



Solidarity and Perceived Justice in the Disaster Kitchen: Social Capital and Trust in Post-Earthquake Food Sharing

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of an earthquake, food is not merely a means of survival but also a domain where social relations are forged, solidarity becomes visible, and inequalities surface. This study examines the food-sharing behaviors observed by actors involved in aid processes following the February 6, 2023, Kahramanmaraş-Türkiye earthquakes through the concepts of solidarity, social capital, and perceived justice. The study uses a qualitative descriptive design, conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with 21 NGO and public-sector staff members and volunteers who worked in the affected region and analyzing the data thematically. The findings reflect disaster kitchens from the perspective of those who managed and observed distribution, with these actors' accounts being used to indirectly access survivor behaviors. The findings show distribution to have evolved from initial chaos toward an order in which a sense of fairness was established and volunteering to have served as both an operational workforce and a means of coping with trauma. Food aid mostly circulated within individuals' close circles (bonding social capital), whereas fair distribution became difficult wherever bridging social capital was weak. The involvement of local leaders, particularly muhtars (neighborhood leaders), facilitated needs assessments but carried a risk of bias. Because the disaster coincided with Ramadan, aid organized around the Suhoor and Iftar meals, along with the emphasis on religious and cultural appropriateness, revealed food to have retained its cultural significance even in the midst of a crisis. The study contributes to food culture scholarship by framing disaster kitchens as a practice of solidarity and identity.

Keywords

disaster • food sharing • social solidarity • social capital • perceived justice • food culture



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Introduction

The February 6, 2023, Kahramanmaraş-Türkiye earthquakes affected 11 provinces in Türkiye and were one of the most devastating disasters in its recent history. Alongside debris removal and shelter, another urgent issue was access to basic food for millions of people. From the very first days, public institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local initiatives, and individual volunteers flocked to the region; soup kitchens were set up, food packages were distributed, and pots of hot meals began to simmer. This intense mobilization was often discussed as a logistical problem: Could the right supplies be delivered to the right place at the right time? What was happening on the ground, however, was not merely about supply and transportation. Questions such as who would hand over the food and to whom, who would wait in line, who would receive it first, and who would give their portion to someone else all pointed to a network of relationships through which the social order the disaster had disrupted was rebuilt.

Food becomes a social act the moment it is shared. Dividing a plate, yielding one's place in line to another, or returning what one has with the words "this is enough for me" are not merely a transfer of calories but also a declaration of belonging, trust, and reciprocity. Under extraordinary conditions such as disasters, these declarations become even more visible due to the scarcity of resources, increased uncertainty, and the suspension of the usual rules of daily life. Precisely for this reason, food sharing in the aftermath of a disaster serves as a useful lens through which to examine a society's capacity for solidarity, the relationships of trust within it, and its sense of justice.

The disaster literature has long treated food largely as a technical issue. A vast body of literature has accumulated on logistics chains, storage conditions, distribution speed, and food safety standards (Holguín-Veras et al., 2012; Tierney, 2014). While these studies are valuable, the social and cultural dimensions of food sharing have remained relatively overlooked, however, as the behaviors of disaster survivors and aid providers are shaped not only by the dynamics of supply and demand but also by norms of solidarity, the structure of social networks, and expectations of fair treatment. This article aims to address this gap by reframing post-disaster food sharing as issues of food culture and the sociology of food.

The central research question asks how solidarity, social capital, and perceptions of justice shape social behavior in post-earthquake food-sharing processes. This question is explored through the testimonies of the NGO and public-sector employees and volunteers who were directly involved in disaster response efforts. The article describes the patterns of sharing that emerged in disaster kitchens, revealing the tension between solidarity and conflict within these patterns and opening up a discussion on the *moral economy* of food distribution.

The following sections first present the theoretical framework comprised of the concepts of food sharing, moral economy, solidarity, social capital, and justice before explaining the research methodology and then discussing the findings under six themes using participants' statements. Finally, the study presents conclusions and policy recommendations from the perspective of food culture.

Conceptual Framework

Food and Sharing as a Means of Social Bonding

The role of food in human life is not limited to the biological necessity of nutrition. Eating together (commensality) has historically been a practice that establishes and reproduces kinship, neighborliness, and a sense of belonging to a community. Precisely on this point, the foundational line of the literature on food sociology proposes the study of meals to involve a system of meaning. Douglas' (1972) classic study analyzing the British domestic dining table demonstrated the content and sequence of a meal to not be random; instead showing who eats what with whom and in what order to encode social boundaries, hierarchies, and degrees of closeness. According to Douglas, a meal is a message waiting to be deciphered: To be invited to the table is to be accepted into the same moral community. Meanwhile, Fischler (1988) extended this insight to the level of individual identity, arguing what one eats to make a person who they are, with the individual being constructed both physiologically and symbolically through the *incorporation* of food into the body. Fischler's later work (2011) directly addressed the concept of commensality, emphasizing eating together to be a fundamental social mechanism that defines groups, delineates their boundaries, and renews their solidarity. Counihan and Van Esterik (2008) compiled a body of work that forms the foundation of a broad field examining food as a cultural text.

