

FACTS, EVIDENCE, REALITY: DEBATES IN THE PHILOSOPHY AND
METHODOLOGY OF HISTORY

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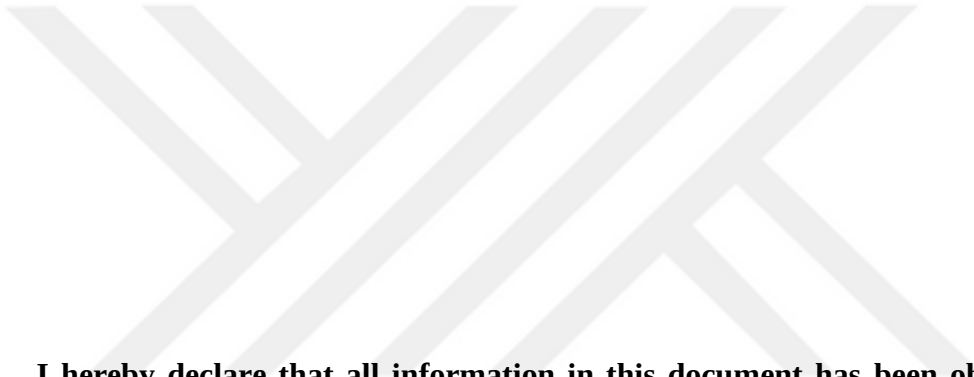
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ABSTRACT

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Historians relations with the past, which is their object of production of knowledge, have always been a problematic issue. The underlying point of this problem is the empiricist claims of historians to establish a direct, unmediated connection with the past. Heavy criticism about this approach emerged with the French, structuralist philosopher Louis Althusser. Althusser argued that historians cannot have direct and unmediated contact with the past. After this criticism, another severe critique of historians' relationship with the past came from the postmodernist side. Postmodernists again questioned the possibility of historians contacting historical reality. They said that historians cannot reveal the historical reality. Instead, they can do mere construction of the past. With direct response to Althusser, the British historian Edward Palmer Thompson argued that historians can contact the past as a result of correct questioning of facts and evidence found objectively in the past. After postmodernists engagement, historians repeated the same methodological argument to defend their territory. This situation reached its apogee with microhistorians emerging in Italy. Microhistorians approached historical evidence and facts in a new

way, arguing that history writing was not a construction but a reconstruction. Although they could respond to some criticisms directed towards historians at the methodological level, they avoided discussing on the philosophical level and left many problems proposed by Louis Althusser and postmodernists unresolved.

Keywords: Historians, the Past, Postmodernism, Microhistory, Structuralism



ÖZ

GERÇEKLER, KANIT, GERÇEKLİK: TARİH YÖNTEMBİLİMİNDE VE FELSEFESİNDE TARTIŞMALAR

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Tarihçilerin bilgi ürettiği nesne olan geçmiş ile ilişkisi her zaman problematik bir durum oldu. Bu sorunun altında yatan nokta, tarihçilerin geçmişle doğrudan, aracısız bir bağlantı kurmaya yönelik ampirist iddialarıydı. Bu yaklaşımla ilgili ağır eleştiriler Fransız, yapısalcı filozof Louis Althusser ile birlikte ortaya çıktı. Althusser, tarihçilerin geçmişle doğrudan ve aracısız temas kuramayacağını savundu. Bu eleştiriden sonra, tarihçilerin geçmişle ilişkisine yönelik bir başka sert eleştiri postmodernist taraftan geldi. Postmodernistler, tarihçilerin tarihsel gerçeklikle temas kurma olasılığını bir kez daha sorguladılar. Tarihçilerin tarihsel gerçekliği ortaya çıkaramayacaklarını söylediler. Bunun yerine sadece geçmişin inşasını yapabilirler savında bulundular. İngiliz tarihçi Edward Palmer Thompson, Althusser'e doğrudan yanıt vererek, geçmişte nesnel olarak bulunan gerçeklerin ve kanıtların doğru bir şekilde sorgulanmasının bir sonucu olarak tarihçilerin geçmişle iletişime geçebileceğini savundu. Postmodernistlere eleştirilerinden sonra, tarihçiler kendi araştırma alanlarını savunmak için aynı metodolojik argümanı tekrarladılar. İtalya da ortaya çıkan mikro tarihçilerle bu yaklaşım zirveye ulaştı. Mikro tarihçiler tarihsel

kanıtlara ve gereklere yeni bir řekilde yaklařtılar ve tarih yazmanın bir inřa sureci deęil, bir yeniden inřa sureci olduęunu iddia ettiler. Tarihilere yoneltilen bazı eleřtirilere metodolojik duzeyde cevap verebilseler de felsefi duzeyde tartıřmaktan kaındılar ve Louis Althusser ve postmodernistler tarafından onerilen birok sorunu zmsz bıraktılar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarihiler, Gemiř, Postmodernizm, Mikrotarih, Yapısalcılık



