual agents assuming a relatively neutral position to avoid a misstep which could cause another member to damage his own *face*. Consideration for the variable positions of others may be understood as one reason for the emphasis on “non-Turkishness” which was observed in interviews. By employing such a tactic, participants were able to communicate the idea of difference without the specific ascription of any other national or regional attributes.

In student’s conceptualization of the foreign aspect of their high school and their experience there, most made a distinction separating it from local culture only by claiming that the atmosphere was “non-Turkish.” Few make any claims at all about it being distinctly American, and those that do use this label also make a point of “de-Americanizing the Americanness” by pointing out that the cultural trappings of that county no longer belong to the Americans as such, having instead become a kind of global standard.

Can, who had previously gone to considerable length to downplay the American association of the school, ultimately acknowledged the American influence found in

Robert College but was only able to do so in a way that globalized the meaning of such attitudes.

“Of course, we’re Americanized, in a way. Luckily, America is becoming the standard, in some ways. It has become the standard in doing business, in communication, even human relations. So it doesn’t really reflect out that strongly. ‘Ah, that guy’s doing it the right way.’ Because, you know, the American way, sometimes, in terms of business, has become the right way. So in that we’re lucky, you know. If it were German, it would be different because it’s not the standard. Luckily. We’re lucky. US was the standard in the ‘90s. Still, even China is taking that model so I don’t see a lot of harm that Robert has done to me in terms of standardizing myself.”

The popularity of expressions which emphasized ‘non-Turkishness’ over those that acknowledged the school as specifically American in nature may also have arisen from a sense of exceptionalism or self-containment that was remarked on by several of the more reflective interview participants. In such observations, the school (both its’ physical manifestation, the campus, and its’ intellectual program) was frequently portrayed as being isolated or set apart from other schools or from Turkish society in general. In such cases, the implications seemed to be that the protective and somewhat idyllic landscape that the school maintained could only exist at the expense of a connection with Turkish society, although the students’ opinions on this phenomenon seemed to vary. One interview participant seemed a bit nostalgic when discussing this aspect of the school:

“It’s like a bubble. It’s true. Completely true, it’s a bubble. You live in this summer camp. Now that I look back, it’s like, ‘That’s just silly!’ but... did I love it as a child? Yes. Did I finally come to understand that it lacks certain things? Yeah. But did I have a great time? Yes!” (Begüm)

The language used by another student indicated that he was somewhat more critical about the gap he perceived between life at Robert College and that of the outside world, with both his vocabulary and intonation reflecting frustration:

“Now I realize! Now I realize! Back then, you were in a cocoon. You’re in Istanbul and you don’t know what Turkey’s about. You get your service buses every morning and then you get the shuttle every night.” (Emre)

At times this exceptional status seemed to keep former students from feeling wholly a part of Turkish society. Some participants spoke of the fact that the type of interests and the outlook they had developed at RC made it difficult for them to make friends who had

not had a similar background. Can felt that the exposure to other people and cultures, the most significant non-academic aspect of the education he received during his time in high school, had differentiated him from his Turkish peers, a situation which had given him certain personal advantages but which had also left him alienated. Can focused on the cultural exposure that he had gained from the school in order to highlight both the positive and negative effects that accompanied his education.

“You hang out with other people in college and you feel sometimes in between. There’s a little bit of alienation, as well. Because you’ve been raised very much American, very much European, in a way, where people don’t really understand or cope with you. So you go back to your cocoon yourself and try to hang out with your RC lads.”

He seemed to be looking for a way to normalize his own experience when he noted that despite being somewhat unusual for a Turk, many of his interests would be commonplace in other countries or other contexts.

“I’m not awkwardly Western but, you know, in Turkey I am considered as an extremely Occidental type of guy. But not only because of Robert College education, because of the way I live. The life I live. The relations I have with my girlfriends, with girls, with women. Or the way I spend my weekends. I was talking about this with a guy from Robert College, I was like, ‘We’re actually like guys from Liverpool. Mine workers. We like to hang out together, we go to football games, we drink our asses off, and then we go to Eastern Europe to party. So what’s the difference between a guy from eastern Manchester and us?’”

The question he ends with is particularly significant, I think, as it is a natural consequence of the practice of defining identity through negation. The problem with describing one’s school (or practices, or interests, or self) as “non-Turkish” is that in doing so, these individuals have failed to create an alternate space in which to share community with others. It is an identity defined solely through alienation. This may in part explain the tendency expressed by my interview participants to consider the friends they made during their time at Robert College to be the ones closest to them, regardless of the experiences encountered later in life.

“The friends you make here are friends for life, hopefully. It happens a lot. My father is also from here and his closest friends are still Robert College friends, which is just... silly sometimes, when I say that to people abroad. They’re like, ‘What?

Your high school friend?’ but it’s moreso than your college friends, it’s weird. I don’t know why.” (Ceyda)

Despite the fact that the recollections of the interview participants were overwhelmingly positive, there were a few people who mentioned the disadvantages that also came with attending Robert College. These disadvantages tended to be personal and often centered around the effect that their education had had on their personality or their social lives. One graduate, Faruk, regretted that his education had made him arrogant:

“The only downside [to attending RC] is you might tend to get a little arrogant or maybe a little bit of an elitist as it happened with me. I do not really like that about myself.”

Another participant was quite somber about what he saw as the drawbacks of having studied at Robert College. He mentioned several aspects that he considered to be disadvantages but warned that internalizing the expectations that accompany an elite education was often the most detrimental.

“There’s so many big failures among Robert College grads, as well. Because the expectations are high and if you cannot fill those expectations and there’s this big depression. There was this guy and after graduation, a few months later he hung himself. He hung himself *in the campus*. He said, ‘Fuck this, I didn’t like it after Robert College.’ It wasn’t like a failure but his nostalgia was so strong he hung himself. A lot of my friends, not all of them but a few of them became potheads, alcoholics, because they became too much laid back after the age of 18.<sup>11</sup> They stopped working, they stopped doing anything. Although the successes are really strong, the failures are so strong as well. Families are expecting a lot from you, neighbors, other friends. You’re like this superstar. When that feeling starts invading you, it’s really hard to get away because each time you have a class reunion: ‘What are you doing?’ ‘I’m vice-president of this company’ – ‘What are you doing?’ ‘I started this company.’ – ‘What are you doing?’ ‘I’m a journalist, I have this TV show.’ – ‘What else do you do?’ ‘Nothing.’ It’s hard to say that.” (Can)

The idea that Robert College students have certain expectations to live up to – both their own and those imposed by others – came up constantly during interviews. Although no one else mentioned the feelings of “peaking” or “failing” that Can discussed, alumni all seemed to be aware of the way their education was shaped by the reputation of their high school, particularly by those people who had not attended Robert College. Indeed, even in

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<sup>11</sup> Earlier in the interview, he had addressed this idea, saying: “That’s the worst thing about being a Robert College graduate: it’s downhill after this.” *You peak at 18?* “You peak so much, you wouldn’t imagine.”

discussing their own experiences at the school, interview participants all seemed to be mindful of the way their representations of the school supported or challenged the Robert College 'legend' as it was understood by others.

Although former Robert College students tended to recall their time at the school fondly, crediting that experience with helping to shape both their minds and their personalities, a consideration of the school's legendary reputation was impossible for them to ignore even in their personal reflections. In describing the atmosphere and attitude of the school as being 'non-Turkish,' they created a definitive break between the school and its national context which served to emphasize Robert College as an incomparable space and the site of an incomparable experience.

## 5. ROBERT COLLEGE AS 'LEGEND'

The elite reputation associated with Robert College which prompted my research questions is an aspect of the school which requires a great deal of attention in any attempt to understand the way that former students interact with the institution. It was not an aspect that was always discussed overtly during my interviews but even the briefest glance at the transcriptions makes it obvious that it is impossible to avoid references to and implications about the school's legendary reputation.

One of the earliest and, arguably, most fascinating examples of the 'understood' nature of Robert College's status was the complete lack of surprise or interest that my interview participants showed in my research. Despite the fact that I introduced my project only briefly, they did not question my attention. It stands to reason that, in the absence of elaborate explanation, there must have been something 'normal' or expected in my curiosity about the school and its students. The site and the group were both, it seems, unquestionably worthy of scholarly interest. This belief in a kind of justified centrality seems to lie at the very heart of the way that Robert College is conceived of, both by students and alumni and, according to the students themselves, by Turkish society in general.

In attempting to understand the unquestioned sense of value that Robert College alumni seemed to ascribe to the school, I turned to the idea of doxa. Bourdieu uses this concept to refer to "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu, 2000: 16, as quoted by Deer, 2008: 120). Doxa can then be thought of as a term used to address all of the beliefs or opinions shared by a group and that have been internalized to the point that their existence is not simply unquestioned, it is unrecognizable as anything other than absolute truth.

In thinking about all of the aspects of the school which alumni assumed were known without having to be spoken, I returned again to the term 'legend,' which was in large part responsible for forming my conceptualization of both Robert College and my own research

project. In the original interview, Gökhan had been asked about whether or not there would be circumstances in which he would be more likely or less likely to discuss his high school background. He replied: “Mentioning RC – which is a legend – has a certain register with people who come from more ‘middle class’ schools.” The word ‘legend’ or ‘legendary’ came up several times during this interview and I began to realize that my participant was using different connotations of the word in different contexts. Although his first usage referred to the reputation of the school, later instances in which he spoke more critically seemed to play with the ambiguity between reputation and fiction.<sup>12</sup>

When former students were asked directly about Robert College’s reputation or ‘legend,’ it became clear that their usages of this idea varied widely. For some, it referred to the timelessness of the school itself, for others, to the socioeconomic status of the students found there, and for still others, to an atmosphere that fostered intelligence with a more interactive, ‘Western’ curriculum and style of instruction. Regardless of the way in which they used the signifier, however, all of the students and alumni clearly demonstrated that they believed that reference to this reputation would result in successful communication; that is to say, they believed that anyone listening would have no trouble understanding the specific idea that they themselves seemed to find impossible to elucidate.

In reviewing the ways that my interview participants spoke about the legendary aspects of the school, I became aware of three distinct themes that arose time and time again over the course of my interviews involving former students’ accounts of their experiences at Robert College. Although their specific details vary significantly, each student was able to describe their early recognition of the Robert College legend, their own experience in taking the entry exam and being accepted to the school, and the first time they saw the Robert College campus. The existence of these narratives, simultaneously unique and unwavering, reflects three distinct aspects of the meta-narrative that surrounds

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<sup>12</sup> This included his occasional projection of a certain persona in order to answer some questions ‘as an RC student.’ Notably, when asked about his university experience, he admitted: “I felt myself more comfortable at RC than I did [at my university] but that’s partly because, as I said earlier, I don’t like to mention that I’m an RC graduate among plebes [*laughs*], among other people.” (Gökhan)

the school and its students. An in-depth examination of the accounts offered by graduates will allow for a better appreciation of each of these themes.