Sharing itself is not merely a transfer of resources but an act of relationship building. Mauss' (1925/1990) classic essay on gifts argued a gift to never be given without expectation of reciprocity and to constitute a system of reciprocity organized around the tripartite obligations of giving, receiving, and returning. For Mauss, the gift is a *holistic social phenomenon* that embodies legal, economic, moral, and religious dimensions simultaneously and weaves an enduring bond between the giver and the recipient. This framework becomes particularly relevant when applied to the context of a disaster: More than just the fulfillment of an immediate need, a plate of food distributed at a soup kitchen is also a declaration of reciprocity that includes both the giver and the recipient within the same moral network. Disaster conditions do not eliminate this symbolic significance; on the contrary, sharing becomes one of the most visible expressions of social bonds in an environment where daily routines have collapsed. The pot simmering at the soup kitchen

does not merely alleviate hunger but also transforms those gathered around it into a community, even if only temporarily.

In the context of disasters, access to food must also be addressed as a multidimensional food security issue. Post-disaster food security is best understood not merely as the provision of sufficient calories but as a multidimensional concept encompassing the dimensions of availability, access, utilization, and stability (Food Security Information for Action [FAO], 2008). The theoretical foundation of this approach lies in Sen's (1981) analysis of hunger. Sen demonstrated famines to often stem not from an absolute shortage of food supply but from the collapse of people's entitlements to food, with hunger being not a problem of availability but one of access and entitlement. This insight applies directly to disaster kitchens: even when sufficient or excessive amounts of food reach a region, certain groups may still be deprived if access channels operate unequally. Indeed, studies examining how households' channels of access to food narrow following extreme events (Casellas Connors et al., 2022) revealed disasters to deepen food insecurity by exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Therefore, disaster kitchens must be understood in two ways, both as a space for cultural sharing and as a food security arena where fair access is put to the test.

The Moral Economy of Sharing: The Expectation of a Fair Share

How food is distributed under conditions of scarcity is more than just a matter of supply and demand; it is a sphere governed by society's established expectations regarding *fair shares* and *legitimate needs*. Thompson's (1971) study examined the bread riots in 18th-century England, referring to this set of expectations as the *moral economy*. According to Thompson, the crowd's rebellion against leaving prices to the logic of the free market was actually defending a traditional norm, the belief that staple foods should be made available to everyone at a fair price and that profiteering must be prevented during times of scarcity. This concept provides a powerful lens for understanding behavioral patterns in disaster kitchens. Attitudes that brand hoarding and profiteering as greed while deeming the principle of taking only what you need as legitimate point to an expectation of fair shares that operates even in times of scarcity (i.e., a contemporary moral economy). Thompson's concept allows one to see the practice of those managing distribution of giving just enough and the attitude among disaster survivors of "this is enough for me" to converge on the same normative ground.

The Two Faces of Solidarity: Mechanical and Organic

Durkheim's (1893/1984) theory of solidarity provides a useful framework for interpreting sharing behaviors within the context of social integration. Durkheim distinguished between mechanical solidarity (based on similarity) and organic solidarity (based on the

division of labor). Disasters offer a snapshot where these two forms intertwine. While the shared experience of a catastrophe reinforces a sense of belonging based on similarity (i.e., the feeling of everyone being all in the same boat) on one hand, on the other, the aid organization itself sets in motion a functional division of labor, ranging from cooks and volunteers to logisticians and managers. Food sharing provides a concrete context for observing how these two forms of solidarity interlock in the field. In this regard, the Durkheimian concept of solidarity intersects with the community-building function of commensality (Fischler, 2011), where eating together both unites like-minded individuals within a shared moral community and provides the ritual moment in which this community is reproduced.

Social Capital: Bonding, Bridging, and Linking Networks

Social capital theory explains the decisive role individuals' and communities' networks play during times of crisis. The contemporary use of the concept draws on three distinct theoretical roots. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the sum of actual and potential resources an individual can access through their enduring networks of relationships. According to Bourdieu, this type of capital is in a transformative relationship with economic and cultural capital and plays a role in reproducing social inequalities. Meanwhile, Coleman (1988) framed the concept within a functional framework, in which social capital is a relational resource that facilitates action and comprises the trust, norms of reciprocity, and information channels among actors. Putnam's (2000) distinction extended this concept to the public sphere and has been directly relevant to disaster analysis, with bonding social capital referring to strong, inward-looking ties among similar individuals and bridging social capital referring to the connections between different groups. Putnam's emphasis on bridging ties echoes Granovetter's (1973) thesis on the strength of weak ties. Granovetter demonstrated loose connections outside one's immediate circle to be able to be more effective than strong ties in accessing new information and resources due to strong ties typically sharing the same limited pool of information.