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

People have always been interested in the past and have been immersed in it in various ways. One can find the traces of the past in a poem, a novel or a memoir. However, there is no concern for the historical traces that appear in these types of writing to be objective in any way. People who are professionally interested with the past, that is, historians, look at the past with a relationship that has a goal of such as talking about and reflecting the past objectively. Therefore, their approach to the past, the object from which knowledge is produced, is crucial, and emerges as a topic worth discussing for anyone interested in questions related to the knowledge of the past.

How historians construct their relationship with the past and what kind of intellectual operation they apply to generate knowledge of the past will be the main subject of inquiry of this thesis. To ensure that this questioning is more proper and comprehensive, it will try not to stay within the framework of historical methodology; along with historical methodology, ontological and epistemological fields will be included in the discussion. Limiting this multi-dimensional discussion to only historical methodology would cause one to enter a vicious and unproductive discussion. As a result, the inferences to be made from the discussion would be one-dimensional and insufficient. To avoid this danger, the thesis will discuss the criticisms of historians from outside their own disciplines in a way that will form the backbone of the discussion here.

To achieve this, in the first chapter of this thesis, the ontological and epistemological enterprise of French structuralist philosopher Louis Althusser will be discussed. This enterprise has unveiled important consequences for historians, which will be handled

in the context of the answers given by Edward Palmer Thompson, a very influential British historian. In the second chapter, the most fundamental arguments of the postmodernist intervention, which has produced the harshest criticisms of history writing after the structuralists, will be discussed on the basis of the writings of Hayden White, a postmodern philosopher of history. In addition to this, once again, historians' responses against postmodern intervention will be included in this chapter. Finally, the third chapter will question how the understanding of microhistory, which emerged in Italy, brought a new perspective to the relations of historians with the past in the face of all these criticisms. They made some contributions to the relations that historians establish with the past. But even though microhistorians were effective in solving some problems, some problems still remained unsolved and needs more clarification.

The general assumption of historians for a retrospective intellectual activity is that the historian reflects the past as it is. In other words, whatever happened in the past is unearthed in the same way without any distortions. This assumption and argument enable history writing, which is seen as a scientific discipline and claims to reveal the past objectively, to set itself on a solid ground and position. However, as a result of this approach, historians bring themselves closer to empiricism in their knowledge production processes, the possibility of which poses a very arduous and tough problem. Althusser problematizes this issue with his criticism of empiricism and historians confront a problem that need to be solved in this sense in history writing. Althusser's three main arguments criticize practices of history writing. He argues that the raw material used in the first stage of the knowledge generation scheme he proposes first consists only of existing concepts. That is why he claims that the raw material is quite passive and inert. This means that without a mediating tool such as theory, the result after the thought activity on raw material will always be the same. Secondly, with his criticism of empiricism, he brings the connection of the historian with the object he produces knowledge to the point of breaking and separates them from each other. Herewith, the assumption of unmediated contact with the past, which is the main claim of historians, comes under severe criticism. Thirdly, Althusser's assertion that the object and the knowledge of the object are different from each other puts the claim that historians reflect the past as it is in jeopardy.

Against all these criticisms, Thompson has made a total defense of the realm of history. First of all, he states that the raw materials used by the historian are not passive or inert. On the contrary, they have determinations independent of the subject that produces the knowledge, and as a result, some limitations can be imposed upon the historian by the raw material. Thompson claims that this is a guarantee for history writing to be objective. In contrast to Althusser's critique of empiricism, Thompson argues that Althusser confuses empiricism with empirical data control. Ultimately, Thompson claims that history writing can be realized objectively by judging the historical given facts and evidence by correct questions and assumptions. However, he accepts the distinction made by Althusser between object and object knowledge, even if he does not openly admit it. Accepting this distinction also means admitting that historians cannot be empiricist. Furthermore, all kinds of assumptions, questions and judgments used while approaching history again show that historians cannot reveal the past in an empiricist sense. Therefore, if empiricism is impossible for history writing, historiography does not mean revealing the past as it is, but a construction of the past with raw materials from the past as remnants to the present. If historians are constructing the past, then questions such as how this construction takes place and what are the limitations and determinants of this construction remain as problems that historians must answer once again.

