

ANALYZING THE SENSE OF BELONGING FROM A BOURDIEUSIAN PERSPECTIVE: WOMEN FROM TÜRKİYE IN NORTH LONDON

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Abstract

The Cambridge Dictionary defines belonging as the feeling of safety and comfort in a given place. For migrants, defining belonging is complicated as it also means establishing good relations with other members of society. A sense of belonging encompasses being included in the family, the country in which one lives, and the group to which one belongs. This study sought to answer the question “How is the sense of belonging established in a diaspora?” It also poses the question “Does the sense of belonging differ between generations in a diaspora?” This study was conducted in North London between 2017–2019. In-depth interviews were managed with 8 first-generation women, 10 second-generation women, and 7-third generation young women. Interviews were organized at the North London Alevi Association. Although the first step of this study was to identify a sense of belonging and how it is established, also generational differences regarding belonging were examined. For this reason, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital were used to analyze the data. Generally, it is observed that first-generation women's sense of belonging is still concentrated in the home country they left, in contrast, for the younger generation it is related to the country in which they were born or went there when they were children.

Keywords: Belonging, Habitus, Capital, Field, North London

AİDİYET DUYGUSUNU BOURDİEU PERSPEKTİFİNDEN İNCELEMELİK: KUZEY LONDRA'DA TÜRKİYE'DEN KADINLAR

Öz

Cambridge Sözlüğü, aidiyeti, belirli bir mekânda bireyin hissettiği güvenlik ve rahatlık duygusu olarak tanımlamaktadır. Aidiyet duygusu kişinin yaşadığı aileye ve ülkeye ait olması demektir. Göçmenler için aidiyetin tanımlanması daha karmaşıktır çünkü göçmenlerin öncelikle ev sahibi toplumla iyi ilişkiler kurmaları gerekir. Bu çalışmada “diasporada aidiyet duygusu nasıl oluşur?” ve “diasporada aidiyet duygusu nesiller arasında farklılık gösterir mi?” sorularına cevap aranmıştır. Bu çalışma 2017-2019 yılları arasında Kuzey Londra'da gerçekleştirilmiştir. Birinci kuşaktan 8 kadın, ikinci kuşaktan 10 kadın ve üçüncü kuşaktan 7 genç kız ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler Kuzey Londra Alevi Derneği'nde yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın ilk adımı aidiyet duygusunun belirlenmesi ve nasıl kurulduğunu belirlemek olsa da sonraki adımda aidiyet konusunda kuşak farklılıkları incelenmiştir. Bourdieu'nun habitus, alan ve sermaye kavramları çerçevesinde analiz gerçekleştirilmiştir. Genel olarak birinci kuşak kadınların aidiyet duygusunun hâlâ ayrıldıkları ülkeye bağlı kaldığı, genç kuşakta ise aidiyet duygusunun doğduğu veya çocukken gittiği ülkeye karşı oluştuğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aidiyet, Habitus, Kapital, Alan, Kuzey Londra

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Introduction

Migrations from Türkiye to the rest of the world occurred during different periods and for various reasons. For example, the first immigrants to the UK differed from those to Europe. The first migrants from Türkiye to the UK mostly left the country because of political conflict. For example, in the 1970s, following the Maras incidents and 1971 military interventions, a substantial number of Alevis moved to the UK as refugees. Military intervention in 1980 escalated the conflict in Türkiye. The Alevis and Kurds faced numerous challenges and began to migrate in the 1980s. Thousands of Kurdish asylum seekers, mostly from southeast Türkiye arrived in the UK in the 1980s and the 1990s (Bilecen & Araz, 2015: p.192). The majority of them were unskilled and uneducated people who were not engaged in any occupations other than agriculture.

