

Feminisms and Feminist Cultural Studies: Mapping the Politics of Language and Discourse

PROF. DR. BERRİN YANIKKAYA*, PERVİN YANIKKAYA AYDEMİR**

Abstract

This paper surveys the evolution and diversity of feminist cultural studies, emphasizing the multiplicity of feminist theories and their engagement with the politics of discourse and representation. Drawing on foundational typologies and key debates, it explores how feminist thought has interrogated the production of knowledge, the situatedness of experience, and the intersectional dynamics of power, identity, and culture. The discussion traces the historical development of feminist cultural studies from its radical, interdisciplinary origins in the 1960s and 1970s to its institutionalization and transformation in the 2000s. It highlights the methodological innovations and critical interventions that have shaped the field, including standpoint theory, discourse analysis, and the critique of patriarchal and neoliberal ideologies in media and popular culture. Ultimately, the article argues for the continued importance of reflexive, context-sensitive, and transformative feminist methodologies in understanding and contesting the cultural production of gendered and intersecting inequalities.

Keywords: feminist cultural studies, discourse, intersectionality, representation, power, gender, activism, gender equality.

Feminizmler ve Feminist Kültürel Çalışmalar:
Dilin ve Söylemin Politikalarını Haritalamak

Özet

Bu çalışma, feminist kültürel çalışmaların evrimini ve çeşitliliğini inceleyerek, feminist kuramların çokluğunu ve söylem ile temsil politikalarına olan ilgisini vurgulamaktadır. Temel tipolojilerden ve önemli tartışmalardan yola çıkarak, feminist düşüncenin bilgi üretimini, deneyimin bağlamsallığını ve güç, kimlik ve kültürün kesişimsel dinamiklerini nasıl sorguladığını ele almaktadır. Tartışma, feminist kültürel çalışmaların 1960'lar ve 1970'lerdeki radikal, disiplinlerarası kökenlerinden başlayarak, 2000'lerdeki kurumsallaşma ve dönüşüm sürecine kadar olan tarihsel gelişimini izlemektedir. Alanı şekillendiren yöntemsel yenilikler ve eleştirel müdahaleler arasında duruş noktası kuramı, söylem analizi ve medya ile popüler kültürdeki ataerkil ve neoliberal ideolojilerin eleştirisi öne çıkarılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, makale, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı ve kesişen eşitsizliklerin kültürel üretimini anlamada ve bunlara karşı çıkmada, düşününsel, bağlama duyarlı ve dönüştürücü feminist metodolojilerin devam eden önemini ele almaktadır.

* Yeditepe University, berrin.yanikkaya@yeditepe.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-8339-9269

** Independent Researcher, pervinaydemir@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-7073-6334

Gönderim tarihi: 20 Mayıs 2025

Kabul tarihi: 22 Temmuz 2025

Anahtar sözcükler: feminist kültürel çalışmalar, söylem, kesişimsellik, temsil, iktidar, toplumsal cinsiyet, aktivizm, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği.

INTRODUCTION

Before engaging with feminist cultural criticism and theories, it is important to acknowledge that feminism does not represent a single, unified approach. Rather, it is more accurate to refer to “feminisms”, a range of perspectives that emphasize different concepts and priorities (Abbott et al., 2005). While all feminist perspectives challenge the ways in which women’s social roles are constructed as subordinate, they offer diverse explanations of how political, cultural, and economic institutions contribute to these dynamics. In this survey article, we aim to map the field of feminist cultural studies in general, with a particular focus on the politics of discourse and discursive practices from a theoretical perspective. However, before turning to these specific areas, we must first address the diversity and complexity inherent in feminist thought.

MAIN QUESTIONS OF FEMINIST THEORIES AND METHODS

Mapping the field of feminist theories is complicated due to its vast and continually expanding literature. To address this complexity, Patricia Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge (2022) propose a typology based on six fundamental questions they state that feminist theory has been called to answer: the descriptive question, “And what about the women?”; the explanatory question, “Why is all this as it is?”; the exploratory question, “What about the differences among women?”, the transformative question “How can we change and improve the social world so as to make it a more just place for all people?”; the analytical question “How – and why – does gender inequality persist in the modern world?”; and the epistemological question “What is to be understood by the category ‘gender’?” (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2022, pp. 218-219).

Lengermann and Niebrugge (2022) classify feminist theories based on their answers to the first two questions they posed. They provide five general responses to the question “And what about women,” and then further break down these in terms of the second question: “Why is all this as it is?” (p. 222). First, in many contexts, women’s positions and experiences differ from those of men in comparable situations- a perspective emphasized by cultural and existential (or phenomenological) feminisms, sociological theories, institutional placement, and interactional accomplishments. Second, these differences often involve systemic inequality, where women occupy less privileged positions than men; this view is central to liberal feminism. Third, women’s positions must be understood through direct power relations, where women are actively oppressed by men - controlled, subordinated, molded, used, and exploited. This perspective underpins radical and psychoanalytic feminist approaches. Fourth, women’s experiences of difference, inequality, and oppression vary according to their overall positioning within the stratified structures of societies, or according to vectors of oppression and privilege such as class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, marital status, and global location. This intersectional lens is central to socialist feminism and the theories of hegemonic masculinity, intersectionality, and postcolonialism. Fifth, as women's position may not be answered in the construct of 'gender', the challenges posed by postmodernism and

neoliberalism must be examined. These challenges and threats, particularly their role in deconstructing gender and promoting the doctrine of individual achievement, need to be critiqued. (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2022, pp. 224-255).

