Toward a Social Topography: Status as a Spatial Practice

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Abstract
Sociological theorists have long understood the central role of status distinctions in producing social inequality. Although empirical studies have demonstrated how status hierarchies are reproduced in a broad range of cultural domains, there remains little research into where legitimating cultural practices take place, where they do not, and the role of space itself in producing status differences. As a result, sociologists lack a clear understanding of how status hierarchies give shape to cities and how the structure of cities might be practiced hierarchically. On the basis of interviews at a high-end shopping center in Istanbul, Turkey, I examine how consumers enact social rank in physical space with specific reference to the social contours of their city. Through privileging particular forms of consumption practices within socially and spatially exclusive venues, elites map legitimating values upon the physical shape of the city itself, providing a spatialized understanding of how status inequalities are distributed.

Keywords
status inequality, space and place, consumption, cultural practice, Turkey

Recent literature has emphasized the role of cultural practices in producing durable forms of social inequality, particularly those related to status (Khan 2012b; Lamont et al. 2014; Petev 2013; Ridgeway 2014). Unlike other forms of inequality studied by sociologists, such as unequal distributions of resources or power, status inequalities are expressed through routine actions and made manifest as “differences in esteem or respect” (Ridgeway 2014:12). Status hierarchies thus involve matters of public recognition and self-concept formed through seemingly benign cultural processes, even in casual and ephemeral social encounters (Lamont et al. 2014; Ridgeway et al. 2009). They are also instrumental for the development of identity within the social world, providing people with what Bourdieu ([1979] 1984) called “a sort of social orientation, a ‘sense of one’s place’” (p. 466).

How literally are we to take Bourdieu’s claim that status hierarchies are internalized as spatial orientations? Empirical studies have shown the reach of Bourdieu’s framework, analyzing how status hierarchies are enacted in various domains of cultural activity, including

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music (Atkinson 2011; Bryson 1996), art (DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004), food (Johnston and Baumann 2008), and fashion (Karademir-Hazır 2014). These studies have extended and modified our understanding of how status hierarchies are put into practice, yet have not paid particular attention to where legitimating cultural practices take place, where they do not, and the role of space itself in producing status differences. Similarly, although sociologists have frequently described social inequalities using spatial metaphors such as social distance, class location, and hierarchy (Tickamyer 2000), few have focused on how these hierarchies are enacted and interpreted within physical space. As a result, we lack a clear understanding of where and how stratifying cultural practices are emplaced and the ways in which status hierarchies may also be expressed as spatial hierarchies.

Building on research on status-stratifying cultural practices (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Khan 2011; Ridgeway 2014) and incorporating insights from a growing sociology of space and place (Gieryn 2000, 2002; Fine 2010; Fine and Harrington 2004; Griswold, Mangione, and McDonnell 2013; Jackson and Benson 2014; Johnston, Rodney, and Szabo 2012; Stillerman and Salcedo 2012), in this article I present empirical data on shopping practices at an exclusive shopping center in Istanbul, Turkey, to investigate how space is both the medium and, in certain respects, the means through which social hierarchies are produced and legitimated. By analyzing how elite customers narrate their shopping practices in spatial terms, I examine how status inequalities can be mapped onto the landscape of the city itself, producing what I call a social topography: a method of representing physical space as it is valued, evaluated, and practiced.

I demonstrate how status inequalities should be understood as being distributed not only vertically, as in a hierarchy, but also laterally throughout the social landscape. The structure of the built environment, as well as the symbolic actions through which elites demarcate and defend exclusionary spaces, have bearing on where and how status practices take place. Following an examination of the conventional mechanisms through which status inequalities are produced, I demonstrate how closer attention to the sociology of space could supplement our understanding of the origin and durability of status hierarchies. I then introduce my case study, conducted at the İstinye Park shopping center in Istanbul, and discuss my data and methodology. The analysis section presents empirical data demonstrating the material, symbolic, and discursive practices by which space is implicated in the construction of status inequalities. I conclude by elaborating the article’s theoretical contribution to the study of status hierarchies, describing how a social topography sheds new light on how status is produced, defended, and challenged through everyday cultural practices.

CULTURE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF STATUS: FRAMES AND PRACTICAL LOGIC

The role of cultural practices in producing status hierarchies has long been a staple of sociological research (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Mills 1956; Veblen [1899] 2009; Weber [1921] 2010). Weber ([1921] 2010:143, 146) argued that social inequalities are expressed not just through the unequal distribution of material resources, but through a broadly-recognized “positive or negative assessment of honor” that “always bases itself upon distance and exclusiveness.” The connection between cultural practices and status hierarchies has proved remarkably durable over time; a recent statistical analysis of nearly four decades of lifestyle and status indicators from the United States found that the association between sociability patterns and status groups had not weakened, while status groups had become increasingly homogenous internally (Petev 2013).
Recent scholarship in status construction theory emphasizes how in the background of all social action lies a pregiven stock of cultural beliefs regarding superficial social characteristics, which serve as “information structures for actors in the particular situations where the characteristics become salient” (Berger, Ridgeway, and Zelditch 2002:160). Social psychological studies have shown that even in the performance of collaborative tasks, external social differences can become the basis for status judgments and unequal treatment, leading directly to material forms of inequality: “Status distinctions implicitly bias the everyday processes through which people are evaluated, given access to rewards, and directed toward or away from positions of power and prestige in society” (Ridgeway et al. 2009:44).

Status inequalities are also important independent of their association with material inequalities. In her 2013 presidential address at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Ridgeway (2014) called for renewed emphasis on social status as an independent dimension of social inequality that, in turn, produces and justifies other structural imbalances such as class, race, and gender (see also Ridgeway et al. 2009). However, whereas a key proposition of status construction theory asserts that an “enduring trans-situational framework of categories, norms, values, beliefs, practices, and procedures . . . defines the immediate situation of action” (Berger et al. 2002:157), Ridgeway (2014) also hinted that status characteristics do not always operate to the same degree across social contexts. Rather, certain institutional arrangements, including the physical setting of organized action, have an effect on the extent to which such transsituational frames become salient (Ridgeway 2009). Such comments indicate an independent effect of spatial qualities upon status hierarchies, however, the impact of space within status construction theory has yet to receive sustained theorization or explicit empirical attention.