A mutually and emotionally interactive relationship must exist to form a sense of belonging. If a person perceives themselves as part of a community, a sense of belonging is constructed. Having a sense of belonging is a fundamental need, Abraham Maslow included it as the third step in his hierarchy of five needs, which are physiological, the need for security, the need for belonging, the need to feel valued, and the need for self-actualization. The need for belonging is considered a prerequisite for self-realization. Individuals seek acceptance and security within society and want to fulfil this need primarily through close contact. This needs to be met within the person's family and social environment. Belonging is established through shared values and behavioral patterns. Individuals integrate with the society in which they live through their characteristics. To bond with the environment in which they live, individuals must feel safe and secure within that society. Sense of belonging can be modified according to an individual's life. Similar to identity, belonging is not a fixed characteristic. As individuals' choices may change, their sense of belonging may also change. Individuals may feel they belong to more than one place at a time (Noltemeyer, 2012: pp.1863-1864). The sense of belonging can be identified by location and can develop in physical and social environments (Waite et al., 2023).

Migration shakes an individual's sense of belonging. With a change in place, individuals continue their existence according to the rules of the new environment. The feeling of comfort means staying in a place without discomfort, and it can take some time to feel this feeling. However, children's sense of belonging takes shape depending on where they live (Hannafin, 2016, p.31). If immigrants in the host country experience discrimination, they engage in "placemaking" in their neighbourhoods. They settle in specific areas among their people and continue to visit their shops



and community centers. Their belonging develops primarily in the special places where they settle (Wessendorf, 2019: p.134).

This study was conducted only with women. Because it comes down to gender in one way, it is not possible to analyze women and men in the same pot. Therefore, only women were selected in this study. The data collected through in-depth interviews were used for comparative analysis, and also the formations of the sense of belonging between generations were analyzed. The study was conducted within two interrelated questions: “How do people establish a sense of belonging in the diaspora?” and “Can a sense of belonging differ between generations?”

Why the Alevi association was chosen as the field is to make the analysis more descriptive by making it on a single group. The data obtained in the study were analysed using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and cultural capital.

1. Habitus and Choices

Habitus refers to gestures, looks, postures, and mimics, and these reveal the culture or group, that is, the social class to which a person belongs. Habitus also encompasses attitudes, behaviors, and sociocultural preferences. Habitus refers to the presence of socially created preferences among individuals and shapes daily life practices. Behaviors in everyday life create individuals' habits. Thus, habitus is a set of actions and behaviors. The dominant habitus of a society constitutes a legitimate culture. According to Bourdieu, habitus is the stock of knowledge in people's minds (Celik, 2014: p.268).

Habitus is learned but internalized as permanent tendencies that are already present in the individual and come from their past lives. These cognitive and normative tendencies vary among individuals. Various formations exist among the classes to which one belongs. Different conditions form an individual's environment, constituting the habitus. These deep-rooted environments and conditions affect individual attitudes. Therefore, individuals belonging to different classes exhibit different behavioral patterns. Individuals possess characteristics of their classes. The predisposition to receiving education is also a characteristic of the class. People from different family structures have different attitudes towards schools and education. The roots of habitus in past life also shape individuals' future expectations and aspirations (Galessar & Cooper, 2012: p.465).

Bourdieu's work titled "The Peasant and His Body," based on his childhood village Bearn's social history. He examines the "problem of rising rates of bachelorhood" in the village. The single



ones attended to the balls for introducing themselves to the others. Bourdieu states that a problem appears there because older bachelors do not dance in their music; one of the old bachelor says “Dancing is not for a man my age anyway. It's a beautiful waltz”. He can dance but the music changed and they even do not know how to dance. And he says that “the young people don't know how to waltz anyway” (p. 582), The peasant tells that the dance habitus changed in balls and so they have to change their dance styles. Again, there is another problem for them. This time there is a problem with the tendency of villager and townmen’s dance styles. The tendency of village men hearing music, and dancing is different from village men. Peasant men's bodies are not that flexible, and they cannot perform these movements (Bourdieu, 2004: p.582). These differences arise from living in different cultures and environments. A certain amount of time is needed for the habitus to change.

Habitus is a permanent system of tendencies acquired from experience. Different habitus forms between groups or classes, and these differences affect the behaviors and attitudes of individuals in their lives. Actions constrained by habitus originate in past experiences (Galessar & Cooper, 2012: pp.482–483).