In the typology of Lengermann and Niebrugge, it becomes clear that different feminist perspectives engage with cultural theory and emerge from varying foundational assumptions. However, it should be noted that the defining feature of feminist cultural theory lies in its methodological approach. While early feminist movements such as liberal feminism navigated within the boundaries of male-dominated knowledge, feminisms gradually began to develop their own epistemological frameworks (Skeggs, 1995, pp. 1-35). This marked a significant shift from relying on established male knowledge to generating distinct feminist ways of knowing. As Beverley Skeggs (1995) argues, the failure to critically examine how knowledge is produced represents a cultural problem. It reflects a broader pattern of cultural reproduction rooted in the myth that knowledge comes from nowhere- when, in fact, all knowledge is contextually situated (1995, p.2). Building on this insight, Sandra Harding (2004) asserts, *standpoint theory*, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory, is “about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power” (pp. 1). Similarly, Donna Haraway (2004), while questioning objectivity in scientific discourse, defines “feminist objectivity” as “situated knowledges” (pp. 86-87):

All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies of the relations of what we call mind and body, of distance and responsibility, embedded in the science question in feminism. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. In this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see.

In other words, we are accountable for the ways in which we construct and use knowledge, rather than pretending to be neutral or detached. Since all knowledge is shaped by the specific social, cultural, and historical contexts of the knower, the concept of situated knowledge challenges the supposed neutrality of dominant cultural narratives and highlights how power and identity shape what is accepted as truth. By emphasizing the importance of perspective and context, situated knowledge encourages a more reflexive and accountable approach to understanding culture, aligning with feminist cultural studies’ commitment to amplifying marginalized voices and critically examining how knowledge is produced and valued.

The response to Michel Foucault’s argument that the identity of the speaker is irrelevant to the production of knowledge—what matters are the rules that permit certain discourses and the effects that knowledge produces (Foucault, 1991, p. 72) —comes from feminist scholars in a collection of essays titled *Up Against Foucault*, edited by Caroline Ramazanoğlu (1993). One of such responses is given by Janet Ransom (1993), who challenges this view by arguing that the identity of the speaker is crucial, especially for feminist theory. She points out that feminists must confront both shared and divergent experiences among women, and these complexities cannot be addressed through theoretical or discursive analysis alone. Instead, they require engagement with the actual varied experiences of women and the social systems that create inequalities between them. According to Ransom, feminist theory demands an approach that acknowledges the speaker’s position and context within discourse (Ransom, 1993, pp. 124-141). In other words, postmodern thinkers are not

voices from nowhere or *neutral voices*, and their analyses are not free from their own political implications. Thus, Ransom's critique highlights the limitations of Foucault's framework for feminist theory and reinforces the need for methodologies that account for both the speaker's standpoint and material experiences of those who speak. Feminist research requires approaches that recognize both the discursive and material dimensions of gender and power. In doing so, feminist cultural studies have offered an array of theories, perspectives, and methods.

FEMINIST CULTURAL STUDIES

Emerging in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s, cultural studies began as a radical, interdisciplinary field focused on analyzing culture, power, and identity, often with a strong political and activist orientation. It challenged traditional academic boundaries and sought to understand how everyday life, media, and popular culture shape and reflect social inequalities. According to Ann Balsamo (1991), the beginning of *feminist* cultural studies can be traced to the publication of the book *Women Take Issue* (1978), written by the Women's Studies Group at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. During the 1980s, it was followed by the growing influence of feminist literary criticism and theory, and the use of ethnographic methods to study subcultures. In the early 1990s, two major directions became prominent: one focused on positionality, nationalism, and ethnic identity, especially among women of color and postcolonial scholars; and the other concentrated on feminist engagements with science, technology, and the body in feminist thought (Balsamo, 1991, p. 51).

In Balsamo's periodization, feminist cultural studies is understood to have first emerged in the 1960s in England, shaped by the development of British socialist feminism. The *Women Take Issue* collection highlights two important aspects of cultural formation: first, it offers a descriptive account of what it means to engage in feminist intellectual work; second, it critiques the systematic exclusion of both feminist perspectives and the category of "women" from the theoretical frameworks and research priorities of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the time (p.53). The CCCS Women's Studies Group in the 1970s brought together women from diverse backgrounds—those researching feminine culture, theorizing subjectivity and gender, committed activists, and others who simply found the group welcoming. It served as a bridge for the new social movements and identity politics of the late 1960s and 1970s into the CCCS, contrasting with more traditional groups focused on social class (Brunsdon, 2005). It served as a bridge for the new social movements and identity politics of the late 1960s and 1970s into the CCCS, contrasting with more traditional groups focused on social class. Whereas traditional Marxist and labor-history analyses centered primarily on the public sphere of the workplace, trade unionism, and economic exploitation, the Women's Studies Group argued this perspective was incomplete. They expanded the scope of political inquiry to include the private sphere, analyzing the family, unpaid domestic labor, and sexuality as crucial sites of power and oppression under patriarchy. By championing the idea that "the personal is political," they validated experiences previously dismissed as individual problems—from the division of household chores to cultural representations of women—as matters of systemic political importance. This new approach insisted that a working-class woman's

experience was fundamentally different from a man's, as she was shaped not just by class but also by gender, thus challenging the primacy of class analysis. As Brunsdon highlights, the group moved quickly to give these ideas an institutional home and a powerful voice, forming in October 1974 and becoming the core of the journal collective that published *Women Take Issue* in 1978 (p. 281).

