



folklor/edebiyat - folklore&literature, 2023; 29 (3)-115. Sayı/Issue -Yaz/Summer

Kitap Tanıtımı / Book Review

**Williams, Raymond (1993) *Kültür*. Çev. Suavi Aydın,
İstanbul: İmge Kitabevi.**

ISBN: 9789755330228, 239 s.

Kazım Tolga Gürel*



* Dr. Kazım Tolga Gürel (kazimtolgagurel78@gmail.com, ORCID ID 0000-0002-1893-8887)

In his book *Kültür*; the author, who wants to lay the foundations for a collective sociology of culture, analyses phenomena such as intellectual, art and artistic, cultural forms based on power and divides the book into thematic chapters. In the first chapter, he analyses the structure of the sociology of culture. In this section, where he reveals the sociological reflections on political economy, the class-art relationship and the sociology of religion, he reveals the foundations of culture by making transitions between subjects. After entering the linguistic and etymological foundations of the concept of *culture*, he analyses the phenomenon shaped by Eagleton through individuals and touches upon culture's relationship with anthropology. Although the archaic structure he calls the "*founding spirit*" reminds the reader of Carl Gustav Jung's (2019) *archetypes* and the Hegelian *zeitgeist*, he returns to structure and anthropology without falling into an idealist trap.

Nevertheless, Williams avoids orthodox realism, winking at a discipline with a mixture of idealist and materialist approaches. With the contribution of empirical sociology, Williams takes up the concept of *culture* to determine the content of the institutions of economic culture and what they produce, and to develop a methodology, introducing his analyses early in the book. It is attempted to analyse the social conditions of art, especially literature, from class perspectives within traditions that are outside and, in a sense, external, and to analyse the points at which social inputs and relations in works of art are focussed. Williams, who looks at the effect of the substructure-superstructure relationship on the primary artistic motives and its reflection on the products, states that although this method reveals the aspects to be criticised, he still finds it valuable and shows the importance of Marxism in art and cultural criticism by stating that the relationship between the bourgeoisie and art cannot be revealed without this method. The examples given by the author about the openness of Kafka's (2019, 2022) texts to different readings and interpretations, the explanation of the transition from novel to a novel about infrastructural changes in the future, and the relationship of ideology with culture and infrastructural forms of change present the reader in a very productive way. Williams, who says that only ideological and political analyses would be overly reductionist, makes the reader feel one of the main pillars of the British School of Cultural Studies by showing the break from economic reductionism in Perry Anderson's (2016) *Considerations on Western Marxism*. In a sense, the thinker, who incorporates a necessary mixture of Weber and Marx, culture and class into the analyses of ideology and culture, shows that ideology cannot oppressively dominate culture.

Referring to institutions and focusing on the relationship between patron and market in cultural sociology, Williams mentions that this patronage determines the artist's mode of production. He starts the chapter with the role of patronage in determining the identity of the artist in Celtic societies; with the emergence of areas of expertise over time, identities such as scientist, artist, and historian emerge with the effect of differentiation; with the legalisation of this institutionalisation, the transition of patronage to the market economy is shown. Patronage consists of support such as sponsorship, salary, living in a palace, etc. Then, when the *market* phenomenon emerged, it was explained how the free market changed these

institutions. According to Williams, nothing disappears or disappears in culture; it changes shape and evolves. Patronage becomes institutionalised with the market economy and later with the welfare state and continues to exist to some extent.

In another chapter, *Formations*, Williams focuses on the structures of organisations in the sociology of culture. Based on the example of art production and not detached from the historical process, he reveals internal organisations such as guilds, bardic rules, etc. Williams links the history of art academies to these points by showing that these guilds provided a specific art education. As a result of the decline in the importance of the church and secularisation, the spatial location and content of education changed, as well as the changes in the older adults' structure and shifted to universities.

Williams analyses three movements in English literature, in which he specialises, and two groups fully and partially dependent on power. He reveals the evolution of culture through political economy and sociological analyses. He enriches his analyses and expansions with the phenomenon of avant-garde he mentions when dealing with one of these groups. Specific structures like bardic rules and guilds are also unique chapter phenomena. The poetic rules that Welsh court poets adhered to while under the pressure of the English royalty were eased with the autonomisation of Wales in the 14th century, and Welsh-specific poetry, reflecting the ethnic structure of Wales, was influential in the nationalisation of these people. Williams, who also explains the emergence of echelons with the phenomenon of patronage as the influence of the church diminished, seems to show Bourdieu's theory of power relations and capital diversification in a different field and within more cultural forms. When the evolution of culture described by Williams is analysed through Bourdieu, while the gap of authority brought about the emergence of new institutions and academies, the centre of cultural capital shifted from religious institutions to academies.

