

Eric Wolf: Discussion of History, Culture and Power

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Abstract

The concepts of culture, history, and power are the key areas in contemporary anthropology. In this light, the main thrust of this paper is to examine how Eric Wolf conceptualizes these three concepts. More specifically, I have tried to reveal how Wolf's personal life history, class identity, and nationality have influenced his academic contributions and theoretical position in anthropology. In addition, this paper deals with the understanding of power relations and its interrelationships with the state, history, religion, social organization and culture. Finally, it concludes in understanding Wolf's arguments regarding the concepts of class, identity, history and power as ever-present and interconnected phenomena.

1. Introduction

This paper is prepared from the writings and thoughts of Eric Wolf - one of the early advocates for cultural anthropology. I would like to reveal in this paper that how an anthropologist's life history, ethnic background, and national identity have become important in understanding his/her theoretical position and intellectual orientations in anthropology. It seems significant that how anthropologists practice anthropology in different steps of their lives, which shape their theoretical orientations in response to wider politics, personal identities, individual roles, dominant power, and trainings. In this regards, I have stated my arguments by incorporating some events of Wolf's personal life experiences, especially during the time of the Nazi German movement, and the Second World War, have inspired him in his anthropological research work and in the development of different theoretical insights.

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To understand Wolf's central arguments, I have discussed some of his early, middle and contemporary writings from his various contributions towards the understanding of on movements, power, history, and culture in anthropology. From his early works, I have identified some of his works on peasant societies; from his middle period (writings in the 1970s and 1980s) I have included the books which focused on history and religion studies (Wolf:1982, 1984); and, from the contemporary period, I incorporate a discussion of his last two books (Wolf, 1999, 2001) on the concept of power. I would like to confess that I have not incorporated much works done by other anthropologists on history, culture, and power, however, I have tried to incorporate different arguments on the concept of 'power' from Wolf's early works to the contemporary works. Along with these issues, this paper is devoted to understand Wolf's views in conceptualizing history, culture, and power in anthropology.

2. Eric Wolf : A Quick Look on his Life Trajectory

The son of an Austrian soldier (in World War-I) and a Russian woman, Wolf was born in 1923 in Vienna which was a crossroads for many people including those of the Northern Bohemia and Czech-German languages (Kyung Lim 1999: 2). In 1933, the year that the Nazis came to power in Germany, his family moved to Tannwald in the Sudetenland because of a long standing interethnic conflict between the Czechs and the Germans. His father became the manager over there of a textile mill, and was charged with rationalizing the production process by introducing such improvements as continuing shifts and increased speed. As a result of these forced movements from one place to another, his family suffered a lot.

In 1938, he was sent to England for his higher studies where he was introduced to the idea of thinking "systematically" about natural phenomenon. Though he was not convinced with that idea, however, since then, he started thinking how far human being and societies are studied "systematically" like natural science. There are many dominant and powerful systems in this world and human are closely related with these systems. In the early 1940, when an invasion across the channel seemed imminent, the English round up all "enemy aliens" and he was

sent to an interment camp near Liverpool (Kyung Lim 1999: 2). There he met with Jewish scholars and socialists who tried to build morale by organizing lectures and discussions. Wolf also talked on "the ideology of the Biologists". One of the lectures was Norbert Elias, who spoke about 'monopolies of power and the net work of social relationships' (Kyung Lim 1999: 2). From these lectures he got the idea that "an individual is born into an established network of people"; and that, in turn, opened his eyes to the social sciences and his first serious encounter with Marxist theories (Wolf, 2001: 3). In the late 1940s, soon after Paris fell to the German army, he and his family boarded one of the last ships to the United States. He was admitted into Queen's College in New York but before graduating he left school and joined the army. After the war he returned to college and graduated in 1946. In the same year he entered the Ph.D. program of anthropology at Columbia University. Here he, along with other graduate students, formed a study group named the "Mundial Upheaval Society" (MUS) and during these years he read three landmark books: Karl Wittfogel's *Witchcrafts and Gesellschaft Chains* (1931), Paul Sweezy's *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (1942), C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) all of which suggested that anthropology could gain much from Marxism. He participated in Julian Steward's Puerto Rico research project (1948-49) and it resulted in his Ph.D. dissertation (1951) on "Plantation economy and patron-client relationship". After that he did not look back. He became active within the American Anthropological Association where he helped found the 'Committee on Ethics'. In that capacity, Wolf brought in light the issues of ethics in anthropological research, more specially helped to expose CIA-funded anthropological research work in Thailand. As an anthropologist he was brave enough to involve himself in many different political movements and he was active in the anti-Vietnam movement in the USA. He had a long teaching and research career in different universities in the USA but he finally settled at the City University of New York.

