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“CHANGE AND INEVITABLE CHALLENGE: DETERRITORIALIZED WELSH AND NON-CONFORMIST CHALLENGE”

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Öz

Yirminci yüzyılın ilk yarısında İngiltere’de gelişen Kelt Aydınlanmasıyla birlikte İngiltere’nin bir imparatorluk olarak yüzyıllardır baskı altında tuttuğu yerel kültürler yeniden odak noktası haline gelmiştir. Buna koşut olarak İskoç, Gal ve İrlanda kültürleri kendilerine özgü nitelikleriyle dönemin sanatçı ve entelektüelleri tarafından öne çıkarılmış ve İskoçya, Galler ve İrlanda’nın tarihsel geçmişi de eleştirel bir bakışa tabi tutulmuştur. Bu bağlamda dile getirilen en önemli düşüncelerden biri söz konusu ülkelerin birer koloni olduğudur. İngiliz kültürünün oluşumu söz konusu olduğunda köken niteliği taşıyan Galler de benzer tanımlamalar eşliğinde değerlendirilmektedir. Bu çalışmada Galler’in kolonileştirilmesi süreci ve bu süreci engellemek amacıyla gelişen muhalif oluşumların etkileri incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Galler, Gal, sömürgecilik, İngiliz tarihi, kültür, muhalif kültür

“Change and Inevitable Challenge: Deterritorialized Welsh and Non-conformist Challenge”

Abstract

With the emergence of Kelt Revival in England in the first half of the 20th century, local cultures that had been suppressed by English Empire throughout centuries were focused on again. Accordingly, Scottish, Welsh and Irish cultures were brought to the fore with their peculiar aspects and histories of these countries were viewed critically. One of the most important ideas put forward with the spirit of this movement is that the mentioned countries were nothing but colonies of the English Empire. Wales, the country which is regarded as the root as far as the formation of English culture is concerned, has begun to be defined and described within the terminology of colonialism. This study is intended to trace the process of the colonization of Wales and the effects of non-conformist formations that emerged as a reaction against this process and aimed to prevent it.

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Recent studies focusing on British culture, history and identity have been questioning the unifying nature of the umbrella term ‘Great Britain’, which is changed by some into ‘Britain broken-up’. The claims by the Scottish and the Irish relating the colonizing and suppressive aspects of this term and its historical references have been well known; the more recent trend is now exploring the status of a small country within Britain, namely that of Wales. The resulting impact of these studies has been a re-definition of Welsh culture and history. With this newer consideration, it has been claimed that Wales is nothing but another colony of Great Britain or previous England. Wales has even been claimed to be the first colony of England; for example, Bud B. Khleif holds that present-day Wales is postcolonial and that most Welshmen claim Wales was the first colony of England. Studies relating political status of Wales have employed such terms as “internal colony” and “dependent periphery” while defining the mentioned country and have drawn parallels between Wales on one hand and Scotland and Ireland on the other.¹ One of the indications that will prove this argument is the fact that Welsh economy and industry have remained underdeveloped compared to other parts of Britain and even become the least developed. If postcolonialist studies have from the beginning had a strong interest in all types of difference and marginality as Bill Ashcroft argues,² then the position of Wales might well be examined in this respect because it has had to accept its own ‘difference’ and ‘marginality’ in the process of otherization throughout history. Publication of such books as *Postcolonial Wales* by Chris Williams and *After Raymond Williams: Cultural Materialism and the Break-up of Britain* by Hywel Dix are an indication of an ongoing interest in the historical, political and cultural formation of Wales and the Welsh public.