2. Identifying with Cultural and Social Capitals

Bourdieu identifies four main types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. Although these forms of capital are interconnected, this study mainly focuses on cultural and social capital. Capital is the accumulation and preservation of specific categories of goods. Bourdieu expanded the concept of capital beyond its purely material or economic dimensions and described capital as “accumulated labor.” Labor can materialize in many different forms: economic capital is accumulated and formed as money and property; cultural capital is formed in the form of cultural goods and services, including education; and social capital is accumulated and formed as acquaintances and relationships. According to Bourdieu, capital can be converted into economic capital at the end of its utilization (Swartz, 2018: pp.109-111). For Bourdieu, social capital is a network based on institutionalized relationships. Accessing institutional resources through this network or obtaining help from community members in the network is social capital. When a group member encounters a problem, solving it represents social capital. Bourdieu explains the social capital perspective by associating it with the habitus and field. Given that individuals at an unequal distance from resources have different habitus and field functioning, other forms of social capital are formed under various conditions (Celik, 2014: p.268). The capital of all groups is different, and



these differences sustain the distance between the groups or, on the contrary, reduce the distance.

Social closeness or separation is determined by economic, social, and cultural capital (Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010: p.53). After a certain period, cultural capital already shows itself in an individual's appearance, but also the cultural capital can be seen in an individual's possessions, like the books he reads and the musical instruments he can play. The cultural capital also shows itself in the educational life of the students. The fact that not all children have the same success in education is again due to the fact that they are from different classes. The cultural capital and social capital of children's families are effective in their education (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243).

3. Field and Belonging

For young immigrants, family is the first place to learn about a sense of belonging. Migrant families help young members with social relationships in their community. They attempt to reconfigure their hegemonic relations with the system. In addition to families, schools are essential institutions for teaching relationships. Those who have capital try to protect their field and they do not allow newcomers to enter there and gain power. They dominate their field with the capital they own (Bourdieu, 1986, p.20).

The field is a spatial metaphor used by Bourdieu to create a social environment in which habitus functions. This is where goods, services, and statuses are produced and circulated. Bourdieu states that each field has a power that is shaped according to its characteristics. In other words, actors influence these fields, but there is a struggle between the actors in these fields. Bourdieu defines this as a battlefield. Therefore, the field appears as a structure that changes, develops, and disappears over time. Fields play essential roles in change and development. Although forces in the field struggle for dominance, newcomers attempt to overthrow this dominance. This is because those in that field previously have certain capital accumulation and authority (Swartz,2018: pp.167-169). Each area has its own rules and sense of belonging. For immigrant families, changing geography creates a different sense of belonging. Young immigrants have multiple senses of belonging.

4. Methodology

This study investigates the preservation and/or formation of belonging in a diaspora. Fieldwork was conducted in the Alevi Association in North London from 2017 to 2019 with 25



people. In-depth interviews were conducted with three generations of female interviewees and their sense of belonging was analyzed. The data was obtained from eight first-generation women, ten second-generation women, and seven third-generation women, and the data was analyzed using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field. The letter W (woman) was used for all interviewees.

In depth interview is used for understanding the interviewer's point of view. As age is essential for this study, it is written in parentheses. Ethical approval was not obtained since the field of this study was conducted between 2017-2019.

5. Analyses

5.1. Habitus and Belonging in the Diaspora

The last-generation interviewees were asked whether they understood that they were British. As the first-generation interviewees' knowledge of English was limited, and the second-generation women knew only enough English to manage their average daily lives, this question was asked only to the last-generation interviewees. All the interviewed people stated that although they were born there or began living there at a young age, they understood that they were not British. When asked how it was possible to know that they were not British, even though their clothes, language, and behavior were British, A11 (16) replied, "Because of my black hair." Habitus has a broad definition that includes physical characteristics. Habitus is a set of behaviors obtained through repetition. However, habitus has historically been connected to and embedded in the body. This is acquired through behavioral practices. In other words, habitus is not acquired solely through thoughts and speech; it also emerges through bodily behavior (Bourdieu, 2023: p.18). The habitus became apparent as they continued talking to the other interviewees. A12 (15) answered the same question "I can tell it's because of my appearance. British people are more blond; they have blue eyes, I grew up here, but I still have a little accent." Although A13 (15) had blond hair and blue eyes, she said, "Some people doubt; they say you are not completely British, but some people don't doubt at all. I have no accent in my English or anything else. I have not quite figured out how they understand it, either." Although the last generation of interviewees speak English like native speakers, native people understand that they are not British as habitus includes posture, look, and internalized behavioral patterns.



