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## CLIFFORD GEERTZ'S APPROACH TO INTERPRETATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND CULTURAL RELATIVITY AND CRITICS

Clifford Geertz'in Yorumlayıcı Antropoloji ve Kültürel Görecelik Pratięi Yaklaşımı ve Yapılan Eleřtiriler

Recai BAZANCİR\*

### ABSTRACT

We believe that one of the important contributions of anthropology to humanity is to present some ways which help to understand the "other". Therefore, various approaches and paradigms present various epistemological and methodological ways. Some problematics and debates such as particularism versus universality, the empirical versus the theoretical- were somehow present within philosophy and science before cultural anthropology existed as a discipline. Positioning in these kinds of debates can inform us about the relation which a social/cultural scientist constitutes with the notion of culture. The cultural views of Max Weber and Franz Boas, two thinkers with particularism/cultural relativism tendencies, inspired our study. Dilthey's approach to the concept of culture is also looked at due to the relations of these thinkers with hermeneutics and the German History School, in this article the approaches of Clifford Geertz, who is mostly known for his influence on the practice of interpretive anthropology and cultural relativism. Finally, some criticisms of cultural relativism in terms of reflexive anthropology have been made by us, focusing particularly on Geertz's approach.

**Keywords:** anthropology, Clifford Geertz, cultural relativity, Wilhelm Dilthey, hermeneutics.

### ÖZ

Antropolojinin insanlığa önemli katkılarından birinin, "öteki"ni anlamaya yardımcı olacak bazı yollar sunmak olduğuna inanıyoruz. Bu nedenle, çeşitli yaklaşımlar ve paradigmlar çeşitli epistemolojik ve metodolojik yollar sunmaktadır. Tikelcilięe karşı evrensellik, ampirik olana karşı teorik gibi bazı sorunsallar ve tartışmalar, kültürel antropoloji bir disiplin olarak var olmadan önce felsefe ve bilim içinde bir şekilde mevcuttu. Bu tür tartışmalarda konumlanmak, bir sosyal/kültürel bilimcinin kültür kavramıyla kurduęu ilişki hakkında bizi bilgilendirebilmektedir. Tikelcilik/kültürel görecelik eğilimleri olan iki düşünür Max Weber ve Franz Boas'ın kültürel görüşleri çalışmamıza ilham kaynaęı olmuştur. Dilthey'in kültür kavramına yaklaşımı, bu düşünürlerin hermenötik ve Alman Tarih Okulu ile olan ilişkileri nedeniyle, bu makalede, çoğunlukla yorumlayıcı antropoloji ve kültürel görecelik pratięi üzerindeki etkisiyle tanınan Clifford Geertz'in yaklaşımları nedeniyle de incelenmektedir. Son olarak, kültürel göreceliğin refleksif antropoloji açısından bazı eleřtirileri, özellikle Geertz'in yaklaşımına odaklanarak tarafımızdan yapılmıştır.

\* Öğr. Gör. Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, Özalp Meslek Yüksekokulu, Tıbbi Laboratuvar Tekni-kerlięi Bölümü, Van-Türkiye. E-posta: recaibazancir@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0003-2393-508X.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** antropoloji, Clifford Geertz, kültürel görecelik, Wilhelm Dilthey, hermenötik.

### Introduction

The powerful figure of hermeneuticans, Wilhelm Dilthey theorized the distinctions between natural and social/human sciences, and negated positivism. Neo-Kantian philosophers and then first wave of German sociologists, such as Max Weber, maintained the non-positivist approach of Dilthey. Weber came to be known a central figure in the establishment of non-positivist sociology. According to methodology Weber suggests sociology be non-empiricist discipline studying social action through interpretive means. Both Weber and Boas may be in parallel to the intellectual debate of the period, try to cope with the notion of universalist history and deductive methods. While Boas was struggling against cultural evolutionists Weber was struggling against positivist sociologists like Comte. Both have tendency towards historical particularism.

