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Simmel's concept of culture

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Abstract

Culture is a Latin-origin word derived from 'cultura'. The word 'cultura' in Latin was then used for the meanings of to sow and get crops, produce. Before Turkish fell under the influence of Western languages, the word with Arab-origin 'Hars' was used instead of culture. After the Republic, the word of culture derived from the Western languages was used. Raymond Williams developed three wide and effective categories of use in order to explain the development of the word culture and the complexity of its use. From the sociological aspect, culture is described by the lifestyles and all actions of a society. Additionally, the concept of culture is explained together with society due to their close relation. The members of society share cultural elements. Culture is a human activity that is comprised of human activities. Culture is also an abstract concept that individuals form together but also when appropriate surrender to it.

Keywords: Simmel, culture, cultura, society, hars.

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1. The concept of culture

Culture is a Latin-origin word and derived from 'cultura'. The word 'cultura' in Latin was then used for the meanings of to sow and get crops, produce. Before Turkish fell under the influence of Western languages, the word with Arab-origin 'Hars' was used instead of culture. After the Republic, rather than using 'hars', the word of culture was derived from the Western languages. The word 'culture' was widely started to be in use around Europe with the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century.

From the historical context of this word, it is described with relevantly complicated definition due to its different or similar uses for centuries. Thus, it has become difficult to make a single, scientific or appropriate definition concerning culture.

Raymond Williams developed three wide and effective categories of use in order to explain the development of word and the complexity of its use.

- i) independent and abstract noun that describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development from the 18th century;
- ii) whether used specifically or generally,... an independent noun that indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or humanity. But we also have to recognise;
- iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' (Williams, 2005).

When we look at the word of culture from the sociological aspect, it is reviewed in a more comprehensive way compared with its daily use. In general, culture is described by the lifestyles and all actions of a society. Additionally, the concept of culture is explained together with society due to their close relation. Society constitutes the mutual relationship systems. The joint orientation of a society leads them to be under a common culture roof. Society cannot be without culture and vice versa. Both terms make each other exist. The members of society share cultural elements. Then these form the mutual contexts that individuals within a society live in. 'The culture of a society is comprised by both non-material—beliefs, thought and values that compose the content of culture—and material elements—objects, signs or technology that represent this content' (Giddens, 2005, p. 22). The concept of culture does not form itself from nature. Culture is a human activity that is comprised of human activities. Culture is also an abstract concept that individuals form together but also when appropriate surrender to it.

'Culture means to create and protect an order, fight with everything that disturbs the order and looks chaotic for the order. Culture is the act of putting or adding an artificial, manmade order in the place of 'Order of nature' (i.e., the status of without no human interference' (Bauman, 2004).

2. Sociology of Simmel

Simmel, born in 1858, has a significant place in not only German thought but also in European sociology. One of the reasons of Simmel's special position is that he formed his sociology without leaving philosophy, yet he embraced the sociology as a new mean for philosophy. Simmel also discussed and interpreted various cultural forms from the aesthetic concept. He argued that art should be reviewed by sociological perspective and vice versa, and these should be discussed by social aesthetics. Moreover, unlike his peers, Simmel did not content himself only with the

subjects like state, power, social classes and ideology; he also was interested in fashion, monetary economy, metropolis, poverty and similar social forms.

Simmel researched about modernism in the modern world, spiritual existence of modern individual and his alienation. From this perspective, Simmel mentioned a paradoxical experience as the main characteristic of being modern. The study of Simmel in his article called 'Metropolis and Mental Life' can be shown as a prototype to such paradoxical experience where modern life opportunities lead people to subjectify, yet challenges to objectify, and individual try to protect his freedom and personality. According to Simmel; 'the most comprehensive problems are based on the demand of an individual to protect his autonomy of existence and individuality against the vast social powers, historical heritage, external culture and life technique' (Frisby, 2003).

Additionally, Simmel created a sociology theory called 'Formal Sociology'. Simmel argued in this sociological thought, which had an influence on various sociologists, that as social events such as the economy, law, history and religion are assessed by various sciences; socialisation and types of human relations should be reviewed separately from other social sciences. Under such circumstances, Simmel separated sociology from other social sciences, created it a separate research area and that was called 'Formal Sociology'.