This theoretical distinction becomes directly apparent in post-disaster food sharing. The circulation of aid within the family, among neighbors, and within the immediate social circle reveals the aspect of bonding capital that strengthens solidarity but simultaneously excludes outsiders. The equitable distribution of resources to a broader and more heterogeneous community, however, depends on the presence of bridging capital and weak ties. Aldrich (2012) is the scholar who has most systematically applied this framework in the disaster literature. By comparing four major disaster cases, Aldrich demonstrated the primary factor determining the speed of recovery to not be the extent of physical damage or the amount of external aid but rather the depth of a community's

social capital. Aldrich also added a third category to Putnam's binary distinction, where *linking* social capital refers to vertical relationships that connect ordinary citizens to the institutions, officials, and local authorities that hold the resources and decision-making power. This third category is particularly well-suited for analyzing the intermediary role neighborhood heads, local administrators, and accredited institutions play in disaster relief kitchens, because the delivery of food to disaster survivors through official channels depends largely on the functioning of these vertical ties.

Trust is the fundamental component that enables the functioning of all these types of capital. Contemporary analyses following in the footsteps of Simmel (Frederiksen, 2012; Ovares Sánchez, 2018) footsteps treat trust as a force that binds individuals together and makes socialization possible. In conditions of extreme uncertainty such as during a disaster, trust becomes a scarce resource that determines both the channel through which aid will flow and whether the distribution will be deemed legitimate. The literature on community-based disaster management also emphasizes that local networks and trust-based collaboration enhance the effectiveness of interventions (Azhar et al., 2022; Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Perception of Justice: Distribution, Process, and Trust

In an environment where resources are scarce, perceptions of the fairness of distribution determine the course of social behavior. Rawls's (1971) theory of justice treated the legitimacy of resource distribution as a fundamental condition for social cohesion and proposed evaluating social arrangements with due regard for cases of the most disadvantaged. However, justice in a disaster kitchen cannot be reduced solely to the question of *what and how much is distributed* (i.e., distributive justice). Equally decisive is *how* the distribution is carried out (i.e., procedural justice). Tyler's (2006) research demonstrated people's perception of legitimacy toward an authority and its decisions to depend largely not on whether the outcome is in their favor but on whether the process is conducted impartially, respectfully, and transparently. Lind and Tyler (1988) explained this phenomenon through the group value model, where being subject to a fair procedure conveys to the individual the message that they are a respected and valued member of the community. Therefore, fair treatment reinforces a sense of belonging regardless of the material outcome.

This distinction finds practical application in the context of disasters. The perception that distribution is conducted equitably and transparently with proper records fosters solidarity, whereas the perception of favoritism or arbitrariness leads to mistrust and tension, even if the amount distributed is sufficient. A disaster survivor who feels that a queue is not being managed fairly despite aid not being denied demonstrates that

procedural injustice alone can erode legitimacy. The perception of justice is closely linked not only to concrete distribution mechanisms but also to trust in the actors carrying out the distribution (e.g., neighborhood heads, institutions, volunteers). For this reason, distributive justice, procedural justice, and trust are three interdependent pillars that hold the social order of the disaster kitchen together.

Crisis, Collective Solidarity, and the Scarcity Mentality

The literature on disaster sociology shows individual behaviors to oscillate between two extremes during times of crisis. At one extreme is the view that a disaster spontaneously triggers an outburst of solidarity and mutual aid. Solnit's (2009) study examining five major disasters argued disasters to reveal an extraordinary capacity for self-sacrifice, sharing, and the formation of temporary communities among ordinary people, contrary to the widespread narrative of panic and chaos. This insight aligns with the *altruistic community* tradition in disaster research. Kaniasty and Norris' (1995) field study examining the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo showed disaster survivors to have both received and provided high levels of material, informational, and emotional support in the initial phase, with solidarity peaking immediately after the disaster. This line of thought also aligns with Drury's (2012) model of collective solidarity, which states common threats to create a shared group identity, with this identity fostering selfless sharing behaviors.

However, the same literature also indicates solidarity to have its limits and to tend to erode over time. Kaniasty and Norris (1995) demonstrated the intense support seen in the initial wave to weaken over time and community bonds to possibly become strained as resources are depleted and distributed unequally. The extreme form of this dissolution is the fear-based hoarding tendency triggered by uncertainty and a scarcity mentality, as defined in Quarantelli's (2008) work. This dichotomy reveals post-disaster behavior to be unexplainable solely through self-sacrifice or selfishness. For the most part, real-world practice is a tense space where these two tendencies coexist simultaneously. The current study's findings test this theoretical tension within Türkiye's cultural context under the specific conditions of a disaster that had occurred during Ramadan.

Method

Research Design and Epistemological Position

The research has been conducted using a qualitative descriptive design. This design aims to produce a rich, context-sensitive description of events and processes based on the narratives of actors who have experienced or closely witnessed a phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000). While the study does carry a phenomenological sensibility, it also adopts the more measured objective of descriptive design over classical phenomenology's claim regarding

the conscious experiences of subjects who have experienced a phenomenon firsthand. This is due to a clear epistemological preference regarding the nature of the data source, as justified below.