After Althusser's arguments criticizing the historian's main source of knowledge, their connection and relationship with the past, further criticisms in the same direction came from the postmodernist movement. Postmodernists have criticized the historians' assumption that historians can obtain objective truth from the past. These criticisms were shaped by the basic objection they wanted to bring to the traditional understanding of reality and truth. Postmodernists, who are against the traditional understanding of reality and truth, have brought severe criticism to historians who claim that they can extract reality and truth from the past. Postmodernists who claim that there is no reality other than language itself have pointed out that the intellectual activity of historians regarding the past is ontologically and epistemologically impossible. The postmodernist philosopher of history, White, has often reiterated that historians' focal point should be more on the texts produced and the language of

historians than the past itself. This assertion meant that historians had been separated from the past, their main object.

White has further claimed that historians have used certain literary techniques, metaphors, and rhetorical tools when writing their texts. Along with the linguistic techniques used, historians construct the past. The most fundamental conclusion of this argument is that historians cannot derive objective truth from the past, but instead, whether they are aware of it or not, they can distort and change the objective reality of the past with the literary and linguistic techniques they use. Therefore, White argued that the reference point of historical writing is not empirical data and reality from the past to the present, on the contrary, the main reference point of history writing must be the linguistic and literary techniques used by historians while constructing the past. At this point historians have generally taken a hostile attitude to Hayden White's theoretical intervention. According to them, White's proposal against objectivity of history writing undermines historiography as a discipline by leading to extreme relativism.

These arguments of historians have been generally in the same direction as E.P. Thompson. Even if they have not denied that the historiography process was a construction, they have put forward that this construction process takes place under constant scrutiny. The source of this scrutiny are historical facts and evidence that historians acknowledge as objective existence. These historical facts and evidence ensure that the historian cannot act independently while constructing the past by constantly limiting the subject, that is, the historian who makes the research and oversees the production of knowledge and do not allow the disruption of objective reality. These defining features of historical facts and evidence, on the other hand, emerge as a result of historians asking the right questions to the past events.

The emphasis on facts and evidence has found its place especially in the understanding of microhistory that emerged in Italy. Microhistory, which positioned itself against the Annales School, which is the most important example of a chronologically and spatially wide-ranging historiographical understanding, has proposed a new method for history with its systematic publication activity. Unlike

the Annales school, microhistorians have argued that by narrowing the research focus in time and in space, historical objective truth could be achieved.

The most important representative of Microhistory is the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg and his famous book *The Cheese and The Worms*. In this book, Ginzburg argues that by taking a single person as his object of research, he has reconstructed his life and mentality. Microhistorians in general have argued that the intellectual activity of the historian is a reconstruction of the past around historical facts and evidence. The main grounds in making this defense against critics have been that they narrowed their focus and approached historical facts and evidence with a new approach. Ginzburg has compared the historian to a diagnosing doctor and a detective trying to solve a crime. Microhistorians as a whole have argued, like most of professional historians, that objective truth can be extracted and reconstructed from the past with the right assumptions and right questions asked to facts.

Covering a range of philosophical and methodological debates, the general purpose of this thesis is to question the hypothetical connection points of historians regarding the past in light of criticism coming from outside the confines of discipline of history. The thesis will examine and discuss the validity of these criticisms for historiography, as well as their content in the responses of particular historians to such criticisms. Finally, the changes in historiography that have taken place as a result of these debates answers will be briefly discussed.

CHAPTER 2

STRUCTURALIST INTERVENTION IN HISTORY WRITING

2.1 Introduction

Historian relationships with their research field, that is the past, has always varied. However, if one has to use a general statement about this situation, historians' views on their research fields are generally on an empiricist ground. Because always the argument of historians is that whatever happened in the past can be objectively extracted from the past. In addition, they were always quite skeptical of the use of theory as a mediation tool that should be used in the process of extracting past reality. The reason for this is that the use of theory always has possibility of distortion to empirical reality which is recognized as real itself. This situation entails immense discussion and nearly insoluble problems.

Between 1960s and 1970s, Louis Althusser, who is structuralist French philosopher, got attention among intellectual worlds. He introduced new concepts such as overdetermination, relative autonomy that deeply affected Marxism. In addition to these new concepts he introduced, Althusser made many studies in the epistemological field. He brought great criticism to the empiricist production of knowledge. Against the empiricist knowledge production, he produced his own knowledge production scheme. In this schema, he gave supremacy to theory for production of knowledge. By using Althusserian language and newly introduced concepts, many intellectuals produced plenty of texts. Edward Palmer Thompson, who is a British Marxist influential historian, saw that this new fashion and epistemological approach are danger for both Marxism and history writing. For Thompson, Althusserian production of knowledge, its attitude towards raw material and formation of subject directly jeopardized realm of history. For this reason, He

wrote a book called “The Poverty of Theory”. In his book, whole intention of Thompson is entire refutation of Althusser’s epistemological enterprise. Namely, “The Poverty of Theory” can be seen as defense for fields of history. After publication of this book, Perry Anderson and Stuart Hall involved this affair.

