HIST 103 Discussion Questions, 28 September 2016: The History of Historical Practice

Reading: Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris, The Methods and Skills of History, Chapter 14, pp. 255-270.

NAZLICAN HIZAL

1. Why doesn’t the article consider the works by pre-nineteenth-century historians good and what is the criteria for good history?
2. How did including groups that have previously been ignored to social history studies contribute to a better historiography?

CAGIL BEKIK

1) How do you think the popular history represented in non-academic books, on TV and in movies with all the false historical facts and events will affect the number of the people academically interested in history? Will this echoing mixture of false and correct facts increase the interest towards history, thus will attract more curious people to study scholarly on history? Or will it induce most of the people to think that the popular history, which they can easily reach via the sources above, is correct and profound enough; thus will make them think that it is not worth to deeply study on history?
2) The modern definition of the history emphasizes on rigorous methodology and primary sources. Then why should we still glorify “Herodotus”, who described the Greek-Persian wars in a style full of myths which would not be considered a true historical record according to the modern scholarly approach, with the title of “the Father of History” first conferred by Cicero, a roman philosopher who lived between 106-43 BC? Would it this title not fit better to Ranke?

ECE ERLAT

1. “In sum, the “new” social history has brought to life the experiences of countless groups previously bypassed in the historical studies that had traditionally focused on the experiences of political and economic elites (Furay, Salevouris, p.235) Considering Karl Marx’s ideas on the relation between social classes and historiography, can we conclude that Marx’s thought has opened the path to the new approaches on history such as social history, women’s history etc. ?
2. “The central point upon which history was founded no longer holds, there is no fundamental distinction any more between history and myth (Furay, Salevouris, p.239) How “scientific” and “objective” is the history that has continuously being created by the historians in 21th century?

AHMET ÇAĞATAY ÜNSAL

1. Currently some countries and governments including France and Turkey tend to impose their ideologies and greatness in to history education. What do you think about that? Is it ethical to try to create a common and great history; in purpose of holding the people together?
2. Why the social history became an area in 20. century? What could be the reason that historians in the past, were not curious about social life? Also why the social history become so popular in nowadays?

ZEYNEP YILDIZ

1) “… pre-nineteenth century historians had a blind spot. They did not fully understand that past ages differed from their own; they had difficulty realizing that styles, habits, and values changed over time” (257) “The French revolution represented a massive break with the past and, paradoxically, made people much more history-conscious”(258) according to sentences quoted above, Does history-consciousness mean alienation from the time/past for people? Or what is the relation between time and otherness for the science of history?
2) With the development of social history; workers, women, ethnic or racial minorities became an actor or subject in the history as like men and governments. Does this fact also mean different narrators, primary sources or the complexity and subjectivity for the historians and historiography? And is that destructive fact for the authorities in the science of history?
MELIKE COŞKUN

1. In the history, even the primary resources have issues in terms of biases towards others. For example, they represent the understanding of the era by looking their perspective toward different religions, states, races etc. How can we trust that the primary resources as valid for understanding the history objectively?

2. In today’s world, some of the historical topics are considered controversial, such as Armenian genocide, both sides Turkey and Armenia say they have historical documents to prove or disprove those things. In the case of those problems, how do we know which side is telling the truth or how much are their record valuable to understand what happened in the past?

3. History is affected from economy as Marx said. But, what are the influences of culture on the history writing? Does culture affect how people persuade, search, write and build the history for their own or for the other societies?

JBID ÖĞER

...Marx and Engels saw class interests as a vital element in any historical equation. (pg 260) according to this; does the working class and bourgeoisie in French revolution played an influential role in the development of Marxist thought?

AYLIN ERDOGAN

1) Which characteristics of the social history allow this field to be considered as new?

2) What are the arguments of the relativistic point of view that claims there is no objective truth about the past, but only the different perception of different groups?

3) Do you think psychohistory would be commonly and widely applied if we had the chance to know the detailed childhood memories of all the famous historical figures?