Simmel put the behaviours and relationships of an individual in the society under three groups. Psychology, social psychology and sociology become a part of the analysis of these relationships.

'Simmel starts with three observations. The first one is that people act with different motives—interest, ambition, power, etc. Psychology analyses these facts. The second observation is that the individual describes himself not only referring oneself but also through the interactions with others in the form of his impact on others or others on him. Social psychology analyses these relationships... Third observation is that human activities develop either in general forms such as imitation, competition, hierarchical structures, etc. or social groupings such as school, church, state; that is, it develops within every formation in various forms. The subject of sociology is to analyse these forms' (Bottomore & Nisbet, 1997).

Another important subject of formal sociology is the form and content problems. The philosopher underlines that the distinction between these two is artificial and states that sciences sort facts and reach an abstraction in the end. According to Simmel; 'there is no science that covers the reality as a whole. There are only specialised disciplines separated from each other by specific abstraction types' (Bottomore & Nisbet, 1997). Thus; psychology step in for the analysis of the content of elements that galvanise a person; while sociology for the analysis of social forms that this content become meaningful.

Simmel discusses social interaction as socialisation and makes a distinction between the form and content of social life. As mentioned above, one of the main interests of Simmel is not the content of social interaction but the form of it. Every day, there are unlimited developing actions, interactions, event, etc. in the world. Formal sociology explains the imposition of some patterns or forms on individuals with the purpose of standing out amongst these formations (contents).

With reference to the contents arising from the common aspects of special interactions, the method of Simmel for formal sociology may be explained by the imposition of limited forms. These forms become the patterns to convert human relations into actions. In this framework, the effort to generate forms from social reality, namely putting the actions from social layers into some patterns, becomes an arguable and crucial characteristic of formal sociology approach.

Simmel compares the description of social forms with geometry. As Bottomore and Nisbet (1997) indicated; 'it is possible to say that Simmel sees sociology as the geometry of social forms'. However, they stressed that such comparison is not that explanatory but suggestive, and social forms do not exactly match with geometry rules. The explanation of content and forms with different formations in different systems is given as the reason for that.

In the formal sociology of Simmel, forms constitute the society and sociology is described as the science that analyses the social forms in an abstract way. Another important feature of formal sociology is that Simmel takes number of people as the indicator for determining the quality of interaction. The role of number becomes a significant factor in the perception of the group internally and externally. Therefore, the number makes a difference in the nature of the group and whether some social forms are possible. So, the increase and decrease in the number of a group make sociological differences.

'The structure of a group with six to seven people is much different than a group with hundreds of members. Additionally, the chance and type of conflict change with the size of the group... Number is the main difference between minority and majority. The reason why aristocracy is not democracy depends on the same reasons' (Bottomore & Nisbet, 1997).

According to the analyses of Simmel on the quality of interaction with numbers, the number one is the principle of loneliness. There is a distinction between unity and duality. Here states that a duo means being equal in numbers as the status of the relation between individuals. For Simmel, there is a more significant difference between a two-people group and three-people group. The addition of the third person into the group makes a fundamental and ultimate change. There is no independent group structure in duo; there is nothing more than that can be said as two separate individuals in one group. It is not applicable for the trio. Trio has the tendency to have a meaning that is beyond individuals. The third individual in a trio may have a general destructive impact on the members. On the other hand, the participation of the third person may create new social rules.

Pursuant to Simmel, the third person may be in three different forms. One of which is to be away from the conflict and may have mediation or arbitration role. Secondly; the third person does not become a part of the conflict in person but tries to get unearned interest from it. In the third circumstance, the third person directly becomes a part of the conflict. The aim is explained as to realise the objective of an individual or again get unearned interest (Bottomore & Nisbet, 1997).

In sociology, the importance of numbers for Simmel is considered to be originated from the direct impact of them on social formations. In the sociology of Simmel, particularly the subject of conflict in modern culture has a major significance. A potential idea of conflict may come up with the presence of the third person in the group. Regarding the conflict, George Simmel stated that; 'Conflict is accepted as a fact that cause the existence of interest groups, unions, organisations or change or transform them' (Simmel, 1999).