A key figure in cultural studies and Welsh culture especially, Raymond Williams also evaluated the situation in Wales in terms of postcoloniality and did so around a time when postcolonialism as a discipline was just beginning to emerge. That is why it might be argued Williams is one of the earliest postcolonial writers of English as Hywel Dix defended. Therefore, he is “a major figure in our understanding of contemporary postcolonial cultures within Britain”.³ He “also conceived of the Welsh as an internally colonized people within the British State”⁴ and thus considered its culture a postcolonial one. Wales, according to Williams, have always had an awareness of its own real power and potentials; it only desires to be itself; however, the burden of the history is so effective that it cannot attempt to face its future. A repressed and destroyed country, it can only find a solution to this problem by utilizing the very sources it has. Williams emphasizes the fact that Welsh language has deliberately been undermined by the British governments, which has resulted in the emergence of a culturally-weakened nation since “with the language goes a literature, and with the literature a history, and with the history a culture”.⁵ Accordingly,

¹ Chris Williams, *Problematizing Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality*, Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (Eds.), *Postcolonial Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2005, p. 8.

² Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 10.

³ Hywel Dix, *After Raymond Williams: Cultural Materialism and the Break-up of Britain*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2008, p. 173.

⁴ Daniel Williams, *Introduction: The Return of the Native*, Daniel Williams (Ed.), *Who Speaks for Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2003, p. xxx.

⁵ Raymond Williams, “Welsh Culture”, *Who Speaks for Wales*, Daniel Williams (Ed.), p. 7.

“there was a gap, that is to say: a gap in the Welsh history for the four centuries after the Acts of Union; a gap in the English history...All the complications, all the real difficulties, are in those gaps, and it is these that not only I, but most of us, find so hard to grasp, to decipher, to connect, as we try to make sense of what is called Welsh Culture”.⁶

The Welsh “have been defeated, colonized, penetrated, incorporated. Never finally, of course”.⁷ For such a culturist as Williams, who consistently drew attention the significance of the understanding of culture as a whole way of life, the problems and sufferings of the Welsh could not be tolerable in that it simply did not allow people of a particular region to control their own lives and live as they wished, which is, above all, anti-humanistic. In “Wales and England”, Williams appears as an intellectual figure who is opposed to all forms of oppression whether it may have effect upon the Welsh or other races and/or nations. “It can be said that the Welsh people have been oppressed by the English State for some seven centuries. Yet it can also be said that the English people have been oppressed by the English State for even longer”.⁸ For Williams, the meaning of the word ‘English’ for the Welshmen must be well evaluated. What comes out from Williams’s writing is the thought that for the Welsh, ‘England’ came to mean the ruling Englishmen who were total strangers to the very nation they ruled in an oppressive manner. Oğuz refers to this negative attitude of Englishmen for foreigners and she also criticizes their behaviour of humiliating and despising those who are different from themselves in Britain⁹. One of the most significant aspects of this rule is the prohibition of Welsh language according to Williams: “..That devastation of naming systems imposed by English administration has left us with some of the most radical identity confusions of any modern people”.¹⁰ Williams’s interest in the historical otherisation of Wales is the main impetus for the publication of his last and greatest novel, *People of the Black Mountains*, which is “the great historical novel Wales has long deserved”, as a review in *Wales on Sunday* suggests.

With a human history of 29.000 years, Wales firstly met imperial exploitation in 48 AD with the arrival of the Roman. The Romans were followed by the teutonic tribes, which maintained the problematical political status of the country. Although Wales was governed by Welsh princes from time to time during these invasions, these periods were short-lived and not continuous. The country had to acknowledge the English rule from the 13th century onwards. The Welsh sometimes attempted to rise in rebellion against the English administration; nevertheless, they were not successful and with the introduction of the capital in the 14th century, the country began to be colonized also financially. In the 16th century, the Welsh law was abolished and replaced by the English law.

Chris Williams argues that “one needs to distinguish between the history of Wales before and after the Acts of Union of the sixteenth century. Before 1536, and particularly after the death of the ‘last’ Prince of Wales, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, in 1282, it is plausible to argue that Wales stood in something of a colonial relationship to England”.¹¹ According to Rees Davies, the historian of medieval Wales, “between 1282 and 1400, Wales displays most of the

⁶ *Ibidem*, p.8

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.9

⁸ Raymond Williams, “Wales and England”, *What I Came to Say*, Neil Belton, Francis Mulhern & Jenny Taylor (Eds.), Hutchinson Radius, London, 1989, p. 64.

