

Streszczenie rozprawy doktorskiej pt. Teoria władzy w myśli Erica R. Wolfa (The Theory of Power in the Thought of Eric R. Wolf), wersja anglojęzyczna

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This dissertation examines the concept of power – specifically, the theory of power articulated across the broad intellectual output of the American anthropologist Eric R. Wolf, including his scholarly work, interviews, political engagements, and wider theoretical and practical positions. The aim of the study is to offer a critical reconstruction of Wolf’s theory. Achieving this required advancing three central claims: first, that Wolf’s conceptualization of power oscillates – „wavers”, metaphorically speaking – between domination and hegemony; second, that his theorization is inherently dialectical and relational; and third, that it is deeply conditioned by its social and historical context.

This conceptualization shapes the structure of the dissertation and reflects both the evolution of Wolf’s analytical approaches and the fact that power constitutes the unifying theme of his anthropological perspective. Substantiating each of the three claims required dividing the study into two complementary parts: one focused on practice, the other on theory. Together, these parts form a dialectically integrated whole, both conceptually and empirically.

The first part situates Wolf’s work within the key sources of knowledge, intellectual inspirations, and socio-political contexts that shaped successive transformations in his understanding of power. Chapter One discusses formative aspects of his youth and socialization, the importance of his fieldwork sites, and the methodological tools he employed. Chapter Two examines the influence of his teachers and mentors, the interpretive communities to which he belonged, and his encounters with Marx. Chapter Three turns to the socio-political landscapes that framed his scholarly development: McCarthy-era repression and the Red Scare, the Cold War, the rise of the national-security state, Wolf’s involvement in the social movements of the 1960s, renewed repression, the Vietnam War, the radicalization of the discipline, the subsequent failure of the radical anthropological milieu following U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, as well as the oil crisis, the new spirit of capitalism, and the advance of neoliberal counterrevolution.

The second part reconstructs Wolf’s theory of power itself, focusing on its transformations. His early formulations are oriented toward domination, emphasizing class confrontation, naked force, rule, and forms of control maintained through violence or the legally sanctioned threat of violence. It was only under the influence of the broader crises of the 1970s, the neoliberal counterrevolution, and shifting intellectual tides in the social sciences and humanities that Wolf

reoriented his theorization toward hegemony. From that point, he focused increasingly on the ideological and cultural processes that secure consent to domination and render it part of an unexamined, „naturalized” background – one aligned with natural law, divine will, or self-evident order.

At the same time, every manifestation of power – whether domination or hegemony – was for Wolf inseparable from resistance and subjectivity. Thus, Chapter Four addresses not only domination, illustrated through examples such as primitive accumulation, *compadrazgo*, patriarchy, structural relations, the hacienda and the domain of the hacendado, the social fields of peasant communities, tactical power, and the political system of *caudillaje*, but also intra- and inter-class forms of resistance characteristic of subordinated groups. Chapter Five turns to power understood as hegemony, initially underappreciated by Wolf, with examples including the crisis of peasant ideology, processes of nation-building, and nationalism. Resistance and subjectivity reappear most prominently in Chapters Six and Seven through Wolf’s engagement with multi-linear determinism. Chapter Six analyzes Wolf’s turn toward hegemony enabled largely by the introduction of the concept of the mode of production. Chapter Seven traces the culmination of this shift – preceded by a revision of the concepts of culture and society and the development of a theory of ideology – and analyzes Wolf’s four types of power, particularly structural power and its configurations among the Kwakiutl, Aztecs, and Nazis, each corresponding to different modes of production.

The critically reconstructed theory of power presented in this dissertation constitutes an important contribution to twentieth-century debates on power. It also offers a point of reference – and at times an alternative – to other, including more widely known, theories and philosophies of power. Moreover, grounded in the Marxian and historical-materialist tradition, the reconstruction proposed here makes it possible to identify what remains vital in Wolf’s theorization and, consequently, to confront the challenges of the present.