Weber constitutes his approach to establish a ground for cultural sciences/humanities within the philosophical debates of late 19th century and early 20th century. In this period, concerning this issue there were two basic attitudes (Ozlem, 1981, 1999, 2001); first one is the sociology of Spencer, Comte and Durkheim that relies on a positivist/naturalist understanding that accepts the society and the culture as an extension of the nature. Though the sociology of Marx continuously emphasizes the notion of history, its basic characteristic still can be considered as a naturalist sociology. The second one is a spiritual and historical approach beginning with Herder in Germany to Dilthey from German History School which is against this naturalist understanding (Ozlem, 1990: 27-28). Unlike natural sciences that seek for laws and simple causality to be explained, cultural sciences seek for an understanding of relationships that are not ahistorical, invariant, or generalizable. Accordingly, the research about culture should focus on an understanding/comprehension of cultural world not on explaining of its laws. Cultural sciences handle their issues as specific and unique. Weber shaped his sociology in this social environment, where the difference between natural and cultural sciences was being discussed in terms of subject and the method. Although non-positivist position of Weber, his approach can be considered as a synthesis of these two methods. Within interpretive philosophical tradition -from Herder to Dilthey and to Rickert- understanding/interpretation/*verstehen* (it refers to interpretive or participatory examination of social phenomenon) is positioned as the only possible way to know humans and a culture, and it is accepted as a method peculiar to cultural sciences. This method claims that students of culture cannot approach to humans and human culture with the methods pursued by natural sciences.

The term *Verstehen* is particularly associated with Weber who established an alternative view based on the analysis of social action through interpretive means to prior sociological positivism. To look at how the notion of culture is designed within this philosophical tradition would be helpful to understand Weber's notion of culture. Within this tradition, the culture is everything the human creates and every deed that human make on/within nature. Language, mythos, technique, economy, theology, art, philosophy are the elements of the culture and human objectifications. These are the concreted products of human autonomy and spontaneity. The human which created the culture is determined by the culture as well. The human is a product of the culture which it is born into. In brief, the human is "the being" which creates culture, and which is created by the culture. Therefore, a science which would deal with the culture cannot handle its subject as a natural object.

According to this approach, the nature is an external realm for the human, where natural laws dominant that also determines the human Hence nature can be discussed through empiricist and deductive methods. In other words, as a natural being, humans can study the nature and the natural factors which determine itself through this method. However, according to this historical particularist tradition, which is inspired by Kant's philosophy, human is not an entity which is only determined by the nature, human has a will power and a practical reason. According to Kant, humans are free beings which are over natural determinations because human being can determine principles for itself and carry on these principles through actions. This idea of Kant was efficient in establishing the definite distinction between the nature and the culture. To approach human and cultural sciences through natural scientific methods is considered as reducing culture to a natural object. In this period there is a search for a different science that will approach to human and culture through some specific methods peculiar to culture different from positivist natural sciences employ (Ozlem, 1999: 53-71).

We can say that in such a search Dilthey stated that the basic method of the science which he called "spiritual sciences" (*Geisteswissenschaft*) is "understanding" (Ozlem, 2001: 305). He suggested definitely separating natural and cultural sciences, because, for him, the nature, as the subject of natural sciences, is the realm of repetitions and continuities. This continuity in natural phenomenon may allow the natural scientist to establish universal, valid laws for all times. Therefore, natural scientist tries to explain singular phenomenon by using these laws. On the contrary, according to Dilthey these laws cannot exist within the reality of culture, because in this reality human knows its own deeds through certain values, principles, and norms, namely knowledge is mediated by culture. All of these values, principles and norms that motivate human activities are not the natural determinants of human activities, and these are created by human as well. In the realm of culture, human actions are determined by these meanings. Nevertheless, unlike

natural laws, there is not any value, norm, legal principle, or ideology that *continuously* determines the human activities (Ozlem, 2001: 307). Accordingly, in the realm of culture the cause-and-effect connection cannot be established as connection of law-fact or as a simple relationship of causality. In the realm of culture this connection is constituted as the connection of meaning-action and meaning-symbol. Dilthey argues that knowledge concerning humans has to take account of the *meaningful action*. The absence of something natural and given which determines human action continuously/infinitely implies a notion of history. In this sense, according to Dilthey, cultural reality acquires a different appearance in each different time period. The things which are realized within the realm of culture are historical, singular and individual. Hence, we can say that generally accepted concept of culture is not possible.

