

# Rebuilding Home Through the Place of Resistance

*“Yolum nerede bileceğim,  
yerim nerede bulacağım”<sup>1</sup>*

Text – N.

Pictures – N., Sude Alkış

Oruç Aruoba

Last December, when I went with friends to participate in anti-fascist protests in Helsinki, I experienced a feeling I had never experienced here before. Coming across a big crowd on the tram—the most crowded tram ride I had seen in Helsinki!—who were headed to protest as I was, I felt like I was headed somewhere very familiar. When we got off the tram, I was worried about where to go and how to find my friends, but by following this familiar crowd, I found my friends easily. As we approached the area, the sound of bells or the collective chants of the crowd, the various banners, slogans, and the flares, which are a must for every protest, took away the apprehension I had before going and replaced it with a slight excitement. When I started chanting “Ei natseja Helsinkiin, ei natseja mihinkään!”<sup>2</sup> with the group gathered for protests in the icy cold of Helsinki, in the shadow of police repression, I was able to place that warm feeling; I felt at home.

It was actually a difficult process to get used to Helsinki—I still have a relationship with this city that I love and hate at the same time, I don’t know where to place it. Coming here, I knew it would be very different from İstanbul, the city I grew up in and made me who I am. Still, I always felt the absence of the blueness of the sea, the smell of the Bosphorus blowing into my nose with the wind, the sound of a ferry whistle, the cries of the seagulls, the *simit*<sup>3</sup> and tea I bought from the street vendor on the way to school in the morning, and the lack of the cats and dogs of our neighborhood that I knew by name and petted before entering my house. It took me a long time to get used to the taste of the pulla or the Baltic Sea, which felt very unfamiliar as a sea or silent seagulls or the calm streets. Most of all, hearing a language that I did not understand and was completely foreign to me in daily life was preventing me from getting accustomed. I found myself becoming more and more withdrawn as I couldn’t say “*kolay gelsin*”<sup>4</sup> when passing by

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1 “I will know where my path lies, I will find where I belong.” - Oruç Aruoba, Turkish philosopher, poet.

2 “No Nazis in Helsinki, no Nazis anywhere!”



a vendor or a cleaning person doing their job; as I questioned whether it would be appropriate to smile at the cashier or the people I met in the elevator and wish them a “good day.” For the first time when I chanted slogans in Finnish with my friends, I felt a new association and closeness with the language. My first reaction was the feeling of being back “home” and later I found myself questioning this feeling on a deeper level. Really, what was the meaning of “home” to me?

I was fourteen when I realized with certainty that home was not a concrete concept, we were already moving out of our eighth house, but instead of moving to the next house, I was going to be placed in a dormitory. At an early age, I thought moving from one house to another every other year, like in my family’s situation, was something very common and was surprised to meet people who had lived at the same house for the most of their lives. From all the moving around, the same repetitive rituals were on my mind: packing up our belongings, finishing up boxes, farewells to an empty house we called home for a couple of years, saying goodbye to friends, arriving at our new home, and opening up boxes. I always wanted to start with the boxes of books; I think setting up my desk with the fun world map poster from National Geographic Kids hanging right above it and my books placed neatly in my bookcase made me more comfortable. This was my way of embracing my *new home* but I would always mourn what I had left behind in the places we had moved to.

In that last moving process, this cycle was broken. My books, the world map that found

its place in every house we had moved into, and every other item which made me feel like a belonging there were put away in my family’s storage—where they still are to this day. That was when I realized home was indeed more than a physical connection, more than four walls, belongings and family; home is a concept one builds for themselves and I found myself in an inextricable search for the structuring of this concept for many years.

This March, whilst still searching for answers on the concept of home, I had to face a sharp reality that threw me back again. The resistance that started in Istanbul and quickly spread across Turkey, intensified by the demand for democracy, struck me from a completely different place. The feeling of being stuck as I watched the developments from afar, the anger bubbling up inside me that I didn’t know where to place, and more than everything, a deep longing for home. This longing for home had deeper connotations than just feeling homesick of the city I called home and felt like I belonged. I felt a deep sadness and helplessness that I could not quite put my finger on as I followed the developments from Helsinki. I also realized that I was in a different kind of pain when my friends and acquaintances were among the arrests that followed the start of the resistance, or when I was texting people I knew every day asking “Are you back home safely?” and following the developments every minute of every day.

I was not there in person but I was very familiar with that feeling of anger, with the energy of the crowd because I was a part of that unity during my activism years, chanting and standing together in solidarity had

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3 A circular bread encrusted with sesame seeds, commonly sold by street vendors in Turkey.

4 A common Turkish expression used to wish someone ease in their work. Said to people while they’re working — whether it’s a shopkeeper, construction worker, or colleague — it conveys support, respect, and encouragement. Literally means “may it come easy.”



become my home. This feeling of home stemmed more from an existential place, feeling accepted as who I am and feeling safe. Most importantly, it included the acceptance of the emotion, anger, that I had accumulated inside me for years and never knew where to put it. As Sara Ahmed<sup>5</sup> said, beyond individual experiences, emotions play a role in the construction of spaces, belonging and orientations. Emotions overflow from us reaching others', colliding, in-

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.


tersecting or merging. I was able to find a place for myself in a space where my feminist anger against social inequality, state violence, male violence which I had witnessed for years, and my own identity struggle, was not suppressed, but made visible. I felt at home for the first time when I was able to exist without hiding my anger, and this collective anger rising from the site of resistance blended with great enthusiasm and joy, creating a sense of unity and belonging.

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The cornerstone of these sentiments, our feminist night marches, which started traditionally at Taksim square following the path to the İstiklal Road, had changed its dimension after experiencing a violent police intervention in 2019. In the following years, even though we found our place in the narrow alleys stretching from Siraselviler to Cihangir, police barricades covered a wider area each year. Still, we continued our chants and protests with slogans “let the husband come, let the father come, let the state come, let the baton come; rebellion for

rebellion's sake, freedom for freedom's sake!”. Even with the changing locations, our voices, cheerful songs, dances accompanying angry chants bore the familiar patterns.

It was impossible to ignore the impact of these patterns and the resistance practices of the feminist and queer movements, the two strongest movements that have been able to survive in the shrinking civic space in an increasingly autocratic political climate and repressive regime that has rapidly intensified in the last decade, on the largest social movement of this decade. As a matter of fact, I once again was able to see how the feminist marches and queer protests which I was a part of for years were able to hold the civic area from afar.

**T**he feeling of desperation following the protests from afar, without being able to physically participate, swung me to the very beginning. Once, home was a place of resistance to me, but now I was in a void with uncertainties. This time I look deeper inside myself beyond the spaces, protests and communities, and I am met with a self that resists becoming a home for itself. Maybe this is a part of my journey. In his book *The Year of the Hare*, Arto Paasilinna says “He had his own world, this one, and it was fine to be here, living alone in one's own way.” It is at this point that I feel that I am on a new path again and I am thinking about the meaning of living where I am right now, the way I am. I don't have an answer to what home is yet, and maybe I don't want to. Yet, despite everything, I am still searching; I am still resisting; I am still afraid to settle in a place, a person, a memory; I am still hoping to belong. 



Am...  
Ka...  
İS...  
Sa... larınız  
g... mizd...  
lenin direği anedir  
mezb...  
tal...