In discussing the previous existence of the Robert College ‘legend’ or their own awareness of the school prior to applying, alumni introduce perhaps the most indefinable aspect of the school: the awareness of a reputation that exists, to some degree, independent from the tangible presence of the institution itself. This type of recognition involves not only a familiarity with the school but also with the subjective positioning of that institution that occurs in the estimation of the student himself, his family, and other members of his social milieu. The relative similarity of valuation we can assume since it is only through a similarity of positioning or a shared acknowledgement of traits that individuals are able to discuss such institutions intelligibly.

Two divergent relationships with Robert College seemed to emerge from the interviews, with some students (often those who were the children of other alumni) speaking easily and openly about their knowledge of the school and using language such as “naturally” and “always” when discussing their ambitions while another group often admits to being either unaware of the school or to having considered the school “beyond them.” In either case, we can recognize in each student’s discussion of the Robert College legend, his social identification of both the school itself and his own original social distance from the position the school occupied in his conception.

After establishing the prior existence and positioning of Robert College, former students generally began to recount their own experience in taking the necessary exams and being accepted to the school. While some of the interview participants described the experience in full detail, talking about taking the exam and waiting nervously for the results to be announced, others seemed to find this stage less worthy of discussion, noting only that they passed. The difference in the amount of detail provided at this stage is particularly telling, as in many ways the account of this success is the individual’s account of his own integration into the Robert College legend, as previously discussed.

In their narratives, interpretations of the event ranged from miraculous (“I was shocked,” “I absolutely couldn’t believe it”) to nonchalant (“I was happy but not very

surprised; I studied hard and I had felt it was expected”). The discrepancies presented in their reactions may have been in large part due to the personal and social expectations they had encountered prior to applying, further reflecting the social familiarity intimated by their explications of the Robert College legend.

The final description shared by most of the alumni I spoke with centered on the physical manifestation of Robert College, the school’s buildings and campus. Interestingly, this topic was nearly always introduced by the interview participants themselves, most of whom were able to vividly recall their first sighting of the campus, though whether this glimpse took place before or after they were admitted and began to attend classes varied quite a bit from student to student.

Chronologically, this was often the last of the three major facets of the Robert College legend and in their narratives it seems to represent the literal realization of their matriculation. The imposing and distinctive architecture and the quiet, natural setting of the campus stood in contrast to both the schools they had attended previously and the city of Istanbul itself and more than one interview participant actually described the place as being ‘very un-Turkish.’ Descriptions of the campus offered the legend an embodied space and not only signaled to students a sort of tangible social confirmation or ascendancy, but also served to underscore the descriptions they would provide later of the otherness of the school and the education that it would provide them.

Beyond the personal narratives about their own experiences with Robert College, former students often seemed unable or unwilling to make definite statements. The recognition of the fact that the Robert College reputation always preceded the individual caused several participants to become more self-conscious about how their association with the high school reflected on them. This self-awareness seemed to prevent them from praising the school themselves, perhaps because of their established association with the institution. Contextualized through the patterns of interaction outlined by Goffman, however, it may be understood that such behavior is an attempt to prevent the loss of *face* that may accompany bragging or self-aggrandizement. This is a variation of a form of cooperation that Goffman identifies as “reciprocal self-denial”:

“Often the person does not have a clear idea of what would be a just or acceptable apportionment of judgments during the occasion, and so he voluntarily deprives or depreciates himself while indulging and compliment the others, in both cases carrying the judgments safely past what is likely to be just. The favorable judgments about himself he allows to come from the others; the unfavorable judgments of himself are his own contributions.” (Goffman, 1955: 30)

This interaction pattern was not carried out fully because our conversational roles made it necessary for my interview participants to provide the information themselves. Another solution was found that proved more effective. When attempting to confront the issue of reputation head-on, most of the interview participants found it necessary to talk about the way that Robert College appears to those who did not attend the school.

When asked how other people thought about Robert College graduates, İzzet claimed that the perception of alumni among graduates of other schools could be categorized into one of two ways, often reflecting the degree of contact they may have previously had with other Robert College alumni:

“I think there are 2 major groups. One group perceives it, or the graduates of Robert College, as arrogant. Even my mother sometimes half-jokingly calls me that. There’s that group in society.”

*And how does it get that reputation?*

“Probably because you were exposed to ... what would you say... to more of the Western culture or to lots more than the people who went to other schools. That gives you a bigger selection of things to choose from which creates a result of creating someone who’s a bit picky as far as other people are concerned. Your standards automatically become higher. Or different, not necessarily higher, but different. You’re either perceived as arrogant or even weird, in some cases [*laughs*], by people who have not been exposed to the same cultural background. That’s one group, and these people are usually people who have been in close contact with students of Robert College or with the alumni from Robert College. Their perception of the school is usually based on those people that they’ve been in contact with. And then, probably a bigger majority, who are aware of such a school and who are not able to get into the school for one reason or another – and in some cases it could be just purely financial, it doesn’t have to be academic – those people sort of look up to it and wish they had a chance to go there. I guess because of that bigger majority it’s a very well-respected institution and it usually makes a very big difference when you mention your school, there’s usually a small silence [*laughs*] for people to digest that. Then, if you haven’t mentioned it up to a certain point, they have one picture of you then after you mention that, you can almost hear the picture changing in their mind.”

Here, my participant is able to make statements about Robert College's social position or value ("it's a very well-respected institution" and "it usually makes a very big difference when you mention your school") without the concern that such language will damage any claims to modesty demanded by his own *face* or cause potential damage (in loss of standing) to the other *faces* involved in the conversation.

What stood out most to me in my participants' accounts of the perceptions by non-Robert College people was the way that institutional legend blended with the characteristics attributed to students. The result is a sort of ambiguity in which it becomes difficult to differentiate individual students from their classmates and predecessors and the entire student population from the institution itself. Whether this conflation exists in the mind of Turkish society at large cannot be stated with any certainty; what can, however, is that the boundaries between self, peer, and school seem to have been understood by my participants as flexible, perhaps even fluid.

Despite the abundance of indirect references to the school's reputation, their real opinions held by my interview participants can be seen in some of the more offhanded remarks. One graduate, Begüm, mentioned that when she was taking the test for admission to private high schools she had written Robert College as a choice but not really expected to get in. "I wanted it," she clarified, "Obviously. Who doesn't want it? But I was only aiming for a good science school." When asked whether he would encourage his own children to attend Robert College, Can, seemed amused: "Of course. I mean, where else are they going to go?" Both of these statements fascinate me because of their dependence upon a shared knowledge of the Robert College reputation. The use of such rhetorical questions assumes that the listener has enough knowledge of the subject to recognize the inquiry as rhetorical; moreover, the ability to provide the obvious answer to each question ("No one" and "Nowhere," respectively) does not simply depend on a familiarity with the subject but indeed on a projected agreement, a valuation of the school that is necessarily shared, perhaps because the speaker himself can conceive of no alternative.

Aysel also referred to this somewhat transcendent reputation when describing her own experience of taking the entrance exam and enrolling in Robert College. She mentioned that she had done exceptionally well on both the private school exam and the

corresponding public exam and that she had been the ‘first girl’ in the enrollment rankings for both Galatasaray and Deutsche Schule. She had also been accepted to Robert College and she admitted that in making her choice “there was not much hesitation, to be honest.”

*Was your decision based on language, then?*

“Yeah, the language and the... the... For the whole of Turkish society, if you get the chance to enter RC, you don’t give it a second thought. Whereas for all other schools you can choose between language or campus... but with RC it’s like, above all those categories and so it was evident, more or less.” (Aysel)

The idea that Robert College is a school so good that it cannot be compared to other educational institutions is one that, in interviews, no one stated and everyone said. The effect of doxic understanding of the school’s reputation essentially nullified the ability of former students to objectively discuss their high school. Trying to find an explanation for the pervasiveness of this effect, I began to consider one of the few supporting points which former students shared: the incredible success achieved by some of the most notable alumni and the alumni network which connected every former student to these exceptional few.

Repeated references to some of the most successful graduates also offered former students a chance to communicate the quality of their education by showcasing the achievements of their peers. In doing so, they are taking advantage of a notion of shared achievement that some critics have observed lies at the core of a school’s ability to extend opportunity to its students: “An institution’s social capital [is] linked to the current or potential social value of its’ student body present and past – its’ alumni.” (Bourdieu, 1996: 198)

Several interview subjects spoke of the academic atmosphere at the school, noting that above all, Robert College had fostered in them a kind of independent thinking that was both creative and critical and which was appreciably different from the competitive, exam-centric environment of ‘traditional’ Turkish high schools. While this portrayal is almost certainly accurate to some degree, it is difficult to believe it entirely because of the intensely competitive exams that all students were required to take (and score exceptionally well on) before they could be considered for admission to the school.

Participants, however, were insistent: rather than fostering a cut-throat competitiveness amongst Robert College students themselves, the unspoken but recognized intellectual success that was a necessary precursor to enrollment in the school actually seems to have encouraged solidarity amongst the students, all of whom could be sure that they were ‘in good company’ with regard to their classmates. The fact that Robert College offered students the luxury of not competing with one another seems central to the notion of unity required for each individual student to take a measure of personal pride in the success of his peers as well as in those who had graduated previously and those whose matriculation would follow his own. Bourdieu discusses this idea in *The State Nobility*, remarking on the way that successful alumni are largely responsible for shaping the overall expectations for a school’s students:

“The institution of an academic nobility, a group designated by collective belief for the brightest futures, has the effect of defining ‘bright futures’ (symbolized by the highest yet most unlikely trajectories) according to the standards of the modal futures, in other words, the most frequent and hence the most ordinary or standard futures. The academic act of consecration unites individuals who in fact constitute a *statistical class* and hence, by definition, include diversity, into one *juridical class* (designated and constituted by its title). It thus leads the chosen *people as a whole* to expect to be crowned by accomplishments that will only be achieved by a small fraction of the class.” (Bourdieu, 1996: 113, emphasis in original)

This phenomenon no doubt explains, in part, why the success of classmates and former graduates was another theme that came up several times during my interviews, often in a context that seemed to validate the idea of Robert College as an institution deserving of its legendary social status. Interestingly, the introduction of this topic did not seem to be limited to alumni from any particular age group but instead was seen most often in those who had gone into sectors which traditionally require more networking, such as banking and business management. Interview participants in these fields seemed to be most keen on both keeping track of their fellow Robert College alumni and on describing to me the highest successes from their classmates and friends.

Age was not completely irrelevant here, however, and a few key differences could be observed in the ways in which different generations approached these types of discussions. A graduate from the mid-70s, now well-established in his career, spoke mainly of his own classmates and seemed to consider the success of the class as a whole. He did not mention

any specific names or companies, instead using an abundance of titles and positions to indicate the achievements of the class.