The phenomenon this study examines involves how actors directly involved in post-disaster food distribution and sharing (i.e., NGOs, public sector employees, volunteers) experienced and interpreted these processes. As such, the participants are individuals who will recount their own work experiences firsthand. In contrast, insights into the behaviors of disaster survivors regarding sharing, stockpiling, or perceptions of justice are obtained indirectly through these actors' observations and testimonies. This situation constitutes the study's fundamental epistemological limitation, as interpretations of disaster survivors' internal motivations (e.g., fear-based stockpiling) are not based on the survivors' direct accounts but on how actors in the field interpret these behaviors. This limitation has been taken into account in the presentation and interpretation of the findings, where inferences regarding the inner world of disaster survivors have been formulated using cautious language.

Study Group

The study group consists of 21 participants who served in the disaster area following the February 6, 2023, Kahramanmaraş-Türkiye earthquakes (Table 1). The gender distribution is 16 males and 5 females, with ages ranging between 22-48. In terms of role, 14 participants were volunteers and seven held managerial positions. Of the participants who specified their organizational affiliation, eight were from NGOs, seven from public institutions, and two from the private sector; the remaining four participants remained unclassified under this category because their data included no single, clearly coded organizational affiliation. In terms of disaster experience, four participants were direct survivors of the February 6 earthquakes, and two were survivors of the 1999 Gölcük earthquake. The remainder were aid actors who had come from outside the disaster area.

Table 1
Participant Profile (N = 21)

Variable	Distribution
Gender	16 males, 5 females
Age	22-48 years
Job Type	14 volunteers, 7 managers
Organizational affiliation (as indicated)	8 NGOs, 7 public sector, 2 private sector
Disaster experience	4 direct disaster survivors (2023), 2 with prior disaster experience (1999), 15 foreign aid actors

Participants were identified using snowball sampling, where individuals who had worked in the field served as references for subsequent interviewees. While this method is effective for hard-to-reach groups, it tends to produce a sample from a relatively homogeneous, interconnected network. This means that the findings reflect the experience of a specific aid network. The male-dominated gender distribution among participants (16 out of 21) should also be interpreted as a reflection of this network structure, and the findings should be interpreted with this imbalance in mind. During the data collection, participants in managerial positions were observed to exhibit the tendency to adopt a protective, normalizing stance toward their organizations. In contrast, volunteers were found to provide relatively more critical, impartial accounts based on their observations. For this reason, the volunteers' accounts were given greater prominence in the analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide included open-ended questions addressing themes such as post-disaster food security, food waste, attitudes toward sharing, perceptions of fairness during distribution, donor behavior, and institutional planning. The form was kept flexible to elicit both the institutional observations of NGO and public sector employees and the field experiences of volunteers.

Data analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach involving: (1) familiarization with interview transcripts, (2) creation of initial codes, (3) grouping codes under potential themes, (4) review of themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) reporting. Coding has been conducted using a hybrid approach that combines both codes emerging inductively from the data and theory-driven codes derived from the theoretical framework of solidarity, social capital, and perception of justice. Coding was done manually without the use of software; the code list and theme map were reviewed during regular meetings with the thesis advisor and subjected to peer debriefing. The interviews were concluded until new themes and codes stopped emerging in the final few interviews, indicating the analysis to be approaching data saturation. However, given that the study group had been formed using snowball sampling and drawn from a relatively homogeneous network, the achieved level of saturation must be evaluated within the boundaries of this network.

The analysis identified six themes. Table 2 summarizes which codes each theme derived from and the frequency with which they were expressed. Participant identities have been anonymized, with participant quotations having been coded as P1, P2, ... P21.

Table 2
Thematic Code Map and Frequency

Theme	Main Codes	Frequency (approximate)
From Chaos to Order: Establishing a Perception of Justice in Distribution	chaos, settling into a routine, lack of coordination, transparency	Most participants
Patterns of solidarity: The moral economy of sharing	intergenerational support, "enough for everyone," volunteerism, distinction between looting and opportunism	Most participants
The two sides of social capital: Connecting networks and boundaries	focus on the immediate community, donations made with trust in the institution	A few participants
Trust, local leadership, and the tension of partisanship	neighborhood head/local actor, suspicion of favoritism, identity-based tensions	A few participants
The cultural significance of food: Season, belief, and appropriateness	Ramadan/iftar arrangements, religious and cultural appropriateness, special provisions for vulnerable groups	A few participants
Fear, hoarding, and the threshold of solidarity	fear of scarcity, excessive stockpiling, food waste (bread, water)	Most participants

Note. Prevalence is a qualitative indicator and not intended to be statistically representative. "Most participants" refers to more than half, while "a few participants" refers to a limited number of participants.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

The study's reliability was assessed in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for qualitative research. To ensure credibility, the study uses direct participant quotations to support the findings and evaluates the perspectives of different stakeholder groups (e.g., managers, professionals, volunteers) together to diversify the data sources. The coding has also undergone peer review with the thesis advisor. Detailed descriptions of the disaster context, the study group, and the distribution conditions have been used to strengthen transferability of the findings. The study also documents coding decisions and the process of generating the themes to ensure confirmability and create an audit trail. The paper has noted the tendency of participants in managerial positions to use language that protects and normalizes their institutions as a clear source of bias. The volunteers' narratives provided relatively more critical, observation-based data and thus have been prioritized in the analysis.

