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Gavin Smith

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ment—he observes in the preface that there has been no comprehensive treatment of tradition (p. vii)—but the level of generalization will alienate some readers, particularly anthropologists, who by inclination and training are suspicious of sweeping assertions about human nature. Herzfeld espouses a carefully relativistic stance that is well suited to the explication of nationalist ideology, but his analysis of what will be (for most readers) obscure texts suffers from the lack of a transparent organization. As is often the case with the writings of symbolic anthropologists, Herzfeld's ability to relativize both epistemological and narrative (or literary) assumptions leaves him without a ready-made format (a tradition!) for the presentation of his arguments: what narrative techniques should we use to write a history about the development of the cultural presuppositions that underlie the writing of history? By contrast, Shils is supremely confident as a stylist, but, as I have suggested, his epistemology is often muddled. Fair enough: the strengths as well as the weaknesses of both of these books are compatible with the study of tradition, which concerns both epistemology and style.

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Is a Global Culture History Possible?

Eric WOLF, *Europe and the People Without History*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1982. 503 pages, US $29.95 (cloth), US $8.95 (paper).

By Gavin Smith
University of Toronto

Cultural Anthropology justifies its existence on the grounds that either the people studied are quaint and their difference is, of itself, interesting, or that the study of other people is in some way relevant to the home society which produces anthropologists.

The 'quaint' argument suggests that anthropologists are useful insofar as they translate the cryptic texts of alien cultures into comprehensible terms. That is why this kind of anthropologist is caught in a perpetual dilemma, for too good a translation might disintegrate the Other whose distinctiveness they are at pains to demonstrate. It is an anthropology of many veils and its project will never be completed.

It is possible that such a project might be interesting but not very important, except of course to professional anthropologists who write in journals and possibly to the objects of their study who do not read the journals. But there is a moral imperative here which has a proud tradition in the profession: fighting the war against ethnocentrism.

The 'relevance' argument is that the understanding of cultures which are not at the moment hegemonic is important; this also has its moral imperative. It may have to do with the possibilities of making development schemes work among 'other cultures' who continually mess them up, or it may have to do with a more revolutionary sentiment having to do with the character of struggle in non-western societies.

But this kind of anthropology was dealt a hard blow by Gundar Frank, and subsequent attempts by anthropologists to bed down with the avenging angel by embracing the notion of 'dependency' have only confirmed the subordinate position of the discipline. For *all* the cultures of interest to anthropologists were simply epiphenomena: the outer ripples on the wave of western expansionism.

Dependency theory may have had many and better predecessors but none whose arrival anthropologists themselves took so seriously. People whose very trade should have mitigated against it began to generalize about 'peripheral societies' with easy abandon. But nothing could disguise the fact that, in the last analysis, this was all necrophology. (Worsley wrote a dismal article called "The End of Anthropology", which may have been a play on words, but he slipped over into the Sociology Department nonetheless.)

It may be that anthropology is best preserved in a shrinking scholarly community by stressing the quaintness of its object. Be that as it may, it will always be hard to disregard entirely the power of those Frankian, Wallersteinian and Marxian arguments which stress the otherwhelming importance of capitalist expansion. And anyway, at the moment of their ascendancy, anthropology had

abandoned its own grand theories in favour of thick descriptions. Redfield's 'continuum', Steward's 'levels', as well as the new evolutionism, all fell into disarray before the respect given to the technical wizardry of micro-ethnography: the sciences of componential analysis, deep structures of the human mind and the measurement of ecological adaptations; or the art of hermeneutics.

In a world where human differences remain, just as the connections between those differences have become more widespread and well-travelled, anthropologists have become consigned to the task of describing isolated cultures, while leaving the connections which belie any such isolation to others. As such they have been ill-equipped to confront the challenge of world systems theories and for many the answer has been to retreat still further into exotica. Now, however, Eric Wolf has stepped forward to confront those for whom cultures are merely pockets not yet reached by capitalism with an argument on the same level of magnitude as their own. And we have a book whose scholarship and breadth is impressive. The question is: Does it carry the day?

Wolf's book is pre-eminently about connections. There are no cultural isolates. But it is premised on a still more profound conviction: that variability itself has been created by the connections. At one point Wolf quotes from an old text of Ber Borochev's, and the question asked is Wolf's own (as long as we remember that in 1937 the word 'national' closely resembled our own contemporary usage of 'ethnic'):

> why, on the one hand, the capitalist system appears as international, and destroys all boundaries between tribes and people and uproots all traditions, while on the other hand, it is itself instrumental in the intensification of international struggle and heightens national self-consciousness (p. 308).

In the process of the argument Wolf has a lot more to say than simply that capitalism "creates diversity, accentuating opposition and segmentation even as it unifies" (p. 383). But before pinpointing what the most original of his key points are and before answering the question of whether Wolf succeeds in his enterprise, we must reduce to a few lines the overall schema of this vast panoply.