“Most of the people in the class went on and became medical doctors because at that point in time in Turkey that was the most fashionable thing to do so they all became medical doctors. Some of them were very well-known doctors. Another group, which includes myself as well, went on and did the second best thing which was to study business administration. Many of us ended up in banking. Some are still doing that, some retired and went on to other things but there’s a group that carried on as well-known and well-respected professionals. The ‘clean industries,’ so to speak. There’s a smaller group who went on and joined their families and carried on their family businesses. Some started their own private businesses. A few of those people have really made it to the headlines, so to speak, so we’re really proud of them. Another group, some you may have met, ended up in academia but in other disciplines. Most of them ended up in Boğaziçi University because of the similar background and because the language of instruction is in English. We have people who were heads of departments and still there in physics, mathematics. There was one guy who was in business administration, financial engineering type stuff, he’s now the head of the Turkish SEC, securities exchange commission. And we have one other friend that went on and became quite a celebrity in political sciences, he both teaches at the university and he has a corner in the daily newspaper and he appears on TV stations. That pretty much includes everyone except the ones who...

*Fell off the face of the earth?*

“Yes... but I don’t think we have too many of those. Somehow everyone made it to the middle lane, so to speak.” (İzzet)

Another participant, Emre, was also aware of the achievements of his friends and classmates. Like İzzet above, he mentioned positions and titles as proof of the validity of their success but he also retained a focus on his own experience of having attended Robert College by emphasizing the educational atmosphere they had shared over the success of individuals.

“We had science classes where we would, you know, all the guys who did good at science are now at MIT, Stanford, PhD guys. Economics? One guy was good at economics and we thought, ‘Ah, you’re really good,’ you know, now he’s a doing a PhD – no, not even a PhD – he’s teaching strategy at Europe’s number one business school. So, you’re with these guys and you think, ‘This guy could be smarter than I am’ and now he turns out to be a professor or something. It’s really a very interesting experience.”

In contrast, Can, a graduate who co-founded a small business in a technology industry currently experiencing rapid growth, spent more attention on specific

extraordinary individuals who seemed to represent a trajectory that he hoped he himself may follow.

“The alumni network is so valuable. It is incredibly valuable. You just, like, meet the President of the Central Bank and then the guy happens to be – not anymore – a Robert College graduate. There’s this angel investor guy, he literally has a lot of millions in his pocket, he made a lot of money from real estate. Last year we were in the same soccer tournament, we played against each other. It’s really interesting, the people you see. Actors, actresses. Check out the Forbes 100. Do we have it here? Here, let me show you. [*Flips through a Turkish Forbes magazine, the cover of which reads: 100 En Zengin Türkler, The 100 Wealthiest Turks*] You’ll be amazed. RC, number one. RC graduate, number two. Who else? RC graduate. RC graduate. I’m not sure about this one... It’s my yearbook and it’s the Forbes 100. [We have the] same culture. I was raised like that. It’s like staying in touch with your rich brothers or something. They’re your brothers, plus they happen to be rich.”

The family analogy that Can offers above is particularly significant to the discussion of legend and reveals much about the way that success functions in supporting the elite reputation of Robert College. Once a student manages to gain access to the school’s network, his ability to benefit from the association with more successful alumni and from the school’s name continues to offer him professional and social advantages, regardless of his own achievements. Bourdieu discusses this as the consolation of exposure to elite education and observes that it provides less successful students with many of the same status rights as those enjoyed by their higher-achieving peers.

“In fact, alumni disillusionment is never as complete or as painful as the difference between anticipated and materialized futures might lead one to expect. The strictly juridical effect of a title is never entirely nullified and, just as a bankrupt nobleman is still noble, the *normalien*... continues all his life to profit materially and symbolically from the statutory difference that separates him from the common people.” (Bourdieu, 1996: 114)

Perhaps one of the most unique aspects of my present work stems from the way in which reputation functions in the specific context of the Turkish high school entry system. Here, the argument can be made that reputation is not only a signifier or an advantage enjoyed by top schools but that it also lies at the heart of their own ability to reproduce and maintain their competitive standards. In order to fully appreciate the complex relationship between reputation and standard in Turkey, however, it is first necessary to have a clear view of the process by which young students gain entry into Turkish high schools.

The high school entry exam (known under a succession of names) is currently administered to students in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of their education. The test contains a number of questions divided between several subjects (Turkish, mathematics, science and technology, social sciences, and a foreign language). Each question in a given section is worth the same amount of points as any other in that section although different sections (subjects) may be weighted differently. The exam is generally administered in early summer and students can expect to learn their results approximately one month after taking the exam.

For years, students were given a form to take home and fill out together with their parents prior to taking the test. This form allowed students to indicate their high school preferences by listing the names of many high schools, ranked according to preference. Once completed, this list was returned to the student's middle school, from which point it will continue on and ultimately be collected by the government. Later, when these students complete their high school entry examination, they themselves will be ranked according to the number (and type) of questions they have managed to answer correctly. At this stage, the Ministry of Education begins assigning students to high schools. The process begins with the 'first' student, the one ranked highest nationally. This student, who will also be the subject of no small amount of national interest and fanfare, will be 'awarded to' the high school that she indicated was her first choice. In a similar manner, officials will proceed down the list of rankings, with each student being assigned to his first choice school until the school in question meets its quota by enrolling as many students as it is capable of accepting.

When the predetermined number of student slots has been filled, entry to a particular school is closed and no further students will be accepted. The next student who has indicated that that school was their top choice will be allotted instead to their second choice school or, if that one is also full, their third choice and so on until all of the students have been sorted and all of the high schools have been filled.

The students taking the exams and making these decisions are quite young; these days, students take the exams around the age of 14 but under the previous system, wherein middle school (grades 6-8) was grouped together with high school, most applicants were around the age of 11. Despite the fact that their choice of high school will have a large

impact on the type of educational and social opportunities they will have access to later, most students know very little about the actual schools themselves. Their youth and lack of experience make it almost impossible for the students to develop their own opinions and preferences and by asking for the school preference rankings to be completed at home, teachers and administrators are encouraging the involvement of parents, making the choice of high schools not simply a personal choice but one in which the students must consider the wishes, expectations, and financial position of his/her parents.

Because of the way this system is organized, families have traditionally been asked to complete their school preference rankings quite a while before they actually take the exams. When the students fill in the rankings for the high schools of their choice, they are unaware of their results; without having taken the test, they are not even able to make a prediction about how well they may do.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that most students prepare intensely for the high school entry exam, enrolling in *dershane* courses and studying with private tutors after their regular classes and on the weekends, psychological factors such as the stress that students are under while taking the test make it very difficult to arrive at realistic predictions about how a student will perform on the actual exam. On the other hand, the score reports published by the high schools themselves are only indicators of the achievements of the previous year's students and are therefore far from indicative of the score a student would need to guarantee his or her admittance to a given school. With no clear information about the scores needed for matriculation to a school or about the student's own level of success on the exam, the list-making process becomes divorced from any practical knowledge of their own performance on the exams. As such, the high school entry system creates an environment in which students and their families are encouraged to create a sort of idealized 'wish list' when ranking their preferences.

The separation of the school ranking process and the entry examinations provides a perfect opportunity to reflect upon the value that institutional reputation holds within the Turkish context. The lack of personal interview or individual evaluation involved in

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<sup>13</sup> This system was changed in 2004 and students now complete the exams and learn their scores prior to creating their list of preferences. Since all of my interview participants enrolled in Robert College well before this time, however, I will describe the process that would have been familiar to my participants.

awarding students to specific schools means that the only way the schools can perpetuate their own high academic standards is by securing a large number of the students who earn high scores on the entry exams. In order to do so, schools such as Robert College need to ensure that the highest-achieving students are not only aware of their school but that these students also attach a high value to the education and/or opportunities they will gain there. When students and their families sit down to consider, discuss, and, ultimately, rank their preferred high schools, they are not simply creating a personal wish list: they are also demonstrating their ability to interpret and reproduce a hierarchy of elite schools.

Given the structure Turkish educational system, then, we see that the reputation of an elite school is not simply a by-product of academic excellence. It also cannot be reduced entirely to a reflection of the academic and professional success of a school's alumni. Instead, the concept of reputation, the standing that a school has in the minds of the people (both those who have attended the school and, perhaps more significantly, those who have not) is an active and essential part of the school's ability to define and delineate its own position within the field of academic institutions. In practical terms, a school's reputation is a key factor in its ability to attract top students year after year. Without a reputation that promises support for their intellectual and social advancement, elite schools such as Robert College would be unable to continuously enroll the most talented students; without the success of students, both on their entry examinations and in their accomplishments later in life, the school would be unable to support such a sterling reputation. Much like the classic paradox of the chicken and the egg, reputation and student success in Turkish high schools are inextricably linked in a way that is not easy to dissect or resolve.

## 6. THE USE OF ROBERT COLLEGE: REPUTATION IN CONTEXT

Nowhere was the awareness of the effect of the Robert College name more apparent than when graduates of the school talked about their own experiences “using” the reputation. Although all of the former students I spoke with acknowledged that the name had an impact, the way in which they utilized or responded to the reputation was incredibly varied. Looking at their answers, the full range of personalities could be seen quite clearly, with different participants displaying vastly different inclinations with regard to the conditions or circumstances in which they might be more or less likely to mention their education at Robert College. Despite individual differences, the consensus seemed to be that talking about having gone to Robert College was a social maneuver that should be used with some consideration.

Some interview participants admitted frankly that they enjoyed the vague but undeniable advantages the school’s reputation afforded them in social and professional settings.

“It usually makes a very big difference when you mention your school, there’s usually a small silence [*laughs*] for people to digest that. Then, if you haven’t mentioned it up to a certain point, they have one picture of you then after you mention that, you can almost hear the picture changing in their mind.” (İzzet)

“I am kind of proud to be a graduate of RC because it is a prestigious school. It makes you feel better when somebody reads your CV and emphasizes the words “graduate of RC,” with an admiring look.” (Doruk)

İzzet’s claim that learning about his Robert College background often caused people to adjust their mental image of him is supported by a number of other alumni who said that the school’s reputation brought expectations as well as advantages. When talking about the kind of perceptions other people had about Robert College, many of my interview participants discussed the expectations that inevitably accompanied knowledge of one’s Robert College education. The expectations were often described as beneficial, particularly

in professional settings where students felt that their school's name promised a certain level of competence.

“In Turkey, Robert College is one of the best schools so it is an advantage in every aspect. People, when they learn that you're from that school, they're more interested. They think that it is a good quality. Afterwards, maybe it doesn't make a difference. When you're in an institution, you're there with your personality, with your skills, so it doesn't make a difference but at the initial level, meeting people, when you apply for a job, it makes a difference. It is a positive factor. But, of course, you have to live up to it.” (Eda)

As often as not, however, the expectations of others also had a somewhat negative effect on graduates, who felt a lot of pressure to live up to the promise implied by the Robert College name. A few participants illustrated this idea by noting that the knowledge of one's Robert College background could be a kind of double-edged sword which entailed stereotypes or prejudice.