Whereas status construction theory exposes how discriminatory status classifications are reproduced through the “background effects” of shared cultural frames (Berger et al. 2002; Ridgeway 2009), Bourdieu ([1979] 1984, 1990) demonstrated how individuals develop cognitive schema and practical dispositions from their objective position within the social structure. Cultural practices both reflect and reproduce status inequalities through leveraging the social privileges of elites into recognizable forms of legitimate taste (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Johnston et al. 2012; Khan 2011). Status is conferred not through personal identification with or declaration of particular aesthetic judgments but rather through the successful management of conduct, so as to demonstrate competence at practices that are already socially recognized as legitimate within that social space (Atkinson 2011; Khan 2011). That is, presence within a field of practice is not itself a guarantor of inclusion; status is achieved and maintained only through exhibiting mastery of the symbolic forms of inhabiting social space that declare to all observers, “I’ve been here before.”

That distinctions in cultural tastes and performances be public and visible is important to how they confer status to some groups rather than others (Karademir-Hazır 2014), unambiguously delineating discrete regions within “a hierarchy of worth and worthiness” (Bourdieu 2000:241). People internalize such culturally encoded distinctions, which then become manifest in positionally motivated action (Bourdieu 1998; Martin 2011). That is, in Bourdieu’s (1985, 1989) terms, a social position describes both one’s specific location within objective structural hierarchies and the subjective vantage point from which individuals orient themselves in social space.

Bourdieu’s description of status hierarchies using spatial terminology is suggestive, but it is important to note that “social space” does not refer to the physical locations where embodied action takes place. Instead, it describes a method of modeling status positions across multiple fields of social practice. Fields—another of Bourdieu’s frequent spatial metaphors—are representations of all the individuals engaged and invested in a particular form...
of social activity, brought together and displayed in an abstract diagram for the purpose of sociological analysis (Bourdieu 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:94–114; see also Fogle 2011; Lizardo 2010; Martin 2003). Similarly, distributions within space (i.e. “social distances”) are not representative of the different locations where legitimate or dominant activities take place but instead are graphed with reference to the quantity and composition of capital recognized as valuable within that field (Bourdieu 1985, 1989). Thus, whereas social space as an amalgamation of various field of social activity display the relational order of social positions within objective hierarchies, social space itself “only exists on paper” (Bourdieu 1998:32).

THE CULTURAL PRACTICE OF SPACE

Understanding the mechanisms through which status hierarchies are formed is crucial, both because status differences structure access to material resources (Khan 2012b; Ridgeway 2014), as well as “access to a socially recognized social being” (Bourdieu 2000:241). Both status construction theory and Bourdieu’s practical logics reveal how status hierarchies are produced through dominant cultural frames and discriminatory social practices. However, it remains to be explored how the cultural practices that produce status inequalities are emplaced, as well as how spatial factors work as mechanisms in producing and securing status imbalances. This condition might be explained in part by sociologists’ relative inattention to physical space. As Gieryn (2000) noted, space has always been important to sociological analysis, though its role has not always been explicitly theorized. The oft-mentioned “spatial turn” in social theory toward the end of the twentieth century raised new questions for cultural sociologists wishing to understand the relation between social practices and the general surroundings in which they take place (Fine 2010; Fine and Harrington 2004; Gieryn 2000; Zukin 1991). Place studies have been particularly helpful in revealing how the emplacement of action is critical to the construction of shared social meanings (Fine 2010), fostering communal forms of social participation (Fine and Harrington 2004), and creating a sense of belonging (Falk 2004).

Other studies have looked beyond specific places as sites of social life to understand the mutual ways in which cultural practice and the physical world shape each other (Borden et al. 2000; Kidder 2009; Lefebvre 1974; Sennett 1996). Looking at space sociologically requires engaging with material forms, the built environment, and how physical structures inform cultural practices, as well as how people engage with space. Gieryn (2002:35) argued that buildings “stabilize social life” in durable ways yet remain open to various forms of social use and purpose. Rather than describing spaces as determining cultural practices (Ritzer 2010), Gieryn found that buildings “are forever objects of (re)interpretation, narration, and representation” and are “vulnerable to the wrecking ball of discourse.” Griswold et al.’s (2013) study of art museum patrons describes the fusing of architectural design and subjective aesthetic appreciations into a “choreography” shaping movement within and engagement with the gallery space.

If the interrelationship of built forms and cultural practices has become recognized as a truism within sociology, less well understood is how physical space and status hierarchies give shape to one another. I propose three forms of sociospatial practices that influence the construction of status inequalities: material practices that organize and regulate mobility (Massey 1993, 2005; Stillerman and Salcedo 2012), symbolic practices that set criteria for belonging in specific spaces (Butler and Robson 2003; Johnston et al. 2012; Savage 2010), and discursive practices that mobilize place names as descriptors of status values that confer social rank upon the people for whom they speak (Benson 2014; de Certeau 1984; Gidley and Rooke 2012; Jackson and Benson 2014; Miller et al. 1998).
The first of these stratifying spatial practices builds upon the argument that as mobility becomes increasingly central to social life (Urry 2000, 2007), the organizational structure of mobility resources assumes greater importance in the production of inequalities (Massey 1993, 2005). The impact of restricted access to mobility may be especially felt among the urban poor, who rely heavily upon public transportation infrastructure to move throughout the city (Caldeira 2012:406). By contrast, prestigious places that maintain their status through the exclusion of undesired groups can be threatened by the ease of access public transportation affords. In a study of a shopping mall in downtown Santiago, Chile, Stillerman and Salcedo (2012) found that the mall’s location within the dense network of transportation routes enabled the urban poor to use the mall as a social gathering site, transposing “street culture” into the spaces of bourgeois respectability.