In this section, Althusser's empiricism critique and knowledge production scheme will be examined. Then, with Thompson's countercriticism, the validity of Althusser's epistemological approach on history writing will be questioned.

2.2 Althusserian Understanding of Science and Production of Knowledge

Louis Althusser is known for his original contribution to Marxism especially with respect to philosophy and theory. Of course, as a Marxist, apart from his intellectual contribution, his writings and the formulation of his ideas had a political purpose. In other words, there is a political aspect to all the texts included in the discussion here. I will try to leave aside the political side of the discussion and focus on the debate and polemic between Louis Althusser and Edward Palmer Thompson, which has important implications for social sciences.

Louis Althusser based his thought on Karl Marx’s writings, dividing the body of Marx’s work into two sections: ‘young and mature Marx’. In young Marx, with immature works such as *Theses on Feuerbach* and *German Ideology*, Althusser found works which were packed with humanism, empiricism and idealism. For Althusser, all these philosophical currents are obstacles for Marxism. To reveal the differences between the young and mature periods of Marx, Althusser used the concept of “epistemological break”, which he borrowed from Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard’s book called “The Formation of the Scientific Mind” had a major impact on Althusser. According to Bachelard, scientific knowledge should be positioned and understood around obstacles. Scientific knowledge is totally against public opinion.¹ “According to Bachelard, in order for scientific thought to be truly scientific, it has to go through various stages of epistemological obstacles.”² Thus, science proceeds by

¹ Agon Hamze, *Althusser and Passolini*, (New York: USPalgrave Macmillan: 2016), 73.

² Hamze, *Althusser and Passolini*, 73.

rejecting old problematics and building new theoretical concepts. In the same way, Althusser thinks that for the emergence of new science, new concepts are necessary.³

Althusser, armed with the concepts of Bachelard, created his enterprise on the basis of this understanding. “The epistemological break refers to the process by which a science is born and constructs itself out of a preexisting ideological field.”⁴ Taking the concept of epistemological break as a reference point, Althusser claimed that after the break Marx removed ideological features from his works. With the epistemological rupture, Marx removed from his works empiricism and humanism that Althusser recognizes as epistemological errors. Althusser considers empiricism as an error because the empiricist approach to production of knowledge produces very problematic outcomes. Humanism is an error because it speaks about the essence of humanity, which is obviously a form of idealism. For Althusser, all of these fallacious tendencies work as makers of ideology. In other words, Althusser sees the works of young Marx as a reproduction of ideology machine. But after *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology*, he freed himself from this ideological cage and proceeded to a new stage. In his mature phase Marx established the science of history (historical materialism) and a new philosophy (dialectical materialism).

For Althusser, practice means “...any process of transformation of determinate given raw material into a determinate product, a transformation effected by a determinate human labor, using determinate means of (‘production’).”⁵ Accordingly, ideology, work, politics, science and philosophy are all practices. Their common feature is that they process pre-existing materials with a method and create new material. For example, this production is very obvious in economic practice. In economic production processes, which is not a theoretical practice, natural materials are processed with labor and specific methods and new products appear. Ideological,

³ Brian O' Boyle and Terrence Mc Donough, "Critical Realism and the Althusserian Legacy", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 46, no.2 (June 2016), 146-147.

⁴ Neil Eriksen, "Louis Althusser and Historical Materialism", *Theoretical Review*, no.31 (January, 1983), 28.

⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, (London: The Penguin Press, 1969), 166.

scientific and philosophical practices, on the other hand, are theoretical practices. In the ideological field production functions as economic field.⁶ “Ideology is a representation of the perceived relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence in the real world.”⁷ Ideology thus provides us with various concepts to make sense of the world we live in. That is why ideology functions as production and reproduction of social life. It does not mean, however, that ideology remains static. When confronted with new conditions, ideology will change itself. But these changes ideology always produce prejudices.⁸

All these levels Althusser described as economic, political, ideological, philosophical and scientific have a common feature: “Production”. In the economic level, this production takes place in concrete. However, in ideological, scientific and philosophical levels, production takes place in a more abstracted way. The point where these practices distinguish themselves from other practices is that they produce knowledge.

For Althusser, ideological practice and scientific practice are similar in terms of what they produce. Although they are similar, they differ from each other with the knowledge they produce. To understand what separates ideological knowledge and scientific knowledge he makes use of the concept of ‘problematic’. “The problematic, by determining what it includes within its field, by necessarily what is excluded there from.”⁹ The concept of problematic functions like a tool that determines the content of theory.