The researcher's position should also be considered as part of the analysis. As a sociologist who has not been directly involved in disaster response, the researcher's external position provided a certain degree of distance and relative objectivity while also imposing a constraint in the form of limited access to tacit knowledge within the field. Care has been taken to frame interpretations with this position in mind.

Informed consent has been obtained from the participants during the research, with their personal data being anonymized and interview recordings used solely for research purposes. The study has been conducted in accordance with approval obtained from the Kırklareli University's Committee on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics.

Findings

The interviews reveal sharing behaviors in the disaster kitchen to have been centered around six themes: from chaos to order (establishing a perception of fairness in distribution); patterns of solidarity (the moral economy of sharing), the two sides of social capital (connecting networks and boundaries); trust, local leadership and the tension of partisanship; the cultural significance of food (season, belief, and appropriateness); and fear, hoarding, and the threshold of solidarity.

From Chaos to Order: Establishing a Perception of Fairness in Distribution

The picture of the early days begins with a narrative of chaos shared by nearly all participants. However, this chaos gradually gave way to an order in which queues and portions were governed by specific rules. As one volunteer stated, "There was a lot of chaos at first. It could be a chaotic environment, but as time went on and the system settled in, there were no issues regarding the line" (P1). This transition is consistent with analyses (Dynes, 1994) that argue social order in disasters to not dissolve spontaneously but on the contrary to be rebuilt over time.

One of the sources of chaos in the early days was the lack of central coordination regarding the flow of aid. The influx of both institutional and individual aid to the region made overseeing distribution difficult: "There was aid coming from institutions, but there were also people bringing individual donations" (P9). Uncoordinated individual initiatives distributing aid without assessing needs led to both duplication of aid and the creation of gaps. As another participant stated, disorder and waste arose together because unaccredited actors "carried out aid distribution without conducting a needs assessment" (P6). This situation demonstrates the transition from chaos to order to have not been spontaneous but to have only been possible through the simultaneous establishment of coordination and a sense of fairness.

The shared perception of the distribution being fair was decisive in establishing order. The attitude observed among aid workers coming from outside the region shows how this perception was fostered: "Some of those who came from outside the region to provide aid made very serious efforts to help and were concerned about fair and equal distribution" (P2). Solidarity is evidently strengthened when justice is not merely equated with equal

shares but also based on a documented, transparent process. Conversely, the distribution mechanism was also observed to not operate with the same legitimacy everywhere. Discontent occasionally arose regarding the distributions carried out through local actors: “We witnessed public complaints regarding aid distributed through neighborhood council members” (P8). This tension reveals food distribution to have been more than a technical procedure; it was a sociopolitical process laden with expectations of legitimacy and justice. Wherever distribution was perceived as fair, the process of queuing and allocating proceeded smoothly; however, the moment suspicions of bias arose, the same process was able to become a source of social tension.

Patterns of Solidarity: The Moral Economy of Sharing

Behaviors of solidarity were clearly observed on foundations where a sense of justice had been established. One of the most striking patterns was intergenerational solidarity: “They didn’t want to make the elderly wait in line. Young people would get in line in their stead and get food for them” (P7). This behavior aligns with the concept of a *sense of shared destiny* in Drury’s (2012) model of collective solidarity. However, the findings also show solidarity to not arise solely from a crisis-driven group identity but to also be nourished by established cultural norms such as respect for the elderly. In other words, the act of sharing in disaster kitchens takes shape at the intersection of a universal crisis response and local cultural codes.

The moral economy of sharing also became evident in the measured relationship a person establishes with what they have. One participant described moments when disaster survivors limited their own shares to look out for others: “People would say, ‘This is enough for me; give the rest to the others’” (P8). This attitude indicates the norms of reciprocity and moderation to have remained in effect even under conditions of scarcity. The same norm was reflected in how those managing the distributions practiced giving just enough: “People weren’t taking much, and we didn’t give much either; that is, we gave just enough” (P5). These moments in which an expectation of mutual moderation was internalized by both those sharing and those distributing demonstrate needs-based distribution to not merely be a management technique but also a moral consensus.