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Although Bourdieu's three concepts are analysed under different topics, they all affect each other. Habitus should not be considered in a personal context but rather in the context of the social environment and conditions. With changes in capital and fields, changing lifestyles and tastes bring about a change in habitus. For example, interviewees from the first two generations continued to consume the flavours they had used in their homeland. However, those who were born or went there when they were children did not share the same culinary tastes as previous generations. When first- and second-generation women were asked about the types of food they prepared at home, they answered that they cook Turkish food. For example, A5 (45) stated that "Children do not eat our food, so we cook British food for them." Similarly, A6 (48) said that she learned to cook British food after going there and explained the reason for this as follows: "Children like British food. I cook it for them." Individuals internalize the objective conditions under which they live and reproduce habitus (Swartz, 2018: p. 148).

Habitus cannot be changed suddenly; all the changes take time to internalize. Bourdieu's three terms are intertwined with each other. If one of them changes, then two of them start to change.

5.2. Cultural Capital and Belonging in Diaspora

Third generation interviewees clearly explained the change in cultural capital that differentiates across generations and the sense of belonging that this creates. The ability to use the language of the destination is an effective factor in the formation of belonging.

A12 (15) said that her mother still could not speak English fluently with the British people. She stated that her mother goes to the Alevi association and constantly meets Turks. When asked where her mother thinks home is, she said, "I think it is Türkiye, because her English is not very good so she cannot express herself very well. The other person immediately realizes she is a foreigner, so she thinks home is Türkiye." Language and education are essential pillars of the formation and accumulation of cultural capital. As language and education enable people to relate to the society in which they live, their sense of belonging increases. Interviewees from the last generation stated that their families felt a sense of belonging to Türkiye. Interviewee A14 (18) was asked whether she thought about leaving her home or living alone. "No, only if I get married... but if I reach a certain level financially, I may leave... My family would not want me to... They would say that I am a girl." These words also included views on gender. This implicitly implies that only males are permitted to live alone before marriage. Even if the environment has changed for them,



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and they see new customs, the cultural capital to which they belong remains that of their home country. Erel (2020) says that migration is a social process, and it has potential to change gender relations. It must be analyzed in different categories of “women” and “men.” Because the masculinities and femininities are constructed in different conditions.

A15 (23), was asked the same question to which she answered the following: “No, there is no chance to leave the family home. I talked to my parents about it, I said my workplace is 5 minutes from here... my friends are here, everything is here, I said I'll pay for a one-room house myself, but they say no, they don't accept it.” She added, “I cannot leave that framework of respect.” Although cultural capital differed for the last generation, the belonging to which their families were attached still bound them to a certain point. However, a complete breakthrough has not yet been achieved. When A15 (23) was asked whether British girls left home, she said, “People here are very independent. They did not consult anything or ask for permission. It seems very interesting to me ... your family raised you and brought you into this world, but they don't consult their families about anything...” As mentioned earlier, a sense of belonging can be to a family, community, or country. Even though the last generation of interviewees developed a sense of belonging to the country in which they lived, this attachment has not overcome their attachment to their family. When A15 (23) was asked about the difference in her family life from the lives of other Britishers, she said:

They do not sit around a table together; everyone eats according to their choice. If they do, it only happens at Christmas... only those times do they eat with their families. However, we are always together. We celebrate holidays. Every person comes to our house since my father is older; it is very nice. Even if we live in another country, we must not forget where we come from. A15 (23).