Here one can ask whether this makes theorizing "culture" impossible and how Dilthey does explain that. We may infer this from Dilthey's hermeneutic approach: Hermeneutics does not accept any theory or concept which is abstract, general, eternal, independent from history and without context. Dilthey says that unlike natural sciences, spiritual sciences as "hermeneutic sciences" should work with concepts of type rather than the general concepts. According to him, there are no general concepts for human-social things, but certain "types" can be identified within each historical period. Through these types of spiritual sciences can make some generalizations about culture, society and history, but these generalizations would be different from the generalizations of natural sciences. Here the important point is that these generalizations are the products of spiritual/cultural *scientist's own interpretive method*. There are economical, legal and political systems, institutions, principles, regulations and ideas which are produced by human beings and peculiar to each historical period. Each historical age and period are an individual, in its own system of values and meanings. The study on history, society and culture which we make from the present towards the past relies on our own spiritual position and point of view. Spiritual scientist can interpret culture only through meanings and the structures of ideas of today. Thus, our knowledge about the reality is "chosen", "partial", "sided" and relative.

However, in the knowledge production and reception process, for a certain time and in a certain context we have to use a certain concept in order to communicate. But this concept cannot be abstract and eternal; it is contextual and relevant for a certain historical period. Hence the concepts, such as the concept of culture, should be reconstituted according to the actual/empirical phenomena in every attempt and in every particular context. Thus, it seems impossible to establish a generally accepted, unchanging meta theory of culture from interpretive approach. However, Weber's notion of ideal type can be considered as an in-between solution for this problem. Ideal type, on the one hand, is the generalization of a concept, on the other hand each ideal type should be verified through actual events within each

new particular context. I will discuss this characteristic of the ideal type of notion in this paper further on.

### Discussion

From interpretive approach culture exists as the particular world and individuality of each people and each nation. Accordingly in cultural sciences it is not possible to work with inductive generalizations. Within the culture it is important to comprehend the meaning-action connection, the meaning (it may be a value, a principal, a law) which *motivates* the action. According To Dilthey, what is required is *Verstehen* or understanding; this requires the observer to try reconstructing *subjective* meanings that influence a particular line of action that could involve re-creating shared cultural values as well as empathizing with individual psychology and life stories (Dilthey, 1924, cited by Ozlem, 1990: 74). To understand is the way to comprehend the human actions and culture through human. Method of understanding/interpretation helps us to comprehend each human, each people, or each nation in their own historical, individual, particular *context* (Ozlem, 1999: 81).

Influenced by Dilthey, Weber concerns about the tension between the universal and the particular and introduced interpretive understanding into sociology. Unlike other founders of sociology -such as Comte and Durkheim- Weber problematizes positivist epistemology of social sciences. However, he attempts to bridge between positivist approach and interpretive/hermeneutic approach as sociologist. Although Weber mentions about sociology as a science that makes generalization, on the other hand he points out that sociology cannot be a nomothetic science. For Weber, sociology is a science based on a systematic interpretive process. According to interpretive approach a sociologist as an outside observer of a culture attempts to relate it and understand any group by their own terms and from their own point of view. The conceptual means of such sociology can be ideal types that are not universalistic and abstract constructions, and these concepts should be verified through empirical ways (Ozlem, 2001: 59). Weber says that "as they are reiterated until now, the ideal types are the harbors to shelter on the immense ocean of empiric phenomenon" (Weber, 206, cited by Ozlem, 2001: 61). In order to understand human action and their cultures, the concept of ideal type, a kind of conceptual generalization, can be seen as just *a form* that can be applied to any phenomenon. But we cannot apply a general model that we had already applied a certain historical object, event, or process to another one, because each object is particular within the history, thus the model we apply should also be unique. For example, we cannot comprehend The Ottoman and The Roman empires through the same model because their particular contexts are different from each other. Their conditions of emergence and their development, their ethos and cultural climates are all different. That means the student of culture should construct her/his model according to the specific *historical context* of the society that he/she examines. We can say that for Weber, sociology is science the content of which should be verified through

historical research. Though Weber criticizes positivism, he accepts that as a science, sociology should be based on empiric grounds, because, for Weber, a knowledge that is not open to any empirical verifying is a "speculation". Weber asks if it is possible for sociology to be both empirically verified and theoretically comprehensive. However, he denies establishing universal, general laws about historical/social life through positivist empirical ideals. In addition, Weber also denies "the table of world", because as experienced by the human, the historical, cultural reality cannot be rendered an exclusive object of observation. Accordingly, the cultural world cannot be comprehended through social laws which are claimed to be valid for all humanity, for all the times, and derived from a linear notion of evolution.