⁹ Ayla Oğuz, Hanif Kureishi ve Kara Plak: Göç, Kimlik ve Aitlik Sorunları, Pegem Akademi, Ankara, 2018, p. 30.

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, “Wales and England”, *What I Came to Say*, Neil Belton, Francis Mulhern & Jenny Taylor (Eds.), Hutchinson Radius, London, 1989, p. 66.

¹¹ Chris Williams, *Problematising Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality*, Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (Eds.), *Postcolonial Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2005, p. 4.

well-recognized features of a colonial society”.¹² The process of ‘controlling’ the Welsh included constructions of castles. The Welsh were always inferior before the law and they had no right to occupy the high ranks of government:

“The English law and political administration were ruthlessly imposed, within an increasingly centralised ‘British’ state. Succeeding phases of a dominant Welsh landowning class were successfully Anglicised and either physically or politically drawn away to the English centre. Anglicising institutions were successfully implanted”.¹³

According to Oğuz “colonialism is directly connected with the concept of territory. Territories are also social, cultural and political spaces that include social formations”¹⁴. The process of colonization in Wales included a conscious deterritorialization. The Welsh were forced to leave their own hometowns and thus give up what has previously been theirs. The English were enabled to settle where the local Welsh people had been living and the Welsh began to experience the miserable effects of ‘ghettoization’; that is, as the new minority of the country they previously owned, they were forced out of the mainstream not only physically but also culturally. In postconquest Wales, the early English settlers were soldiers, craftsmen, and adventurers. According to Gwyn A. Williams, the newcomers’ strong urban culture was so effective upon the Welsh as to create a new image of the Welsh people as a non-urban people. This was the main factor behind the emergence of Welsh nonconformism. Originally a religious movement, nonconformism would later on turn into a systematic discourse about English and/or British colonialism and gain a nationalistic impulse. As the term itself implies, nonconformism was a form of questioning Christianity and affected by Welsh Methodist Revival. It transformed “the national and religious self-image of the Welsh”.¹⁵ It was felt by the Welshmen that being a nation was a secure way of preserving values that are necessary for the continuation of a culture. “The revival of Welsh national identity became identified with evangelical religion, most especially Nonconformism, which, if it was conscious of the Welsh national past, was itself perceived as being a break with that past, and as the creating of a new, vibrant and essentially Protestant Wales”.¹⁶ Nonconformism was also a form of national pride for it supported the idea that the Welsh were distinct people in terms of both intellectual development and national characteristics.

Nonconformism gained great popularity soon and being a Welsh even came to mean being a Nonconformist; that is, it was not only a religious movement but a cultural identity. Alan Liu describes the situation in Wales at the time by referring to the writings of William Wordsworth, who had the chance to personally witness what has been happening in the region in a visit to North Wales. In this visit that was made in the late 18th century, Wordsworth realised the spirit of a counterrevolution rising among the Welsh people. The leading men of this counterrevolution were the reverends, who were trying to enthuse the people with their sermons. Liu narrates that Wordsworth even felt disturbed by the religious and nationalistic

¹² *Ibidem*, p.4.

¹³ Raymond Williams, “Wales and England”, *What I Came to Say*, Neil Belton, Francis Mulhern & Jenny Taylor (Eds.), Hutchinson Radius, London, 1989, p. 70.

¹⁴ Ayla Oğuz, “Space and Segregation in Postcolonial Context in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, Münir Atalar Armağanı Ortaçağ Tarihi Yazıları, Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, Ed. Pınar Ülgen ve dğr., İstanbul, 2015, p.272.