As Stillerman and Salcedo (2012) demonstrate, spatial exclusion cannot always be materially secured in dense urban areas. However, symbolic resources can also be deployed to inscribe social exclusions within physical space, particularly through emplaced consumer practices (Brown-Saracino 2009; Butler and Robson 2003; Johnston et al. 2012; Mele 2000; Savage 2010; Zukin 2010). Zukin’s (2010) expansive study of New York City revealed an intricate ecology of “urban terroirs”: a patchwork of unique neighborhoods typified by distinct and authentic forms of cultural production and consumption. Such contexts cultivate their specificity through attracting discerning but like-minded publics fluent in the local aesthetics (Brown-Saracino 2009; Zukin 2010). This process of place creation is also fundamentally a process of displacing, as rising rents and shifting norms change the urban profile (Mele 2000). In a study of ethical consumption, Johnston et al. (2012) found that when shopping for food, consumers made conscious comparisons with “neighborhood prototypes” that set the standard for legitimate eating practices. Failure to abide by the spatially constructed criteria for consumption practices both invites status judgments by fellow residents and structures individuals’ sense of “moral rights over place” (Savage 2010:116). Residence develops “mini-habituses” out of commonality with neighbors against the (real or perceived) values held in places further afield (Butler and Robson 2003). Place identities are therefore constructed symbolically through emplaced practices indexed to recognizable social values, the reflexive understanding of which encourages self-selection into appropriate neighborhood space.

Residential choice is also influenced by discursive practices that narrate status judgments in spatial terms. De Certeau (1984:104) described the “strange toponymy” of space, where naming practices aggregate and express meaningful associations between places and practices. For de Certeau, “constellations of names . . . are like stars directing itineraries” as people move throughout and toward familiar places, but markers of place are also “carried as emblems by the travelers they direct and simultaneously decorate.” Place names are therefore metonyms for social values that function as sociospatial boundaries by which status identities are constructed through discourses of affiliation and disaffiliation (Gidley and Rooke 2010; Jackson and Benson 2014). Subjective understandings of physical space are, as Bourdieu (1985, 1989) stipulated about social space, constructed relationally through direct comparisons of the hierarchical status positions signified by the various places in the urban environment (see also Emirbayer 1997; Vandenberghhe 1999). They indicate who belongs where and who belongs elsewhere (Cresswell 1996).

Urban environments take their shape and derive their character through the combination of these different practices, but they do so unevenly, such that inequality is durably built into the form of the city itself. Infrastructure is simultaneously material and symbolic, serving as a differentiated means of access to urban resources and a “social mnemonic” signaling priorities in public investment (Amin 2014:151). “Gating coalitions” made up of real estate
developers, local governments, and affluent urbanites parcel residential space into restricted-access communities where perimeter walls not only deny access to outsiders but “serve as a material representation of exclusivity for members” (Vesselinov, Casessus, and Falk 2007:111; see also Low 2004). Such gated communities, particularly those in non-Western contexts, are often given foreign place names that announce the elite status and cosmopolitan ambitions of their residents (Zhang 2010:84–87). At the same time, distance from urban resources, symbolic exclusion, and neighborhood stigma contribute to the “inheritance of the ghetto” by the urban poor, a transmission of spatial context into social status that can persist across generations (Sharkey 2013).

Taken together, material, symbolic, and discursive practices mold the physical landscape so as to reflect and reproduce status hierarchies, creating a sociospatial distribution I refer to as a social topography.4 Legitimate cultural practices are always *emplaced*, and their placement matters for their legitimating effects. Places are also the site and the stakes for social struggle, as inhabitants and patrons of social arenas strive to assign meanings that legitimate their social existence. A social topography charts the outcomes-so-far of these struggles, displaying *where* place shapes status and how legitimate practices legitimate space. As a relief map of socially recognized values, a social topography displays the vertical order of status hierarchies across the lateral expanse of physical space as it is lived and experienced by the people who move within and construct it.

That is, just as the social practices by which hierarchies are constructed differ according to cultural context, so too are the contours of a social topography locally specific. In the following sections, I use empirical data on shopping practices at an elite urban mall to sketch out such a map of Istanbul, Turkey, a city whose growing urban wealth is matched by a widening income gap (Pamuk 2008; Özar and Ercan 2002), and where an explosion of retail spaces has been accompanied by rural-to-urban migration and the rise of a provincial bourgeoisie (Demir, Acar, and Toprak 2004; Ertekin et al. 2008; Keyder 2005, 2010; Tokatlı and Boyacı 1998). As a mobile and visible method of simultaneously displaying wealth and legitimate belonging to the city, consumption has become the dominant idiom of status positioning in Istanbul (Karademir-Hazır 2014; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Öncü 1999; Rankin, Ergin, and Göksen 2014; Üstüner and Holt 2007).

Turkey’s embrace of consumer culture mirrors global trends whereby shopping practices constitute increasingly important social relations that are linked to the production and maintenance of status inequalities (Johnston et al. 2012; Miller 1998; Warde 2015). Moreover, shopping is a profoundly *spatial* practice built into the physical and social landscape of the urban environment (Zukin 1991). Shopping involves not only choices of what to buy, but *where* to buy from, with shopping malls serving “as points of reference through which most households construct a sense of their relative position in terms of social status” (Miller et al. 1998:147–48). Shoppers actively contrast numerous qualities of shopping venues, only some of which are related to purchasing goods (Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks 2002). Crowdedness, design, novelty, convenience, proximity, and cultural cachet all figure into choice of where to shop, in addition to the more conventional measures such as the price and availability of specific brands (Stillerman and Salcedo 2012). Consumers’ judgments of shopping venues color their impressions of the surrounding neighborhood and its residents (Johnston et al. 2012), while at the same time the variety and type of shopping destinations in a given area influence personal mobilities throughout the city (Gregson et al. 2002).

Shopping is also a sociospatial practice afforded disproportionately to social elites. Despite a growing sociological focus on the broadening cultural tastes held among people of high social status (Lizardo and Skiles 2012; Peterson and Kern 1996; Warde 2015), elites remain “the engines of inequality” (Khan 2012a:480), a relation of social dominance through
cultural practice that has been repeatedly demonstrated in Turkey (Aydin 2006; Karademir-Hazır 2014; Öncü 1997; Rankin et al. 2014). In a dense urban location such as Istanbul, where social distance cannot be automatically translated into spatial distance (Keyder 1999; Özyeğin 2002), the cultural practice of shopping demarcates areas of legitimate and dominated status that in turn decorate or disparage the people who shop there. Charting how social actors map values onto the physical space of the city demonstrates the intimate but unspoken relationship between status and spatial practice. In the next section I describe the context for Istanbul’s social topography in further detail and outline the data and methods from which it is drawn.