As I said before from the view of Dilthey, there can be no generally accepted culture. If so, a problem emerges; "does this makes theorizing 'culture' impossible?" This is one of the critiques towards interpretive approach. But Weber finds a solution by utilizing both the interpretive approach and the positivist approach: ideal types. Any ideal type is a generalization and can be changed according to each particular context. In order to better understand that let us look at "capitalist culture", which is the most famous ideal type of Weber: As a cultural scientist, Weber especially focuses on "capitalist culture". "Capitalism" is a *universal generalization* as ideal type. On the other hand, Weber, like a historian, tries to understand capitalism in its *particular conditions/context* as a historical phenomenon. On the one hand, he employs sociology's generalization models as ideal types, on the other; he still considers capitalism as a set of events which happens in a unique, particular historical period. For him, capitalism is the name for a particular set of events which are particular to the West and based on Protestant ethics. This is an historical phenomenon which exposes individuality. However, in terms of its certain *general* characteristics, bureaucracy is a fact which appears continuously in many societies -feudal, capitalist, socialist etc.- in different densities and to the various extend. Even bureaucracy appears individually in certain dimensions within some societies, it seems to be a reiterated phenomenon; for example, in terms of relying on written laws, hierarchical order, distribution of authority, there are similarities between various bureaucracies. In this case, now we can consider bureaucracy as a social ideal type. Weber suggests studying history through ideal types and abstractions, but he does not offer a general receipt which allows connecting historical eras in a regular linear order. Weber accepts that historical, social and cultural reality changes constantly. For Weber, any explanation of a universal system which neglects the individuality and specificity of the societies is just a false construction (Ozlem, 2001: 51).

### **Inference and Findings**

Like Weber, Franz Boas also defends a historical particularistic view against the universalistic culture view of cultural evolutionist. We may say that also Boas

-inspired from German School- makes a synthesis of physical methods and the historical method in anthropology. But at the same time, he can be considered as a positivist empiricist. As an assistant of Adolf Bastian, Boas has traces from Bastian's views in his cultural view (Hyatt 1990 cited by Altuntek, 2009: 19). Different from his coevals, Bastian is an ethnologist who thinks that cultures are hybrid like races. According to him, each culture utilizes different resources, it is based on borrowed ideas and constantly changes; and at the same time, it is rooted in a universal mind (Altuntek, 2009: 21). In other words, because of the changes caused by local processes such as environmental repressions, immigrations and trading, history does not have a fixed pattern. Similarly, Boas defends that what made us is not the biology but the culture. According to Boas' anthropology, the race, the age, the gender which are considered to be unchangeable and dependent on fixed natural conditions are cultural constructions (Kupper, 1999: 13-14).

Boas argues that on the contrary to comparative laws of natural sciences, cultural behavior cannot be comprehended through laws. According to him, similar environmental conditions and historical coincident can lead to similar cultural features which are independent from any evolutionary progress. Opposing to categorize ethnological phenomenon through biology, Boas defends that the categorization should be made according to the actual distribution of these phenomenon. In his article, "On Alternating Sounds", he shows that previous experiences and subjective perceptions of the observer should also be included in categorization. According to him, the observer cannot perceive every voice directly; he/she categorizes them according to the voices which he/she knows in his/her language. Perceptual processes of the observer are mediated by the culture.

Boas suggests the anthropological facts to be understood in their own historical contexts. He suggests understanding them through looking at their geographical distribution, physiological and psychological bases (this reminds Dilthey's hermeneutic circle notion and part/whole relation). This method allows us to consider the culture as a specific and a whole pattern. According to him each singular culture continuously changes within its interrelatedness with the others and with partly its internal development and partly external effects. We cannot talk about a stable, pure culture and accordingly a race, which do not change in this interrelatedness. In order to show each culture's singularity Boas focuses on the differences between the cultures rather than their similarities. He researches the reasons for cultural and/or racial differences. To defend that everything is singular means that each culture can be understood in its own historical context, and this is the main emphasis of cultural relativism.

Above relativist views are the common point between Weber and Boas. One can ask if looking at culture through such a view is only employed to analyze existing cultures. For example, does Weber's analysis of capitalism and Boas' view on race differences, provide us conceptual tools in order to challenge inequalities

in the world? What kind of strategies of resistance can be suggested by this approach against the legitimization of these inequalities?