I have discussed different phases of Wolf's life because several times, during the World War I and II, his ethnic identity, nationality, familial network, were encountered by the dominant power structure. Wolf (2001) expressed later from the different experiences as some one from 'minority' identity during the war period that the class struggle is not

just a theoretical construct but as something which has constant existence in the real world (Wolf 2001: 1). He related his personal life experience to his anthropological writing, which in turn informed his research. In the journey of his life, he tried to understand the concepts such as: race, class, identity and power as interconnected phenomenon. Now I will explain Wolf's earlier works on peasant societies and their movements, which were perceived and explained differently from conventional anthropological researches.

3. Earlier Works on Peasants Societies and Movements

The "Peasant Question" was one of Wolf's prime areas of study in anthropology. Wolf started his career as an anthropologist by studying peasant societies. Since the 1950s, he was involved in peasant societies through his work with Julian Steward and through his own work in Mexico. In his book *Peasants* (Wolf 1966), Wolf explained the concept of peasant and the different roles of the peasant mode of organizations. Furthermore, he also described the important roles of friendship, kinship and patron-client relations or factions in the peasant society. According to him, the peasant world is not amorphous but is, instead, an ordered world possessing its own particular forms of organization. He argues that peasants should not to be understood in terms of backwardness, underdevelopment, or as unskilled traditionalism.

As an anthropologist, he does not explain peasant society as "traditional" which portrait peasants in isolation with others. Wolf (1956) explained that peasants are linked with markets, money, patrons, multinationals, social organizations and different power structures (Wolf, 1956: 1065). He studied peasant society as a changing society, rather than as closed, and peasants are related to a world system in many ways. In his Ph.D. research, for example, Wolf (1951) explained that Puerto Rican communities and their socio-cultural traits could not be understood correctly unless we consider the impact of nationwide power relations, international trade, and world markets (Addink in Kyung Lim 1999: 1). However, historically peasants are important in anthropology, because peasant societies are going to be ruined as a result of industrial development.

3.1 Capitalist Interventions and Movements in Peasant societies

Like others (see; Shanin 1984, Chayanov 1986), Wolf's long-term academic engagement with peasant societies, tend him in viewing peasants not as an isolated, static, or homogenous group but are historically connected entity within the world capitalist system. Wolf explained that the world as interconnected and changing, rather than as fixed for all time, and he criticized the anthropologists who tend to interpret society and its people as always having the same constant, unchanging shape (Wolf, 1988: 753). According to him, this static approach what anthropologists were incorporated in the past failed to understand the constant processes of change within a society or the influence on other societies.

Wolf begins his analysis with the impact of commercial agriculture on peasant life. In Britain, France, and the USA, this development transformed agrarian society into a modern society through a 'bourgeois demographic revolution', but in the peasant societies this transformation provides a different picture. The integrity and equilibrium of rural communities were shattered by the intrusion of a market economy. Peasants lost their traditional land ownership for the establishment of plantations and other large enterprises. As a result of the modernization and commercialization of agriculture, and the accompanying process of the transformation from a pre-industrial to a colonial society that produced raw materials, peasants were removed to remote and unfertile land. Alternatively, they were pushed to work as unskilled laborers in plantations, mines, or road and railway construction through either direct or indirect compulsion. Those who remained in the communities were controlled by the values of the market.

Peasants are also confronted with unequal power relations as an organized force in the different historical events of colonialism, imperialism, and industrialization. Peasants have to produce surplus as gifts, tributes, and tax for different powerful institutions. Therefore, in different contexts peasants face power and move against power. As a continuation of his peasant study, he also discussed the different peasant movements and violence which are an outcome of suppression and exploitation by industrial development and world capitalism.