“Usually [other people] are interested, as I said, because they think it's a difficult school to finish. So they feel like it's an advantage, a positive factor. Again, there are – not maybe later on in life, but especially in the university level or at the initial stages of your career – there are some preconceptions about Robert College. They think that people who graduate from Robert College are usually from the richer families so they tend to be more, let's say, extroverted, more... what they would call as 'spoiled,' more egoistic, etc. They have some preconceptions and sometimes also people are a bit afraid. And they may see you as a challenge because they have these prejudices, let's say. Either they see you as a challenge or they expect something extra from you. 'If you are from that school, you should be better.'” (Eda)

Some interview participants acknowledged that their use of the Robert College reputation was something that was far from automatic and that they tried to exercise discretion when deciding where and how to mention this aspect of their background. The reasoning for this caution seemed to vary, however. For some, their reluctance to mention the school grew out of a sensitivity to the way such conversation may be received by others.

“If you're a humble sort of person, as I am, you wouldn't want to mention it in every environment because it is sometimes in Turkey seen as showing off, that you are trying to make an impression on other people by talking about your high school. Usually I prefer to talk about it only if I know that the other people are also of good schools so I know that they won't feel a disadvantage on their part.” (Eda)

This sensitivity was also discussed by İzzet, who, as one of the earliest graduates to participate in my research, was able to reflect on the way his relationship with the school's weighty reputation had changed over time.

“When I was younger, actually, I was a bit shy about mentioning it, particularly in places like the army or a government school, like Boğaziçi. (But in our time most of the people studying there were either out of Robert College or the other American schools so we were a bit less shy about mentioning our school.) But as I grew older I sort of made a point of mentioning it but I had to grow almost as old as 40 years before I felt comfortable mentioning it.”

*What do you think caused the change?*

“I don't know. I guess you start caring less and less about what other people may think. You grow a little less sensitive to other people's needs or what may go through their minds. When I was younger I was shy about a lot of things because, you know, I sort of come from a background which is probably a little bit more privileged than the majority of the society so I was probably acting under the influence of the urge to become a part of the society, to integrate with the society, so you sort of tend to mention as little as possible about your own background so people wouldn't feel alienated. Halfway into your career, you've more or less established yourself so you've become a little bit more confident and you know where to mention it and where not to mention it. In professional circles, it usually helps to mention it. [laughs]”

İzzet indicated that his initial reluctance to talk his education was the result of a youthful desire to blend in with his peers, a mentality which he later grew out of as he became successful in his own right. It may come as no surprise, then, that it was primarily among the younger participants interviewed that a similar measure of discomfort was expressed in making their educational background known to people from other schools.

Refraining from mentioning one's Robert College background was attributed not only to this social sensitivity but as a way of avoiding certain personal expectations or stereotypes, such as those described by Eda. In addition to this, several of the younger interview participants also commented on the way the school itself is perceived locally. Here, alumni claimed that the unwanted attention generally centered around the cultural or political affiliations of the school, both real and perceived. Can, for example, recognized that the expectations other people held ranged from personal expectations of what a Robert College student should be to beliefs about the political affiliations of the institution itself.

“[In university], I was the *Robertli*, always. Since Day 1. From 11 ‘til today, this will continue forever, til I die. You’re always framed as a Robert guy because at the age of 11 there’s this one exam and every single upper middle class family or middle class family prepare their children to either make them get to Robert College or, you know, their 2<sup>nd</sup> choices or 3<sup>rd</sup> choices. But the 1<sup>st</sup> choice is always Robert College. So I was one of the few lucky guys out of 60 guys who made it that year to Robert College. Among my peers, I was always this guy who went to Robert College, which is spoiling in a way but you’re also always challenged, you’re also always criticized. If I say a dumb word, if I act like a dumbass, they’re like, ‘You went to Robert College, you stupid ass!’ There’s this pressure on you, always.

“In college it was like that. To guys from Anatolia, I was always like this capitalist pig, which I wasn’t like that but they labeled me like that. From other schools in Istanbul, of course, it was OK, you could hang out with those guys, but the guys from Anatolia always saw me even as a non-Turkish guy. That was their perception. And I’m not that type, I’m not the guy who speaks English between every single word of Turkish, who always... how do you say... shows off. I’m not a show off guy, I try to keep a low profile. But even doing that didn’t always work out with some guys.

“[In Turkey,] Robert College *eşittir* America, *yani*. Anything, any connotation that reminds you of the US, as a third world country, belongs to Robert College. Every good and bad. So, Clinton comes, people start talking about Robert College. I don’t know why. Bush bombs Iraq, they also start talking about Robert College.”

The international or political affiliations that deterred some alumni were not mentioned by others, who implied that their own discomfort was based on the socioeconomic status outsiders often attributed to Robert College students. One interview participant, Gökhan, remarked on the fact that the association that many people have with Robert College is complicated and based as much on the perceived socioeconomic status of the students as it is on their intelligence or academic ability. It was this aspect of the reputation that seemed to make that particular subject most uncomfortable, perhaps because he had admitted earlier in the interview that even though it was quite difficult for his family to afford (“quite frankly, the tuition scared my father”), his parents had seen the high tuition as an investment in their son’s future.

“When getting together with friends from RC, we reminisce about those days. Other than that, I prefer not to with people who are not RC... I think it could steer the conversation or attention in a different way. Mentioning RC which is a legend has some register with people who come from more ‘middle class schools.’”

*How would you describe this ‘RC legend’?*

“It depends on the person’s educational background. People from more middle class schools tend to think of RC graduates as rich kids, for one, and refined bourgeoisie, for another. Which is pretty much it, I think.”

*So it’s more a social reputation than an educational one?*

“Yeah.”

*Is that the part you’re trying to distance yourself from?*

“I’m not trying to distance myself... well, maybe I am... but the main motive there, I think, is so that they don’t ask me or ask themselves or whatever: ‘This is not what an RC graduate is supposed to be! An RC graduate is supposed to be rich and go around in a *robe de chambre* and...’ I don’t know.”

Although he begins confidently in describing the times when he might confidently use the Robert College name or indulge with friends in memories of their time at the school, Gökhan soon seems to become uncomfortable with the conversation. After referring to other schools as “more middle class” he attempts to find a balance in his speech by describing Robert College as a school whose graduates are rightly thought of as “rich kids, for one, and refined bourgeoisie, for another.” His inability to hold a *line* with regard to his own socioeconomic position makes it difficult for him to proceed in the conversation without contradicting himself. Eventually, he admits that he is intimidated by what he perceives are the expectations demanded of Robert College students/alumni and he concludes the description by creating a caricature of the character who would meet these expectations.

His attempts at *face-work* correspond to those that might be expected of a participant who recognizes that he has made a mistake and who is attempting to avoid committing any acts that may further the damage to his *face*.

“Any claims regarding self may be made with belittling modesty, with strong qualifications, or with a note of unseriousness; by hedging in these ways he will have prepared a self for himself that will not be discredited by exposure, personal failure, or the unanticipated acts of others.” (Goffman, 1955: 16)

Although his motivations in the interaction were individual, the ellipsis that ended his thought was familiar, coming – as so many others had – at the point at which a speaker would have to convey the enormity of the impression Robert College had on others in a few words. It also appeared when interview participants attempted to describe the school’s

legend. Some alumni found it difficult to articulate the impact that the Robert College reputation had on outsiders, resorting instead to facial gestures and imitations of dialogue and leaving their own summary descriptions incomplete. At times the speechlessness was even directed toward the participants themselves, who, as Robert College students occupied a position within the school's legend.

“Whenever I said ‘I’m going to RC,’ people would react – [*makes a surprised face*] ‘Whoa!’ – as if I was some sort of a... which, I mean, you do sort of enjoy it but it’s a bit exaggerated, I felt. So, unlike my other fellows, I wasn’t like ‘Oh, I’m going to RC, you know.’” (Gaye)

An awareness of the personal register that the Robert College reputation may have was demonstrated by all of the former students interviewed. The notion of regional limitations on the status or reputation of the school also appeared several times, however. As my earliest research questions had anticipated, the topic of localized influence was most often brought up by former students who had gone on to international schools after graduating from Robert College. This is hardly surprising, since uninterrupted immersion in one’s own culture rarely allows for the type of reflexivity that arises from exposure to other cultural perspectives.<sup>14</sup> What did seem significant to me was the fact that even those alumni who had attended university abroad (at sites ranging from small, “unknown” schools to top European and Ivy League schools) and who offered insightful comments on the localized importance of the Robert College name acknowledged that the limitations they observed in no way affected their willingness or desire to take advantage of this status within the range in which it held currency. Quite simply, these graduates recognized the regional boundaries of their school’s reputation and rather than allowing these limits to restrict their use of the reputation, they used this knowledge to refine their own ability to determine where, when, and how to gain advantage from the status associated with their high school’s reputation.

Discussing the relationship between location and Robert College’s reputation therefore requires the consideration of two more or less distinct regions: Turkey, as the

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<sup>14</sup> I am reminded of the variously-attributed adage that seems to be the heart of sociological inquiry: “I don’t know who discovered water, but it certainly wasn’t a fish.”

local site of the school itself, and the international community as a whole. These geographical divisions generally served to situate the experiences of recognition or non-recognition that my interview participants related to me. The issues alumni mentioned concerning the geographic considerations of Robert College's reputation were often expressed in through a duality: the awareness of the pervasive influence the Robert College name had within local Turkish society and the lack of acknowledgement for the school that alumni had experienced in international contexts.

Over the course of my interviews, I was surprised to hear several of the participants directly address the issue of Robert College's regional value. This was, of course, one aspect of my original, comparative research question and it was something that I was hoping to learn from the alumni I spoke with. In order to avoid influencing their thoughts on the subject, however, I made a point of phrasing my questions in a way which would not directly call this issue into consideration. Despite the fact that I didn't touch on it myself, however, quite a few of the people I spoke with engaged with this idea.

“It's weird, it's stupid, it's all by name. Turks have their obsession with brand names, you know?” (Didem)

“I was more comfortable talking about [my university], both because I was older plus, you know, it meant less to people in Turkey than Robert College did. It's basically mentioning a very big club in Turkey versus a very big club somewhere else. It's interesting. I think it's the common experience of all people who went to some sort of high school education in a foreign school. I've heard it from people who went to French high schools, German high schools, etc. They always say that, in Turkey, which high school you graduate from makes more of a difference than which university you graduate from.” (Gaye)

Students with international experience often referred to the limitations of the Robert College reputation by observing a difference in the amount of respect that knowledge of their educational background earned them abroad. All of the former students admitted that mentioning their Robert College background in Turkey inevitably elicited a distinct reaction, although the exact nature of the reaction tended to vary based on the other person's own educational background. Internationally, most of the alumni I spoke with confessed that there had been no such reactions except when meeting fellow Turks. Faruk, an RC graduate who completed his undergraduate and Master's studies in the US and who is currently finishing up a PhD there notes:

“It is very common for Turks living abroad to ask each about their educational background when they meet in networking/social events, etc. Most people would at some point ask the other party which universities they attended and, eventually, which high school.”