However, as Balsamo notes, two shortcomings were notable in these studies: a lack of sustained analysis of race and racism, and the tendency to reproduce nationalist or imperialist biases within feminist identities. Despite these blind spots, the *Women Take Issue* collection played a pivotal role in the development of feminist cultural studies. It provided a model that incorporated broader cultural and subcultural analysis, drawing attention to the importance of everyday life and the domestic sphere in reproducing power relations. Furthermore, this contributed to developing an understanding that social relations and power distribution at any given historical moment should be analyzed through the intersecting lenses of gender, sexuality, and class. In other words, by focusing on women's subordinated status in relation to both class and gender, the collection explored their structural position in the production and reproduction of material life, the political and ideological interpretations of this condition, and the lived experiences of women within such frameworks. It also highlighted how subjectivity is socially constructed and expressed through everyday practices (Balsamo, 1991, p. 53).

Michelle Meagher (2007) asserts that feminist cultural studies encompass a range of scholarly efforts dedicated to foregrounding women's cultural experiences, supporting further investigation into how women interact with cultural contexts, and drawing on these experiences to develop new cultural theories. This expansive field exists at the crossroads of women's studies and cultural studies, both of which are deeply connected to the pursuit of political transformation (p. 272). Sarah Franklin et al. (1991) point out that "[b]oth women's studies and cultural studies have a strong link with radical politics outside the academy in common, having their academic agenda informed by, or linked to, the feminist movement and left politics respectively (p. 171). While they discuss the similarities and dissimilarities between feminisms and cultural studies, they also refer to the divergences and influences between the two. With the rise of poststructuralist "tendencies" cultural processes started to be analyzed as texts. This approach enabled feminists to build a bridge between literary analysis and social sciences. As Franklin et al. explain:

The ability, for example, to locate the production, criticism and consumption of literary texts in the context of the non-literary 'texts' of patriarchal social relations opened up an obvious space for more politicized 'readings' of both the literary canon and what had been excluded from it. Likewise, the emphasis on how meanings are 'encoded' into practices of cultural production and consumption opened up a whole range of radical re-readings of traditional subjects in both the humanities and the social sciences" (p. 180, emphases in original).

APPROACHES, THEORIES AND POLITICS

Michèle Barrett emphasizes the importance of cultural politics in feminist thought, highlighting that they center on "struggles over *meaning*" (1982, p. 37, emphasis in original). In a similar vein, Lana Rakow (2006) by citing the works of Gilman (1911) and Hale (1914), demonstrates how early contributions by women scholars have been excluded from the academic canon on

popular culture, a field in which creativity has traditionally been framed as a male domain (p. 201). Drawing on these works, Rakow argues that they raise important questions regarding women's opportunities for creativity and how these opportunities have evolved over time, the ways in which women's creative efforts have been evaluated, the mechanisms by which women have been silenced, and how women have constructed meaning in their lives through the myths and activities assigned to them by men, and how men have often defined their own identities at the expense of women. In this context, she contends that feminism "is a challenge to the very power relations that have determined the ground over which the discussion can be waged" (Rakow, 2006, pp. 202). She further explains that although contemporary feminist scholars have adopted a range of perspectives in their analyses of popular culture, two central assumptions commonly underpin their work. First, they posit that women's engagement with popular culture is fundamentally different from that of men. Scholars have noted that women have frequently occupied pivotal roles as consumers of specific popular culture products, have often been prominent subjects within popular culture for audiences of all genders, and, in certain historical contexts, have also contributed as influential creators and producers. Second, feminists maintain that a critical understanding of how popular culture functions for women, as well as within patriarchal frameworks, is vital. Such understanding is seen crucial for women to assert control over their identities and to effect change in both cultural narratives and social structures.

Rakow (2006) classifies feminist approaches to popular culture into four interconnected yet distinct categories: *The Images and Representations Approach* critically analyzes how women are portrayed in popular culture, questioning not only the types of images presented but also who creates them, whose interests they serve, and how these representations shape broader societal understanding of women, often highlighting the stark disconnection between media portrayals and women's actual lived experiences. Complementing this critical lens, *the Recovery and Reappraisal Approach* shifts focus on reclaiming women's historical agency by recovering and valuing women's creative expression throughout history, seeking to rediscover women's stories, self-representations, and cultural contributions that have been systematically neglected or devalued within male-dominated narratives. *The Reception and Experience Approach* challenges traditional assumptions about passive media consumption by emphasizing the audience's active role, examining how women engage with, interpret, and find meaning in cultural products, demonstrating that even seemingly conventional media like romance novels or soap operas can offer moments of autonomy, identification, and subtle resistance to patriarchal structures. Finally, *the Cultural Theory Approach* provides a broader theoretical framework that explores how culture itself is produced and structured around gendered power dynamics, engaging in ongoing debates about whether women's marginalization is best addressed through integration into a unified, androgynous culture or through the transformation and reclamation of women's separate cultural sphere, while consistently critiquing patriarchy's pervasive influence and emphasizing the fundamental need for women's autonomous cultural expression (2006, pp. 202-211).