The sections where he emphasises the reproduction processes occupy ample space in the book and indicate that the young Marx influenced Williams and did not experience a fundamental break with his work. He goes on to deconstruct the examples of these conditions of reproduction in art. Referring to the process of struggle of asymmetrical social relations, Williams gives examples of asymmetries, such as the state and the market, the church and broadcasting production techniques. He states that the market is liberating in art, but this role also reproduces sovereign control. He briefly touches upon the transition from verbal to written form and the evolutionary writing process. He influenced technological determinists such as McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Barry Sanders came after him.

He states that the distinction between high culture and popular culture has its evolution and that these two concepts are based on the concepts of noble art and folk art. Williams, who also analyses art symbols, looks at the social symbols that enable art to be accepted as a product. He gives the example of the art gallery. He mentions the importance of the representation of the art gallery in the meaning worlds of individuals in the memory of society in making sense of a work of art. In his analyses of symbols, he enters into the evolution of the theatre. He states how the position of the priest in the Dionysian theatre

turned into an internal conversation in the early medieval period, how the choir represented the worshippers in the Dionysian theatre, how dialogues emerged with individualisation in the English Renaissance theatre, and how the problems of society were expressed with signs by going down to the people with Shakespeare's theatre. He says that the storm in King Lear or the mad scenes in Hamlet refers to the depressed periods of society. The bourgeois theatre of the first half of the 18th century reflects the social order dominated by the bourgeoisie and looks at it from their point of view.

Stating that he is not talking about copying in the chapter titled *Reproduction* and that it would be a problem to understand it as such, Williams reveals that he is influenced by both Gramsci and Althusser while showing how the forms of education and tradition are in the process of reproduction towards the dominant social structure.

In analysing the means of production, how the development of writing influenced oral culture is addressed. The reproduction of images and graphics, the effect of the quantitative reproduction of artworks on the work in a Benjamin-like way, and the evolution of culture in terms of the reproduction of cultural commodities are mentioned, and distinctions are pointed out. Showing the asymmetrical relations and conflicts between the structures in which the forms of cultural reproduction are involved, Williams demonstrates how the means of control, such as censorship, are transformed with the change of capital and shows the evolution of culture in a manner reminiscent of Foucault's evolution from disciplinary society to surveillance society.

Raymond Williams' book *Culture* is an attempt towards a sociology of culture that is generally Marxist in orientation but differs from orthodox Marxist theories. As can be seen in the phrase "...as a whole social order in which a precisely describable culture takes place as a direct or indirect product of an order shaped by other social activities (p.10)", Williams, who enters into a Marxist analysis of structure, also proceeds in a realist line with the examples he gives from history throughout the book. Williams sees three main points in contemporary cultural studies:

1. The emphasis on the social material in works of art
2. The emphasis on the social conditions of art
3. The emphasis on the social relations that emerge in works of art

In various parts of the book, where these emphases are summarised, Williams points out the need for more Marx and Engels' work on art to fill this gap.

He explains that the sociological analysis of culture should start with the concrete elements seen, but the interpretation will be sterile if limited to these concrete elements. It is fundamental for Williams to go down to the substructural process and to search for the effect of these substructural changes on the cultural element.

The *Institutions* section of the book enters into the history of the social conditions in which the artist is nurtured. It comments on the evolution of the relationship between the master artist until capitalism and how it evolved into the relationship between artist

and patron or artist and state under capitalism. He interprets the artist-market relations and defines the artist in craft-type commodity production and post-craft commodity production through Marx's commodity relations.

However, the emphasis of Williams' treatment of these institutions is only partially based on the economy. Although he mentions a patronage/ patronage institution, he also states that the patronage institution transformed into a patron in the process of evolution and into a relevant unit of the state through state artistry. However, it does not go into the economic substructure of this process and therefore remains to some extent sterile. While at some points, the book is enriched by the fact that it does not go into class phenomena, at other points, this leaves the causality of the study in a vacuum.

In another chapter, *means of production*, Williams displays a more Marxist orientation. He can be criticised for placing more emphasis on the discovery and development of the material means of production of culture than on their ownership and the class to which they belong. Using examples from artistic activities such as dance, song and speech, Williams argues that the complexification of culture is reflected in artistic techniques and the specialisation of these practices.

In his analyses of intelligence, which is an excellent point in the last parts of the book, he comments on Gramsci's (2014) famous quote: "All people are intellectuals. But not all people have an intellectual function in society." The validity of this statement disappeared with the mass production line in the early 1900s. Because the mass culture created by the mass production line and the worlds of individual consumption brought to the fore by the postfordist flexible forms of production in the 1970s, it can be said that Gramsci's intellectual human being and the uniqueness that Williams, who salutes him, had in the essence of every human being as a focus of resistance, have been rendered obsolete.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, P. (2016) *Considerations on western Marxism*. London: Verso Books.
- Gramsci A. (2014) *Hapishane Defterleri*. Çev: Adnan Cemgil. İstanbul: Belge Yayınları.
- Jung, C. G. (2019) *Dört Arketip*. Çev: Zehra Aksu Yılmaz. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.
- Kafka, F. (2019) *Dava*. Çev: Gülperi Sert. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
- Kafka, F. (2022) *Şato*. Çev: Regaip Minareci. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.