Wolf (1969) explained in his book *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* that the socialist revolution against capitalism has occurred not in industrial societies but in agricultural countries as well, despite Marx's expectations that it would occur in the working class rather than the peasantry. The peasants had to revolt in order to escape from this capitalist exploitation. According to Wolf, the revolution initiated by peasants handed over power to a group to solve the agrarian problems. Wolf examines these problems in the context of the revolutions in Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba. He argued that in pre-revolutionary conditions, the peasants of these six countries were controlled by the political forces. According to Wolf, only the middle peasants can lead the revolution because they are not completely dependent on an employer, landlord or the market, and their distance from the center gives them political freedom. I am not going to go into the long debate about how effective his notions were - because he did not incorporate the working class in the cities into his argument, and moreover, how far the middle peasants could carry the revolution is a matter of debate. However, with these arguments and six case studies from the six countries, Wolf had attempted to explain the peasantry as a class as well as the ways, they are able to organize movements. He also used his case material to raise different arguments challenging the Marxist view that peasants are unable to make a revolution without outside leadership (Wolf 1969: 294). Trotsky also argued ideas that were similar to those of Marx, that the peasants must follow either the workers or the bourgeoisie. However, Wolf (1969) disagreed with them and said that if we follow the history of peasant's movements, peasants followed not the worker but the intelligentsia in arms and it was more realistic. Thus, Wolf also argued that the American wars with Vietnam as a peasant's war against the imperialist nations.

4. Middle Works on Religion, Power, and History

As Wolf's middle period of works, I have incorporated two books published during the eighties, and which were discussed on power with relation to religion, symbols, states, churches, gender and history. In 1984, he edited a book, *Religion, Power and Protest in Local Communities: The Northern Shore of Mediterranean*, and made some

valuable comments on the relations between religion, politics, power, and other constructions which are important in understanding his perceptions of power in diversified contexts.

In his editorial comments, Wolf (1984) criticizes the established anthropological approaches to religion studies, and the ways of writing about "primitive" people and "exotic" practices. He argued that the functionalist anthropologists explained about the role of religion in society but still far from answering the question: What is religion? He said that we are bounded by our religious "common sense", by religious traditions and culture, and by such polarities as natural/supernatural, visible/invisible, profane/sacred and ordinary/extraordinary. As an anthropologist, Wolf continually seeks to understand how human beings convert the universe into a humanly usable habit (Wolf 1984: 2). Moreover, he described the importance of the study of religion in contrast to the realms of local level law, economics, and politics.

4.1 Religion, Gender, and Power

Wolf argued religion as a powerful mechanism which controls humans not only as a spiritual power but also as an ideology, myth and politics. Furthermore, he argued that generally the powerful social class or an organized social structure control religion. In this context he recalled the paradigmatic Christian myth of the fall from grace and the loss of paradise to describe the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam in their treatment of sexuality, marriage and procreation. From the Bible, Wolf chose the story of Eve, Adam, Lucifer, the fruits of the tree of good and evil and Gods punishments for sin and raised some points, such as:

1. Human kind has come to know (sexual) good and evil by committing sin.
2. The guilt for the original sin is not equally shared between the sexes. Eve is stigmatized.
3. The power of the church and the priesthood is established on earth as a purification mechanism (Wolf 1984:3).

Christian (1972) said, "Ever since Eve, women have been seen as temptresses, slaves to passion, and the cause of man's down fall" (Christian in Wolf 1984: 4). God is viewed as the supernatural master who controls the earth through the hierarchal Church, with the priests

being superior to laymen, and men considered superior to women. Attwater (1999) mentioned that, as a result of this trust, women were not allowed to serve Mass at the altar (Attwater in Wolf 1984). Christian (1972) said that within Latin American churches women are condemned and they have to maintain cycles of purification (Christian in Wolf 1984: 5).

However, in Islam, although the Quran reproduced the same story, the concept of original sin is not present. Even though Islam does not attack sexuality as anything but a practice in society, there are still some boundaries between the rights of men and the rights of women. Women are viewed as a towline of Satan and are controlled by the men. In these practices, the elder male controlled sexuality and sexual politics (Wolf 1984: 6). In this society, rules are constructed using religious aspects such that women are less prioritized to inherit property rights. Thus, religion is not just a cultural system and ritual process (see Geertz; Turner, Douglas) rather a power mechanism which creates different ideologies, make subordination, and human distinct role in the society.