On the other hand, what constitutes science is its revolutionary quality. The change in science shows itself in the change of the theory it uses. Althusser uses the concept

⁶ William S. Lewis "Knowledge versus "Knowledge": Louis Althusser on the Autonomy of Science and Philosophy From Ideology", *Rethinking Marxism : A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 17, no.3 (2005), 459.

⁷ Eriksen, " Louis Althusser", 36.

⁸ Lewis, "Knowledge versus "Knowledge", 459.

⁹ Norman Geras, "Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment", *New Left Review*, no.71 (1972), 67.

of problematic to understand precisely this change in theory.¹⁰ “...words, concepts and methods cannot be considered in isolation; they exist the (theoretical) framework in which they are used. This framework is a problematic.”¹¹

The concept of problematic is important because it provides the most accurate understanding of the concepts used in theory, which is the crucial part in production of knowledge.¹² Problematics work differently in theory. For example, ideological problematics are closed systems and constantly aim to reproduce themselves. In contrast, scientific problematics should always be open to change and constantly develop revolutionary approaches to the concepts that they have previously used. Another difference between scientific problematic and ideological problematics lies in the functions performed in the knowledge production process. Ideological problematics begin with certain presumptions and tries to form its theory around it. Scientific problematics arises the application of previously proven concepts and methodology to new fields. For example, this distinction is clearly seen in the comparison of theory of evolution and the idea of creation. The idea of creation starts from the presumptions outside of science; without questioning the answer provided by theology, it begins to form its theory around it. However, the theory of evolution is an open process that continues as a result of constantly testing and correcting the concepts and the resulting cumulative scientific research.¹³

It is quite obvious that, among all practices, Althusser attributes supremacy to theory. Theory, science and knowledge concern not only the academic community but also Marxist practice. To stress this point, he quotes Lenin’s dictum: “Without no revolutionary theory, no revolutionary practice.”¹⁴ Theory therefore is necessary for practice.¹⁵

¹⁰ Eriksen, “Louis Althusser”, 28.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Geras, “Althusser’s Marxism”, 66.

¹³ Eriksen, “Louis Althusser”, 28

¹⁴ Althusser, *For Marx*, 166.

¹⁵ Ibid.

As such, theory is a “...specific form of practice, itself belonging to the complex unity of ‘social practice’ of a determinate human society.”¹⁶ According to Althusser, theoretical practice operates on raw materials and the content of this raw material can be ‘empirical’ ‘ideological’ or ‘technical’. Scientific theoretical practice is very distinct from ideological theoretical practice because if a theoretical practice is a truly scientific, it must produce “theoretical” or “historical” rupture.¹⁷ Here is Althusser’s final definition of Theory:

I shall call Theory (with a capital T), general theory, that is, the Theory of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences), which transforms into ‘knowledges’ (scientific truths) the ideological product of existing ‘empirical’ practices (the concrete activity of men).¹⁸

In Althusser, theory and theoretical practice seem to be a tool that purges ideological aspects from science. In a sense, eliminating ideological elements seems to be the general purpose of the whole Althusserian project. For him, this is the only remedy for producing scientific knowledge and sound Marxist practice. He pushes the point that supremacy of theory clears all ideological impurities so much that theoretical practice is seen as a magical word and almost a source of ‘divine’ solution.

Althusser divides the process of production of knowledge in three parts: “Generality I”, “Generality II”, “Generality III”. “Generality I” indicates raw materials. “Generality II” is the theoretical practice. “Generality II” transforms raw materials into product that is “Generality III”, “knowledge”.¹⁹ The content of raw materials is not purely giving things. Because “...a science always works on existing concepts...”²⁰ That is why Generality I is ideological in nature.²¹ The process of transforming Generality I into generality III is where science occurs and works.²²

¹⁶ Ibid, 167.

¹⁷ Ibid, 168.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 183.

²⁰ Ibid, 184.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

This schema of production of knowledge brings up a couple of important issues. The first one is that ideological nature of raw material and acceptance of existing concepts as the content of raw material. This means that Althusser displaces everything except the existing concepts from the raw material. This brings much controversy and invites the objection of E.P Thompson at this precise point. For, the fact that the content of the raw material consists of only existing concepts takes most materials which are used in historical studies away from historians. The second issue is that according to Althusser, the raw material is quite passive. If we do not examine the raw material with a highly revolutionary theory, it will continue to talk us ideologically. However, the question of where this revolutionary theory comes from is questioned by E.P Thompson. Contrary to Althusser, Thompson considers raw material to be highly active. These two issues will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.2.1 Empiricist Conception of Knowledge

