

KİTAP İNCELEMESİ / BOOK REVIEW

**NATURE, CULTURE ET INÉGALITÉS: UNE PERSPECTIVE COMPARATIVE ET HISTORIQUE,
THOMAS PIKETTY, SOCIÉTÉ D'ETHNOLOGIE, 90, ISBN: 978-2-36519-054-1**Ahmet Tuğşad DOĞUKAN¹

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Renowned French economist Thomas Piketty is well-known for his in-depth studies on wealth and income inequality. He is a professor at the Paris School of Economics and is the author of numerous well-known books and papers. The long-term patterns of inequality and the policies that can be implemented to address them are the main subjects of Piketty's research. His ground-breaking book, "*Capital in the Twenty-First Century*" made him a well-known across the globe and established him as a leading voice in the field of economic inequality.

His early writings, particularly "*The Economics of Inequality*" and "*Capital in the Twenty-First Century*" established the foundation for knowledge of the socioeconomic and historical elements influencing wealth inequality. Building on these premises, Piketty explores the complex dynamics of socioeconomic differences in "*Nature, Culture et Inégalité*" questioning conventional assumptions and providing an innovative perspective on the causes and evolution of inequality. "*Nature, Culture et Inégalité*" claims that political and social forces, rather than natural factors like individual skills or resource endowments, are the primary drivers of socio-economic disparities. By doing so, the book challenges deterministic ideas and emphasizes the significance of political and social mobilizations. Piketty argues that the

diversity and level of social inequality that are seen in the modern world are mostly the result of collective political mobilizations and cultural changes. He offers a thorough case study, focusing primarily on Sweden, to show how quickly social and political shifts may significantly impact inequality.

In addition, Piketty tracks the historical development of inequality regimes, highlighting a broad trend in recent decades towards more equality. He contends that important historical occurrences and societal conflicts, including the French Revolution and the growth of the welfare state in the 20th century as an example, are connected to this shift towards equality. Since Piketty argues that political and social events, rather than natural differences, are more influential on the course of inequality, using examples in line with this argument, he emphasizes that it is critical to draw lessons from both local and global experiences in order to understand and address inequality more effectively.

Piketty's "Nature, Culture et Inégalités" is a remarkable use of historical data and of visuals and graphics based on these data, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding how inequality has changed over centuries. With its powerful documentation of the impact of political and social issues, his comparative method convincingly refutes the idea that there are inherent causes of inequality, adding a great deal of depth to the analysis. The extensive case studies, which focus mostly on Sweden, show how quickly social and political shifts can significantly alter the distribution of inequality. Furthermore, Piketty adeptly connects historical understanding to contemporary problems like climate change and the requirement for more egalitarian economic structures.

Thomas Piketty's research highlights the equality of access to basic rights including healthcare, education, and political engagement. He makes the case that such equality can only emerge within a more equitable system, using Sweden's voting rights as an example. Piketty emphasizes how crucial it is to increase media and political campaign funding in order to promote this equality. His plan seeks to emphasize individual differences and diverse desires while striking a balance between economic power.

In "*The Economics of Inequality*", Piketty explores the processes that lead to and maintain inequality while providing information on the redistributive tools at hand, including social transfers and progressive taxes. This earlier work provides a theoretical foundation that supports the arguments presented in "*Nature, Culture et Inégalités*" reinforcing the idea that political and social factors are pivotal in shaping inequality. According to Piketty, income taxes are an essential instrument for lowering economic disparities. He examines the development of income taxation throughout history and its importance for a fairer and more equitable economy. Piketty says that the concepts of theorists such as Graslin and Lacoste¹, who originated in 18th-century France, were applied in the 20th century.