CONTEXT, DATA, AND METHODS

The İstinye Park shopping center was built in 2007 as part of a huge wave of retail expansion in Istanbul that began in the early 1990s. Whereas Turkish retail had traditionally been dominated by small-scale, mostly family-owned enterprises, such markets began to be displaced as the combination of growing urban wealth and import liberalization made large-scale retailing a viable option (Tokatlı and Boyacı 1998) The growth of large-scale retail markets, from multidepartmental “hypermart”s to expansive retail zones anchored by shopping malls, has precipitated an immense and rapid transformation of the physical and social landscape. As late as 1992, there were only two buildings in Istanbul that featured 2,500 or more square meters of retail space; by early 2010, Istanbul had 71 fully completed shopping malls (including the two largest in Europe) with a further 121 mall projects under construction or in planning stages (Arslan, Sezer, and Işığçok 2010:179).

Like shopping centers in other late-industrializing countries (Abaza 2001; Anjaria 2008; Hobden 2014; Houssay-Hozschuch and Teppo 2009; Stillerman and Salcedo 2012), Turkish malls exist within a different socioeconomic environment than the one to which malls were introduced in North America and Western Europe. In contrast to the American suburban mall, shopping centers in Turkey are overwhelmingly concentrated in the urban core and linked to various channels of public transportation (Erkip 2005; Ertekin et al. 2008). Turkish malls are also integrated into extended mixed use commercial landscapes; many of Istanbul’s most elite shopping malls, such as Akmerkez and Kanyon in the busy commercial center of Levent, advertise themselves as “life centers” (yaşam merkezleri) and include condomini-ums, allowing residents literally to live at the mall.

Shopping center construction, financed through international retail consortia with land rights guaranteed by municipal and state governments (Keyder 2010), had the inevitable effect of displacing preexisting forms of retail (Terzi, Mutlu, and Dökmeci 2006; Tokatlı and Boyacı 1998). Particularly hard hit were the periodic markets (pazars), the neighborhood-based open-air markets conveying local produce and economical household goods (Dökmeci, Yazgı, and Özüş 2005). In the five-year period between 2006 and 2011, some 50 periodic markets in Istanbul were either downsized or relocated to peripheral areas of the city (Öz and Eder 2012). The changing retail environment ushered in changes to shopping practices, as shopping malls provided both an open space for social activity in the overcrowded city and a market for experimenting with new identities (Durakbaşa and Cindoğlu 2002; Öncü 2002), particularly those related to idealized visions of Western bourgeois values (Öncü 1997). Although malls attracted a broad spectrum of shoppers and visitors, the location and form of shopping practices quickly became stratified. Consumerism became a primary cultural idiom in which status differences were signified, as fashion sense in particular became a dominant gauge of social worth (Karademir-Hazır 2014; Üstüner and Holt 2007). Where and how Istanbulites shopped constructed status boundaries not only along class lines but
between “Eastern”/“Western” and “secular”/“religious” value orientations (Öncü 1999; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Rankin et al. 2014; Sandıkçı and Ger, 2007; Üstüner and Holt 2007).

Istinye Park represents significant continuities and departures from this sociospatial context. First, although it is one of Turkey’s most elite shopping centers and is anchored by exclusive international brands, it occupies a strategic position alongside the main traffic artery that rings the urban center. Thus, in contrast to the majority of Istanbul’s malls, which are located along the municipal metro corridor or accessible by city bus (Ertekin et al. 2008; Tokatlı and Boyacı 1998), Istinye Park is most easily accessed via private automobile. Second, whereas the majority of the mall reflects international design standards for open-planned, multilevel retail spaces that cater to the cosmopolitan tastes of Turkey’s elites (Akçaoğlu 2009), a separate section of the mall signposted the Istinye Bazaar incorporates vernacular design elements. With a separate entrance to the main atrium of Istinye Park, the Istinye Bazaar is something of a mall within a mall, making explicit differences between shopping practices within and without it, as well as summoning contrast between the periodic markets that mall developments are in the process of displacing (Dökmeci et al. 2005; Öz and Eder 2012).

The mobility structures linking Istinye Park to the urban center, as well as the aestheticized evocation of vernacular culture in the Istinye Bazaar, provides an ideal location for understanding how material, symbolic, and discursive practices shape the spatial distribution of Istanbul’s status hierarchies. During the summer of 2011, data were collected in the Bazaar Area of the Istinye Park shopping center in Istanbul, where I asked customers and patrons about their consumption habits, shopping preferences, and evaluations of various shopping venues throughout the city, including weekly neighborhood bazaars (mahalle pazarları), greengrocers (manavlar), shopping malls (alışveriş merkezleri), and the bazaar at Istinye Park itself. All interviews were open ended and semistructured (see, e.g., Lofland and Lofland 1995) so as to encourage respondents to discuss their own preferences in terms of the associations they draw to different social spaces in the city, while allowing maximum flexibility for follow-up questions.

It is not typical in Turkey, even within the cosmopolitan spaces of an elite shopping center, for citizens of foreign countries to speak Turkish, nor is there a large population of Western inhabitants in Istanbul. During the recruitment of participants and the conduct of interviews, I was accompanied by a paid Turkish undergraduate research assistant, Güneş Öztürk. The decision to hire an assistant was made to reduce potential discomfort or suspicion among prospective participants, as well as to provide minor linguistic clarifications when necessary. Güneş also provided valuable insights as the research progressed and frequently contributed follow-up questions during interviews.