As we have seen, Althusser holds empiricism as an obstacle for scientific activity as it reduces scientific activity merely to collecting given facts. Secondly, the empiricist conception of knowledge establishes a problematic relationship between knowledge and real.²³

“The empiricist conception of knowledge presents a process takes place between a given object and a given subject.”²⁴ Empiricist production of knowledge operates in the level of abstraction and divides object into two parts: essential part and inessential part. In order to obtain knowledge, the subject must separate the essential part of the object from the inessential part.²⁵ Althusser writes on this particular point:

What does a real abstraction actually mean? It accounts for what is declared to be a real fact: the essence is abstracted from real objects in the sense of an extraction, as one might say that gold is extracted (or abstracted, i.e., separated) from dross of earth and sand in which held and contained.²⁶

²³ Eriksen, “Louis Althusser”, 30.

²⁴ Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*, (London: NLB, 1977), 35.

²⁵ Geras, “Althusser’s Marxism”, 63.

²⁶ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 36.

The empiricist conception of knowledge thus creates a dichotomy between subject and object on the one hand, and the concrete and the abstract, on the other. According to empiricism, knowledge production begins with observer's direct observation of the given object. The subject takes the necessary parts from this object, that is, the parts that make up the knowledge, and creates the knowledge by leaving the unnecessary parts out. By removing the parts that prevent us from seeing the essence of reality, it gives us the object, that is, knowledge. Althusser stresses that the problem here is that what empiricism presents us as knowledge is only a part of reality. It establishes a problematic relationship between truth and thought and clearly reduces thought to reality.²⁷

The method of modeling is one of the most basic methods of empiricism. He emphasizes the falsity of the model obtained as a result of abstraction, that is, by removing unnecessary parts of the reality.²⁸ Here one encounters another major problem of empiricism. Empiricism equates knowledge and the real. What is achieved, however, is only an approximation of the reality obtained by discarding unnecessary parts of it.²⁹

To resolve the dilemma of the real and the abstract, Althusser suggests that the knowledge of the object and the object is different from both. After the process of "Generality I", "Generality II" and "Generality III", one can obtain knowledge that neither part of the truth nor the abstract, a separate category:

Recall again the claim just made about the 'work' of theoretical practice: it brings together 'thought power' and the other means of theoretical labor (concepts and a method). The raw material that is worked on in theoretical practice and transformed into the object of knowledge, is precisely not the real object itself (the object that exists outside of and prior to thought). Rather, it is the object as already appropriated by thought (or the concepts and methods through which one understands her or his world). So here we see the distinction between thought and reality as such, or as Althusser puts it, here we come upon the fact that: The real is one thing, along with its different aspects: the real-concrete, the process of the real,

²⁷ Geras, "Althusser's Marxism", 62.

²⁸ Ibid, 61.

²⁹ Ibid.

the real totality, etc. thought about the real is another, along with its different aspects: the thought process, the thought-totality, the thought concrete, etc.³⁰

The situation that emerged after all this knowledge production process can be summarized as follows: What empiricism reveals as knowledge can neither represent the reality itself nor present its knowledge. To solve this problem, Althusser says that the reality and its knowledge are different from each other. To move away from the problems of empiricism and to resolve the tension between reality and its knowledge, Althusser introduced a third category: concrete abstraction.

In summary, Althusser rejects empiricism that poses a dilemma between reality and its knowledge. The tension relationship between empirical reality and the concepts established by the subject is realized only by accepting that the object, knowledge, and the knowledge of the object emerging at the end of the knowledge production process are completely different categories.

The way in which Althusser rejects empiricism, namely emphasizing that only existing concepts are used as raw materials, has important repercussions for historiography. Historians follow empirical procedures to produce knowledge about the past. The raw material they use is data that supposedly exist in their own sake, without the participation of the subject. Althusser's rejection of empirical reality as the referent point of knowledge production brings up a critical point that historians should confront. In Althusserian approach the empirical data that scientific practice receives as raw material, and the already existing concepts are passive. As a result, if we go to this ideologically contaminated and passive data with the same theory, it will always tell us the same things. Therefore, being a prisoner of the passive data, historiography cannot go beyond repeating already existing concepts. In other words, historians create theories and concepts out of data which is already ideologically 'dirty' and passive. On the contrary, Althusser argues that empirical data should be approached with a revolutionary concept or theory. Only in this way can a new

³⁰ Geoff Pfeiffer, "On Althusser on Science, Ideology, and the New, or Why We Should Continue to Read Reading Capital", *Crisis and Critique* 2, no.2 (2015), 136.

approach be revealed by ending the hegemony of ideologically contaminated and passive data over theory.