Moreover, Simmel emphasises that the increasing number of people in a group brings a parallelism in the improvement of individual freedom within a group or society. However; in his article called 'Metropolis and Mental Life', he underlines the opportunities in modern life, as well as the reality that effort of an individual to become a subject in the metropolis and promised way of freedoms objectivise the individual. The related paradoxical structure will be elaborated thereafter.

Another significant subject in Simmel sociology is the concept of 'distance'. The distance is considered one of the main socialisation forms of modern lifestyle. Especially distances bring

personal freedom to people. In other words, it gives the individual to put his personality space. But Simmel stresses that modern life provides personal freedom to the individual but such freedoms have a negative potential. Simmel stated on this issue that

'When compared with the metropolis crowd, there is no other place for a person that he feels so lonely and lost—this is explicitly is the other side of what we discuss as freedom. As in other circumstances, it is not essential that the freedom of a person does not have to necessarily reflect to the emotional life as peace' (Frisby, 2003).

3. Simmel and culture

While the approach of Simmel on culture is mentioned, the concept is delivered together with the modernity theory, which has the most effective role in the formation of his sociology.

Many others considered Simmel as the sociologist of modernity. The reason might be the influence that he got from the approaches of Baudelaire, who was an early period modernist philosopher. Baudelaire was one of the most important creators of modern aesthetics and who is known for his literature and critiques that he established on the metropolis life of modern Paris in his time. Simmel, particularly with his studies regarding the conflicts within metropolis city and modern culture, approximated with the modernity perception of Baudelaire.

Instead of separating aesthetic domain from the other domains of life (science, art and ethics), Simmel embraced the modern lifeworld as a whole and aimed to form a social theory on modernity. He dealt with the interrelation of phenomena, interaction and 'random fragments' that occur during socialisation. The relevant random fragments are the sections constituting the whole social reality. Simmel looked for such 'loops' in the phenomena of metropolis life that is the centre of the monetary economy.

While explaining the cultural structure of modern society, Simmel talked about a paradoxical structure based on the problems of modern life, which can be described through objective and subjective culture.

3.1. Objective and subjective culture

Simmel separated the individual aspect from the subjective one and identifies the definition of culture. Therefore, people can easily be influenced and generally threatened by the cultural products. According to Simmel, objective culture is constituted by the things produced by people and includes the subjects such as science, art and philosophy. Individual culture is described by the production, incorporation and control capacities of an individual. However, objective culture becomes independent and might detach from its creator. This is mainly defined by the modern life conflict. In the introduction of his article called 'Metropolis and Mental Life', Simmel stated as; 'the most comprehensive problems are based on the demand of an individual to protect his autonomy of existence and individuality against the vast social powers, historical heritage, external culture and life technique' (Frisby, 2005).

It is indicated that modern life opportunities lead people to subjectify, yet challenges to objectify. The main challenge becomes how an individual protect his autonomy. In other words, an individual makes an effort to get his subjectivation again by leaving the burdens aside against the external powers.

Simmel essentially supported the conflicting unity of object and subject. He rejected an objective reality free from human subject or vice versa. Simmel symbolised two society models as

rural and urban (metropolis). According to him, modern life is an enormous structure, where an individual tries to protect his autonomy and stay a subject without being an object. Simmel under such circumstances answered the question how 'a personality adapt itself against external powers'(Frisby, 2005, p. 85).

Metropolis and rural were put over against each other and assessed in such opposition. There is an unchanged cycle on one side and pace and motion from technology and development on the other. While there are major changes, thus many stimulants in metropolises; the life in small places is slower without any changes. The world of information and perception present itself in more traditional forms, yet in the cities, the mind has to stand out. Bringing the mind forward is connected with modern life. The person of metropolis exists with his mind not with his heart and tries to protect his subjective life against external oppressive powers. The individual lives with a different awareness compared with town life. Simmel explained this situation as 'conscious awareness'.

'... mind has the most adaptability among our internal powers. It doesn't have to experience shocks and internal upheavals in order to comply with the opposition and change between phenomena. Whereas, the spirit as it is more conservative can keep up with the rhythm of metropolis after such shocks and upheavals. Therefore;... metropolis type personality... develops an organ against its external environment. It reacts with its mind not with heart. It then owns the privileged position of spirit, conscious awareness' (Frisby, 2005).