¹⁵ Dorian Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1999, p. 49.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

excitement of people in that he thought these people might behave towards him badly and announce him a persona-non-grata, an unwanted man who was representing the British values and policies which these people opposed. What Wordsworth saw in Wales was the trigger of a Celtic struggle and these revivalists and nonconformists were determined to fight against the English at all costs.

That is to say, it was apparent that the Welsh were resisting English colonialism and this was being done through a formation of a discourse which was anti-colonial in essence but which was also informative and consciousness-raising about the process of colonization in Wales. The reason for this was not only that Wales was a colonised country; it was also the case that Wales and the Welsh were alienated. In this sense Oğuz, emphasizes the fact that being a stranger means being exposed to the expectations of others¹⁷. Welsh language was forbidden and one of the main emphases of nonconformism was upon the use of this suppressed language. Nonconformism thus helped the Welsh to remember their own language in which England had always been referred to as a foreign country, which shows the historical negative connotation of this word among the Welshmen. The movement made use of the Welsh versions of the Bible and other holy books and thus aimed to make the Welsh public literate. It also tried to publish newspapers in Welsh and the Welsh language was tried to be made a normal means of expressing Welshness. Apart from the alienation of people and prohibition of language, Wales was racially divided between the Celts and the English, which was a deliberate attempt to weaken a public with traditionally strong ties. In other words, Welshness was the very decisive factor among the Welsh public; the Welsh people knew each other only through the feature of being Welsh. Although in time the Celts and the English were intermingled as races and began to demand the rights given to each other, especially in the late 18th century the racial division became more effective and clear. In addition, Wales in the late 18th century had become a country of rebels.

Welsh colonial discourse under the influence of nonconformism regarded the history of the Welsh as the history of a disappeared or nonhistorical people assimilated to a conquering culture. The nonconformist movement aimed to create a new Wales with a new Welsh public who would be conscious of their identity and who would fight against those trying to assimilate and suppress this identity. For Oğuz, “everybody is advised about his or her identity and tries to follow the way about how he or she should be”¹⁸. Nonconformism also aimed to remove degenerated Welsh values and replace the degenerated culture with a newer and more original cultural formation based on Welsh and Celtic myths. Therefore, nonconformism was a kind of revival and rebirth for the Welsh public. The main focus in this new formation was upon the commonness of people; ordinary man was the main target of nonconformism. Nonconformism raised the interest not only in Welsh language but Welsh literature and poetry. The nonconformist literature was noted for its great enthusiasm especially in matters relating national and racial interests. Having various forms, nonconformist poetry was a highly-politicised form of literature and tried to trespass the boundaries of not only English poetry at the time but political boundaries. Nonconformism helped the production of Welsh dictionaries, orthographies, grammar books, philological writings, literary histories, poetry anthologies, biographies, registers, translations, songs and even national anthems.¹⁹ The remarkable aspect of this prolific production is literary histories because the Welsh are known to rely on oral

¹⁷ Ayla Oğuz, Hanif Kureishi'nin My Son the Fanatic Adlı Öyküsünde Kimlik-Değer İlişkisi, Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 16/3, 171-184, 2012, p.175.

¹⁸ Ayla Oğuz, *Reflections of Cultural Conception of Self in Zadie Smith's The Autograph Man*, İnönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, Cilt 4, Sayı 2., 11-20, 2015, p.12.

¹⁹ Alan Liu, *Local Transcendence: Essays on Postmodern Historicism and the Database*, The University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 96

histories as Raymond Williams suggests: “Our histories are written not by schoolmasters or monks or apprentices, or any base persons, but by noble bards, nobly descended barons, and fellows to lords and princes”.²⁰ The main feature of these writings was the polemical tone they carried and looked like a manifesto of nationalism.²¹ Nonconformist writing expectedly met furious reaction by the supporters of the Empire and British government. Accordingly, most of these written productions were burned; the publishers of the periodicals were threatened; anti-nonconformism was supported in any sense and journalists found themselves in exile.