To approximate a sample representative of customers and patrons at the Istinye Bazaar, data were collected in five-hour shifts during different hours of weekdays and weekends over a six-week period in June and July. Participants were selected at random as they entered the research site, with every fifth person being approached for recruitment. In accordance with regulations on research conducted with human subjects, minors were not allowed to participate. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted exclusively in Turkish, so mall patrons who were unable to express themselves in that language were not allowed to participate, discounting a sizable number of foreign tourists. Although the shopping mall attracts customers from other regions of Turkey, all participants but one maintained residences in Istanbul, where they lived at least part of the year. Of the 40 interviews, 39 were conducted in situ and averaged 25 minutes apiece. After the interview, each participant was given a short survey collecting demographic information used to determine patterns of consumer practices and the social locations of the respondents. The total sample includes 21 men and 19 women, aged 19 to 66 years, with an average age of 37.
This sample corresponds to observations of the characteristics of the Turkish-national population at the Istinye Bazaar during the period of data collection. The sample should not, however, be taken as representative of Istanbul as a whole. Although the survey did not collect income data, a number of proxies, from neighborhood of residence to means of transportation to the shopping mall, attest that the sample is heavily representative of upper-income Istanbulites. Furthermore, respondents were regular mall patrons who rarely shop at bazaars (participants reported an average of 5.6 trips to shopping malls in a typical month, compared with an average of 1.4 visits to bazaars). There is also reason to believe that the space of the shopping mall is disproportionately composed of the traditional urban elite, whose religious practice is less visible to the public than that of the growing conservative middle class (Demir et al. 2004). In particular, women wearing the Islamic headscarf—despite constituting, by one estimate, 48 percent of Turkey’s female population (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006)—are notable for their near absence from Istinye Park. Given the lack of Istinye Park clothing retailers that offer tesettür goods, it is reasonable to expect that this exclusion is consistent with other deliberate strategies whereby pious women are made to feel unwelcome (Gökarıkşel 2012). Although Güneş was trained in administering the interview protocol in the event that the respondent would feel more at ease being interviewed by a woman, my sample of 40 patrons included only one participant who practiced tesettür.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms and data were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative software, allowing me to trace the social topography drawn by my respondents through several successive rounds of coding the interview transcripts. Data were finally assembled according to the three major ways in which the patrons of Istinye Park narrated status hierarchies as sociospatial practices. The analysis section describes these material, symbolic, and discursive practices through which status difference is written over the physical space of Istanbul.

MATERIAL PRACTICES: THE ORGANIZATION OF MOBILITY

The construction of Istinye Park in 2007 contributed to the urban transformation of Istanbul that registers the social and spatial anxieties of its residents. Customers and patrons at Istinye Park describe their city as “thrown together” and “complicated,” a place where “rich, poor, middle class—Eastern, Western—there’s every kind of person.” This diversity, however, is not evenly distributed but, as Keyder (1999) argued, has been socially and spatially bifurcated:

The spectrum of available services and consumer goods became much wider, and the disparities in consumption between the top and the rest too visible. A two-tier system emerged and the two spheres grew apart whenever lifestyles and consumption patterns could be segregated. (p. 24)

This “growing apart” is not meant to be taken figuratively. There was and is an explicitly spatial component to the differentiation between social groups, and the fault lines are drawn largely along a sense of belonging to the city. These divisions have left a palpable impression on Istanbul residents. Mehmet, 51, who came to Istinye Park to supervise his daughter and her friends while they shopped, claims that

the [affluent] class is trying to isolate itself. Condominium complexes, gated communities—these places really stick out. . . . Two hundred meters’ distance from one another, on one side you can see people who drive Porsche and Mercedes, on the other side are people who can’t pay their rent at the end of the month . . . Istanbul’s jumbled up like that.
As described above, İstinye Park diverges somewhat from the trends of shopping mall placement found by Ertekin et al. (2008), in that it is located neither in the urban core nor in the suburban periphery; rather, it is placed just beyond the junction between the major thoroughfare linking the financial and commercial centers of Istanbul and the highway connecting the European and Anatolian sides of the city. “İstinye Park’s strategic position has everything to do with its district,” says Orhan, 32, a shop owner from the Bosphorus neighborhood of Arnavutköy. “It’s close to those who live along the Bosphorus . . . there are 26,000 workplaces in Maslak next door. There’s the stock exchange, there’s Istanbul Technical University. These are all factors” in its placement. Adds Cavit, “This place was consciously chosen from the start. It attracts the elite strata . . . at their point of intersection.”

İstinye Park’s location at such an intersection is as important for the kinds of mobility it restricts as those it enables. “Coming to İstinye Park without a car is nearly impossible,” says Coşkun, 29, a resident of the distant neighborhood of Fatih. “Transportation here is pretty tough. At best, you’d ride the metro and go from there to here, [but] even that is a world of distance walking under the sun. People who come here have cars.” Among the 40 participants in my sample, 27 (68 percent), including Coşkun himself, came by private automobile, a privileged ability for a city in which the rate of vehicle ownership is only 129 per 1,000 population. In fact, İstinye Park privileges the car not only as a means of access but as a totem of wealth and status. Whereas parking in the main garage beneath the building is free to all customers, the separate vehicle entrance to İstinye Park’s top-floor courtyard has a restricted-access gate with pricey valet parking along the courtyard’s perimeter road, putting the customer’s car on full display to the outdoor cafes and restaurants (see Figure 1).

For Alp, a graphic designer at a major newspaper, the physical separation of İstinye Park from customers of limited mobility is an important part of its appeal. Referring to Istanbul’s center of culture and nightlife, Alp explains,

You know how crowded Taksim is . . . on normal days. During holidays the municipality makes public transportation free. Men who have never seen Taksim before in their lives [arrive by] all those city buses and oh, how you can’t even walk around in Taksim,
you can’t escape. You can’t even walk around in your own neighborhood! And shopping has the same logic. Men who come here [to Istinye Park] see it as a luxury to come. [For lack of] transport money, I don’t know what all, they can’t come. And because of that, they do things among their own segment.

Alp tells me that he used to shop at the Akmerkez shopping center in the upscale district of Etiler, but now prefers Istinye Park, where he comes two or three times a week. “You know what ruined the atmosphere at Akmerkez? Kids from [working class neighborhoods] Gültepe and Kağıthane came and ruined the atmosphere. The quality customers who used to go there took off.”