There was some slight variation in the way interview participants perceived of Robert College’s international reputation based on their own experience, with alumni who attended European universities indicating that they expected the school’s name would be more recognizable in the US, but on the whole, the acknowledgement of Turkey as the boundary of the school’s influence was expressed by most of these former students.

When they mentioned the lack of attention or acknowledge given to the reputation of Robert College by those they met abroad, former students generally took the stance that such an oversight was normal and to be expected. They did this by downplaying the importance of the school themselves, intimating that it was high school, not a level of education that was commonly discussed in the world at large. Some went on to claim that a lack of familiarity with the school was hardly a shortcoming and even stressed that focusing too much on one’s high school was a sign that the person had probably accomplished little in the meantime.

“Since you’re asking questions about Robert College, I’m this frank. Usually, it’s not my – it could be my first identity, if I identified myself in different layers, it could be one of the first few important identities I carry, but I try not to mention that. I’m not one of those guys that tries to live on with their Robert College legacy. Because it’s over. It’s high school. It’s just a high school. Of course, if you ask questions like that, I talk about it in a very fashionable way but now there’s 15 years of other stuff that’s happened afterward. There’s some friends who their only achievement in life is Robert College so they tend to mention that a lot, all the time. But if you think that you have done a good amount of work afterwards, you know, you don’t have to live with that identity.” (Can)

Can’s shifting of the blame for this conversation onto me, the researcher, was something I found interesting. Throughout the interview he had praised the school and his time there, referring to it as the “best time [he’d] ever had.” As he shifted his conversational *line* to put Robert College into an international context, he began to downplay the school. His tone at this point of the interview was somewhat hostile and I recognized that he was embarrassed at having been caught ‘out of *face*,’ contradicting the

self-image he had previously constructed throughout the interview of a graduate for whom attending Robert College had been a major life achievement.

Coming on the heels of their own insistence that their time at Robert College had been the most formative of their lives, however, the belief professed by Can and other alumni who had studied abroad that one's high school was not a major source of status or prestige was difficult to believe. Juxtaposing these statements with other observations seems to indicate that the relationship is more complex than it appears at first glance, with Robert College itself occupying many different and occasionally contradictory positions within the minds of alumni. For example, although many of my interview participants had also mentioned the negative aspects associated with the Robert College name, including the pressure of having to live up to sky-high expectations, those who discussed the lack of register that Robert College carried abroad always seemed to do so with an air of vague disappointment.

Even those former students who said that they avoided mentioning their Robert College background seemed to feel that they were at a loss in international contexts in which the school's name would have little register. The excerpt from my interview with Can, provided above, may offer an important clue as to the nature of this loss. He admitted that whether he publicized it or not, he always considered "RC graduate" to be one of the most fundamental "layers" comprising his own identity. It stands to reason, then, that any context in which the meaning (or, more accurately, the significance) of this label changed would also bring about a corresponding change in his sense of self-worth. As long as he is in Turkey, then, or within a space in which Robert College is recognized as an elite school, this former student would possess all of the traits and/or status attributed to the school and its graduates. The knowledge of its existence would suffice in giving him all of the confidence and self-assurance that such a status holder is entitled to, even without the need for external confirmation. Removed from that space, however, he would be subject to the curious experience of having lost nothing in terms of his own personal accomplishments and yet been separated from a significant portion of the social status to which he had become accustomed.

A similar observation can be made in the case of Aysel, another Robert College alumnus who went on to study at top Turkish universities before continuing her education with a Master's degree in Europe. After admitting that her rigorous high school education combined with the Robert College name had allowed her to succeed in university almost effortlessly, she noted that her experience in her MA program had been quite different. She insisted that this had been excellent for her personal development and that it represented the first time "since Robert" in which she had actually had to struggle and put effort into something. Her words and her tone, however, indicate that there was also something lost in the experience: if not a sense of identity, at least a momentary sense of orientation.

"There, it doesn't matter whether you're from RC, no one cares about RC, no one knows about Istanbul. You're just a Turkish girl speaking good English. It's not like the US. In the US, they know more or less about RC. You don't need to explain yourself over and over again. But in Europe, no one knows and no one cares."

Although her Master's program had been made up of international students from many different countries, her remark about being "just a Turkish girl" seems to be filled with a kind of self-consciousness about her national identity. It implies a sort of discomfort – akin to nakedness – that comes with being evaluated on her own merits and without the Robert College name to vouch for her worth, as she had become accustomed to in Turkey. Can joined her in expressing this sentiment:

"You can't really brag about your college [high school] degree as a Robert College graduate in France because nobody knows about it but in Turkey it's a good network."

The difference is social register that came with international education was not limited to the representation of high school education, however. Several of those participants who had studied abroad similarly claimed that their international university experience was not fully comprehensible within certain Turkish circles. İzzet finished Robert College in the mid-70s and later spent several years in the US earning a Bachelor's degree and an MBA before returning to Turkey. He said in his interview that he felt that Turkish attitudes toward foreign education had shifted over the years. Arguing that Turkish people were now more aware of the status associated with specific universities abroad, the former student claimed that the local standards applied to international university had risen.

“When I came back from the States as a relatively young graduate, it was more of a status symbol but nowadays it’s losing its glamour, I think, because more and more high school graduates go to the States and most of the students that go to the States to study come out of schools like Robert College, they end up in what they call the Ivy League schools so a school like [my small, second-tier university] doesn’t mean as much as it used to. [laughs] Although I appreciated the time I spent there, if I knew what I know now I probably would have shot for something a little bit more prestigious but it’s OK. I can deal with it. [laughs]”

The laugh at the end of this quotation particularly interests me: it is the good-humored magnanimity of a well-established professional who recognizes that his academic background and the personal and professional skills he has developed have secured him a very comfortable and respectable position in his chosen field. Although he is acknowledging the fact that his international university does not, in a sense, live up to the expectations created by his Robert College experience, he is not particularly concerned about not having attended an Ivy League school; from his current social and professional position, he recognizes that an “even better” university would have made very little difference.

A more recent graduate, Begüm, offered an interesting counter to the opinion expressed by İzzet that a degree from a high-status university would be more important these days. After completing her undergraduate degree at a small Ivy League school in the States, she observed while job-hunting in Turkey that few people had ever heard of her university and they focused instead on her Robert College background.

“People from Robert College having gone to Princeton, Yale. They’ve been going for years. It’s like... like having Harvard on your CV in Turkey. Robert College is so big. And I think, like, for job connections in Turkey, Robert College is more valuable than [my university]. I mean, [my university] people don’t even know. ‘Okay, you studied in the States, fine.’ [My university] very few people know but Robert College is...”

This interview subject was never able to finish that sentence. It was one of many sentences, found in nearly every interview, in which former students gave up, trailed off, or changed the subject rather than attempting to describe the full Robert College reputation (“legend”). Descriptions of the way in which the school was received locally inevitably fell back into either comparisons with other sites or ended with uncompleted sentences. The pauses lingered, in the interviews and on the transcripts; pauses that indicated that the

speaker had arrived somewhere, come to the end of something, and would need to struggle with explanation no longer. Eventually, I too was able to recognize the pause on the distance, forecast its arrival, and expect no more. My interview participants, Robert College alumni from a variety of backgrounds and with a wide range of personal experience, had reached the limitations of their ability to question the school's reputation. Their shared acceptance of the school's position, their doxic understanding of its value, required no further explanation. This, I believe, is the heart of the Robert College legend. It is the ability for people to discuss the school, to talk about and around it, and to make reference to the institution and her students without ever having to fully explain themselves. It has become, within Turkish society, a sort of known unknown – an institution whose status everyone recognizes unquestioningly and which they, in turn, perpetuate by their own deference to silence.

This perspective is essential to understanding how Robert College's reputation functions in Turkey. Alumni, students, and prospective students alike all recognize that despite the fact that it is "only a high school" and that one's further university education will also play a part in future success, attending Robert College is in itself enough to ensure that students will have access to all of the best opportunities Turkey has to offer. It will, of course, be the student's responsibility to live up to the promise implied by this association and there will, no doubt, be students who somehow 'drift away' but in terms of gaining access to the best networks, opportunities, and positions, all of my interview participants seemed to feel that a Robert College degree was unequalled in Turkey.

## 7. TRADING IN THE UNKNOWN: AMBIGUITY IN FORMS OF CAPITAL

Key to any discussion of the reputation or advantages of Robert College is the notion of power. For those aware of the school, this power or recognition is formidable although there are a variety of claims made regarding its source. Some allege that it results from a long history of academic excellence, others point to the high socioeconomic level of its students and graduates, and still others to the school's close relationship with American thought and culture. In attempting to explicate the numerous strands that make up the fabric of Robert College's image, it is important to have an understanding of Bourdieu's theory of capital.

Bourdieu primarily outlines three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social.<sup>15</sup> *Economic capital* is that identified in the most traditional sense as the value of one's accumulated money, possessions, and other assets. Within this form of capital, individual manifestations can easily change form, as occurs when cash is used to purchase items such as real estate which can also be readily converted back into cash. Economic capital has long been associated with power and it remains the most immediate and most easily measured form of capital. Moving beyond the scope of economic capital, Bourdieu introduces the notion of *cultural capital*. Cultural capital can be thought of as the skills, abilities, proficiencies, dispositions, or cultural objects which an individual has collected or internalized. The earliest development of this form of capital begins with the family, in the home, and it is later supplemented within more formal educational institutions. Cultural capital is, above all, a knowledge capital which indicates one's ability to successfully navigate a given field and it may frequently be associated with expertise arising from experience or exposure. The final form of capital discussed by Bourdieu, *social capital*, is

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<sup>15</sup> He also constructs and refers to a notion of symbolic capital which transcends these and is distinguished from them not in its content but instead on the basis of its mode of symbolic recognition (or misrecognition), dependent upon "the intervention of the habitus, a socially constituted cognitive capacity." (Bourdieu, 1986: 27) Symbolic capital, then, is not a form of capital: it is a characteristic of certain manifestations of capital indicating that they must be 'intuitively' recognized.

comprised of interpersonal networks and connections that can be used for profit or advantage. Significantly, social capital functions to extend benefit both internally (as when a friend uses influence to help another gain access to a professional position) and through demonstrations of unity presented to outside members (as is the case when a member of an elite club or group gains respect from those who are not members solely as a result of his association with the group). All of these forms of capital exist simultaneously but are unequally distributed, reflecting an individual's relative position within the field and providing him varying status values in relation to the other agents or participants with whom he is interacting at any moment. A more detailed examination of cultural and social capital will demonstrate the way in which these concepts are reproduced and exchanged as well as the way they were referred to in my conversations with graduates of Robert College.

## CULTURAL CAPITAL

The theory of cultural capital, discussed most explicitly in his 1986 essay "The Forms of Capital," is one which Bourdieu claims arose from a desire to explain the unequal educational success seen in students from different social classes. Beyond the differences which could be accounted for through unequal economic status, he observed that children from certain groups were not as 'well prepared' for school as some of their peers, leading him to consider the variability among home environments and familial instruction. Arriving at the theory of cultural capital, Bourdieu explained this difference as a familiarity with (or, in the case of those students who had more difficulty in school, distance from) the dominant culture in a society.