4.2 State and Religious Institutions

Wolf identified powerful and dominant relations between the Church and the State and the way that the Church contributes to the process of state formations and the control of individuals. By introducing laws of monogamy, adultery, marriage, divorce and inheritance the church controls individual behavior, particularly those of women. Ideologically, the church is male and therefore women have rarely benefited from the religious laws. Wolf said that the Church reduces the influence of the relations of large scale kin groups and makes people more individual. John Boss (1970) suggested that the success of Lutheranism caused the Church to regard "household religion as a seedbed of subversion" (Boss 1970 in Wolf 1984:7). Thus, the religious individuals who are a by-product of Church politics, and who are less bound by a long kin-based lineage become more easily controllable as individuals by the state power. According to Wolf the church create individuals as citizens for the state power which controls human by its unequal laws. He identified a deep relation between religious institution and the state both are part of controlling people in the society.

Wolf explained that nowadays churches are not only related with national state power but also with international politics and controlled by the world religious organizations. In capitalist states churches are welcomed as their different institutions and universities contribute to the production of effective individuals for the capitalist market. During the anti-communist and pro-communist movements in the 1940s, the church played an important role in using religious notions for protecting capitalism.

Therefore, it is understood that the anthropologists who are involved in the study of religion should not merely to explain religion as parts of different stages of rituals and their functions in society. Rather, in many societies, religion creates unequal relations between the priest and the layman, between men and women, between religious and secular. Religion also provides a powerful ideology for the state to control her people as individuals. Religions involve not only spiritual phenomenon for social scientists, but also political, economic, and historical phenomenon. Religion, quite obviously, carries with it some unequal, hierarchical notions of power. Thus, it can be said from Wolf's discussions that religion is a powerful mechanism to understand different forms of power in the society.

4.3 Arguments on History

Wolf (1988) argued that the notions of the state, capital, modern, tradition, tribal society and community are all constructed in the course of capitalist expansion around the globe (Wolf 1988: 753). The world of humankind constitutes of a manifold, totally interconnect process, and therefore it would be blocking ideas if we differentiated the application of history. By raising these arguments he wants to understand the historical dimension of exploitation, unequal power relations and the power involved in the construction of history.

In addition, he also said that history allow us to look at the processes unfolding, intertwining, spreading out and dissipating our time. It helps us to see and inquire about such things as households, regions, locations, and national entities and to view them as problematic – that is, shaped, reshaped and changing over time as a process of changing

social organization (Wolf 2001: 391) Without history we are unable to see the whole picture. He said that microscopic history and processes of organizations that consider power are important elements for anthropological research (Wolf 2001: 391).

In 1982, Wolf published *Europe and the People without History*. In this book he synthesized hundreds of empirical and theoretical studies which had never been considered together. With the help of Marxist theories and political economy ideas, he tried to understand the history of the changing relation between the capitalist classes (Europe and North America) and other parts of the world. He explained the general processes of mercantile and capitalist development while at the same time followed their effects on the micro populations studied by the ethnographers and ethno historians. He studied history differently and tried to free himself from the dominant construction of European and Enlightenment history. He argued that it is not true, as the anthropologists who have studied different simple societies in the past had claimed that they do not have a history. Wolf argued that since 1570 European trade goods have appeared in Nigeria as we are currently connected ecologically, demographically, economically, and politically. Different societies and population were also connected in the past through colonialism, business, and the slave trade. Therefore, if the industrial revolution was the history of the enlightened world, obviously others part of the world is part of that same history. So it is difficult to say "East is the East, and West is the West, and never the twain shall meet" or that native people do not have any history (Wolf 1982: 7). According to Wolf, what we know as history is the success story of western society but not the complete story of the world. If we perceive some thing called "ethno- history" or "black history" and then ignore them from the trajectory of history. Question can be raised than what is the real history?

In addition, Wolf (1982) discusses the effects of western penetration into Iberian America, North America, Siberia, Africa and the Orient. He also argued that in the name of fur trades the Europeans caused many forms of destruction by decimating various animal species and by spreading deadly diseases to the human populations (both intentionally and unintentionally). The most serious effects were on local cultures by

forcing them to pay harsh tributes or by merely providing them with guns and alcohol.