The overlapping theme underlying the approaches summarized above is that "[f]eminism, as a critique of existing social relations, assumes that change is not only desirable but necessary"

(Rakow, 2006, p. 202). Consequently, women's engagement with popular culture, and thus, culture needs to be seen through the lens of various perspectives. Instead of positioning women as only passive receivers of cultural products or focusing on women's stereotypical representation in media and popular culture from male perspectives, Rakow outlines the feminist approaches to popular culture that emphasize women's experiences as both producers and active consumers of culture.

In this context, popular culture is a contested space where dominant and subordinate groups negotiate over meaning (Hall, 2019, p. 357-359), in which the symbolic and real relationships between men and women, in all areas of everyday life, are constantly defined, produced, and reproduced (Milestone & Meyer, 2016). Despite its role in reinforcing social and cultural structures particularly patriarchy, popular culture long remained on the periphery of academic inquiry. Cultural critics paid limited attention to how popular culture, often described as an ideological mechanism that captures, governs, and directs individuals, is perceived through a female lens. In evaluations of popular culture produced by and for women, the roles of women as producers, subjects, and consumers were frequently overlooked or reduced to passive, objectified figures. The stereotypical images of women in such media have reinforced traditional gender roles, particularly the socialization of women into domestic identities such as housewives and mothers.

Sarah Gamble (2001) argues that "[i]n common usage the stereotype can be seen as an ideological discursive strategy which demarcates an us/ them binarity which functions to reinforce the dominant discourse" (p. 306). She continues discussing how patriarchy, for instance, uses stereotypes to define women's roles and traits as fundamentally different—and inferior—to men's, while elevating masculinity. The ideal woman is often depicted as a nurturing wife, mother, or muse, shaped by the male gaze, whereas female sexuality is portrayed as dangerous and uncontrollable. Patriarchy establishes fixed, repeatable notions of femininity and encourages women to internalize these images. In this way, stereotyping becomes a key mechanism through which patriarchal ideology shapes and limits women's identities.

When exploring topics such as gendered experiences, meaning-making, representation, power dynamics, or social relationships, it is useful to consider these inquiries across multiple interconnected analytical levels. Disagreements over knowledge often stem from analyses being conducted at different levels, or across multiple levels simultaneously (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 153). Given the complexity and sensitivity of how gender and power intersect, it is important to clarify which levels are being explored in a given study and how they relate to one another. Analytical levels can vary; for instance, one might choose to analyze gender and power relations through the lens of language and discourse or through the institutional structures that regulate gendered behavior.

Studying gender at the level of language involves analyzing ideas, beliefs, norms, discourses through which culture is reproduced, and power is exercised. cultural reproduction, along with their impacts. This level is essential to understand how relations of power and gendered experiences are shaped. Feminist scholars have long argued that notions of masculinity and femininity – like those surrounding race or class- are socially constructed and can be challenged. These constructs shape how people perceive reality and navigate their world. Postmodern theory has been especially

influential in demonstrating how gender is created through specific discourses and representations, with gendered identities and subjectivities being constantly formed, contested, reshaped, and fragmented. At this discursive level, individuals may exercise agency by accepting, resisting, or challenging constructions of gendered identity, an interaction that can lead to either empowerment or disempowerment.

Language, thus, plays a crucial role in linking knowledge and experience, as it shapes how identities, subjectivities, and lived experiences are constructed, understood, and reinterpreted. Nevertheless, language alone does not fully explain how gender and power operate. Drawing on Foucault, Patti Lather (1991) notes that language is particularly influential in generating categories—such as those used to classify gender—but reality is multifaceted and cannot be entirely reduced to language. As Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland similarly argue, there is a fundamental distinction between viewing gender and power as entirely constructed through language and recognizing that language is only one component within a broader, multi-layered framework (2002, p. 153).

CONTEXTS OF FEMINIST CULTURAL CRITICISM

According to Balsamo (1991), feminist literary criticism provides a framework that paves the way for feminist theories. Within this framework, writing is not viewed as a purely individual act; rather, literature is understood as a cultural product shaped by its historical and ideological context. This perspective insists that art is inherently political and cannot be detached from broader political realities. Both feminist literary criticism and feminist cultural studies are deeply concerned with the discursive construction of identity, subjectivity, and the politics of representation. In this context, literary analysis is situated within the broader domain of cultural studies, where texts serve merely as tools for exploring wider social, political, and cultural issues. Feminist scholars shift the focus toward structures, institutions, and power relations. The struggle with the canon—seen as a rigid set of norms and exclusions—is fundamentally a critique of the politics of representation and the power relations that govern knowledge production. This struggle extends beyond literary and cinematic representation to encompass university curricula, social activism, and global economic dynamics, among many other things. In this way, feminist cultural studies represents an effort to transform representational practices both within academia and in broader sociopolitical contexts. Consequently, feminist cultural studies are closely tied to the analytical framework of contemporary feminist social and political theories (Balsamo, 1991, p. 56).

Since the 1980s, however, the work of feminist critics such as Tania Modleski (1986, 1991), Janice Radway (1991), and Ien Ang (1985, 1996) has prompted a shift in the analysis of popular culture. These scholars challenged the exclusion of women as both subjects and objects of research and critically examined representations in media. Their work revealed that women's gender identities are not monolithic but vary significantly depending on intersecting factors such as age, education, ethnicity, race, and class.