### **Geertz's Ideas on The Hermeneutic Tradition and The Concept of Semiotic Culture and Criticisms of Gertz**

The first person who applied interpretive approach/hermeneutics to Anthropology is Geertz. In anthropology *verstehen* come to mean an interpretive process, or emphatic or participatory understanding of a culture in which observer tries to understand the "other." This is sometimes called as cultural relativism. The major characteristic of cultural relativism is to be against universal ideals. Through his interpretive anthropology approach Geertz brought some interpretation and meaning issues -which were previously in the realm of philosophy- to the discipline of anthropology, and he put some epistemological and methodological issues on agenda such as, what is the scope and context of anthropology? What anthropological analysis amounts to as a form of knowledge? What ethnography is or what doing ethnography is? (Martin, 1993: 269). Geertz has an important place in history of anthropological thought. One of the key concepts of his interpretive approach is culture.

Geertz states that he adopts a semiotic concept of culture and emphasizes that he establishes his approach on the basis of the relation between meaning and interpretation: "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, constructing social expressions on their surface enigmatical" (1973: 5).

Like the other thinkers from hermeneutic tradition Geertz suggests that culture can be comprehended by understanding (understanding can be possible by interpretations) not by explaining. Geertz defines culture by separating cultural system and social system from each other as different abstractions of same phenomena. For him culture is "an ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction take place," "The framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments." He suggests that "culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes the actually existing network of social relations" (1973: 144-145).

Despite the relationality between the social and cultural structures, Geertz considers them as independent phenomena and consequently says that each of them should be discussed within their own realities. Geertz's approach that distinguishes culture and social system, leaves social structure to sociologists, and says that anthropologists should only deal with culture. Talcott Parsons' thought which

tries to establish a division of work between the sciences, has a great impact on Geertz's this approach (Altuntek, 2007: 312). According to Shankman (1984), criticizing the positivist methodology, which is dominant in discipline of anthropology, Geertz suggests social scientists to leave aside the traditional assumptions about the nature of intellectual attempts.

Geertz suggested social scientists to study meaning instead of behavior, to pursue understanding instead of laws and he rejected the mechanistic explanations of natural sciences on behalf of interpretive explanations. Geertz called his colleagues to take analogies and metaphors seriously and to consider human activities as a text, and the symbolic action as a drama (Shankman 1984: 261, cited by Martin 1993: 269). While defining the culture Geertz deals with the symbolic context of the elements that constitute culture rather than what they are; he considers culture as a network of symbols and meanings (1973). According to him an anthropologist who is trying to understand a culture should focus on the relationship between the elements which constitute this network of meanings. Thus, an anthropologist can explore a meaning in its relationship with other meanings rather than to explore the meaning which is confined in a certain element. This will be possible by trying to understand how the people, who are the creators and bearers of this culture, perceive the meanings.

When we look at the history of anthropology, we see that it is remarkable that in this historical process the discipline claims to know or to explain the culture in a definite way. When we take this emphasis into consideration, we can say that the theoretical dimensions as suggested by Geertz, weaken the claims of the discipline. During the methodological phases of ethnographical studies within the history of anthropological thought we see the approaches which categorize the "native", othering it even by pretending to embrace native's point of view and place the participatory observation on the center of the research. After the new ethnography approach, the symbolic/interpretive anthropology as represented by Geertz, points out a period where the border between social sciences and humanities becomes ambiguous (Altuntek, 2009: 109). This situation is a clear declaration of the crisis in social sciences which the positivist epistemology relying on natural sciences is explicitly questioned. As stated by Gadamer, one of the advocators of hermeneutics, the theory of humanity is not composed of the methodologies of a series of sciences it is rather a radical philosophical problem more than the methodology of natural sciences (Gadamer, 2008: 187). Here, the revolutionary approach of Clifford Geertz shines out.

Criticizing the positivist methodology and pushing the boundaries of epistemology, Geertz suggests ethnographers to problematize the methods they utilize at fieldwork epistemologically rather than to handle them in an ethical perspective. Although Boas recognizes hermeneutic approach which is centered on the problematic of "understanding the understanding," Geertz was the first practitioner in

this field. Mentioning Malinowski's diary's shocking impact within anthropology discipline in one of his articles, he emphasizes that this diary asserts an epistemological problem rather than a moral one. Geertz suggests that the events should be seen from the native's point of view; but this does not mean that the ethnographer has to establish a specific psychological affiliation, spiritual connection and a kind of intercultural identification with her/his interlocutor. Malinowski's diary revealed that it is not necessary to be one of the natives in order to understand the phenomena. For the ethnographer the talent is to estimate what the natives are planning to do. In this sense ethnographical knowledge relies on understanding the meaning of the experience, not the experience itself.

