

traditions and ironies return the reader to Hammerton's central claim: that, while it is possible to trace the "progressive weakening of the old paradigm of religiously sanctioned patriarchal authority", the evidence simply does not support a "whiggish" interpretation of this history, which would celebrate the gradual displacement of a harsh patriarchalism by a kinder, gentler model of masculine behaviour. Hammerton's study introduces new questions and new problems and helps to set the agenda for further studies of this important topic.

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Eric R. Wolf — *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. ix, 339.

This is not an easy book, and it is difficult to imagine that its reception will be warm or its use all that wide. If this is the case, it will be an intellectual loss, for the topic and approach are both significant and novel. Wolf's book is a meditation on power as it relates to culture. It journeys across time and space to explore the Aztecs of fifteenth-century Mesoamerica, the aboriginal Kwakiutl, a Pacific Northwest tribe which became a staple of ethnographic inquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Third, "National Socialist", Reich, a fleeting but decidedly more catastrophic moment of power's perversions, lasting from 1933 to 1945. Human sacrifice, the potlach, and a brutalizing construction of the Aryan *Volk* and its historical destiny become, in Wolf's analytic orchestration, the ritualized ideologies of specific, historically constituted regimes of power capable of sustaining governing authorities that commanded allegiances, managed social labour, shaped human practice and thought, and translated material being into a seemingly understandable set of cosmological imperatives.

It is an expression of Wolf's range and synthetic imagination that such disparate social formations can be brought together. Particularly in the cases of Aztec human sacrifice and the Kwakiutl potlach (the latter Wolf regards as "the display and affirmation of privileges" and "transfers of valuables in the presence of witnessing guests", all of which marked life-cycle stages and confirmed the structures of authority and governance), this book develops suggestive and insightful readings (pp. 112–113). Wolf is able to take specific ritualized ideologies and practices of an extreme and flamboyant character, albeit events somewhat episodic in their spirituality and festivity, and work them through anthropological constructions and readings in ways that have both conceptual flair and analytic innovation. The result is a portrait of power in social motion, one that illuminates complexity, depth, and texture in the relations of life's reciprocities and restraints. At the foundation of Wolf's vision of the power operating in these ostentatious regimes is the role of myth, display, and regenerative reconstructions, all of which solidified relations of hierarchy and inequality. For Wolf they ensured the continuity of structural governance and its capacity both to coerce and to coax allegiance, a process, in short, of the making of hegemony. Students of "the gift", however specifically conceived, will want to con-

sult these arguments and positionings in their future endeavours and to pay particular attention to Wolf's important interpretation of the pivotal significance of labour.

Hitler's hold over the German populace, while undoubtedly dovetailing in some abstract, analytic ways with these case studies from the pre-modern world of North America's aboriginal peoples, is markedly different and perhaps less open to the ways in which Wolf examines the *problématique* of power. His exploration of the Nazi experience is less satisfying precisely because the horrific "sacrifice" demanded of a wide swath of humanity — Jews, gypsies, the eugenically "impure", the "ideologically" corrupt (liberals, bolsheviks, social democrats), the sexually "deviant", and more — were not episodic *displays* of power's cyclical reconfirmations. Nor was "the gift" offered self-contained in terms of its social formation of gestation. Rather, such brutal assaults were an escalatingly persistent and, after the articulation of the "Final Solution", an all-encompassing program of exterminism with global implications. That this took place, moreover, not in a pre-capitalist social formation of potential want and pressured containment, threatened by "nature's" limitations and eventual colonizing counterpowers, but rather in the midst of a modern, liberal-democratic Europe (where, admittedly, Germany was subject to certain overdeterminations), makes the Third Reich a case rather distinct from those of the Aztecs and Kwakiutl. It was for this reason that evidences of internal resistance to Hitler — from the liberalism of an intellectual White Rose movement to the rough culture of the Edelweiss pirates to the nonchalance of swing youth to, eventually, the conservative patriotism of the General's Plot — can be located. However muted such self-generated opposition was within Germany, it operated at a different level than those voices raised in earlier power regimes against human sacrifice or the potlach. The "gift" was decidedly different, as were the social relations of adherence to authority. It is surely odd, but not unrelated to this problematic differentiation, that Wolf has less to say about labour and class in capitalist Nazi Germany than he does about the socio-economic structures of the aboriginal Northwest or Tenochea society. An anthropological reading of the Third Reich can hardly proceed along lines that slight more resolutely political and economic interrogations.

Wolf's strengths nevertheless override such weaknesses. He provides a cartography of anthropological theory's culturalism, offering instead a forceful reminder that culture is received within power's parameters and often comes to us covered in blood and compromised in its encounters with the violence of governance, rather than bleached benign in the wash of exoticism and universalism. In the process Wolf reminds us what culture is, a lived practice as well as an analytic concept. A malleable configuration of material relations, social organization, and wide-ranging ideas that break the boundaries of innumerable separate spheres, culture is not so much a totalizing, homogenizing, incarcerating quarter, within which all live, as it is a relational interaction, not complete without crossovers and complex negotiation. But the shadow of power, if not its grip of dominance, Wolf tells us, is never far from these exchanges.

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