Wolf strives to write "a global culture history" (p. ix) in which human variation is seen neither in terms of isolated cultural units nor as a function of primordial survivals crumbling before the onslaught of capitalism. He rejects either an approach which, because of the constraints of fieldwork, minimizes the role of variables emergent from a larger field, or an approach which sees the expansion of Western Europe in terms of a structurally uniform kind of capitalism. The richness of the material in *Europe and the People Without History* derives less from a love affair with historical detail than from a need to demonstrate the complexity and unevenness of the process by which direct producers were made available for surplus extraction by others.

This is not then, a book merely about how peripheral 'micropopulations' were brought under the influence of mercantilism first and then capitalism.

It is a book about the variety of ways in which *all* direct producers have been subordinated. The people most recognizable to anthropologists—who bear the names of specific cultures; Iroquois, Ashanti etc.—fall away as new kinds of production relations come to determine human variability: the organization of production on plantations, in mines and on cash-cropping family farms, for example.

Historically, there are three major periods to be dealt with. The first sees a world of many tributary 'civilizations' with kin-ordered micro-populations on the edge of these geographically dispersed centres. Here Wolf addresses the question of ecological differences in the determination of these centres and their particular characteristics. But his ultimate goal is to suggest why the Western European fringe eventually became the centre of a prolonged period of predatory expansion, which broke the bounds of 'civilizations' and 'micropopulations' to become essentially a 'world system': that is to say, a world the reproduction of whose parts became increasingly dependent on their connections with the whole.

But before that period of proper capitalism emerged, there was a crucial period of mercantile expansion. The crisis of feudalism was not met by the immediate emergence of nascent capitalism, but by mercantile expansion: the search for items of trade. This was a process which manifested immense variety, both historically and geographically. Merchants arose to service modes of production whose dominant characteristic was not itself trade but tribute. Mercantile relationships—theoretically presupposing a process of surplus transfer which does not require direct involvement in the process of production itself—were, in historical reality, infinitely variable both as a function of the position of trade *within* the emerging and expanding states (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British and so on) and as a function of the differing social systems exploited by the merchants *beyond* those states.

Wolf is at his most dazzling in this section. Other writers have addressed the merchant/surplus-producing-system relationship for one or two cases: here Wolf presents a survey of them all. And while each ethnographer will draw out his/her knife when reading Wolf's treatment of 'their' area of specialization, that would be to miss the point. Here is an object lesson to anthropologists in the importance of studying history. We see both the dense forms of Iberian trade in South America, the French, British and Russian trade in furs to the north and the slave trade in Africa, and also the dispersed forms in South and Southeast Asia.

Violence, exemplified in the greater technical advances in the means of war than in the means of production, is an essential component lying beneath every variation of this system. But more important for later developments on the periphery is the role of collusion, a feature which reached its apogee with Indian financial backers underwriting European merchant adventures to the East.

This then was the period of mercantile expansion and it too reached its limits, as had the tributary system out of which it emerged. Its crisis came with the inability to effect rational divisions of labour and technological innovations, and this can only be understood as long as we recognise that this was not merchant capitalism or capitalism of any kind, as Frank or Wallerstein would argue. "Capitalism to be capitalism must be capitalism-in-production" (p. 79). Indeed merchants, like peasants, have never emerged as dominant in a mode of production.

With the emergence of nascent capitalism in Britain at the end of the 18th century, we embark on a new era in which merchants became just one more machine which reduced useless expenditure of energy in trade and hence preserved for the capitalist more time to be devoted to production (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. II, 1956. Progress, Moscow: p. 134). This period can most usefully be seen in two phases. The first phase began when industrial capitalism was struggling to achieve maturity and we see how its demand effectively rewrote the history of the Southern slave plantation, displacing it westward and uprooting native peoples as it went; it also rigidified the Egyptian social structure and entirely modified vast areas of India.

In the second phase, industrial capitalism, now a mature and ungainly beast, reached its first crisis. This was the great depression of the last quarter of the 19th century. It was during this period that the territorial expansion usually associated with imperialism took place. In its wake a variety of production relationships came into being, but they all had as their common characteristic the fundamental capital/labour relationship. If commodities are nothing more than the frozen representation of the social relations under which they are produced, then wheat, rice, bananas, rubber, sugar, tea and many besides stood for variations in capitalist relations as they spread throughout the world.

And this spread, too, meant the great unleashing of free labour, now a commodity like any other. Well, not quite like any other: when capital began to move labour—from the great waves of trans-Atlantic migration to their Chinese and East Indian counterparts—it also moved cultures. Nor was the heart of capitalism itself anything like a melting pot: it created its own divisions and identities. And so Wolf brings us back, once more, to a discussion of culture: "Within an ever more integrated world, we witness the growth of ever more *diverse* proletarian diasporas" (reviewer's italics) (p. 383). And so he ends,

> I continue to believe that the human sciences cannot do without a concept of culture. I think of the present discussion as a contribution to an ongoing debate on how the concept can be recast in the light of new understandings (p. 425).