According to Geertz, in order to understand the historical existence of the human being and the symbolic system which human being has created, carried and developed through its experiences, one should not look at what it has done but how humans perceive and interpret them. Ethnographer should try to perceive the way her/his interlocutor perceive something and express them. Rather than observing and examining, such a point of view would need to go through the details within which the meanings would be grasped. At this point Geertz introduces the ethnographic approach which he calls thick description. By declaring this approach, he accelerated the debates about the fieldwork studies as well as the theoretical debates.

From Geertz's point of view, if culture is the network of the meanings which are expressed in symbolic forms, the ethnographer should search the meaning which is hidden behind the symbolic behavior of the human being; consequently he/she should be able to interpret some symbols in order to better understand any culture. Influenced by Weber, Geertz also emphasizes the need of researching the meaning of social action. Thus, the motivation and the context of human behavior or action should be viewed and interpreted in detail, which could be possible by thick description as Geertz states. While trying to understand the culture, ethnographer should figure out the relation between the elements which constitutes this network of meanings and reveal the *context* which a certain element relates with other cultural elements within. All of these could be possible by trying to understand how the creators and the bearers of the culture perceive the meanings.

Geertz does not attempt to reduce culture into to a definition instead he problematizes what one should focus on while dealing with the culture. Namely, he points out that culture cannot be capsulated in one definition, and culture is the complex texture of all signs, symbols, and manners and so on around us. Relying on phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy, Geertz has already mentioned that it is impossible to make some deductions about what culture and its elements are. When we look at some approaches claiming to know a certain culture definitely, we can say that Geertz's effort is very important in terms of showing the

weakness of these claims. Geertz's main refusal is against the methods of the ethnographers influenced by the positive sciences. Geertz clearly criticizes the ones who consider research field as a laboratory and attempt to present some explanations; accordingly, he says is there any laboratory that could not be manipulated? (1973: 62-63). His objection is in parallel with the criticism of hermeneutics against positivism, saying that claims of objectivity in social/cultural sciences are only an illusion. Furthermore, Geertz challenges constructing of micro-macro relationship through a positivist approach; according to him to define macro through micro in an analytical way is also an illusion, and the claim of exploring the world relying on this illusion is a problem. Besides, even the micro realm has been understood, it can't be said the micro represents the macro (Martin, 1993: 271). This issue which problematizes micro-macro relation and the expectations of representation between them are discussed by George Marcuse in the future and will be one of the basic problematics of anthropology.

Geertz suggests that even a detail which is considered as very simple and unimportant is very important in terms of thick description. For Geertz, main issue of the ethnographer is to analyze the conceptual structures which have complex formations, rather than collecting some routine data. Geertz establishes an analogy between culture and text and suggests the culture to be read as a text. In this sense, ethnographer is not the person who finds explanations about culture; ethnographer is an expert of text who tries to examine the text profoundly and to understand and to interpret the text in this way. He suggests that an ethnographer should not make a translation by transferring other's expressions into his/her way of expression; ethnographer should make a text criticism which will allow other's mode of logic to be transferred into our mode of logic. The most realistic thing to do is to penetrate to text (2007: 20).

In his approach, Geertz is influenced by Ricoeur, Wittgenstein and Dilthey. Ricoeur says that text analysis can be utilized for the analysis of the society. He suggests that human can be interpreted as a text consisting of complementary sentences which are not in equal levels and open to different interpretations. There is a similarity between Ricoeur's approach towards the structure of the text which says the text consists of complementary complex sentences and Geertz's view which sees culture as a network woven by meanings. For Geertz, culture is a universe of meanings which interact with each other and therefore became elaborated and can be understood in their connectivity with each other. And this universe can be considered as a text, which can be profoundly understood in terms of the connectivity of its sentences. According to Geertz both culture and text are open to different interpretations and anthropological text is just such an interpretation. This is a secondary level interpretation; if primary level interpretation comes from the actor of the culture, the thing which anthropologist does is the interpretation of the interpretation. But for Geertz this does not make anthropological text invalid

or wrong. Here, this reminds me a question; is there any difference between the text which is based on the fiction and the anthropological text? If there is no difference between them, from where a text acquires its "scientific" status or authority?

