

How a Sense of Belonging Is Formed

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As we are entering the second quarter of the twenty-first century people are relocating more than ever. More and more people are leaving their birthplaces due to various issues including but not limited to war, oppression, economic opportunities, education, climate crisis or simply for a lifestyle change. All these people will experience at least some form of alienage during their stay and may find it difficult to adapt to a foreign land. In this essay I will attempt to decipher how a sense of belonging is formed with the use of examples from my home country, Turkey a place where belonging can be studied in various aspects, so that we can have a better understanding of the adaptation process expatriates goes through. I have divided this essay into three main parts, each covering a different element that I have judged key to understanding the nature of belonging.

Part One, Roots:

Children, as they have unbiased minds and underdeveloped brains, are very open to embracing values around them. Even the most insignificant events one goes through in childhood may shape one's future self drastically. As the mind usually builds itself up by adding new pieces on top, replacing a piece at the foundation, in this case a concept embraced in childhood, is significantly harder. This analogy can also be used to explain why gender norms exist. Many people feel embarrassed when acting out of their gender stereotype if they were exposed to such things in their childhood. Similarly, an attachment forged in the early stages of one's early life is difficult to abandon since it has its roots in the very foundation of one's mind. Which makes the environment one grows up in a key element for understanding the sense of belonging. I would like to stress the word environment as the subject of belonging does not necessarily have to be a place. A great example of this would be the nomadic communities; even though they never settled anywhere for long periods of time they had strong senses of belonging to their cultures and their lifestyles. Even today very noticeable remains of the nomadic traditions can be observed in Turkey. However, historic origins and early life events can never fully determine one's sense of belonging, they can only complement. Humans have a sense of selective belonging meaning that they choose where they eventually will put their roots down based on their personal preferences, interests, and feelings. Where they will and will not choose to belong can also be discussed, which I will do in later sections. Nonetheless, it is very likely for one to reject the roots they are born into. But if one proceeds in life without belonging to a certain place, community, or value they may have an even greater affinity for forging bonds and even the idea of not belonging to anywhere is also a type of belonging since it involves attachment to a certain lifestyle. In conclusion, one's roots can strongly complement a sense of belonging but can never determine where or what one will belong to.

Part Two: Social Bonds

When people say they belong to a particular place they often don't mean the literal location. They usually mean the bonds they have forged with the people in that location. For highly social beings like humans interacting with others is almost obligatory. Belonging to a social environment is so important for us humans that people are willing to avoid abandoning hostile relationships for the sake of not being left out. We even judge ourselves based on how others judge us and behave considering how others would think of us. For this reason, receiving positive social response is essential for a sense of belonging. One first needs feel welcomed before feeling belonging. Thus, it is almost impossible for one to belong to a place they are not accepted in. But not feeling welcomed is not the only thing in the way. Language barrier, for example, is a serious obstacle against social bonding. Since speaking is the main way of our communication, not being fluent in the language spoken in an environment will most certainly result in a communication block. Even if one is highly fluent in the language they may still suffer from not being able to describe their thoughts and emotions accurately or not as well as they would in their native language. These factors will most certainly slow down or completely halt the process of developing a sense of belonging. But on the contrary receiving a positive social response, getting into a friend group for example, would immensely contribute to the feeling of being at home. This is most probably the reason why most students have special sympathy for their school, where the majority of their social life is formed. If one succeeds in forming strong social bonds, they are likely to put down their roots in the place where the bonds are forged. In conclusion, social response from the environment can make or break the sense of belonging and a place where one has strong social bonds is a place they are likely to belong.

Part Three: Life Satisfaction

While part two could have been included in this section as social bonds complement to life satisfaction, I have decided to separate them as social response was a topic far too important for squeezing in. For the last part of my essay, I will argue that people are likely to feel belonging to places where they are satisfied with their lives. With the current economic crisis in Turkey a great number of people often state that they wish to leave the country because they are not satisfied with their lives and say that they have lost their bonds to their country. When people start to feel unsatisfied with their lives their sense of belonging starts to weaken until it reaches the point where the bonds are totally broken. People are not likely to accept places they are unhappy at as a home, even if it contradicts their roots, as I have mentioned in part one. People developing a sense of belonging to places where they are happy is most probably the reason why one's apartment feels like a home and others do not despite being one of many concrete boxes, considering one has pleasant memories inside. In conclusion, people are likely to develop a sense of belonging to places they are satisfied with their lives.

This concludes my essay in which I have attempted to decipher how a sense of belonging is formed. My hypothesis states that one's roots complement and life-satisfaction, especially including social bonding, create the sense of belonging. Understanding belonging is a major task in the world of the twenty-first century and thus, I sincerely hope that my work has created useful ideas.