He looks at how the World War I and World War II affected the US and France's adoption of income taxes, highlighting how crucial they are to maintaining fiscal fairness and supporting the welfare state. Piketty

¹ Both were theorists who published many pamphlets during the revolutionary period, proposing a progressive tax on income and on wealth, respectively.

contrasts the deteriorating fiscal policies of Ronald Reagan's administration with the advantageous effects of high tax rates on high-income groups in mid-20th-century America and Europe. He looks at how these adjustments relate to wealth distribution and economic growth. Piketty shows that contrary to Reagan's desire to stimulate growth with the 1986 tax reform, American growth in the years 1990-2020 was almost half of that in the years 1950-1990.

In addition, Piketty addresses decolonization as a means of mitigating the disparities of the 20th century, highlighting the destruction of colonial resources as a momentous shift in the world economy. In his discussion of public debt management, Piketty examines earlier approaches to controlling disproportionate national debt, focusing on Germany's strategies after both world wars. He contends that the prevention of severe inequality and the maintenance of democracy depend heavily on progressive taxation policies and the decommodification of essential industries like infrastructure, health, and education. In order to create a society that is more equitable and sustainable, Piketty supports strengthening these institutions as well as public finance and progressive taxes.

Piketty discusses inequality and nature and ties the two to climate change, emphasizing the connection between environmental deterioration and economic inequality. He offers statistics in collaboration with Lucas Chancel² that demonstrates notable differences in carbon emissions between and within countries. Countries in the North, especially those in North America and Europe, emit a disproportionate amount of carbon compared to those in the South. To achieve more equitable emission reductions and avoid tax uprisings similar to the Gilets Jaunes (The Yellow Vest Protests), Piketty suggests specific measures like carbon cards and large reductions in income and wealth inequality. He contends that in order to achieve climate change goals, more egalitarian policies are required.

Some readers may still find the material complex because of the in-depth historical and data-driven debates, even though it is generated from a series of lectures and seminars that normally strive for clarity and accessibility. Moreover, the emphasis is predominantly on European and Western contexts, which can restrict the relevance of certain ideas to areas with distinct historical paths. In terms of the trajectory of inequality, the author makes frequent references to Sweden but also to the United States and Western Europe in comparison. However, the book does not provide much insight into how this "limited but real" movement towards equality has unfolded in the rest of the world.

Through an in-depth examination of various forms of inequality and the underlying causes, Piketty's book contributes to our understanding of the intricate structure of economic disparities. It also emphasizes how critical it is to take a multifaceted approach to addressing inequality, considering both the historical background and the current issues. "*Nature, Culture et Inégalités*" offers a thorough examination of the socio-economic elements influencing inequality since "*The Economics of Inequality*" supplies the theoretical foundations for this investigation.

2 Lucas Chancel is a French economist. He is also Codirector of the World Inequality Database and Research fellow at the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations.

All things considered, Piketty's work has made a significant contribution to the literature on inequality by providing insightful viewpoints for comprehending and tackling one of the most important problems of our day. For academics, decision-makers, and anybody else curious about the workings of economic disparity, this book offers crucial perspectives and a strong starting point for additional research. Building upon the theoretical groundwork established in *"The Economics of Inequality"*; Piketty provides a thorough and nuanced analysis of the socio-economic factors causing inequality, making this book an invaluable tool for comprehending and resolving the intricacies surrounding wealth disparities. It also highlights how difficult it will be to address both the economic and climate change issues and achieve a more equal economy in the future. Piketty thinks that when the effects of climate change become more apparent, views and economic policies may shift more quickly. He claims that there have always been setbacks and successes along the path to equality. A multidisciplinary approach incorporating historians, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, and ethnologists is necessary to comprehend economic concerns and distribute economic power. According to Piketty, democratizing information is essential to creating a society that is more just and equal.

Overall, *"Nature, Culture et Inégalités"* by Thomas Piketty offers a thorough analysis of the variables influencing socioeconomic inequality in diverse countries and eras of history. Through dispelling the fallacy of inherent factors and highlighting the pivotal function of political and social dynamics, Piketty presents an engaging story that prompts readers to reconsider the causes of inequality. The book's virtues, in spite of its complexity and Western-centric orientation, are its thorough historical study and strong arguments.

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The authors have equally contributed to the manuscript.

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