According to Geertz, although culture is intellectual/mental, it does not take place in mind; although it is not physical, it is a formation which does not have hidden structure. With this approach Geertz shows clearly that he breaks with cognitive approach -which he has been involved in before. Geertz rejects that culture is a formation which takes place in human mind and human heart. For him, culture manifests itself in an interintellectual and intersubjective realm of existence (1973: 28-29). Hence, refusing cognitive approach which affirms universalism, he emphasizes the specific contexts of the culture. The important thing is not to look at what meaning in the mind is but to see how the meaning in mind holds on a symbolical context. With his relativistic approach -which emphasizes the particular characteristic of culture by using the symbols in order to interpret the culture- Geertz separates from Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology.

By warning that the powerful abstract theories cannot overlap with the ordinary flow of life, Geertz heralds a postmodern view (if we leave aside that hermeneutics has emphasized these issues centuries ago). For him, while studying a culture, it is disturbing to seek for unified patterns in order to reset a logical arrangement for abstracted entities. He considers culture as a system of symbols which are always in dynamic relations. Because of his concern about diverging from the reality; he avoids establishing a system by abstracting the culture. He says that he prefers reducing the value of cultural analysis, rather than having correct but unconvincing definitions (1973: 32).

Interpretive approach of Geertz, who applied hermeneutic theory to ethnography by focusing on the relation between understanding and interpretation, was accepted as a challenge to positivist approaches which has dominated the discipline of anthropology until then. But his approach was criticized for its ambiguous and problematic aspects. Gottowik criticizes that in Geertz's ethnography -that suggests culture can be interpreted by reading it like a text- "native" is not taken into consideration. According to him, Geertz doesn't pay attention to how native read the text of their culture and how they react to the text of ethnographer about them. Another critique of him is that there is no room for one of the main concept of hermeneutics and the condition of meaning, empathy, in Geertz's approach. For him, Geertz appropriates Dilthey's concept of hermeneutical circle, but he rejects the concept of empathy (1997: 3-4).

Bob Scholte (1984), who criticizes Geertz strongly and the pioneer of reflexive anthropology, points out that Geertz challenged scientific reductionism, but he did semiotic reductionism. For him, Geertz's semiotic approach reduces context (as political legitimacy) to text (as symbolic meaning), dialog (communicative praxis) to

monolog (ethnographic description). Citing Keesing, Scholte emphasizes that where feminists and Marxists find oppression, the symbolists find meaning there (1986: 9). In fact, this problem is a result of Geertz's tendency toward separating cultural system from social system. Geertz's approach which neglects social context at the same time neglects the relations of power and domination within the social structure. Geertz does not interest in the issues about how and by whom and for whom the meaning is constructed. For example, Scholte asks what is considered and valued as meaningful. How meaning is maintained, distributed and verified through negotiation or through compulsion (Scholte, 1986: 10). It seems impossible to find answers to these questions in Geertz's anthropology.

According to Scholte, Geertz provides us with an understanding that power has a poetics, but at the same time there is also politics of power and power politics. Geertz keeps silent about this issue. In his Morocco and Bali ethnographies, he does not mention anything about the exploitation, violence and domination of the exploiter (1986: 9- 10). Citing Ortner, Scholte explains the reason of this as follows: Geertz mainly interests in symbolic meanings of cultural texts; he does not interest in how these meanings are produced and maintained. Since Geertz primarily interests in meanings, he incidentally interests in praxis (1986: 10). In addition, although Geertz follows up Dilthey's hermeneutic approach, he also neglects part-whole relation in hermeneutic circle which is emphasized by Dilthey. Geertz does not include broader contexts (namely the whole) into his analysis.

Dilthey states that as a part of hermeneutic circle, human beings understand (realize understanding) through lived experiences and any interpretation can be made by taking cultural, social, and historical context into consideration. During the interpretation process, while dealing with the interpreted issue, the condition of which this issue is emerged, and its background should be taken into consideration. Neglecting boarder meanings Geertz's interpretive approach leads to posit particular cultures as isolated structures. In this sense, on the one hand Geertz tries to see cultures as open-ended, relational and intersubjective processes but on the other hand in his analysis cultures are confined within their own details. Hermeneutic circle not only emphasizes the relation between the whole and the part but also emphasizes the relations between the parts and the contextuality of the meaning. Here we can see that Geertz cannot say anything about the relations between cultures, the interrelation and interconnectedness of the parts.