Volunteering itself was also part of this moral economy. The participants’ accounts described volunteering not only as an operational workforce but also as a way of coping with trauma. Individual examples (e.g., one volunteer was hired as a cook at the organization after working in the field) may point to the transformative power the practice of sharing has to reconnect the individual with society. The available data, however, cannot be used to definitively determine the prevalence of such patterns. The psychosocial burden of the field has revealed volunteers to also be in need of protection: “Our search and rescue

teams were receiving psychosocial support training; we provided psychiatric support for our colleagues working in the rubble” (P2). Another participant stated “We need to be healthy first” (P3), which serves as a reminder that the sustainability of solidarity depends on the well-being of those who generate it. Thus, disaster kitchens transform into a space of mutual care where both the giver and receiver are healed simultaneously.

Solidarity also has its limits, however, and even a dark side. In moments when resource scarcity and a lack of oversight deepened, looting was able to replace sharing. One participant harshly criticized this breakdown, saying, “I saw people looting a furniture store with no shame. After the earthquake, we saw people buying luxury cars” (P5). This observation aligns with analyses suggesting social control to be able to temporarily break down during disasters (Dynes, 1994). However, the participants did not blanket-label looting as mere greed; they carefully distinguished between taking based on need and taking based on opportunism: “You have a need; you’re hungry. You take only what you need. But there’s no logical justification for looting a furniture store” (P9). This distinction demonstrates the participants to have actively drawn and monitored the boundary between legitimate need and opportunism within the moral economy of the disaster kitchen.

The Two Sides of Social Capital: Connecting Networks and Boundaries

According to the participants’ observations, the path food aid took had been largely defined by the boundaries of an individual’s social network. As the actors reported, many disaster survivors tended to first direct the resources they had or the aid they could access to their immediate circle (i.e., family, neighbors, close friends). This pattern highlights the solidarity-strengthening aspect of bonding social capital: Strong ties provide a rapid and reliable support network during a crisis. However, this same tendency also has an exclusionary side. The circulation of aid within a narrow circle makes accessing resources difficult for those in need who fall outside this network.

In this regard, the weakness of bridging social capital became a decisive factor. In situations where insufficient connections linked different groups, having resources reach a broad heterogeneous community fairly became difficult. The tendency to channel donations through trusted institutions can also be understood within this framework: “Because you work through an NGO, citizens would generally make their donations through us... They made donations to our organization” (P8). The way institutional trust shapes the flow of donations (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011) also implies that channels not deemed trustworthy are sidelined. This demonstrates just how dependent resource distribution is on the structure of social networks.

Trust, Local Leadership, and the Tension of Partisanship

Local leaders' participation served as a resource that facilitated identifying those in need and that ensured aid reached the right people: "*Muhtars* [neighborhood heads] or well-known figures in that area were at the forefront of this effort" (P7). Locally recognized and trusted individuals expedited distribution both because they were familiar with the situation of the disaster survivors and because of their legitimacy within the community.

A double-edged aspect exists with this situation, however. Observations were also recorded indicating these same local actors to sometimes act selectively using favoritism: "One of the complaints we frequently encountered was that a selective and biased attitude was adopted when directing those in need to distribution points" (P11). The ease local trust provided and the perception of injustice the risk of bias created had generated a constant tension in disaster kitchens. This tension parallels analyses of how injustices in resource distribution can reproduce social inequalities (Holguín-Veras et al., 2012). The findings highlight both the necessity of leveraging local networks and the imperative of cross-checking these networks against independent assessments of preexisting needs.

The fragility of trust reached its peak when distributions were vulnerable to identity-based tensions. One volunteer described the reaction to aid provided to refugees, saying, "We encountered a woman's angry outburst because we were giving food to Syrians. She lashed out at us in a fit of rage, claiming we were giving her share to the Syrians" (P4). This example aligns with findings showing disasters to exacerbate existing social divisions and the processes of othering (Bolin & Kurtz, 2018) and demonstrates how resource scarcity can transform the question of *who has the right* into a source of conflict.

The Cultural Significance of Food: Season, Belief, and Appropriateness

Disaster kitchens are not merely spaces for food distribution abstracted from food's cultural meaning. The February 6 earthquakes coincided with the month of Ramadan, which necessitated reorganizing food aid according to the religious rhythm of the month. Distribution plans were devised with Suhoor and Iftar times in mind. Similarly, seasonal needs also determined the composition of food being distributed, with the need for water in the summer and hot meals in the winter coming to the fore.

The cultural appropriateness of food was one point the participants particularly emphasized: "The contents of supplies from international organizations must absolutely be checked for compliance with religious and cultural values" (P10). This emphasis highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in disaster relief. Special arrangements for vulnerable groups also demonstrated food to serve not only a nourishing function but also a protective one: "We included chocolates for the children" (P7). Such choices for children

indicate food to have also been used as a tool for psychosocial support. All these examples demonstrate food to retain its cultural, religious, and emotional meanings even under crisis conditions, with disaster kitchens serving as a space of cultural appropriateness.