In the 1990s, critiques led by Black feminist and postcolonial scholars focused on two main concerns. First, they challenged the assumption that there is a general consensus among feminists

regarding the appropriate political aims of critical feminist studies. Second, they highlighted the difficulty of addressing complex systems of oppression shaped by gender, class, and race within a fundamentally racist social structure. Hazel Carby (1982, 2005), for example, argued that the issue is not simply about recognizing the presence of Black woman within feminist discourse, but about redefining the core assumptions of mainstream feminist thought to reflect how race, class, and gender intersect, and to recognize racism as a fundamental part of white women's relationships with women of color (p. 212). Carby's critique is fundamentally directed at the discourse of "white" feminism, which often seeks to construct a universal "we" that ultimately excludes the diverse experiences and cultural realities of non-white women. The demand for an intersectional analysis, initially directed at feminism's own internal power structures, naturally expanded into a broader critique of how power operates within other seemingly objective discourses—like science, medicine, and technology—which were similarly seen as constructing knowledge that marginalizes women and people of color.

Specifically, this critique manifested in a key area of interest for many American feminists: the power/knowledge dynamics embedded in scientific and medical discourse and expressed through technological systems and practices. According to Balsamo (1991) feminist concerns by the end of 1980s centered on three main points: 1) the idea that science is culturally determined discourse that constructs a specific worldview; 2) the understanding that scientific knowledge is socially constructed, and that scientific practices and institutions are shaped by broader social relations; and 3) the recognition that contemporary science, technology, and related institutional logics -such as medicine- are complex, globalized and highly decentralized (p. 63). These issues highlighted the necessity for diverse feminist projects aimed at engaging with, critiquing, and resisting the structures of power and knowledge. Such projects not only have focused on increasing women's participation in science and technology but also have critically examined the authority these systems claim over defining "reality".

One landmark contribution to this area is Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985, 1991), which offers a detailed critique of the global technoscientific landscape from a socialist, materialist feminist perspective. She asserts that "[t]he *Other* is simultaneously produced and located outside the more real in the twin discourses of life and human sciences, of natural science and humanism. This is the creation of difference that plagues 'Western' knowledge; it is the patriarchal voice in the production of discourse that can name only by subordinating within legitimate lineages" (1991, pp. 79-80, emphases in original). In Haraway's cyborg cosmology, identity - feminist or otherwise- is fragmented, hybrid, relational, and always in flux. Thus, feminist cultural studies should focus on producing critiques that reflect the fluid and evolving nature of identity, as feminist intervention, engagement, and reconstruction target specific domains (Balsamo, 1991, p. 64).

Feminist criticism more broadly examines the socially constructed roles attributed to women and men, exploring how these roles shape literary texts while employing gender as a central analytical framework—an aspect often neglected by earlier literary approaches. Feminist scholars have argued that the narratives found in Greco-Roman myths are male-centered structures that

mirror the male psyche. In contrast, earlier women-centered mythologies are believed to have offered more empowering representations. For example, Virginia Woolf reinterpreted the myths and symbolism of Isis to challenge patriarchal norms and envision alternative forms of female identity (Humm, 1994, pp. 59-61). Building on Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "woman as Other," French feminist theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray have explored binary oppositions like man/woman and mind/nature within dominant literary traditions. These French feminists aim to create new, affirming portrayals of femininity through *écriture féminine*-a mode of writing that expresses women's unique experiences and perspectives (Humm, 1994, pp. 23,93-94).

In the 2000s, feminist scholars such as Angela McRobbie, Sara Ahmed, Rosalind Gill, among others, continued to analyze language, power, and representations that shape social realities, each offering unique perspectives on how discursive practices construct and challenge gendered, racialized, and sexualized identities. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed explores how emotions circulate within discursive frameworks, creating what she calls "affective economies." She argues that emotions are not individual but are shaped by cultural discourses that attach feelings to specific bodies and identities. She explores, "how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of collective bodies" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 1). Later, in *On Being Included* (2012), Ahmed critiques institutional diversity discourses, arguing that they often serve as performative gestures that reproduce existing power structures. She emphasizes that diversity becomes a form of institutional speech that allows organizations to appear inclusive while maintaining existing exclusions. In that sense, diversity becomes "a form of hospitality" (2012, p. 43) and "a form of public relations" (2012, p. 34), masking power differentials under the guise of openness.

Rosalind Gill's (2007) work focuses on the discursive construction of gender in media and popular culture. She identifies recurring themes in postfeminist discourse, such as the emphasis on individualism, choice, and empowerment. She critiques how these discourses often mask structural inequalities by framing them as personal failures. Gill claims that postfeminist discourse operates through a sensibility that emphasizes self-surveillance and self-discipline, aligning femininity with neoliberal values (Gill, 2007). Similarly, Angela McRobbie (2009) also emphasizes how discursive practices in media and culture perpetuate neoliberal ideologies while masking structural inequalities. In *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009), McRobbie introduces the concept of "double entanglement," where feminist ideas are simultaneously incorporated and undermined within popular culture. She argues that postfeminist discourse uses feminist language to suggest that gender equality has been achieved, thereby negating the need for further feminist critique. McRobbie accentuates that postfeminist discourse works to undo feminism by presenting it as both taken into account and no longer necessary. Collectively, throughout the 2000s, these feminist scholars analyzing culture and the discursive practices within cultural products emphasized that, whether or not it is labeled as a backlash, patriarchal and neoliberal ideologies introduced new forms of femininity that ultimately served the dominant discourse.

METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

From the outset, feminist cultural studies have been multidisciplinary, multicultural, and inherently transgressive. Therefore, defining feminist cultural studies merely as interdisciplinary fails to capture the distinctive diversity within cultural studies. Until the late 1980s, the literature reflects a wide range of political perspectives including those of women of color, womanists, Marxist feminists, diasporic and exiled women as well as postcolonial, and gender studies and draws upon on a variety of intellectual traditions such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, sociology, philosophy, medicine, anthropology, film studies, literary studies, performance studies, and education. Given this richness of sources and methodologies, it has been argued that feminist cultural studies should no longer be simply considered interdisciplinary or even multidisciplinary, but rather post-disciplinary (Balsamo, 1991, p. 50).

Thus, mapping the theoretical diversity of feminist theories also raises the question of which methodologies, research methods, and techniques are employed in feminist scholarly work—especially within feminist cultural theories—to describe, explain, explore, and analyze socio-cultural phenomena within the contexts in which all knowledge is situated. From this perspective, before discussing the constitutive elements of feminist cultural theories and studies, it is essential to emphasize that “[f]eminists methodologies are (...) engaged as counter-narratives to dominant traditional models of research and science, as well as through foregrounding the experiential and embodied nature of doing research” (Harcourt et al. 2022, p. 4). Harcourt et al. (2022) point out that their work—and, we believe, much feminist research—goes beyond merely critiquing traditional research methods. Instead, they demonstrate how feminist methodologies can recognize that knowledge is embedded in bodies, emotions, communities, and lived experiences. By sharing stories and making visible the negotiation of multiple identities, positionalities, ethics, and the complexities of everyday research, feminist research shows that knowledge is not detached or neutral but intimately linked to experience and subjectivity. The knowledge that feminist researchers produce is shaped by our lives, cultures, communities, and feminisms.

As feminist scholarship aims to understand, analyze, and transform existing social formations—that is, the intertwined relationships among social, political, economic, historical, ideological, and cultural phenomena—there is a tendency to engage more frequently in qualitative research methods, since these approaches allow for a deeper exploration of lived experiences, power dynamics, and the complexities of identity and social structures that quantitative methods might overlook. Qualitative methods are seen as better suited to capturing the nuanced, context-dependent, and often marginalized perspectives that feminist research seeks to highlight, such as textual analysis, ethnography, audience studies, and memory studies (Skeggs, 1995, p.3), participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups are particularly valued as primary tools for conveying experiences (van Zoonen, 2006, p. 135). Discourse analysis, in particular, occupies a distinctive place within feminist research from the late 1980’s on, with variety of focal points from how “dominant discourses define women” as dependent on men to how male violence is “a primary method of controlling women’s behavior and, therefore, discursive representations among many (Humm, 2003, p. 67 and the references therein). As Campbell and Wasco (2000) observe, “[t]he

writings that define feminist research are dense, span multiple disciplines, are highly philosophical, inherently political, and as with all specialized discourses, full of jargon" (p. 774). This methodological complexity and interdisciplinary richness, as these scholars demonstrate, reflects feminist scholarship's commitment to challenging traditional academic boundaries while developing research approaches that can adequately address the multifaceted nature of gendered power relations and women's experiences.

WHAT HAPPENED TO 'FEMINIST' CULTURAL STUDIES

As demonstrated above, the "glory days" of feminist cultural studies appear to have gradually waned by the mid-2000s. However, it is not only feminist cultural studies, but cultural studies as a "project" in general lost its impetus. As Rodman (2015) states that "[c]ultural studies promised—or, if you were on the other side of the fence, threatened—to radically transform the ways in which people approached scholarship, cultural criticism, and political action (p. viii). He argues that cultural studies has an important role in striving toward ambitious, idealistic goals. However, he suggests that in recent decades, the field has been sidetracked by its own justified critical pessimism about current realities, allowing this outlook to eclipse its capacity to imagine and pursue more hopeful, transformative possibilities (xi).

For feminist cultural studies, the early signals of the "fall" began in the early 1990s when the institutionalization of both feminism and cultural studies within academia led to its fragmentation and loss of radical edge. Franklin, Lury, and Stacey (1991) argue that feminist cultural studies became increasingly absorbed into mainstream academic structures, which diluted its critical and political potential. Similarly, McRobbie (2009) critiques the depoliticization of feminist cultural studies, arguing that its focus shifted from activism to academic discourse. She accentuates that feminisms had largely retreated from its earlier engagement with social movements, becoming more concerned with theoretical debates than with practical change. On the other hand, popular cultural texts from the 2000s—such as *Bridget Jones' Diary*, *Ally McBeal*, and *Sex and the City*—celebrate the conventions of traditional girlhood. These women and the cultural narratives, according to McRobbie, "have taken feminism into account and implicitly or explicitly ask the question, 'what now?'" (2009, p. 21). She argues the rejection of feminism is compensated by new forms of freedom and agency, made possible through a post-feminist gender settlement she terms the "new sexual contract." The conditions of this "new deal for young women" involve occupying visible and agentic roles by participating in education, employment, and consumer culture; abandoning critiques of patriarchy and relinquishing political identities; and engaging in practices that are "both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 57). Unlike previous gender regimes that dictated what women should not do, the new sexual contract functions through a "constant stream of incitements and enticements," promoting capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, and social mobility (McRobbie, 2009, p. 57).