Wolf explained the historical slave trade of Africa, the exploitation and losses in Latin America by mining and spreading disease, and the European incursions into Asia from the 15th century to the 18th century. He also mentioned the way that India, and the trade between India and China, played an important role in the British Capital formation at the start of the industrial revolution and explains these issues as they contribute to the unity of the world as a locus of exchange.

Moreover, Wolf (1982) discussed the state's role in the emergence of a free capitalist economy. The state was a collector of tribute, a defender of capital and a subsidizer of new enterprise. To understand the interconnected nature of change Wolf ties the proletarianization of the England peasant, the creation of large estates and masses of landless peasants in Egypt, and the spread of North American slavery to the technological advances in England's textile mills. To me this is also a simplification in his analysis because he missed the historical context of Egypt and England.

Wolf described the ways that the tropical cash crop, large-scale migration, and the development of cities in Europe created a working force for industrial expansion. However, capitalism needed even greater labor flexibility and mobility to maximize investment opportunities. Wolf felt that capitalism also divided the working class by appeals to racial or ethnic distinctions (Wolf 1982: 380). In the past, Rome and other classical empires also tended to create ethnicity by displacing masses of people and by loosely integrating them into large-scale politics. Economic growth creates new types of diversity.

From this analysis, it is observed that the small societies what anthropologists are defined as isolated but rather connected with unequal capitalist structures in many ways. If the Europeans have history anthropological "others" are the part of that history. He tried to explain the different stages of the historical development of capitalism in the European countries and America and the ways that the peripheral countries have been changed in response to these forces. Western

capitalism did not only make profit, it also created an ideology of power, domination and history which is still controlling the whole world as an imaginative force. From these historical relations of the world Wolf identified the complex multidimensional power relations between Europe and the rest of the world.

5. Contemporary Writings on Power

The two most recent published books by Wolf are incorporated in this section as his contemporary works. These are *Envisioning Power* (1999) and *Pathways of Power* (2001). In both of these books, Wolf discusses the different dimensions and issues of power relations

as a control mechanism in the society. This expression of power has been found through out his writings on peasants, Peasant War, inter-group relations in Mexico and the development of plantation system and particularly in Europe and the People Without History (Yenjoyan in Wolf 1999: X).

According to Wolf, power is visible in every relation among people (Wolf 1999: 4). He argued that he himself first encountered power (in this formation) when he heard Norbert Elias lectures in the detention center in Liverpool, England. He also mentioned that 'More or less fluctuating balances of power constitute an integral element of all human relation' (Wolf 1999: 4). Thus, power works differently in interpersonal relations, in institutional areas, and on the level of a whole society. Wolf described four modalities of power in social relations, such as:

1. Power as the capability of a single person.
2. Power can be expressed by an 'ego' towards 'alter' in the forms of social interactions or interpersonal relations (Weberian View).
3. This mode refers as tactical or organizational power which controls a given context in which people exhibit their capabilities and interact with others mode. This mode explains the 'instrumentalities of power' which is not operate only interpersonal terms but in a much broader sense.
4. The power manifests in relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and control the setting that is called structural power (Wolf 1990: 586, 1999: 05).

In Marxist terms, Structural power refers to deploy and allocate social labor and Foucault (1984) also described this same form of power as 'governance' which he uses to refer to the exercise of action upon action (Wolf 1999:05). In Wolf's (2001) view, 'the notion of structural power is useful precisely because it allows as to delineate how the forces of the world impinge upon the people' (Wolf 2001: 385). He thinks that this is important to our present world in relation between tactical power and structural power, which helps us to study different societies. He also wants to find ways of interrogating such materials to define the relations of power that are played out in social arrangements and cultural configurations, and to trace out the possible ways in which these relation of power implicate this idea.