In both the case of Taksim on the holidays, when free bus rides ease access to the space by differently classed actors (here Alp does not consider that it may be a day off from work for the whole family may be as rare as bus fare among Istanbul’s working poor), and the case of Akmerkez’s social decline after its discovery by children from the wrong part of town, the entire social tenor of the built environment of the city is altered by the infiltration of different status practices. In Alp’s estimation, Istinye Park has become the new space created by the “quality customers” to reassert their social domination through practical exclusions.

Just as hard-to-reach shopping sites are valorized for aiding the selection of mobile actors, neighborhood markets (pazarlar) and retail strips (çarşilari) are similarly stigmatized for their accessibility: “Those places are more appropriate for people without cars,” says Sezen. “There are more buses and public transportation vehicles.” Istinye Park, by contrast, is a place worth visiting because of its inaccessibility. “All the socialites come here,” says Ceren, a fashionable young woman who likes to sprinkle her sentences with English words.

The people who make good money, and those who want to show themselves off. You know, it’s a place where celebrities come. You won’t see too many at a shopping mall in, say, Bakırköy [a middle-class neighborhood]. Just people with homes nearby or those who’ve got business to do there.

The restriction of mobility not only preserves a particular demographic for a maximally exclusive display of social practice, it also marks the mall as a destination rather than a functional place of convenience. The privileged access to Istinye Park by those with private vehicles, therefore, makes it a space of choice and volition for those of means; markets connected to the network of public transportation are understood as places of necessity and last resort. The difference in shopping venue produces a change in social meaning given to the act of shopping itself. In access to and choice among malls, place matters—not just for the where of practice, but also for the what.

**SYMBOLIC PRACTICES: CONSTRUCTING STATUS BOUNDARIES**

As demonstrated in the previous section, the structure of Istanbul’s built environment bears itself out in the social stratification of the city, physically restricting mobilities between the rich and poor (Aydın 2006; Buğra 1998; Keyder 1999). However, the strict social separation of strata in a city as diverse and chaotic as Istanbul could not be sustained by formal space alone. Decades of migration made people from Anatolia an “indispensable part” of the city. Where spatial separation could not be maintained, “the contact between these groups gave rise to intensified forms of boundary-defining activities”
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(Özyeğin 2002:47). The role of practice, as distinct from that of geography itself, is the critical constituent of symbolic power—Bourdieu’s (1989) constructivist “power of ‘world-making’” (p. 23). If Istinye Park’s position in the city was designed to exploit physical geography for the creation of an elite space of social practice, the structure of the building itself reveals the power of practices to produce tacit rules of deportment. Alp, the graphic designer, explains his understanding of the social topography of Istinye Park’s multilevel interior in explicit terms:

Every floor here caters to a specific income level. As you go up the floors, the income level also rises. I can make it up to the top where that courtyard is. But I can’t go out to the courtyard.

Although many patrons of Istinye Park spoke of the dramatic increase in the prices of goods sold at shops in the courtyard,15 the threshold between the interior section of the top floor and the courtyard outside is more of a social and practical barrier than a physical impediment. The courtyard, a large and open, yet restricted space designed to train the gaze of passersby on the brands, cars, and celebrities on social display, creates an environment of unease for those unaccustomed to mingling among the social elite.

Status judgments need not be spelled out in words; they are felt implicitly by those actors who feel unfit to participate—what Bourdieu (1993:124) called the “mute injunctions and silent calls to order” latent in the built environment. Bülent, who moved to Istanbul only a few years ago from the small Thracian city of Kırklareli, expresses both his fascination and discomfort with the social display in Istinye Park’s courtyard area: “Because people’s economic levels are different, the people you come across, when they look at your clothes they can make a character analysis of you. They see you as base, which can be miserable.” Asked if he ever goes to the courtyard, Bülent replied, “I go there tentatively, yeah . . . because the way they look at you, sometimes it can really affect you. Normally, I go out there to smoke. On foot, that is, not sitting down.”

Fatmagül, who splits the year in between Istanbul and her Black Sea hometown of Samsun, says she noticed the “hierarchy” of Istinye Park only after a conversation with a friend. Now she says she notices it every time she comes:

You know how there was a caste system in the old days? To be honest, it reminds me a bit of that. . . . That’s why the design here strikes me as interesting. It’s as though they marked out your territory. . . . If you’ve got money, you’re upstairs. You’re comfortable, however you wish to be. But if you don’t have money—All right then! Back down you go.

Fatmagül’s observation illustrates the strategic class actions built into the design of Istinye Park’s structure, but Bülent’s invasion of the space shows its limitations. It is worth reiterating that there are no formal barriers between the tiers of Istinye Park; indeed, they are linked by escalators (see Figure 2). The distribution of people among them is reliant on a practically recognizable social topography—a real-world space of positions in which each individual is encouraged to select his or her own proper place according to status. Bülent’s trepidation to enter the courtyard area to smoke, even while standing near the door, reveals how the concentration of status practices in particular areas of the mall teaches patrons of Istinye Park to be self-censorious. The luxurious setting of the courtyard may provide certain impediments to participation by “nonquality” customers, but it is the active and discriminatory class practices that take place there—the “character analyses” of the dominant actors within the courtyard—that make the area intimidating rather than alluring for people.
representative of dominated social positions. Although the physical structure of the mall could not prevent Bülent from walking “a world of distance under the sun” and ascending all the way to the courtyard, the discriminatory gaze of the elite practitioners within that space made him hesitant to take a seat, let alone browse the shop windows along the courtyard. As Fatmagül says, such actors are encouraged to head back downstairs of their own accord, back between those people and practices more suited to their own “territory” within the social topography of the mall.

DISCURSIVE PRACTICES: NAMING STATUS AS PLACE

The physical layout of Istanbul and the architectural design of Istinye Park contribute to how social exclusions are effected through and experienced as spatial exclusions. But this socio-spatial distribution does not exist merely as a fact latent to the built environment; the segregation of status groups is reflexively understood by the city’s residents, as place identities become a basis through which status distinctions are narrated, legitimated, and thereby recreated. Knowledge of Istanbul’s social contours informs where and how elites shop, as well as what it means to shop elsewhere.