SERDAR KARAKAYA

1) Edward Gibbon is given as one of the very few pre-nineteenth century historians who produced works of great power and sophistication yet his book "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" is criticized to be very biased when it comes to the portrayal of the Byzantine Empire by a lot of Byzantine historians. Some even argue that his portrayal of the Eastern Roman Empire led to the lack of interest in such an important entity in history throughout the following two centuries. Given the fact that he himself admitted to that, the fact that he did not really consider the Byzantine Empire as a vital entity; could it be said that since we call his work one of the first modern works of history, objectivity is not really the main focus of history but the use of sources is? He is known for his pretty excellent use of citations and extensive research but not really for his (very doubtful) objectivity when it came to present civilizations of the past. Obviously we see many more examples of such biased (or let us say not really objective) books of history every now and then. Should not objectivity be one of the main foci of historiography, almost like a universal rule? Although Ranke specifically says that we should not study history with our own values and culture and instead try and see it from the eyes of the people that actually lived in the era we are interested in; even the very selection of a particular era to work on is a personal decision, one that has to be biased so can we say that an unbiased historiography is impossible?

2) It is said that pre-nineteenth century historians had a blind spot, that they could not really differ the past ages from their own. What led to the end of this phenomenon? What kind of developments in social sciences (or even everyday life) caused people to start realizing that the people of the past indeed lived in a different world? Perhaps more importantly, once they realized that the past was different, when and why did they stop to denounce it and instead embraced its difference and the fact that it should be researched nevertheless?

3) The text we read focused almost solely on the historiography in the West which led me to question a rather simple thing; was there really no notable historian in the East? We already know that some people like the Hittites used Annals to keep a record of events, If I remember correctly Egyptians tried to record events by categorizing them with the contemporary rulers, some Far Eastern countries also recorded certain events either via religious institutions or royal ones. It is obvious that writing of history and record-keeping are two different things but one cannot help but wonder how can no notable historian be present in the East with all these records just waiting to be used. What caused such a phenomenon to happen?

4) It is said that "only after World War II did historians begin to pay systematic attention to the role of women in history", can this be associated with the role of women in the WWII and how it affected the very outcome of the war or is it really only related to the increased number of feminist writers/historians all around the world?
Burcu KAVKACI

1) Jews believed that the workings of the physical universe were the products of supernatural forces. However, Greeks questioned this belief and searched for natural causes and solid evidences. What is the reason of this huge difference between Jews and Greeks?

2) What is the importance of social history?

FURKAN INAN

1) In which ways the history writing is affected by the historians own political thoughts and ideology? What problems this may cause in a regular reader’s understanding of the past? What should be the extent of this effect?

2) Is there any form of relation that could be formed between social history and political history?

ELIF OZSOY

1) As the father of modern historiography, Leopold Von Ranke stated that historians should not judge the past with their own times’ values and realities. Considering the fact that Marx and Engels had a chance to witnessed the Industrial Revolution and its effect on the societies, and emphasized that economic reasons are the primary causes of historical events. Marxist historians materialized a bad way of history writing by manipulating the real facts. Can we consider the Marxists as pre-Rankean historians in terms of historical mindness?

2) Even though it is hard to stay unbiased, how should history writing be applied in a more scientific way (regarding interpretation of the sources) ? How historians’ interpretations can be framed and evaluated as facts ?

MERVE DURAN

1) What was the role of Leopold Von Ranke for elevating the study of history?

2) How do we explain the meaning of “historical-mindedness”?

3) Why do we use “new” as a word for social history?

EKIN EMIROGLU

1) In Renaissance, how did historians manage to return to secular understanding of historiography even though they were Christians?

2) Why there is not a "women's history" in general when there are women in every historical event?

CEM DUNDAR

1) At that time, why Ranke and his contemporaries had developed a strong understanding of the differences between the eras, but not a respect or sympathy against other nations or races? (in terms of ethnocentrism and nationalism)

2) We can observe that the methods and standardizations of the historiography changes dramatically in different eras. Is it possible to come up with a set of rules for the historiography that will make sense in the future or does the writing of history is doomed to have an ever-changing standards, depending on the era?

BERAY KOCABAS

1) Why do people need to learn past strongly and do they be hist-concious when a specific event occurs? (Such as French Rev-Renaissance)

2) If history changes due to the ages, which requirements or patterns of this age do we have (as historians)?

YILMAZ AKSU

1. What are the main motivations of Hebrew history writing and Modern history writing?
2. What is the relation between Nationality and Modern history writing?