Nonconformism in time became strongly politicised and reformative. It even turned into a Welsh radicalism and the most significant reason for this radicalism was again ghettoization of the Welsh public and the ‘non-urban’ label stuck upon these people. The Welsh colonial discourse also emerged around this time. What the nonconformist writing and literature did was to try to help the Welsh get rid of British colonialism linguistically. The pressures and threats forced the Welsh to seek a better place for their struggle and publications and the idealised place for that was America. Some Welsh groups migrated to America in the early 18th century and such areas as Pennsylvania and Delaware turned into small Wales. The process also created a kind of association and collaboration between these two countries since America itself was struggling to become independent from the British. The Welsh encouraged the American to start their revolutionary war against the British and found their own state.

Nonconformism sometimes dealt with military problems of the British Empire. The Welsh people created some sort of civil disobedience and refused to join the army. They even supported the foreign state against which the British were fighting. The Empire tried to silence the effective voice of the Welsh colonial discourse and did so with the pretext of preserving the unity of the island. Of course the Welsh remained the others of the Empire; despite all its efficiency, nonconformism was regarded as a trifle effort of a dissident group who had been living in a small border country and who had been accustomed to priding themselves on their national and historical heroism. These people were nothing but parrots who were always telling the same story in search of a dead past in a nostalgic manner. That is to say, as opposed to Welsh colonial discourse, the British Empire put forward its own stately counter-discourse in order to maintain the centuries-long propaganda in which the Welsh were despised, degraded and deprived.

Despite the attempts made to ignore nonconformist movement, nonconformism maintained its significance throughout the nineteenth century and became one of the founding elements of Welsh nationalism. The blessed Wales image continued to exist especially in the religious writings of nonconformist priests. In these writings, Wales emerged as a nation second to no other and a country which was God’s hand in the world.²² It was always emphasized that the Welsh were superior to the English morally and spiritually although they were the victims of oppressive tendencies of the English. Nonconformism continued to focus on distinct characteristics of the Welsh nation. They tried to bring positive aspects of the Welsh nation to the fore since British discourse had drawn a totally negative picture of this nation. The English image was replaced by a worse alternative and these people were shown to be “worldly, ignorant and complacent”. As for the Welsh, they were depicted as focusing on higher things and having more sacred aims. The Welsh language was also claimed to be superior to English language. In other words, nonconformism had become well aware of the importance of

²⁰ Raymond Williams, *People of the Black Mountains, Vol. 2- The Eggs of the Eagle*, Paladin, 1992, p.228

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 96

²² Griffith, W. P., “Preaching Second to No Other under the Sun’: Edward Matthews, the Nonconformist Pulpit and Welsh Identity during the Mid-Nineteenth Century”, *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland C. 1700-2000*, Robert, Pope (ed.), University of Wales Press, Cardiff, Wales, 2001, p. 61.

representation on the national and racial level and did its best to reverse the negative image of the Welsh. It aimed to unite the Welsh both linguistically and culturally.

With the influence of nonconformism, according to W.P.Griffith, “at a time of dominant imperial and British values, religion gave Wales one means of marking itself out as special”.²³ In the 20th century, this spirit of revivalism was going to be one of the formative elements of Welsh nationalism and influence the foundation of Plaid Cymru and other nationalistic Welsh organizations. In the 20th century, nonconformist movement led to the disestablishment of the Anglican Church and establishment of Church in Wales. If today Wales has a parliament of its own and Welsh culture is drawing worldwide attention in any platform, the role of the nonconformist movement must be thought upon and examined once again. Nonconformism’s remarkable feature is that although it started as a religious movement, it soon turned into an independence struggle which aimed at acting as an organizing principle of social and cultural life in Wales. It proved so effective that Welsh church began to be regarded as Welsh nation, and Welsh nation was associated with the Welsh church. In addition, it not only affected Wales alone and became a triggering effect in the American Revolution. That is why nonconformism itself deserves being studied upon in contemporary fields of study relating postcolonialism and identity.

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²³ Griffith, W. P., p. 76

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