Customers of Istinye Park describe their choice of shopping center with references to malls in middle-class neighborhoods and department stores alongside busy pedestrian
streets, but status contrasts among various urban settings are most explicitly invoked in a separate section of the mall called the Istinye Bazaar. Whereas the upstairs luxury courtyard cultivated an atmosphere of Western European high fashion, the Istinye Bazaar is thematically organized around vernacular elements of Turkish culture. At its center is something of a town square, with a greengrocer, dry goods vendor, and a coffee garden occupying the intersection of several sign-posted lanes leading customers towards the other boutiques just steps away (Figure 3). The flooring is of small raised tiles reminiscent of cobblestones, and each storefront has an overhanging second-story façade supported by the iconic buttresses of Ottoman architecture. The distinct layout, design elements, and variety of goods suggest eclectic historical and contemporary influences, but among Istinye Bazaar customers, the dominant reference for comparison was the Istanbul district of Eminönü, the center of the old city dating back to Byzantium.

Eminönü is not without its own claims to positive recognition among the elites: it boasts some of the most well-known tourist destinations in the city, including the Grand Bazaar and the Spice Bazaar, but is also a working-class neighborhood with many vendors, legal and extralegal alike, selling a wide variety of consumer durables, clothes, and food (Öz and Eder 2012). The streets of Eminönü are commonly packed with a diverse range of local residents, visiting customers, and foreign and Turkish tourists alike. Although many Istinye Bazaar shoppers spoke of the district as a place of nostalgia, very few made Eminönü a frequent destination. Lifelong Istanbul resident Melike, 66, described the general sentiment of Istinye Bazaar shoppers toward Eminönü:

“It’s generally a place preferred by slum dwellers. You can’t see the same things anymore going to Eminönü. The other day I went to Eminönü and had a look. The people who go there, I can say that 99 percent of them come from the East. They come and without knowing, without familiarity with Istanbul, and learn from those places.

Fatmagül echoes this theme: “People there live more closed-off. They are in the city but we can say that they still haven’t urbanized.”

Figure 3. The Dry Goods Store in the Istinye Bazaar.
Residence within the city is distinct from the achieved status of belonging to the urban; shopping practices reveal both aesthetic tastes and value affiliations that become naturalized as ways of behaving in public space. Whereas Melike laments that Eminönü serves as the cultural introduction to Istanbul for (supposed) migrants from “the East,” Istinye Park shoppers see shopping malls as playing a positive pedagogical role for visitors unaccustomed to elite standards. In contrast to what is perceived as the unpredictability and disorder of behavior in neighborhood bazaars or Eminönü, Hicran, herself a transplant from Eastern Anatolia, sees the formal, regulated social practices in the shopping mall as disciplining consumers:

In terms of manners and appearance, when you take a look it’s always more proper people. . . . When you go to a shopping mall, you aren’t able to behave in the manner you do at a normal bazaar. You behave with more etiquette. You behave more appropriately according to the rules here.

As emplaced within one environment while evocative of another, the aestheticized space of the Istinye Bazaar both calls to mind and reinforces the devaluation of the social practices associated with its original, thus drawing a sharp status relief between those people who shop at each place. This value-mapping of people, places, and practices into the physical geography of the city defines the recognizable social topography of status hierarchy. Distant places, from the cosmopolitan origins of consumer brands to the “improper” behaviors associated with village culture, can imbue local environments with meanings that order practices in everyday life.

Place names become stand-ins for status distinctions linked to shopping practices: working-class neighborhoods like Kağıthane and Gültepe contribute kids who “ruin the atmosphere” of erstwhile elite shopping centers like Akmerkez; malls in middle-class neighborhoods like Bakırköy aren’t destinations in their own right, but places serving “just people with homes nearby”; Eminönü is a haven for “slum-dwellers,” “villagers” from “the East” who “still haven’t urbanized.” If the dominant classes that populate the Istinye Park evaluate locations according to the hierarchical ordering of those people presumed to shop there, their own self-image as rightful occupants of recognizable, socially valued places naturalizes and validates their elite status. The contours of Istanbul’s social topography, drawn through differentiated capacities to navigate the physical spaces of the city and enforced by discriminatory practices and discourses, define the relational landscape of status hierarchies.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have referred to the social mapping of hierarchical practices into the physical geography of Istanbul as a social topography. Although the contours of this particular relief map are unique to the social space from which it is constructed, the concept can be redrawn from actors’ practical value orderings within any social setting. In this concluding section, I suggest that understanding the relationship between spatial practices and status hierarchies will help sociologists better understand both, as well as contribute to the integration of cultural and spatial theories that underlie practical action.

Thinking about a social setting topographically reveals many aspects of status practices that may otherwise go unseen. First, it illustrates how hierarchies are distributed not just in an abstract heuristic as Bourdieu (1985, 1989) described social space, much less a ladder that proceeds single-file from top to bottom, but rather through lateral stratifications.
that correspond to the physical structure of the city. Social exclusions and informal barriers to entry practically wall off parts of the built environment, conferring social recognition and legitimacy for those whom it protects inside. The social contours of the city are known to its residents: they are mapped out relationally through the practices that fit their venues, through the attitudes of the present and absent people within them, and through the judgments toward those emplaced elsewhere. They are formed by, but also inform, personal mobilities.

Second, a social topography demonstrates that physical space does not merely contain or reflect status hierarchy, it is also an important mode of its expression. People make status judgments in terms of the places that are familiar and foreign to them, but place also speaks for the people it represents. As was shown in the case of the bazaar district of Eminönü, despite its status as the historic center of the city, its invocation functions as a metonym designating status characteristics of the people who shop, live, and “learn from” there. Conventional social mappings may attempt to locate higher incidences of poverty or crime, or perhaps chart the concentration of various segments of the population; a social topography reveals places—of origin, of residence, of visitation, spaces of discretion or default—as ascriptive characteristics that hang heavily on individuals’ beliefs, practices, and identities.

Third, a social topography maps how places are loci for investitures of social meanings, which act back upon the population that constructs them. Dominant status groups, such as the shoppers who patronize İstinye Park, imbue preferred places with legitimizing value, thereby displacing social discrimination into the location and structure of the building itself. Through the active policing of legitimate practices by elites (as with the “character analysis” trained upon Bülent by the affluent customers in İstinye Park’s courtyard), individuals are encouraged to self-select themselves to inhabit particular locations suited to their status, reinforcing the existent hierarchical relief throughout the social space.