An individual in the metropolis survives with mentality against all possibilities. Additionally, modern life may push the individual to open for change and standardisation away from his individualism. As the noun of modern life, the individual becomes anonymous, as well as when compared with small towns, has the freedom to do whatever he want without any concern to get judgments.

Simmel also mentions that all such standardisation is related with the monetary economy since money makes everything be similar, thus destroy everything the unique, peculiar. Therefore, it does not consider particular characteristics. The sociologist generalises monetary economy in modern life and things that are not similar with numbers, money and brings them under the same denominator. Simmel explains this feature of modern life with the degrading quality values to quantity values. Moreover, the monetary economy in town becomes one of the most significant determinants of human life interaction and time. He also stresses the importance and chaotic characteristics of time in city life where time turns into cash.

At the same time, Simmel noted that individual acts carelessly towards the quick differentiations in the metropolis. Against such differentiation, the individual could not find the chance to collect power for any reaction and therefore weariness arises. So this is described as the subjective reflection of the interiorised monetary economy.

'The carelessness against differences is the core of weariness... The thing in the question of weariness is the loss of different meanings and values of things, thus loss of their importance. Everything has the same dullness and is all grey, none of the nouns are more preferable than other. This mental state is the complete subjective reflection of interiorised monetary economy' (Frisby, 2005)

According to the sociologist, apart from weariness, an individual may experience other psychological processes like alienation. He believes that our minds adapt to modern life while our spirit cannot find a way out and create 'neurasthenia personality'. Neurasthenia can be explained with the distance between social environment and individual, 'alienation'. Alienation is considered as the heaviest of freedom notion that modern life gives to the individual. At the

same time, hereby 'alienation' represents a metropolis psychology reflected upon human relation in modern life.

Fashion and aesthetic concepts are also among the fragments that Simmel reviewed in society. It is underlined that fashion forms both social equalisation and differentiation. On the other hand; Simmel argues that fashion is combined with the 'objective functioning conditions of the economy'.

'... now objects are produced in the need of being fashionable... In this sense, the relation between intangibility and objective-social organisation stands out as a form in the carelessness of fashion against any meaning reserved by its own meaning, and in its much more specified relation between social-producer economic structures (Frisby, 2005).

With reference to Simmel, the most significant reason in the development of modern culture is the dominance of objective culture on subjective culture. Yet, there may be some deterioration in the culture in terms of morale and idealism. When assessed from other perspective, there is a significant improvement in objects and information, organisations and things that materialise our lives from the cultural aspect. At this point, Simmel talks about a difference of proportion between objective culture and subjective culture. He noted that the distribution of work in metropolises directs an individual to a unilateral work and leaves him face to face with the danger of losing personality and yet triggers the disproportion between objective culture and subjective culture.

4. Conclusion

While assessing the modern culture, Simmel researched the diversity of forms that are unique to modern society. In order to generate his modernity theory, he concentrated on the norms of metropolis life and individual living in the metropolis. The impacts of the metropolis on individual and efforts of the individual to keep up with the high rhythm became the most principal research subject in presenting the culture in modern society.

Generally one of the highest prices of modernity in the sociology of Simmel is the concept of 'freedom'. While freedom forms 'alienation', it also leaves the individual facing with the danger of losing his personality. In that framework, the replacement of subjective with objective, thus the desire of the individual for protecting his own existence autonomy and individualism, is presented as the main issue of modern life.

The sociology of Simmel mentions the transformation of tool to aim and yet this brings alienation together with it. It is seen that such alienations are observed today and subjective culture is under the threat of objective culture in a globalising world.

Today, as modern life turns individuals to consumption object, the studies of Simmel from the end of the 19th century are still valid. Especially when the cultural perception in the modernising countries that are under the influence of West is reviewed, together with rapidly developed and developing technology; subjective action, value and lifestyles are observed to become standard and uniform.

As Simmel stated, even today the individual, who tries to compromise with urban life for his own interest, aims to become the subject of life. Thus, it is considered that this may be explained in terms of the price of freedom deemed by the city, as the effort of the individual to overcome his loneliness and feeling of lost that he never felt before in anywhere else.

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