The acquisition of cultural capital occurs in a number of ways but Bourdieu emphasizes the role of the family in providing the earliest exposure to ideas, patterns of behavior, language, and cultural objects. Although cultural capital is not, in itself, dependent upon economic capital, the life conditions that financial independence provide better enable the conscious and unconscious transmission of cultural values, allowing for

the development of comparatively greater amounts of cultural capital. Brubaker has referred to such cultivation as “an investment of time (whether the time of hired specialists or the parents’ own time)” and observed that “this investment returns dividends in school and university” as well as any number of other social contacts (Brubaker, 1985: 757).

School attendance marks students’ universal exposure to the norms, values, and interaction patterns of the dominant class. Not surprisingly, it is in this environment, generally perceived as meritocratic and reflective of intellectual ability, that children whose accumulation of cultural capital does not mirror that of the dominant classes find success to be particularly elusive. This is not incidental, Bourdieu argues: it is the basis of the educational system’s ability to legitimize cultural capital and present the reproduction of the existing power structure as ‘natural’ or justified.

“By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the education system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture.” (Bourdieu, 1977: 494)

Despite the disparities seen among students from different social backgrounds, school attendance contributes to the development of cultural capital by legitimizing certain patterns of behavior and interaction. Bourdieu claims that aspects of education such as curricula, instruction styles, and evaluation procedures all tend to familiarize students with the demands of the dominant classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). In considering the application of this framework to the specific site of Robert College, it can be seen that the high school entry process (including both exam success and the social proximity indicated by selection of the school) have already contributed a high level of discrimination to the pool of viable applicants. This no doubt explains to some extent the unusually high proportion cultural capital enjoyed by students.

“Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because [...] it confers entirely original properties on the

cultural capital which it is presume to guarantee.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 17, italics in original)

Each of these aspects reflects skills or abilities which are indicative of a certain relationship to the cultural values or practices of a class or classes and which therefore demonstrate an individual’s comfort with or relative proximity to both the values and, by extension, the class itself. In essence, cultural capital goes beyond economic capital to situate an individual in a multidimensional web of power based on one’s distance from the dominant class. Acquired both in the family and in the school environment, an individual’s accumulated cultural capital is thus an indication of his total accumulated experience. In the case of Robert College, it will be seen that interview participants addressed each of the forms outlined by Bourdieu in their descriptions and recollections of the school.

Among the embodied forms of cultural capital that former students attributed to Robert College, the most prominent was the ability to speak English. The association of this language with Robert College, which uses it as the medium of instruction, is very strong and nearly every participant that I spoke with acknowledged that the school’s English education was a major factor in their interest in the school and their decision to attend. Thus, English is not only a skill that students acquire during their time at Robert College but in fact is one aspect of a Robert College education that helps the school attract Turkey’s top students. Linguistic competence has been discussed as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) but little emphasis has been placed on foreign language proficiency, a skill which global business expansion and international mobility have made increasingly important.

Participants said that their familiarity with English had a number of effects on their personal and/or professional lives. One of the graduates interviewed spoke generally, mentioning that the ability to speak English was a source of pride for him and one aspect which distinguished him from his peers:

“Back then, we were like the only ones who could speak English. A tourist would get lost in Beyoğlu and they wouldn’t be able to find anyone to speak English with them, as a 15 year old you could speak English, they’d be really shocked. ‘I’ve been traveling in Turkey for a month and you’re the best English-speaking person I’ve met and you’re only 14, 15.’ That was a big surprise.” (Can)

Another participant, who finished Robert College in the mid-70s and has worked in several disparate sectors over the years, admitted that his knowledge of English had given him distinct advantages on the labor market:

“We were lucky because when we graduated there weren’t too many people that could speak both Turkish and English and that could operate in both languages... after the first quarter of our careers, let’s say, Turkey went into this big economic boom and all the foreign companies started investing in Turkey and it was easy to do a lot of job-hopping, which is what I did, and it was easy to catch some nice positions and a lot of people stayed in those tracks and made it to the top.” (İzzet)

Both men recognized that their language skills, the quintessential example of embodied cultural capital, benefited them later in life and resulted directly from their having attended Robert College. The personal impact of language acquisition on students can be seen to run much deeper, however. In her interview, Aysel described the experience of attending a Master’s program abroad and being confronted with a lack of recognition for her high school. She summarized this perceived loss of status by saying: “[There,] you’re just a Turkish girl speaking good English.” The phrase is crucial because it shows the degree to which this ability (to speak English fluently) had been incorporated into her own perception of her identity. Even in an international context where “no one cared” about Robert College or its reputation, this participant felt that her language skills remained not simply relevant but a defining part of her own existence.

In contrast to easily discernable skills such as the ability to speak English, several former Robert College students credited the school with helping them to develop personal characteristics, including the tendency to think critically and approach new ideas with skepticism. Again unlike language skills, such characteristics are less easily correlated with advantage in the labor market although, as one PhD student pointed out, there are certain fields which highly value a questioning nature:

“I consider myself to be a skeptic when it comes to most things. I’d like to think about things myself before accepting those as facts. This sort of mentality is important in scientific thinking, where you have gone beyond the reach of most text books and the knowledge out there at this level starts becoming more and more questionable. I tend to believe that the education at RC has more or less shaped me this way.” (Faruk)

Former students certainly never implied that the development of critical thinking skills was somehow limited to Robert College or her graduates. As with the knowledge of English previously discussed, these are skills and characteristics which are hardly exclusive. What is significant, however, is not the objective availability of these traits but rather the fact that many interview participants considered the qualities to be inherently associated with their own experience at the school. Much the same way that language skills were observed to be essentially constitutive, traits such as critical thinking were also described with language that revealed a large degree of internalization. Statements such as “I consider myself to be a skeptic” and “I question things” (a claim made by interview participant Gökhan) reveal a fundamental identification with the role or habitual action of the critical thinker. The fact that these graduates also credit Robert College with their own development of the trait – a trait they have come to identify with on a personal level – seems to anticipate a similar projection of the school itself onto their own identity.

One final example of the type of cultural capital often seen in former Robert College students offers a more direct parallel with Bourdieu’s own research. In his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), Bourdieu explored a wide spectrum of proclivities asserted by French citizens from a variety of backgrounds. His argument was that the consumption choices they made with regard to food, clothing, hobbies, artistic pursuits and more were indicative of their cultural capital. They were all outward manifestations of ‘taste,’ a type of representation through which individuals express their own (dis)position in relation to culture.

This idea, that personal preferences reflected exposure to and familiarity with cultural objects and ideas, was indirectly referred to by a number of my interview participants and was particularly evident in their attempts to explain how people who did not attend Robert College view them. İzzet seemed amused while relating that even family members called him picky (“half-jokingly!”) because of his tastes but he admitted that many of his own preferences resulted from his having been exposed to certain things that the others had not.

“One group perceives [Robert College], or the graduates of Robert College, as arrogant. Even my mother sometimes half-jokingly calls me that. There’s that group in society.”

*How does it get that reputation?*

“Probably because you were exposed to more of the Western culture or to lots more than the people who went to other schools. That gives you a bigger selection of things to choose from which creates a result of creating someone who’s a bit picky as far as other people are concerned. Your standards automatically become higher. Or different, not necessarily higher, but different.”

Another student, on the other hand, spoke more generally about the way in which her education at Robert College had encouraged her to cultivate not only an affinity for certain objects but also an understanding of and appreciation for entire fields or approaches from which she had previously been removed.

“After the first year, we had lots of theatre plays, drama courses, unlike any other school. Robert College is the place where I started to enjoy literature, both Turkish and English literature. And to this day, I owe my knowledge and my curiosity – both in theatre, cinema, literature... The books we read? I still remember. Not my university years. I feel like my education – my *real* education – stopped when I graduated from Robert College. These are the years when I absorbed most of my knowledge about life and things. It’s not about biology, physics, or any other curricula but... literature, theatre, plays... the way you express yourself, the way you can question – even if you’re not a questioning mind – how others respond to different things. Approaches about thinking, being different. That sort of thing.” (Didem)

The cultivation of this perspective can be seen to bridge the gap between embodied cultural capital, which is closely related to attending Robert College, and objectified cultural capital, which does not result directly from an association with the school. As Bourdieu himself is quick to point out, the accumulation of objectified cultural capital, the ownership of cultural goods ranging from works of art to textbooks to machines, is valuable precisely because it implies a corresponding ability to consume the goods. Didem’s explanation of the personal development of a particular approach, then, is a description of types of embodied cultural capital that requires for their full application the presence of external cultural objects.

In his interview, Can drew this point out more explicitly by mentioning specific cultural goods that formed the basis of his education at Robert College:

“We read books like Anne Frank’s diary, *Catcher in the Rye*, Aldus Huxley *Brave New World*, all those things on the US curriculum. *Great Gatsby*, all

those books. We started reading *Romeo and Juliet* when we were 14, then *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, the things you probably studied in high school. We took an elective class like 'Feminine Literature,' we've seen movies like *Citizen Kane*, *Dr. Caligari's Cabinet*, Eisenstein, these are all classics. At the age of 16. Then my friend went to study cinema at [a university in Turkey] and they showed these movies all over again, when he was 20. We were fans of Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, you know, all these psychedelic guys, Janis Joplin, stuff like that at the age of 16... Then we go to college and we see people are exploring that new. [You think,] 'Oh, I was there 5 years ago.' That feeling really keeps you ahead of the competition. That was the good thing about Robert College, it kept us ahead of the competition."

Although the school was not responsible for providing students with the cultural artifacts which Bourdieu has identified as objectified cultural capital, the incorporation of such works into the education enabled students to interact with them as comfortable and familiar objects. Doing so may have helped students to develop the disposition or approach to culture already mentioned by Didem.

It is also the assumed development of these various instances of cultural capital which gives Robert College the ability to extend to its students a heightened degree of institutionalized capital. Academic degrees and honors are the most recognized form of institutionalized cultural capital as they offer what is seen as an objective guarantee of skill or proficiency in a given field. Graduates of Robert College receive a high school diploma which is itself not particularly different from the hundreds of thousands of other high school diplomas awarded in Turkey each year. The fact that these diplomas have been issued by Robert College, however, is one that many alumni have claimed increases the local value of their degree.

The advantages of institutionalized cultural capital based on the reputation of the school were not lost on interview participants, several of whom admitted that when applying to later educational programs or for professional positions, there was a marked emphasis not simply on the level of education that a Robert College diploma indicated but, more importantly, on the quality of the candidate that was implied by their association with that school in particular.