5.1 Idea and Power

Wolf wants to explore the relation between power and ideas. According to him, "each mode requires an ideological definition of who does what to whom in the operations of the mode, which is translated into aspirations to and assertion of asymmetrical power". (Wolf 1999: 01) – this became the subject of envisioning power. He said that in complex societies, it is the upper classes that produce the ideas that other people attempt to follow. Wolf said that the concept of ideology has a problematic history and that it is the Enlightenment which, strove to free human kind from mystification and error and to clear the way for truth. But humanity cannot be free from the ruling class who produced 'reason'. In these regard Marx and Engels argued that the leading ideas of a society are the ideas of the ruling classes. According to Marx these leading ideas are not only mask but also veils rendering people unable to see how social reality was actually constructed (Merquior in Wolf in 2001: 379). Creation and celebrations of rituals are the one of the processes of constructing ideology and exercising power. For example, in the past Indian kings always created different ceremony and rituals for spreading their fame or collecting more tax. Everybody had to maintain this order and practice that constructed ideology. Therefore, the people who create rituals and produce ideology, obviously they are powerful. The people, who lead the rituals, they are also powerful.

5.2 State and Power

Wolf identifies state as another phenomenon what produces ideas to hold the populations and manage the crisis. In the past, ideas of imperialist domination or resistance, communism or anticommunism, fascism or anti fascism, holy wars were produced, and reached everyday life and created family values. From this idea Wolf (1999) criticized cultural personality school that tries to see society and culture as homogenous and this homogeneity lays in the prevalent technique of child training. But Wolf believed the heterogeneous character of the society where household and family have no control in the formation of the social structure. The class rule and hegemony, state policy, law and public institutions as well as child training shaped the guiding ideas, attitudes and the mode of actions. However, Wolf recognized Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitats', shows how people acquire durable and transposable dispositions conditioning to the institutional landscape of societal settings (Wolf 1999:10). So historically, the nation state, national identity, nationalism that is already established helps a child to develop his personality not only single society and culture but also how nation-state grows, nationalism manifested is also linked with the various levels of power structure. He also explained the functional relation of ideas and power which was discussed in his earlier book- *The Social Organization of Mecca and The Origin of Islam* (1951). In his book, Wolf, he explained the concept 'Umma' (build up around the worship of one overarching God) which relates different tribes together. This religious beliefs and constructed ideology have power to hold a nation together (Wolf 1999: 12).

5.3 Symbol and power

According to Wolf (2001), symbolic anthropology as a school of thought emerged during the sixties which focuses on the intertwining of symbols in creating cultural mindsets and culturally constructed injections for action (Wolf 2001: 371). However, this school explains symbol as "timeless general essences." However, Wolf argued that in the society symbols are produced and controlled within structural power. Thus, the role of society merely produce symbols in order to produce social labor and surplus to maintain that existing structural power. Hence, symbols carry both cultural meaning as well as social

power. On the other hand, Shalins (1976) identified the locus of power in both simple and complex societies. In primitive society, the locus of symbolic productivity is kinship where market act as a locus of power in complex capitalist society.

In the book, Mexican Image of the Virgin Of Guadalupe (1952) Wolf also analyzed symbols and icons as a collective representation of collective national identity. The icon of the Virgin had played significance role at several junctures of Mexicans history such as: movement for independent from Spain in 1810, they used emblem of the Virgin in the battle flag, Mexican revolution, and Catholic churches. Wolf also observed bore signs while he was passing through rural villages and people expressed about themselves as they are neither protestant nor communist – they only believe in the Virgin of Guadalupe. Then, Wolf said that symbol is meaningful in multiple realities however, we cannot go far to uncover those symbols without knowing the totality of the history of a given society where symbols are functioning.

Wolf also argued that symbolic anthropology have operated and explained language- as a model of equal and power neutral communicator, cultural bearers, homogenous speakers of the language. But wolf was not convinced with that generality of symbolic anthropology rather argued speaker is not an abstract "I" or "we". They are also equally recognized as " you", " they" and "us". All these categories are related with unequal power relation and social differentiations. All speakers in a linguistic community may use language but what some people say and make others to say is more burdened with social power than are the world of others.

5.4 Social Organization and Power

Social organization and social groupings, as building blocks for the structure of the society are not a powerless concept. Thus, social organizations which deal with different categorizations like gender, generation, rank, and other social groupings such as lineage, kinship, marriage are all intertwined with the concept of power. However, in the past anthropological literature, there were little concern to discuss the influence of power in shaping, maintaining and destabilizing the social

organizations. He said that organizations are not the product or outcome rather organization should be viewed as a process and as a "flow of action". For example, to understand the dynamics and process of the social organizations we can ask questions like- what is going on in the organizations. Why it is going on? Who is engaged in the process of organizations? With whom and when? All the answers to these above questions are closely related to some forms of power relations within the society.