Fear, Hoarding, and the Threshold of Solidarity

At the end of the spectrum opposite sharing lies fear-based hoarding fueled by uncertainty. One important note must be made here: This study has examined disaster survivors' hoarding behavior and the fear behind it not directly through the survivors' own narratives but through the observations and interpretations of the actors on the ground. One participant linked this observed tendency to the fear of scarcity and of children going hungry, saying "The fear of being left out among disaster survivors, as well as the fear that their children might go hungry, might have led them to take two items instead of one, even if they were only entitled to one" (P2). The actors' interpretation of this behavior aligns with analyses of the *scarcity mentality* (Quarantelli, 2008), which suggest the need for security during crises to be able to lead to excessive consumption. However, this interpretation of the motivation should be evaluated not as the disaster survivor's own statements but as one attributed by observers.

While the individual logic behind stockpiling is understandable, its societal consequence is often waste and inequality. Food that had been stored and hoarded in excess would spoil, leading to both a loss of resources and distribution imbalances: "They were stockpiling a lot, hoarding the aid. It was going bad. Sometimes something we needed wouldn't arrive at all, and then suddenly there would be so much of it that it was just thrown on the ground" (P4). Certain products being wasted illustrates this imbalance: "There was a lot of bread wasted; there was so much bread it was as if nothing else was going to be consumed. It was all laying on the ground" (P11). Even a basic resource such as water turned into waste, when coordination failed, an excess would occur in one place and a shortage in another: "There would be an excess of water, but that water wouldn't reach everywhere because it [the distribution] wasn't organized" (P3).

These findings clearly reveal the dual nature of post-disaster behavior, with fear-driven hoarding on one hand and solidarity-based sharing on the other. What is important is that these two tendencies coexisted simultaneously in the same context rather than being alternatives to one another. Solidarity has a threshold. While sharing prevails under conditions where trust has been established, fair distribution has been made apparent, and the norm of giving as much as is needed has been institutionalized, the tendency to hoard would come to the fore in moments of increased uncertainty and lack of oversight. The social balance in disaster kitchens depends precisely on the direction over which this threshold has been crossed.

Discussion

The findings indicate post-disaster food sharing to be shaped by the dynamic relationship among solidarity, social capital, and perceptions of justice. How distributions evolve from chaos to order supports analyses that have suggested social order to dissolve and be reconstituted during a disaster (Dynes, 1994). Meanwhile, the fact that this reconstitution depends on perceptions of justice aligns with the Rawlsian insight that views the legitimacy of resource distribution as a condition for social cohesion. The perception of fair distribution fostered solidarity, whereas the perception of inequality and favoritism triggered distrust and tension.

In this regard, the findings indicate justice to not be measurable solely by the amount being distributed (i.e., distributive justice). The participants described the subsiding of chaos in terms of things falling into place and attributed grumblings over the neighborhood headman's distributions to the arbitrariness of the process rather than the amount being distributed, and these descriptions point to the decisive role of procedural justice (Tyler, 2006). As Tyler demonstrated, the legitimacy of an authority rests not primarily on whether the outcome is favorable or not but on how impartial, transparent, and respectful the process is conducted. In the disaster kitchen as well, the erosion of legitimacy during moments when aid is not being refused in a disaster kitchen but the queues are being perceived as unfair confirms Lind and Tyler's (1988) group-value theory: Being subject to a fair process conveys to the disaster survivor the message that they are a respected member of the community; wherever this message is lacking, trust is undermined even when material aid is sufficient.

The intertwining of solidarity and conflict is one of the study's most prominent findings, with Drury's (2012) collective solidarity model having resonated strongly in the field. However, solidarity was observed to have been fueled not only by a crisis-induced group identity but also by established cultural norms (e.g., respect for the elderly). This points to a unique area where universal crisis responses intersect with local cultural codes. At the same time, an exclusionary aspect of solidarity has also come to light: While bonding social capital provided strong support within close-knit circles, the weakness of bridging social capital hindered the fair distribution of resources to the broader community. Putnam's (2000) distinction has been instrumental in explaining why solidarity produces inclusive outcomes sometimes while producing exclusionary ones at others.

The finding that solidarity has a threshold adds nuance to the theoretical debate. While Drury's (2012) model explains how sharing is strengthened, Quarantelli's (2008) analysis of the scarcity mindset reveals the logic behind hoarding. This study's contribution lies in how it has demonstrated these two tendencies to not be alternatives to one another

but rather poles operating simultaneously within the same field. What is decisive is the direction to which the balance tilts: Conditions under which trust has been established, fair distribution has been made visible, and the norm of giving as much as is needed has taken root foster sharing, whereas uncertainty and lack of oversight trigger hoarding. Thus, solidarity is not a fixed character trait but a capacity that institutional and cultural conditions either foster or weaken.