"I am kind of proud to be a graduate of RC because it is a prestigious school. It makes you feel better when somebody reads your CV and emphasizes the words "graduate of RC," with an admiring look." (Doruk)

“In Turkey, Robert College is one of the best schools so it is an advantage in every aspect. People, when they learn that you’re from that school, they’re more interested. They think that it is a good quality.” (Eda)

“On CVs, it again makes an impact. It is, by itself, a symbol of success. No matter which university you went to or what you did in your later life. It does have a huge impact.” (Emre)

## SOCIAL CAPITAL

The theory of social capital has been the focus of a great deal of sociological interest over the past few decades. Bourdieu identified social capital as a web of connections or “social obligations” that can be either individual, as in a relationship between two social contacts or acquaintances, or network-based, as enjoyed by members of a group. Making use of this capital requires mutual recognition or acknowledgement on the part of both actors and, as such, “the volume of social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 21)

Coleman points out in his essay on how social capital is used in the creation of human capital that the organization of social capital is far less important than its ability to be utilized:

“Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors [...] within the structure.” (1988: S98)

This facilitation of certain actions is the basis for social capital’s power, and it is the aspect of social capital which has been most widely considered by sociologists. As a research tool, the concept of social capital has frequently been used in studies of occupational outlook, status attainment, and social mobility. Applying the concept to empirical research has led to a variety of uses and connotations, however. Lin has taken care to underscore the difference between social resources and social capital in his own work, even going so far

as to trace separately the intellectual origins of the former. Social resources, Lin claims, are the individual connections or relationships and thus naturally lend themselves to research. In contrast, the expression 'social capital' denotes the summed value of these resources, a notion which has the potential to offer much insight but which can be unwieldy for the researcher hoping to gather empirical data. Ultimately, he argues that both concepts are necessary for sociologists and that each helps to reinforce the other: "[The convergence of the social resources and social capital theories] places the significance of social resources in the broader theoretical discussion of social capital and sharpens the definition and operationalization of social capital as a research concept." (1999: 471)

In studying the field of education, many researchers have found it expedient to differentiate between personal social capital, transmitted through the family, and institutional social capital, acquired through education and other formal memberships. Despite variations in the terminology used to categorize these types of social capital, results seem to agree, with a number of studies concluding that the social connections or networks forged through personal achievement or shared institutions being more significant than familial connections in occupational attainment (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Lee and Brinton, 1996). Another study by Buerkle and Guseva found that personal income was also positively affected by one's social capital, prompting those researchers to observe such networks "reduce the uncertainty inherently present in the hiring process by compensating for the lack of information with personal, in-depth knowledge and trust." (2002: 674)

In his own writings, Bourdieu tends to emphasize the social capital inherent in groups over that of one-to-one interaction, although he is clear in claiming that the value of any group as a whole is dependent upon the proper and consistent conduct of each of its members. "Each member of the group is thus instituted as a custodian of the limits of the group," he claims (1986: 22), a stance which corresponds neatly with Goffman's assertion, examined earlier, that members of a group share a *face* with regards to their representation of the group, both internally and during interactions with others.

The dynamic of individual representation of a group is important for this study, as the social capital enjoyed by Robert College students present itself primarily through their

membership in the alumni network. Following the precedent set by my interview participants, my discussion of this group will refer to the informal category of all of those individuals who can call themselves graduates of Robert College and not to any strictly defined organization formally associated with the school itself. Former students approached in a variety of ways this informal network, which extends both laterally to include their classmates and vertically to connect alumni from multiple academic generations.

Some participants were quite forthright about the type of opportunities that they had access to through the network, as could be seen by their use of specific names and titles.

“The alumni network is so valuable. It is incredibly valuable. You just, like, meet the President of the Central Bank and then the guy happens to be – not anymore – a Robert College graduate. There’s this angel investor guy, he literally has a lot of millions in his pocket, he made a lot of money from real estate. Last year we were in the same soccer tournament, we played against each other. It’s really interesting, the people you see. Actors, actresses. Check out the Forbes 100. Do we have it here? Here, let me show you. [*Flips through a Turkish Forbes magazine, the cover of which reads: 100 En Zengin Türkler, The 100 Wealthiest Turks*] You’ll be amazed. RC, number one. RC graduate, number two. Who else? RC graduate. RC graduate. [...] It’s my yearbook and it’s the Forbes 100.” (Can)

The emphasis on the “value” of the alumni network recalls the economics-inspired phrasing of Bourdieu and seems to imply that this participant, a young businessman, was aware of the potential for profit (in every sense of the word) which accompanied his relationship with his fellow Robert College graduates. Although already quite successful in his own right, Can chose to mention older alumni who were quite well-established in their careers; whether he did so because he found such successes inspiring or because he recognized that these contacts were the ones with the most to offer him personally would be difficult to state with any certainty. What can be certain is that this graduate was sensitive to the width and breadth of Robert College’s alumni network and that it was a viable, active connection to which he was acknowledged as having full access.

While Can thought of the benefits that could be derived from his membership in the alumni network, another participant talked about a different aspect of the connection, but one which was vital to a full understanding of how such networks are able to main the intimacy required for their continuation.

“I feel like, as you get older, this whole RC bond makes it easier to connect with people. So when I see an RC person, either here [at the office] I’m more inclined to... you know... to... for example, if I have a CV in front of me from RC, I’m more inclined to, of course, work that he’s employed, he’s recruited. Or, I mean, I make friends more easily with interns that are RC.” (Aysel)

This remark illustrates both the way in which advantage is extended through alumni and one of the major factors encouraging this behavior. Aysel admits that it is easier for her to relation or “connect” with her fellow graduates, implying that even in the absence of other information, having attending the same high school (Robert College, specifically) gives them something significant in common. This may arise from her desire to indulge in nostalgia with someone who she feels will have had similar experiences or it may be indicative of some attachment to the idea that Robert College graduates constitute a group that is somehow homogeneous. Her claim that she would be more inclined to offer a job or other position to another former Robert College student demonstrates the way that social networks turn connections in to actual benefits. It is worth noting that Aysel, like Can, quoted above, is a relatively young professional and that both of these participants are still early in their careers. This may partially explain the desire for solidarity within the network that both express and which was not observed in the older interview participants. This may be an extension of Buerkle and Guseva’s finding that in making use of social networks such as alumni groups, those in charge of hiring are able to feel more confident in their selection of a candidate.

A final perspective on the alumni network by another interview participant shows that İzzet has already reflected a bit on the nature of his connection to other Robert College graduates.

“I’m in touch with probably a handful of classmates. On the internet I’m friends with a lot more but the ones that I call probably are just a handful. ... But I know that they’re there if I need to talk to them or I need to ask for help in some respect or if I think somebody knows a little bit more about a topic than I do, I can easily call them or write them a note and ask for their help and I usually get a positive response. In fact, I *always* get a positive response. That’s a privilege. I think that my classmates are probably more careful about making sure that they respond somehow. It’s like a loose network and membership requires respect for other members, in a way, so we try to make sure we’re courteous to each other. It’s a part of the deal, to respond to people. You could call someone and tell them that you can’t do anything about that but it’s not a part of the deal not to call someone.”

Several things stand out about this discussion of the network. Having graduated from Robert College in the late ‘70s, İzzet himself has a more well-established career which enables him to take a position that offers a nice balance between the reception of social network benefits and the granting of them. He does not focus solely on the way that he can make use of his social connections, nor does he address the specific ways in which he might personally be called upon to help someone else. Instead, this description of the alumni network brings to the fore the aspects of mutual respect and shared responsibility which underlie the most overt exchanges of favors. His use of words such as “membership” and “privilege” indicates that he thinks of these connections more as a system of obligation than as an inalienable resource to be exploited. This is echoed by his descriptions of the type of actions or responses that are required in order to maintain good will and fellowship within the network. Perhaps as a reflection of the personal achievement enjoyed by his own cohort, his representation of his contacts and connections seems to imply a more lateral focus with direct discussion of his friends and classmates as being those he is most closely associated with.

The personal regard implied in İzzet’s observations about his network and his network connections recalls Bourdieu’s insistence that social networks and the capital they engender should not be understood as purely self-interested relationships:

“It should be made clear, to dispel a likely misunderstanding, that the investment in question here is not necessarily conceived as a calculated pursuit of gain, but that it has every likelihood of being experienced in terms of the logic of emotional investment, i.e., as an involvement which is both necessary and disinterested.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 28)

## TRANSFER: REPRODUCTION AND LEGITIMIZATION

Each form of capital (economic, cultural, and social) is distinct and incapable of being completely reduced to any other kind. Although Bourdieu goes to great lengths to explicate and differentiate each of these forms of capital, it is essential to remember that in day-to-day life, all types of capital are combined at varying levels to create the dynamic sum of one’s value or power. The fact that all three work together to provide a basis for power, however, allows for a degree of flexibility within an individual’s particular configuration or distribution of these forms. Much the way financial wealth may be diversified in order to maximize profit and minimize risk, the forms of capital discussed here are often exchanged or recombined.

In thinking about the ways in which various forms of capital are transferred, it is important to consider the role of economic capital, which Bourdieu claims provides the real basis for each of the other forms:

“It has to be posited simultaneously that economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (no least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root, in other words – but only in the last analysis – at the root of their effects.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 24)

Bourdieu claims that it is the desire to reproduce social conditions (and, by extension, social structures) that drives the transfer of different forms of capital. Taking

economic capital as the basis of power, he focuses on the way that the diversification of capital enables power not only to reproduce itself but also to legitimize its own existence. It does this by taking advantage of agents' 'misrecognition' in instances where the true workings of the system are obscured.

Quite often in his attempts to expose the agents or structures responsible for the reproduction of class distinctions, Bourdieu addresses the education system. The education system offers a good example of legitimization because, despite the fact that students who enter the system with greater amounts of cultural capital are inevitably more successful, the results of educational evaluation are perceived as being meritocratic and unbiased. Successful students are seen to 'deserve' their success in much the same way that unsuccessful students are blamed for their failures. The misrecognition entailed in this relationship (that is, the fact that the trappings of cultural capital are mistaken for objective intelligence) help the bearers of cultural capital to legitimate (and thus successfully reproduce) their own position and common values.

This system of legitimization is not necessary only for the role it plays in the reproduction of power; by obscuring the actual channels through which power is transferred, it prevents challenges to the system and maintains a semblance of natural order. Systems such as education appear to be beyond the influence of economic capital because the relationship between the two is mediated by cultural capital, a form of power that is largely invisible or, when visible, takes on the appearance of innocent differences. Even within the realm of economic capital, the support of other "disguised" forms of capital is required for successful reproduction. Brubaker has observed:

"Objectivist variants of Marxism, according to Bourdieu, cannot account for the 'specific contributions that representations of legitimacy make to the exercise and perpetuation of power.' Nor can they account for the importance of the accumulation of non-economic goods and resources for the exercise and perpetuation of power, even economic power." (1985: 754)

Among those in power, the impulse to pursue legitimizing opportunities, such as education, is not consciously recognized for its own purpose. Instead, members of these

classes engage in such practices because they reflect common values. The importance of this last point cannot be overstated. Those individuals who have large amounts of economic and/or cultural capital and who use elite education to legitimate their position almost universally do so unwittingly. They may recognize that a school has a good reputation or that attending a particular school is a family tradition but their enrollment is rarely a conscious attempt to preserve their own status position. The increasing power held by the educational system in particular was noteworthy for Bourdieu, who recognized this development as a fundamental shift in the modern presentation of power.