5.5 Culture and Power

In earlier anthropological literature, any events in the society were explained as to signify the cultural unites such as- ethos, paradigms or cultural structure. However, cultural ethos and unity does not work all the time. We cannot understand global warming only by cultural logic rather we need to explain the power relations in association with the global Warming. Therefore, what is significant to anthropologists is to study the contemporary multi-cultural societies in the changing global power structure. Wolf (2001) argued that it is not enough to understand the transformation of agriculture, settlement, sociopolitical organization and relation of war and peace with a cultural structure, which is significant to anthropologists. Rather, we should take further steps of understanding to the consequences of the exercise of power (Wolf 1994:5, 2001:397).

According to Wolf, cultural forms are always intrinsically connected to the domain of public power. Therefore, power relations exist within groups and group throughout time and space. He argued that property and production relations of power are the basis of all class relations. He described this form of power as controlling and converging mechanism in the class-based society. The different class interests are manifested through the cultural hegemony which are created and ritualized by the power structure. Wolf (2001) alerts that there is no single source or essentialized entity through and from, which all power relations emanate. He said culture is fully embedded on power relations; nothing is neutral in mode of control. Wolf (1999) discussed different understanding of the problem of power and the interplay between power relation and cultural form through the analysis of three cases, the

Kwakiutl, the Aztecs, and National Socialism in Germany of 1933s. He viewed power as cultural and the vice versa.

Finally, he conceptualized culture in relation to history. He thinks that the root of culture is embedded in German thought, American context, the Enlightenment and civilization which found its anchor in England and France (Wolf 2001: XIII). He was critical of the cultural boundary, homogeneity and romantic (e.g. cultural truth, soulful, sense of beauty) idea of culture and its extreme form of cultural relativism.

His major point is that romantic ideas of culture are not simply shared but also evolve through the unifying efforts of the elites, ruling classes, and chiefs who both use the means of establishing borders and determine how these borders are guarded from outsiders. Therefore the idea of homogeneity of culture is a ruling class construction to control any emerging ideologies for their own benefits. From an analysis of these cases, Eric Wolf (2001) explains that power is multi-stranded and explains that the elite controlled extension of the past, the future and all nature. Those who exercised power used the entire cultural world, as expressed in mythic time and heroic events, in ways that made them pan-human. In his two most recent books he demonstrates how power and ideas are connected through the medium of culture.

Conclusion

Eric Wolf understood anthropology as a cumulative undertaking, as well as a collective quest that moves in ever expanding circles. As an anthropologist he gives a lot of attention to peasant society, history, social relation, and the processes of organization such as class, power and the state. He was influenced by of the idea political economy school and wanted to study society within the relations of a world system and attempted to explain that many phenomena are interconnected and constantly changing rather than fixed for all time. When he tries to describe any issues he first discusses the contemporary thought surrounding them and gives their historical background. Through out his journey in anthropology, Wolf contested different dominant concepts and thoughts in anthropology. From his writings he also wants to give some directions and theorizations to the contemporary anthropologists. Much of his time was spent studying

peasants but he also moved on to different venues within anthropology. He was highly critical of structural functionalist ideas because, he perceived society and all social relations as changing mechanism. In addition, according to Wolf, every phenomenon within the society is interconnected and historically linked with ideas of the enlightenment and historical emergence of global capitalism. Through out the discussion, Wolf tried to reveal how power as a changing force is deeply rooted in every forms of human relation, and how it shapes/reshapes such relation with relation to global structure. Wolf also observed that power is exercised and practised through social organization, culture, society, idea, history, religion and so on. At the end I would like to say that the significance of Wolf's works lies in personal life experiences and understanding of power relations and their interrelationships with the state, history, politics, religion and culture.

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End Notes*

I am aware of Wolf's contribution to Islam, which is widely appreciated in anthropology. In addition, Wolf (1957) also discussed the emergence of Islam against the Pre Islamic Arab society. However, because of the scope of the paper, I am not going to dwell on the issue here.

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