The same conditionality applies to the dark side of solidarity. Looting and opportunism can be explained by the temporary dissolution of social control (Dynes, 1994). However, the participants' careful distinction between legitimate need and opportunism indicates this dissolution to be incomplete and actors on the ground to actively reproduce moral norms. This distinction can be directly interpreted through Thompson's (1971) concept of the moral economy. The participants' view of the principle of taking only what you need as legitimate while rejecting looting a furniture store as irrational points to the existence of an ethic of fair sharing that operates even in times of scarcity. Just as the 18th-century crowd Thompson examined had condemned profiteering and defended the expectation of fair prices, the actors in disaster kitchens also drew the line between legitimate need and greed through a collective moral norm. In this sense, disaster kitchens are not merely a space for resource distribution but a moral arena where what constitutes right and wrong is being negotiated. The most fragile point of this negotiation occurs when the question of who has the right to a resource becomes entangled in identity-based tensions. The backlash against aid provided to refugees (P4) aligns with findings showing disasters to sharpen existing social hierarchies and the processes of othering (Bolin & Kurtz, 2018). However, this study has revealed the tension to operate not only based on ethnicity but also through perceptions of locality and foreignness. Aloof attitudes toward aid teams coming from outside suggest othering to be a flexible mechanism that is redefined according to context.

When considering how donations are channeled through trusted institutions (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011) alongside trusted local figures' central role in distribution, trust can be said to be the scarcest and most decisive resource in the disaster kitchen. Aldrich's (2012) concept of linking social capital can explain the intermediary role of neighborhood heads, accredited organizations, and locally recognized figures, as these vertical relationships that connect the ordinary disaster survivors to the actors with access to resources and decision-making power allow food to reach those in need through official channels. These same vertical ties, however, can lead to unequal distribution when they carry the risk of bias. In other words, linking capital can serve as both a bridge and a bottleneck. This situation confirms Sen's (1981) insight at the field level, which states that when sufficient or even excessive amounts of food reach a region, certain groups remain deprived if the

networks that determine the rights to access operate unequally. In other words, hunger is not a supply but an access problem. Therefore, strengthening bridge-building and the connecting social capital is not merely a logistical necessity but a matter of building trust between institutions and groups.

From the perspective of food culture, the most notable finding involves how disaster kitchens have not lost their cultural significance. Organizing distributions in accordance with Ramadan, emphasizing religious and cultural appropriateness, and making special selections for vulnerable groups demonstrate food to function as a carrier of identity and belonging even in times of crisis. Transforming food selections for children into a tool for psychosocial support reveals food's nourishing and nurturing functions to be intertwined. This situation highlights the shortcomings of approaches that treat food distribution as a purely logistical matter, indicating the need to examine disaster kitchens through the lenses of commensality, solidarity, and cultural appropriateness. An aid practice that is technically adequate yet disregards the cultural significance of food will not be able to meet the need disaster survivors have to feel they are respected members of a community.

The practical implications of this analysis can be summarized under three points. First, distributions must be made clear to not only be equitable but also transparent and documented, because the perception of procedural justice is just as decisive as the amount being distributed. Second, local networks must be cross-checked against independent needs assessments that have been prepared prior to a disaster in order to limit the risk of bias without sacrificing the ease of access these local networks provide. Finally, needs assessments must account for seasonal and religious rhythms (e.g., Ramadan), as well as the specific needs of the elderly, children, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic illnesses. These recommendations require designing disaster kitchens not merely as a matter of supply but also as a space for social interaction and cultural appropriateness.

Conclusion

This study has revealed post-earthquake food sharing to be a social process shaped by solidarity, social capital, and perceptions of justice. The disaster kitchen is a multilayered space where chaos gives way to order and solidarity becomes visible, while simultaneously exposing inequalities and the dynamics of othering. Food is not merely a resource for alleviating hunger in this space but also a carrier of belonging, trust, and cultural appropriateness.

This study's theoretical contribution lies in how it links post-disaster food sharing to the literature on food culture and the sociology of food, thereby moving beyond the technical framework of disaster logistics. Its practical contribution is how it offers

concrete recommendations to NGOs and disaster management actors regarding the fair, transparent, and culturally sensitive distribution of aid.

The research has certain limitations. First, the study has been limited to a single type of disaster (i.e., earthquakes). Sharing the patterns of different types of disasters (e.g., floods, fires) may take on different forms. Second, the findings have been derived not from disaster survivors' voices directly but from the observations of the NGO staff and volunteers who worked in the field. Future research can enrich this picture by focusing on the experiences of disaster survivors themselves and conducting comparative analyses over different types of disasters and cultural contexts.

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Ethics Approval	Ethics Approval: This study was reviewed and approved by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Kırklareli University (Decision No. 199/157703, dated 02 April 2024). All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the institutional research committee's ethical standards and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments.
Consent to Participate	Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants prior to the in-depth interviews. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their responses, the use of audio recordings solely for research purposes, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.
Consent for Publication	Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants prior to the in-depth interviews. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their responses, the use of audio recordings solely for research purposes, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.
Data Availability Statement	The qualitative interview transcripts that support the findings of this study contain sensitive personal information and are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and the confidentiality commitments made to participants. Anonymized excerpts presented in the article are sufficient to follow the analytical argument. Further anonymized data may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to ethics committee approval.
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