“The more the official transmission of capital is prevented or hindered, the more the effects of the clandestine circulation of capital in the form of cultural capital become determinant in the reproduction of the social structure. As an instrument of reproduction capable of disguising its own function, the scope of the educational system tends to increase, and together with this increase is the unification of the market in social qualifications which gives rights to occupy rare positions.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 26)

Interview participants time and time again referred to Robert College as a ‘legend.’ They recognized and expressed to me the idea that the school’s reputation was so large as to ultimately transcend comparison and yet, when questioned further, they all failed to provide any substantive support for this reputation. Any attempts proved to be entirely superficial:

“Reputation? I don’t even know how it gets its reputation. I think just age, how old it is, the beauty of the campus.” (Begüm)

An appreciation for the complex way in which the major forms of capital are combined with regard to Robert College may shed light on the difficulty that former students encountered in their attempts to describe the school. By examining each form of capital individually, we can gain a better understanding of the multiple layers of meaning attributed to the school.

Economic capital is one which is often discussed together with Robert College. With a current annual tuition of \$21,000, the cost of education at the school makes attendance an

impossibility for many. Because of the expenses associated with the school, a few interview participants mentioned that the socioeconomic status of students was one of the school's most widely recognized traits. In thinking about the school's reputation, then, the previous existence of students' economic capital is one defining aspect. Robert College is not simply the recipient of large amounts of money, however. The alumni that I spoke with were generally all employed in or retired from successful careers and some further implied that graduating from Robert College had been a factor in their ability to attain high-level positions with good salaries. As such, a Robert College education may be seen as an asset capable of increasing one's economic capital.

The success on the high school entry exam that students are required to demonstrate before they can be admitted to Robert College reflects Bourdieu's observation that academic success in the education system is an indication that a student has acquired the cultural capital necessary to allow her to thrive in a learning environment governed by the language and behavior patterns of the dominant class. It is quite unlikely that the real reason for this success would be correctly identified, however. Traditional modes of discussion would generally consider the intelligence or 'brilliance' of the school's students. Because only the best students qualify to attend Robert College, the school's name is often associated with a measure of quality, allowing students and graduates to earn returns for years on their earliest shows of cultural capital.

Social capital in the form of alumni networks is strongly associated with Robert College. While these connections do certainly benefit the members of the network, they are networks that could only be built after enrollment. The social capital of the parents, on the other hand, may have had a bigger influence on getting a student into the school in the first place. The young age at which students have traditionally applied for entry to high school makes school selection a family affair, with parents bringing their own thoughts and opinions into the decision-making process. Since school choices are somewhat limited, families who select Robert College are those that are not only aware of the school but also those who feel that such an ambition is a reasonable outcome to expect for their child. Selection of Robert College then implies a familiarity with the school that may only grow

out of a 'reasonable' social proximity and which therefore may to some degree reflect the family's existing social capital.

Because the Robert College reputation present an amalgamation of all of these ideas, former students seem to refer to the school and its reputation in a fairly ambiguous way, at times emphasizing the socioeconomic status of students, at other times to the cosmopolitan curriculum. The inability of graduates to pin down a single description of the school seems to mirror the school's own shifting nature, making it an institution that can be discussed and understood without ever becoming completely accessible, a known unknown.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the present study, I have sought to understand the unique relationship that former graduates seem to have with Robert College, to identify the components of the institutional ‘legend’ that have made the school so well known locally, and to recognize the way in which graduates present and represent their experience at Robert College to others.

The relationship between former students and their high school, Robert College, is one in which my interview participants heavily emphasized the formative experience of their time. They attribute to the school many of their own most distinctive personal traits and characteristics (both positive and negative) and speak of the exposure to new ideas, cultural artifacts, and educational styles as one of the primary benefits of having attended the school. Some of the graduates I spoke with were also critical, however, claiming that the habits, interests, or inclinations they developed at the school isolated them to some degree from many of their Turkish peers.

The legendary aspects of Robert College that were discussed in interviews generally made use of three distinct ideas, all of which should be understood in order to fully appreciate the way that the school functions as a site of social confirmation. In the first stage, participants talked about their social knowledge or awareness of the school as an institution with a history of excellence. By doing so, they not only conceptualize Robert College as a site that transcends the physical boundaries of the space but they also recognize their own social distance or relationship to that site. Descriptions of the test experience and of learning that they had been accepted to the school indicated a shift in the narrative which made up the second stage of the legend, the student’s own personal integration into the legend. Finally, discussion of the school’s campus and buildings helped to embody the space and provide a tangible support for the notions of grandeur and distinctiveness that in part made up the institutional legend described earlier.

In studying the way in which real graduates presented, represented, and explained their Robert College background, I learned that many former students seemed to consider there to be a 'right' way and a 'wrong' way to refer to their education. The examples for what constituted each type differed considerably from person to person but a few rules appeared applicable to all of my interview participants. All of them acknowledged the reputation of the school in the greater social context but preferred to discuss their own specific experiences rather than making any statements about the nature of the institution as a whole. Most also made a point of raising some criticisms about Robert College (although here the focus of the criticism varied widely) and about those graduates who spent 'too much' time talking about the school.

Perhaps one of the biggest limitations of my research was my inability to escape from an RC-centric point of investigation. To some degree, this difficulty was foreseen not only by my framing of the issue but also by the way in which interview participants were located and by my initial introduction of the topic. Although I originally sought to understand former students' personal conceptualization of their education networks, the peer-referral system I used for finding research participants and my early explanation of the project may have skewed the results of my investigation by causing the subjects to focus on Robert College as primary. It is possible, therefore, that the interview participants themselves did not necessarily consider the school to be the most central or important institution. Rather, because they were aware that their connection to Robert College was the basis of/criteria for their involvement in the interviews, their connection to the school may have subconsciously put Robert College into a central position in their minds. The nature of their responses combined with the non-verbal behavior exhibited during interviews tends to make me think otherwise, however. The answers that they gave about Robert College and the time they spent at that school indicate a kind of reflexivity that was lacking from descriptions of their universities, intimating that the former students themselves had spent more time attempting to make sense of their high school experience.

With this examination of the legendary Robert College narrative and the way in which graduates interact with and embody this legend, I hope to open the field of education, reputation, and social status in Turkey to further inquiry. Future studies of

Robert College that wish to arrive at more objective results on the position of the school's local status would benefit greatly from incorporating the responses of people who did not attend Robert College. Future research on the Turkish education system could also take into consideration not only the political or social implications of attending a top-tier school but also the social and cultural factors that allow such institutions to gain such status in the first place.

## 7. APPENDIX

Table. Demographic information on the participants interviewed for this study.\*

	<b>RC Graduation</b>	<b>Post-RC Education</b>	<b>Current Sector</b>
Aysel	late 90s	a top-tier private university in Turkey (BA, international relations)	public service (development)
		a second-tier private university in Turkey (MA, European studies)	
		a top-tier public university in the Netherlands (MA, political science)	
Begüm	early 00s	a small Ivy League university in the US (BS, cognitive science)	unemployed
		a top-tier private university in Turkey (MA, cultural studies)	
Ceyda	early 90s	a top-tier private university in the US (BA, political science, literature)	education
		a top-tier private university in the US (MBA)	
Didem	mid 90s	a second-tier public university in Turkey (BS, management information systems)	education
Eda	mid 80s	a top-tier public university in Turkey (BA, political science)	education / public service (development)
		a top-tier public university in England (MA, European social policy)	
		a second-tier public university in Turkey (PhD, European Union studies)	

\* The names and identifying details of all participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Fatma	late 70s	a top-tier public university in Turkey (BS, physics)	education
		a top-tier private university in the US (MS, PhD, physics)	
Gaye	early 90s	a second-tier public university in the US (BS, computer science)	unemployed
Ali	mid 70s	a top-tier public university in Turkey (BS, chemical engineering)	business (construction)
		a second-tier public university in Turkey (MBA)	
Burak	early 00s	a top-tier public university in Turkey (BS, MS, computer science)	student (PhD candidate)
		a top-tier public university in Canada (PhD, computer science)	
Can	late 90s	a second-tier public university in Turkey (BA, communication, journalism)	business (technology)
		a top-tier public university in France (MA, politics)	
Doruk	early 70s	a top-tier public university in Turkey (BS, mechanical engineering)	publishing
		a second-tier public university in Turkey (MLS, PhD, library science)	
Emre	late 90s	a second-tier public university in Turkey (BA, business administration)	marketing
		a top-tier public university in Turkey (MBA)	
Faruk	early 00s	an Ivy League university in the US (BS, electrical and computer engineering)	student (PhD candidate)
		an Ivy League university in the US (MS, PhD, electrical engineering)	

Gökhan	early 00s	a second-tier public university in Turkey (BS, management information systems)	technology
Hakan	mid 00s	an Ivy League university in the US (BS, computer science, economics)	finance
İzzet	mid 70s	a top-tier public university in Turkey (AA, business management)	business (finance)
		a second-tier public university in the US (BA, MBA)	

## APPENDIX.

A sample of the type of questions used in my interviews with participants.

### **Personal Information**

- Where do you live currently? Where were you born (if different)
- Do you come from a large family? Do you have any siblings?
- What is the highest level of education completed by your parents?
- Are you married? Do you have any children?
- Can you describe your current job? How long have you been in this position?
- Can you describe your complete educational background (including dates)?

### **High School Information**

- What attracted you to Robert College? Which factors influenced your decision to attend?
- What (if anything) did you know about the school before you began attending?
- How would you describe your time at Robert College?
- How would you describe your classmates at RC?
- Do you keep in touch with your friends from RC? If so, how do you stay in touch? How often do you talk or meet?
- Do you think that attending RC has affected your personal/professional life? (How?)
- Do you often talk about your high school? With whom? In what circumstances?
- Are there any situations in which you are more likely to discuss your high school? Less likely?
- How do you think people who did not attend RC think of the school?
- How do you think today's RC compares to the school you attended?
- What do you think about Turkish and other international high schools in Istanbul?

### **University Information**

*(please consider every university you have attended when answering these questions)*

- What attracted you to your university? What factors influenced your decision to attend?
- What (if anything) did you know about the school before you began attending?
- What was your university experience like?
- How would you describe your university classmates?
- Do you keep in touch with your friends from university? If so, how do you stay in touch? How often do you talk or meet?
- Do you think that attending your university has affected your personal/professional life? (How?)
- Do you often talk about your university? With whom? In what circumstances?
- Are there any situations in which you are more likely to discuss your university? Less likely?
- How do you think people who did not attend your university think of the school?

### **Social Networks**

- Are you still involved with your high school or university these days?
- Have any of your family members or relatives studied at your high school or your university?
- Which alumni networks from former schools are you still involved with?

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