For the third generation, the cultural capital felt in the family and brought about by the family has not been overridden. Indeed, the sampling method also has an impact. This is because all interviewees were from rural areas and traditional cultures. It is possible that these results may differ for the sample groups that moved from cities. Thus, the last generation developed a sense of belonging to both communities. With cultural nourishment from the family and cultural flow from school and the social environment, it was observed that when they were faced with a dilemma between the community and family, their preference was in favor of their family. When A8 (47), a second-generation interviewee, was asked, “How do you see the new generation here?” she replied, “Our new generation is closer to the British. They grow up in the culture here; they go to the schools here.” The second-generation interviewees see their children as closer to British society. The last generation developed a hybrid belonging. Bourdieu says that to enter a field, one must



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first be predisposed to that field. To be a “legitimate” player in the field, a certain level of knowledge and skill is required. In other words, to enter that field, the capital of the individual must be prepared in advance. After entering the field in this way, the highest benefit is obtained from the field (Bourdieu, 1986: pp. 20-21). Subsequent generations whose cultural capital is more favorable to enter the field can also develop hybrid belonging.

However, as they acquire language and education, they differentiate themselves from the capital they are born into and lean towards a different capital and belonging. This differentiation develops hybrid belonging. Similar to identity, a sense of belonging is not a once-and-for-all construct; it is fluid and can constantly evolve. Field and belonging in the diaspora According to Bourdieu, (Swartz, 2018) the field is an area of conflict that reveals habitus and shapes individuals. Conflicts may arise between newcomers and oldcomers in this field and the habitus of whoever is stronger dominates. The first generation of women, in addition to those at work and home, has mainly been present in Alevi associations, and they have socialized and spent time there. As they did not speak English, they could not attend places other than Turkish-speaking ones. Therefore, women, especially those of the first and second generations, have not left North London where Turks are mostly based. The Alevi Association is located in Northern London. Families bring their children to weekend courses so that they do not lose connection with their motherland culture. The children did not object to this and did not resist the idea of continuing their cultural accumulation with their families. As mentioned before, the last generation has maintained the sense of belonging that their family wants, and they have created hybrid belongings for themselves. Therefore, the field analysis was divided into two sections. First, the Alevi association where they socialize and feel a sense of belonging to the North London region where they live, and schools as places of socialization and cultural acquisition since girls receive education there.

5.3. Alevi Association and North London as the Field

The Alevi association is important to Alevi immigrants. In response to the question “How often do you go to the Alevi association?” All interviewees from the first generation stated that they went there at every opportunity. A1 (65), “I have never communicated with anyone outside... no one understands anything from anyone... It is not because of language but because of culture. I come and go here, I do not go anywhere else.” The only reason for first-generation interviewees to go to the Alevi association is not only that they do not speak English, but also that they cannot share anything with the outside world. Second-generation women stated that they went to the Alevi



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association after work or when their household duties were completed. When asked if they would go anywhere else other than the association, A6 (45) said:

I mean, there are no neighborhood relations here. They do not go to others' houses or do anything like this. They give appointments such as let us go somewhere for a coffee. They meet in coffee shops and talk to each other. There are no houses like ours here. We meet and socialize with our own community here. A6(45)

Again, differences in cultural capital prevented them from getting closer to their host society. The third generation went to the association at the request of their families, culturally continuing the cultural differences. When the third generation was asked how often they attended the association, they said they attended only weekend courses. A14 (18) "I go to the Alevi association (cemevi) every weekend. I also attend the courses there. I think it's because it brings us all together, to teach culture to this generation, that's why..." The Alevi association is a place where migrant capital continues and is transferred to the next generation. The third generation is involved in this field with the encouragement of their families, in addition to the culture they have received in other fields. In the Alevi association, habitus and cultural capital formations occur again and the field is reconstituted. Families bring their children to the association to help them learn about the bağlama instrument, the semah (whirl), and Alevism. At this stage, the internalization of culture, which is the first form of cultural capital, is realized through socialization, and preferences are formed. Thus, cultural capital is internalized, and the values of the community are grasped by children. Second, the association is already experiencing the objectified form of culture. Alevi nights are also organized here, where children consume what they have learned. The third is the institutionalization of culture through the education system (Swartz,2018: pp.111-112).