In her response to what happened to "cultural studies", Ien Ang asserts that "the world operates through the intricate entanglements of active meaning-making and power relations; that 'culture' is an ongoing social process through which whole ways of life are constructed and

reconstructed; that we can only understand ‘what’s going on’ by analyzing practices in their complex contexts, and so on” (Ang, 2020, p. 286). She indicates that an increasing number of scholars are now engaging with issues like climate change and the environmental crisis as important arenas of social struggle. However, this body of work is often not recognized as belonging to cultural studies; rather, it is typically classified under newer fields such as ‘science and technology studies’ or ‘environmental humanities’ (2020, p. 288). According to Ang, while it is debatable how much cultural studies as a discipline can truly keep up with the times, it is clear that many important works in the humanities and social sciences today utilize insights from cultural studies to engage with new arenas of social struggle—even if they do not explicitly identify as cultural studies. In this sense, cultural studies often function as an invisible or underlying influence. Ang (2020) highlights the fact that with the retirement of the first generation of cultural studies scholars—those most connected to the field’s origins and identity—newer scholars often approach cultural studies with less emotional attachment, viewing it more pragmatically. Nearly fifty years since its beginnings in Birmingham and elsewhere, the world has changed dramatically. If conjunctural analysis is central to cultural studies, then today’s pressing issues differ greatly from those that shaped the field’s theories and methods in the late twentieth century. While race, gender, sexuality, and, to a lesser extent, class once defined the main arenas of cultural struggle—focusing on identity, representation, and popular culture—these concerns remain important, but today’s context has shifted and demand new critical tools and perspectives (2020, p. 288). In this light, feminist cultural studies is still relevant whether as a discipline, a set of methodologies or as a “project”.

CONCLUSION: FROM DISCOURSE TO ACTION—RECLAIMING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF FEMINIST CULTURAL STUDIES

In conclusion, the trajectory of feminist cultural studies reveals both its transformative potential and the challenges it has faced over time. While the field emerged as a radical, interdisciplinary project committed to critiquing and reshaping dominant cultural narratives, its institutionalization within academia has sometimes diluted its political edge and critical ambitions. Nevertheless, feminist cultural studies have made enduring contributions by foregrounding the situatedness of knowledge, the complexity of identity, and the interplay of power, discourse, and representation. Its engagement with intersectionality, poststructuralism, and the politics of everyday life has expanded the horizons of cultural analysis and challenged the exclusions of mainstream scholarship.

Despite shifts in academic and cultural contexts, the core insights of feminist cultural studies—its commitment to amplifying marginalized voices, interrogating structures of power, and envisioning social transformation—remain vital.

However, to address contemporary challenges and maintain its relevance, the fluid interactions between women’s movements and the political action that once energized feminist cultural studies need to be reinvigorated. Reconnecting theory with activism and fostering dynamic exchanges between scholarship and social movements will be essential for the field to reclaim its critical and transformative edge. As new arenas of struggle emerge, from environmental crises to

evolving forms of media and technology, the reflexive and critical methodologies developed within feminist cultural studies continue to offer valuable tools for understanding and contesting the ongoing production of gendered and intersecting inequalities in contemporary society. Ultimately, the promise of the field lies in its ability to bridge scholarship and activism, to amplify marginalized voices, and to challenge the narratives that sustain inequality. In doing so, feminist cultural studies remind us that cultural critique is most powerful when it moves in step with collective action and the ongoing pursuit of justice—where every word, story, and representation becomes a potential site of transformation.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, Pamela et al. (2005). *An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives*. (3rd edition). London: Routledge.
- Ahmed, Sara (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Routledge.
- Ahmed, Sara (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Ang, Ien (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Ang, Ien (1996). *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences*. London: Routledge.
- Balsamo, Ann (1991). "Feminism and Cultural Studies". *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association: Cultural Studies and New Historicism*, 24(1), 50-73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1315025>
- Barrett, Michèle (1980). *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*. NY: Verso.
- Barrett, Michèle (1982), "Feminism and the Definition of Cultural Politics", in *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, (Eds. Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Brunsdon, Charlotte (2005). "A thief in the night: Stories of feminism in the 1970s at CCCS". In *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. (Eds. David Morley & Kuan-Hsing Chen) 275-285. London: Routledge.
- Carby, Hazel V. (2005). "White Woman, Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood." In *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. 211-234, NY: Routledge.
- Campbell, Rebecca & Sharon Wasco (2000). "Feminist Approaches to Social Science: Epistemological and Methodological Tenets", *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28 (6).
- Foucault, Michel (1991). *Politics and the study of discourse*. In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller), 53-72. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Franklin, Sarah et al. (1991). "Feminism and Cultural Studies." *Media, Culture and Society*, 13, 171-192.
- Gamble, Sarah (Ed.) (2001). *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. Routledge.
- Gill, Rosalind (2007). "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility". *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10 (2), 147-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898>
- Hall, Stuart (2019). "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular". In *Essential Essays Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, (Ed. David Morley), 347-361. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