One historian who has taken these claims about the relation between data and theory is the British Marxist historian E.P Thompson. As Althusser's criticism amounted to attacking the basic assumptions of history writing, Thompson rose to the challenge and mounted a scathing polemic against Althusser. The next section discusses the response of E.P Thompson to what can be considered an attack on the practice of history writing.

2.3 The Poverty of Theory: A Defense of History

Althusser's pioneering work in Marxism and the field of epistemology were seen by E.P. Thompson as serious threats to both Marxism and historiography. His book *The Poverty of Theory* is written as a comprehensive critique of Althusserian framework. In this polemical book, E.P Thompson strives to protect the historical field against Althusser's intervention and likewise responds to the dehumanization of the whole sphere by Althusser's philosophy. The distinctive feature of this book, something also makes it is important and interesting, is that it written by a historian to criticize a philosopher who intervenes in his field.

Historians are often unwilling to talk about the nature of their work in the most fundamental way. They do their research, collect their resources, interpret them and turn their interpretations into a meaningful and coherent text. In fact, there must be some pre-assumptions for all these processes to take place. First, the existence of what is considered history must be accepted. If this is not accepted ontologically, historical writing will not occur. After this presumption, ones move on to the second field, which is now the domain of epistemology. The person who accepts the existence of history ontologically, epistemologically considers whether or not information can be produced from this object. If it is accepted that it is possible to produce knowledge, then one arrives in the third field. One is now in the methodological field, and the purpose of this field is to make the knowledge obtained as objective as possible as the knowledge may not reflect the truth, be distorted and unscientific. Historians generally pay attention to this field and gloss over the other

two through unquestioned presuppositions. In *Poverty of Theory*, we see the historian's direct responses to a philosopher, concerning both ontologically and epistemological fields, which makes the book all the more interesting.

2.3.1 Production of Knowledge and Empiricism

E.P Thompson begins by criticizing Althusser's knowledge generation scheme, which, as we have seen, consists of three stages: “Generalities I”, “Generalities II” and “Generalities III”. “Generalities I” consist of raw materials which proceed to “Generalities II”. In the “Generalities II”, these raw materials are processed with theory and new concepts are revealed. So “Generalities III” emerges as product of the theoretical activities.³¹

E.P. Thomson's main criticisms center on “Generalities I” and “Generalities II”. According to him, raw data used in the first stage does not always come in ideologically distorted form. The facts used in experimental and human sciences are under great control in the process of knowledge production. What Althusser warns against can happen in the fields of pseudoscience such as astrology. If the raw material we are using is always ideological, verification and falsification procedures will never work.³²

The second problem is that Althusser breaks the empirical data from the theory set up because he sees raw data as concepts that already exist. Breaking the relationship between reality and thought formation, Althusser only admits that the reference point of knowledge is the real. But the relation of the real and its knowledge is a relation of knowledge. This creates an endless loop between the two.³³

This shows that for E.P Thompson, Althusser does not know the difference between empiricism as an ideology and verification with empirical data; his analysis simply

³¹ Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory & other essay*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 10

³² Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 12

³³ D. Atkinson, "The Anatomy of Knowledge: Althusser's Epistemology and Its Consequences", *Philosophical Papers* 13,no.2 (1984), 5.

confuses the two.³⁴ Althusser does not provide much explanation about the theoretical source of production in Generalities II. This turns the whole theory into something based on the subject and its intuition. A closed system arises where no external empirical data is entered, and this system will always verify itself. Thompson considers this to be a form of idealism, turning one of Althusser's critical points against himself:

This mode of thought is exactly what has commonly been designated in the Marxist tradition, as idealism. Such idealism consists, not in the positing or denial of the primacy of an ulterior material world but in self- generating conceptual universe which imposes its own ideality upon the phenomena of material and social existence, rather than engaging in continual dialogue with these.³⁵

To evaluate the mutual argument about knowledge production so far, Althusser seems to argue that we can never come into contact with reality and that we can only relate knowledge to concepts that already exist. Since these concepts are loaded with ideology, he tells us that if we do not go to them with a revolutionary theory, they will speak to us ideologically. In other words, the subject that produces knowledge will be a prisoner of the object and will not be able to produce scientific knowledge. On the other hand, Thompson argues that the nature of the raw material is not necessarily ideological; instead, it can be filtered through empirical verification or falsification. Finally, Althusser's theory falls into the extreme subjectivity that empirical data cannot control, and in this case, causes a cognitive cycle to emerge. The subject distorts it by imposing his own thought on the reality. It completely breaks the link between the real and its knowledge. Althusser's statement that we can never come into contact with pure reality and that the raw material is loaded with ideology makes the practice of historians impossible. From an Althusserian perspective, the knowledge production by historians is not the production of scientific knowledge. It is rather the production of ideological knowledge.