About Geertz's text-culture analogy, Scholte says that as ethnographic analysis, text prevents both the realization of self-referential positioning and the open-ended spiral affect of hermeneutic circle. According to Scholte, rejecting the "active role" of anthropologist during the direct encounter with the other "writing" protects and even hides the "self". Writing implies that the other does not really speak. Thick description is a restricting rule over native discourse (1986: 11).

Interpretive anthropology of Geertz was developed through the influence of Dilthey's hermeneutic approach, some call it pioneer of postmodern anthropology and it has some ambiguities and controversial dimensions. Nonetheless, focusing on following issues Geertz's interpretive anthropology attracted a remarkable interest: In this approach behavior is replaced by meaning, anthropological texts are fictions indeed, each culture should be dealt within their own particularities rather than considering them as universal generalizations. The main issue of Geertz's approach is to take a step toward defining/understanding the other and thereby ourselves, rather than to make some explanations about the generalizations and to pursue the certainties. Taking away anthropology from positivist approach Geertz has brought it closer to humanities. This was marking that the absolute borders between various realms were being removed. This can be seen as the herald of the postmodernist approach which the definitions and meanings are all upside-down. But Geertz rejected the comments which claim that he is in a postmodernist framework.

### **Conclusion**

Geertz's work, which deals with social value norms from an anthropological perspective, has been discussed in many variables and titles, has had a significant impact on cultural anthropology and social sciences, and has provided important theoretical frameworks for making sense of human behavior and cultural structures. However, it should not be forgotten that since human nature and cultural structure are quite complex, all kinds of theories about human beings can contain debates and different perspectives. The first person who applied interpretive approach/hermeneutics to Anthropology is Geertz. But criticisms of Gertz's ideas and questioning of his conclusions were also made. The powerful figure of hermeneuticians, Wilhelm Dilthey made important criticisms on this subject.

It is possible to find the sources of the ambiguities and controversies of Geertz's approach to culture in Dilthey's approach which leaves the objectivity problem of historical/social sciences unsolved. Dilthey says that in the process of understanding, the lived experience of the other is externalized through the expressions in various styles; by comprehending this expression the person internalizes it through reconstructing the experience. Human can understand others and their expressions by feeling them and by reliving them in his/her consciousness. And thus, other people may become the object of our knowledge (Dincer 2003: 51). However, Dilthey does not mention how this knowledge is grounded. Another common problem of Dilthey's and Geertz's approaches is that hermeneutic approach and interpretive anthropology consider "explanation" (as the method of natural sciences) and "understanding" (as the method of humanities) as opposite methods. This view has some problems because explanation and understanding are the basic elements of any knowing action; the similarities (universal) and differences (relative) between the humans and cultures can be analyzed with the juxtaposition of

explanation and understanding (Altuntek 2009: 20.) "To understand the other" through the ways provided by hermeneutics pave the way for us to develop new perspectives about the world. As Dincer (2003) emphasizes, the matter is whether our starting point should be "self" or "other."

To summarize, some general criticisms of Geertz have different topics, the most common of which is about cultural relativism. Geertz argued that understanding a culture in the sociological context is possible by looking at it from the perspective of the people living in that culture. Therefore, critics have emphasized that this theory can lead to the legitimation of some negative practices by ignoring ethical norms and universal human rights. In addition, Geertz's methods of signification based on meaning and symbolic interactions have been accused by critics of lack of objectivity and ambiguity. It was thought that there was a lack of scientific method in the interpretation and explanation of cultural symbols. The excess of personal interpretations is another important criticism of Geertz, that is, Geertz's interpretation of texts has often been criticized for relying on too much subjective judgment. If we interpret this situation, it may lead other researchers to interpret the same data in different ways and reach conclusions. Geertz was reluctant to reach generalizable conclusions and generally worked and developed ideas on understanding and interpreting cultures. Because of this, some critics felt that Geertz's work was often unique to a single culture or community and difficult to apply to other cultures. Finally, Geertz's work has been criticized for being a form of romanticization that idealizes certain cultures and emphasizes their positive side. Thinkers have argued that such a behavioral action may not be sincere and may hinder efforts to resolve socio-cultural differences. Weber's views, criticisms of Bob Scholte and Wilhelm Dilthey contributed to our understanding of Clifford Geertz's concept of otherness and his immediate approach. In addition, Geertz's views, which criticize the positivist methodology and push the boundaries of epistemology in the sociological context, have been discussed with different subjects and contents from the past to the present, and it is thought that these intellectual conflicts and consensus contribute to social anthropology and cultural relativism.

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