Fourth, as a method of representing the range of practices that distribute status throughout the social landscape, a social topography reflects changes to space as it is lived. The physical form of the built environment is much more obdurate than the variety of social practices coursing through it, and this flux alters how places are interpreted, experienced, and socially recognized by the people who inhabit it. The relationship between place and status-conferring shopping practices is a tenuous and highly contingent one. The overall strength of consumer confidence in an economy, the financial solvency of transnational brands, changes in the demographic and retail composition of the surrounding area, the connection or disconnection of transportation routes, acts of God or Nature—all of these factors contribute to the sorts of practices that a particular place attracts and permits. As with the case of Akmerkez, the shopping mall preferred by Alp before it became overrun by “nonquality” customers from the wrong part of town, the structural permanence of the urban landscape is insufficient to preserve its relationship to distinctive status practices. Likewise, the construction of İstinye Park reorders the previously estimable Akmerkez as passé, just as the choice to forswear Akmerkez in favor of the new shopping center of İstinye Park now provides evidence of discerning tastes and up-to-date fashion sense upon the chooser. The effects of space on status change over time because space itself is profoundly relational, subject to the social practices that make it up.

Last, the concept of social topography best captures the practical spatial knowledges of ordinary people. Legitimating cultural practices are always emplaced, and their placement becomes a part of how they are understood. A social topography describes the working geography of socially recognized status values, mapping popular associations of places and practices. As such, its contours are locally specific. The case considered here constitutes an attempt
to advance sociological theory connecting spatial and cultural practices, and how this relationship constructs status inequalities. However, whereas shopping practices are the dominant idiom in which status conflicts are played out in the context of neoliberal Istanbul, it should not be assumed that this relationship would bear out similarly elsewhere. Future research should explore the distinct shapes given to social settings along different axes of stratification, driven by locally salient status frames. As a theoretical construct for understanding and representing the relationship between place and status, the concept of social topography would be made more robust through further empirical research investigating the various ways in which places are given and give value to the people who occupy them.

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NOTES

1. Bourdieu preferred to describe the social hierarchies of rank and esteem as social classes rather than as status groups. However, Bourdieu’s ([1979] 1984:54–55) acknowledgment of debt to Weber’s ([1921] 2010:148) formulation of status groups as “stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by specific ‘lifestyles’” suggests that Bourdieu’s language can be slightly altered without committing great harm to his meaning.

2. Bourdieu (1990) did demonstrate some concern with physical space in his earliest work, notably his essay on the Kabyle house, a structure which “is organized in accordance with a set of homologous oppositions [that] . . . also exist between the house as a whole and the rest of the [Kabyle] universe” (p. 275). However, Bourdieu (1990) later distanced himself from this analysis, referring to it as “perhaps the last work I wrote as a blissful structuralist” (p. 9). He developed the concept of social space in part to avoid some of the ontological problems associated with treating physical structures as social structures (see Bourdieu 1989:16; Lizardo 2010).

3. The great exception to this misrecognition is within symbolic interaction theory. Goffman made use of space in a number of studies, from the metaphorical description of separating interaction into “front stage” and “back stage” performances (Goffman 1959), to the analysis of behavior in public space (Goffman 1963), to the role of “total institutions” in regulating social action (Goffman 1961).

4. I propose this term as distinct from Anheir et al’s (1995) use of “social topography” to characterize Bourdieu’s field theory. That study, like Bourdieu’s own work, examines status distributions in abstract conceptual, rather than physical, space. Thanks to Samuel Shaw for drawing my attention to this usage.

5. The Turkish word pazar, from which the English word bazaar is derived, functions in everyday language to signify a “market,” often held weekly and vending fresh produce and household goods, similar to how farmers’ market is used in English. It is distinct from the word çarşı, which denotes a market that is also typically lined along the street, but with permanent storefronts selling mostly clothing and consumer durables. Indeed, the Turkish term for the famous Grand Bazaar, Kapalı Çarşı, would be more literally translated as Closed Market. As with pazarlar, çarşıs are not merely historic relics—they maintain a substantial presence in low-, middle-, and upper-income neighborhoods alike (Dökmeci et al. 2005).

6. Data collection for all stages of this project was conducted in accordance with University of Maryland policies on the research on Human Subjects (IRB Protocol No. 11-0419).

7. I owe a debt of gratitude to the American Research Institute in Turkey for making me a research fellow in advanced Turkish in the summer of 2010.

8. The exclusion of foreign tourists from the sample was intentional, given that the interviews concern the ways status differences are understood and narrated within a Turkish context. Although the presence of
foreigners lent prestige to the space of the shopping mall, they are, in a sense, off the map of Istanbul’s social topography.

9. The relative difficulty recruiting respondents within a shopping mall for extended sit-down interviews led to a large number of people’s declining to participate (approximately one in five, or 20 percent, participated in the study). However, the level of participation is consistent with previous research conducted in shopping malls in Turkey (see Akçaoğlu 2009).

10. Sampled patrons who declined to be interviewed on site were given the option to arrange interviews at times and places of their convenience. In the single case in which a participant scheduled an interview, it took place within the clubhouse of her private social club.

11. It should be noted, however, that like most other malls in Turkey, İstinye Park features a dedicated prayer room (mescit) available for use by workers and patrons alike.

12. Although it is beyond the scope of the present article to speculate further, other studies have found that women observing tesettür have developed alternative venues to the shopping mall for the expression of distinctive fashion practices (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Sandikci and Ger 2007).

13. The first round of NVivo coding was informed by themes that emerged from notes taken at the time of the interviews and memos written during and after the collection of the data. Themes that became more apparent during the analysis, particularly those related to the associations between shopping practices, hierarchy, and space, were coded in subsequent rounds.

14. This approach was developed in the United States by the Chicago School of urban sociology.

15. According to Alp, “Last time I looked up there, the cheapest shirt was 650 Turkish liras [about $400 at the time of the interview]. That prices me out.”

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