What then are the contributions? Wolf's formulation of three essential modes of production, capitalist, tributary and kin-ordered is clear and useful but not especially controversial. More controversy will arise from his emphasis on mercantile, rather than merchant capitalist, expansion, and especially fruitful, I think, is his notion of 'capitalist differentiation'.

Wolf's rejection of the notion of a period of merchant capitalism and of Wallerstein's even broader definition of capitalism, is not merely a terminological issue. By distinguishing this mercantile period from capitalism proper, Wolf is able to demonstrate how it was an essential feature of tributary modes, why the role of state power became such an important component in its continuation and, above all why, because of its inability really to take hold of the process of production which itself generated capital, the period faced a crisis. By making such an emphatic distinction Wolf in effect makes *trade relations* prior to capitalism an essential first step in the incorporation of the periphery in what was to become a world system.

It is common ground for anthropologists to accept, with Marx, that the differing ways in which capitalism has penetrated and transformed pre-existing social forms has to do with the kind of social forms that were encountered. Wolf's view of capitalism is, however, considerably more challenging. For he suggests that the unevenness of

capitalist development was also generated within the mode itself. He calls this 'differentiation' and he uses Mandel's concept of 'long waves' as one of its manifestations and the differing organic composition of capital from one sector to another and among firms within a sector, as the other manifestation.

The specific demands which capitalism makes in any time or place are by no means uniform. On the one hand, these requirements vary with periods of boom and periods of recession. On the other hand, firms and sectors of the economy vary in the mixes of labour, machinery, state infrastructure etc., which they require. The combination of these two factors, as well as the resistance which it encounters, make for a wide variety of different forms of capitalism and suggest that, if the task of anthropology is to examine human variation, then it is not a task that ceases as capitalism spreads.

But while emphasizing the variety of different working classes around the world, Wolf disappoints by ending up with too much respect for the endless rolling on of capital and too little for the forms of resistance to it about which he has previously written so well. In the latter chapters, our vision becomes far too much like the fleeting view of the plantation worker glimpsed from a speeding train's window.

Capitalism, as well as the mercantile system which preceded it, required not only a class of direct producers within the bounds of each capitalist state, but gradually exploited the 'micropopulations' beyond. Whether essential to capitalist production or not, it is an historical fact that, besides the class relationship between capitalist and worker, capitalism has also involved that other relationship: between itself and micropopulations.

Of course at one time micropopulations too existed within Europe itself. Eventually their transformation came to make up the stuff of the formation of working classes to which Wolf refers. And to the extent that they were *not* transformed they continue, in the form of the Basques, Occitanians or Welsh, to question the legitimacy of the hegemonic state cultures in which they are found. Meanwhile, capitalist social relations in one form or another have extended beyond Western Europe to become a world system. (Indeed Frank has recently argued that the socialist bloc itself must be understood within the framework of such a world system.)

So a process has occurred, a process in which the 'cultures' of such fascination to anthropologists have become the raw material for the formation of (widely different kinds of) working classes. And the same process occurred within Europe, though through a different history and at a different time. Surely then contemporary anthropology must now ask the question posed implicitly by the project of Wolf's book: just what *is* the connection between subordinated cultures and subordinated classes?

Wolf has demonstrated brilliantly that the idea of integrated and bounded cultural systems does not stand up to critical examination. Diffusionists, evolutionists and so on, may protest that there is nothing new about this. But the point is that what is being proposed is that cultural identity emerges from a process of interdependency and opposition between groups. It is a dialectical process which would invert, for example, the proposition that 'modernization' reduces cultural pluralism. Contrary to such a prediction, the process of (often forced) interdependency implicit in modernization—the spread of civil society—would, according to Wolf's view of the generation of culture, have as its other arm a potential of distinctiveness, of opposition and resistance to assertions of the universality of civil truths; in short 'progress'.

Of course the combination of interdependence and opposition is the basis upon which Marxian class analysis rests. But if the notion of 'cultures' devoid of interdependence and opposition is weak, the notion that political expressions of the contemporary working classes are to be understood in terms of class consciousness devoid of cultural distinctiveness is equally weak. Anti-hermeneutic, Althusserian structuralism is in disarray: class analysis requires more than the structural determination of subjectivity. But, if cultural identity is ineluctably bound up with dependency and conflict, while class identity is never devoid of cultural specificity, then issues which anthropologists have kept so distinctly separate must surely be addressed as one set of questions: What *is* the connection between dominated cultures and dominated classes? Is the one particularistic and exclusive and the other universalistic and open-ended? One suspects that no such easy lines can be drawn.

And yet anthropology has persistently shied away from making this its central problematic and hence being a science of the contemporary world. It thus remains divided between those fascinated "with the study of the unravelling of what is 'in the heads' of single culture-bearing populations" (p. 16) and those concerned to make the study of non-capitalist peoples relevant in what appears to be an increasingly capitalist-dominated world.

Wolf has then, at the same time, both vindicated the profession of anthropology and challenged anthropologists to take seriously the 'connections' which extend beyond the village pump.