

Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ed. *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Pp. 288. Paper, \$34.95; ISBN 0-415-34108-6.

Practicing History consists of debates on theoretical analysis in the last twenty-five years and on the tools of understanding and analyzing the past. In the preface and introduction Gabriel Spiegel provides context and background to the debates in the field and summarizes the main arguments. Spiegel divides the book into three sections containing thirteen chapters written by well known scholars in the field such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Anthony Giddens, and Joan Scott, to name only a few. As with the question of the egg and the chicken, these debates center around the question of structure versus agency in analyzing historiography and whether human agency can be seen as an agitator versus an originator of structures.

Several key concepts are addressed in this work, such as Saussure's linguistic theory, Lacan's psychoanalysis of different ways of seeing, Foucault's discourse of power and knowledge, Gramsci's concept of the hegemony of certain discourses, and Said's deployment of Foucault's and Gramsci's concepts to the field of Orientalism.

These debates and insights invite us to think about whose history is written, who is writing it, and that history is relative and continuously written and then rewritten with new available sources, information, and methods. These debates also ask us to think of issues such as: race, gender, class, and culture and their effect on history; the history of the marginalized and or dehumanized people, topics, and issues; and how to write and analyze them. They ask us to think about the limits of writing history about women, men, class from the perspective of the writer, not from the perspective of those written about, and the power relations between them. They provide us with debates on theorizing history, history of theorizing, and the politics of theorizing. As we know that history is written by those who write more or have the tools, access, and the power to write, then the field is already a biased project.

The book could be used in advanced undergraduate as well as graduate courses majoring in history but also in other fields and subfields in the social sciences and humanities disciplines. It could also be used by instructors to introduce in social science and humanities classes a way to articulate openness to different interpretations.

As Ibn Khaldoun, the great fourteenth-century Arab scholar, reminds us, not everything can be explained and known with complete certainty. Yet a healthy approach to knowledge is the application of logical deduction to test and even expose contradictions, flaws in arguments, explanations, and theories, in order to keep working on a better understanding. Thus, knowledge is a process, a journey.

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