When all three generations were asked the question "Where would you like to live in the UK?" the first two generations said that they would like to live around the association and together with those who migrated from Türkiye. Their living preferences provided information on their sense of belonging. Clearly, in the first two generations, the sense of belonging is centered on the Kurdish Alevi community. Only one interviewee from the second generation said that she lived in South London of her own choice. However, in the third generation, no uniform sense of belonging was observed. Their sense of belonging has developed in both countries, and they do not prefer to live only in North London, like their families.



5.4. British Schools as a Field

Children in a diaspora can work in different fields than their families. Schools are among the most important in these fields. Owing to their education, they can meet other children from different cultures. When they first attend school, their cultural capital differs from the cultures they encounter. Therefore, they encounter a different culture from what they receive from their families and learn from the association. The habitus that the younger generation acquired informally may conflict with the habitus built by formal education systems. According to Bourdieu, the inequalities created through education constitute the basis for class distinctions. In Western democracies, income inequality persists even though there has been a huge increase in education. This is because the educational system reproduces the codes of the dominant system. Academic achievements actually perpetuate the unequal social order (Swartz, 2018: p.264).

The last generation is made more compatible with the dominant system of education they receive. To understand the dissimilarity between the last and former generations, the participants were asked to understand the differences in spending time with friends. A12 (15) said, “My mother frequently goes to the Alevi association, she spends more time with Turks. However, as I was born here, my friends are from school... I am not with Turks as much as my mother, but I still have good Turkish friends in the association as well as other friends from the school.” This difference in the field resulted in a difference in habitus. New generations have acquired a different identity than their families, with the cultural capital and habitus they have acquired from the fields in which they have lived, and a hybrid culture other than the migrant culture has emerged.

Conclusion

Although this study focuses on cultural and symbolic capital, all these types of capital interact. Habitus becomes integrated with the individual and is defined as tendencies that reveal internalized meaningful practices and meaningful perceptions of a person and manifest themselves in the bodily qualities of patterns, such as cultural knowledge, eating and drinking manners, and everyday behaviors, encompassing the individual’s personal characteristics. Individual characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors such as speech, eating and drinking habits, the environment in which the person grew up, environmental factors, social customs, and traditions were all included as habitus characteristics. Regarding the field, women who live in North London and socialize by



going to the Alevi association constitute the habitus and cultural capital provided by the same field.

Although first-generation migrants may have problems with adaptation, language, and education, those born there or migrated when they were primarily young overcome these problems. The third generation analyzed are those who were born there or came there at a very young age. In other words, they learned about two cultures. Their subsequent participation in the outside world, the education they receive, learning a foreign language or being born in an environment where that language already exists, and the fact that some of them start working there afterward, mean that they no longer fit the definition of “migrant” that their families are expressed in. The word “integration” used for migrants until today, is not used for this younger generation. It is necessary to analyze these young people, who grow up in that environment and already live in harmony with it, but also carry the cultural background they bring from their families. The first generation continued their lives with a sense of belonging to their homeland, whereas the second generation's sense of belonging diminished slightly. As the children of the second generation will be living in the UK now, they have started to feel a sense of belonging to the UK, even though they predominantly feel connected to Türkiye. Thus, the answer to the question “Where is home?” was Türkiye. Third-generation migrants have developed a hybrid sense of belonging while carrying the migrant capital inherited from their families. When third-generation immigrant women were asked where they would like to live if they left home, they said that they did not have such concerns and that they could live in the same neighborhood with the British. The women of the last generation are quite different from their mothers and the first-generation women in terms of education, language, and lifestyle. They have the culture of their families and also they are very familiar with the culture of the place where they live. In this study, the most important result seen in the field is that Bourdieu's concepts (habitus, capital, field) are indeed intertwined. The change of one leads to a change in others.

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