- Haraway, Donna (1985, 1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. NY: Routledge.
- Haraway, Donna (2024). "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Persepective". In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, (Ed. Sandra Harding), 81-101. NY: Routledge
- Harding, Sandra (2004). "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate". In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, (Ed. Sandra Harding), 1-15. NY: Routledge.
- Humm, Maggie (1994). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Humm, Maggie (2003). *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lather, Patti (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. Routledge.
- Lazar, Michelle M. (2017). "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis". In *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, (Eds. John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson), 372-887. Routledge.
- Lengermann, Patricia M., & Gillian Niebrugge, (2022). "Contemporary Feminist Theories". In *Contemporary Sociological Theory and its Classical Roots* (6th ed.), George Ritzer & J.N. Stepnisky (eds.), 217-256. London: Sage Publications.
- Meagher, Michelle (2007). "Feminist Cultural Studies." In *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, George Ritzer (ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- McRobbie, Angela (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: Sage Publications.
- Milestone, Katie & Anneke Meyer (2016). *Gender and Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Millett, Kate (1970). *Sexual Politics*. Doubleday.
- Milner, A. (2003). *Literature, Culture and Society* (2nd ed.). London: UCL Press.
- Mitchell, Juliette (1974). *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*. NY: Pantheon Books.
- Modleski, Tania (1986). *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture (Theories of Contemporary Culture)*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Modleski, Tania (1991). *Feminism Without Women Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*. London & NY: Routledge.
- Parla, Jale (2005). *Kadınlar, Edebiyat, Dil: Eleştirel Bir Antoloji*. Ankara: İletişim Yayınları.
- Radway, Janice (1991). *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press.
- Rakow, Lana F. (2006). "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy its Due". In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, (Ed. John Storey) 199–214. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Ramazanoğlu, Caroline, & Janet Holland (2002). *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Ransom, Jane (1993). "Feminism, Difference and Discourse: The limits of discursive analysis for feminism". In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism* (Ed. Caroline Ramazanoğlu), 123–146. London: Routledge.
- Rodman, Gilbert. (2015). *Why Cultural Studies?* Boston & Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Skeggs, Beverly (1995). *Feminist Cultural Theory: Process and Production*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Storey, John (2008). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- van Zoonen, Liesbet (2006). Feminist Media Studies. In *Mass Media and Society* (4th ed.). (Eds. J. Curran & M. Gurevitch), 135–154. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Women's Studies Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1978). *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination*. London: Hutchinson Press.
- Woolf, Virginia (1929). *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press.

27 MAYIS DARBESİ'NİN TÜRK ROMANINA YANSIMASI

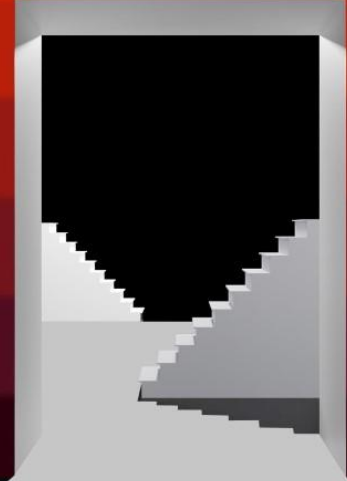
DR. FERHAT ÇETİNKAYA



Günce Yayınları

Türk Romanında Arzunun Görüngüleri

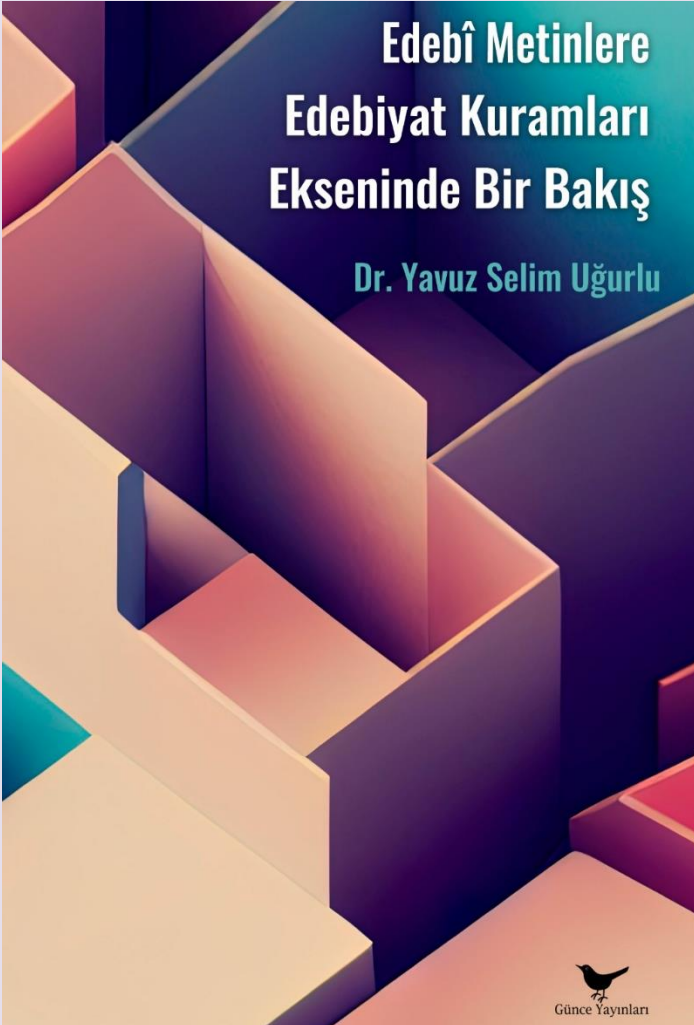
Ömriye Bayrak



Günce Yayınları

Edebî Metinlere Edebiyat Kuramları Ekseninde Bir Bakış

Dr. Yavuz Selim Uğurlu



Günce Yayınları

Ertuğrul Gazi Derhem

Türk Romanında Narsisizm



Günce Yayınları