2.3.2 The Formation of Historical Concepts

Unlike Althusser's highly passive raw material, which is open to any intervention of the subject, E.P Thompson thinks that the raw material will limit the operation of the

³⁴ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 6.

³⁵ Ibid,13.

subject and impose its properties on it.³⁶ He sets out with a basic example: “I will give an illustration...I see my table. To be an object, to be “null or inert” ...No piece of timber has ever been known to make itself into table: no joiner has ever been known to make a table out of air, or sawdust.”³⁷

With the table example, Thompson makes an ironical comment on Althusser's allegedly passive raw material. Although our raw material is passive, it has its own defining features as the table has. For example, various properties of the raw material of the table may be determinant in the structure of the product to be produced.³⁸

Thompson continues:

...the wood cannot determine what is made, nor whether it is made well or badly but it can certainly determine what cannot be made, the limits (size, strength, etc) of what is made, and the skills and tools appropriate to the making. In such an equation “thought” (...) can only represent what is appropriate to the determined properties of its real object and must operate within this determined field.³⁹

The statement that the raw material has properties independent of human thought will form the basis of Thompson's thoughts on concept formation. Now Thompson's fundamental objections have been revealed. The real past exists. Because it can impose determinations on the thought forms, we create. This is proof of their objective existence. Thompson claims that even if Althusser's epistemological initiative does not deny the existence of the real past, contact with the subject is impossible in his knowledge operation. According to Thompson, this assumption assumes that the past can only exist in the human thought operation, so we cannot access the past as an objective reality. At this point he considers sees some of the impositions of the raw material on human thought as the existence of the real past. The real past therefore exists, and it is open to human thought operation. If the actual past is open to the subject's thought operation, what are the sources of such an operation?

³⁶ Ibid, 17.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid,18.

³⁹ Ibid, 18.

The historian's thought operation starts with archival material. For historians, such materials are full of evidence and facts and constitute the raw material of historians. Although these facts and evidence are not revealed directly, historians come into dialogue with these facts through a specific method of research and reveal the real past by purifying its ideological aspects. Historians go to these materials with certain approvals and ask questions. The historian, who checks these facts by asking the right questions, now reveals the schemes of thinking about the real past.⁴⁰

After examining the facts and evidence, historians need a variety of concepts to make sense of them. According to E.P Thompson, historical concepts are formed as follows:

Such concepts arise within the historian's common discourse or are developed within adjacent disciplines. The classic concept of the crisis of subsistence, proposes a rational sequence of events: as for example, poor harvest → dearth → rising mortality → the consumption of next year's seed → a second poor harvest → extreme dearth → a peak in mortality, accompanied by epidemic → a sharply rising conception-rate.⁴¹

According to Thompson, these historical concepts are concepts obtained by generalizing many examples and the concepts are rather "expectations" from the "model". The concepts are not prescriptive, but instead thought devices that make it easier for the historian to study his/her evidence. Therefore, historical concepts show a rather "elastic" structure.⁴²

As to the ideological nature of the evidence, the historian's operations of producing knowledge of the past proceeds as follows: Firstly, he examines historical evidence and facts. He is aware that they are loaded with the ideological burden of his time, which masks objective historical knowledge. So, the historian asks the right questions and reveals the objective properties of evidence and facts. Even if they are parts of different places and different times, similar parts of the facts and evidence can form historical concepts. These historical concepts allow historians to interpret specific situations. The dialogue that takes place between the historian and the past is

⁴⁰ Keith Nield and John Seed, "Theoretical poverty or the poverty of theory: British Marxist historiography and the Althusserians", *Economy and Society* 8, no.4(1979), 390.

⁴¹ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 45.

⁴² Ibid, 45-46.

not static and not fully finished. The historian goes to his source with some assumptions, examines the evidence and these assumptions can change with the impact of the evidence. In more, historical concepts can change with empirical control of the evidence. That is, there is always an ongoing relationship between concrete (the facts) and abstract (concepts). As a result of this relationship, historical concepts are always open to change. In other words, historical knowledge is formed by the process of the never-ending relationship between the concrete and the abstract. That is why E.P Thompson says that Althusser's empirically unchecked theory distorts the past and that thought is a consonance of the real past.

2.3.3 Criticisms of EP Thompson's Intervention

While seen by some historians and in some Marxist circles as a timely intervention against the domination of Althusserian framework in Western Marxism, Thompson has also been criticized. For one, Stuart Hall, who was once a structuralist Marxist, has seen a major problem with Thompson's model formation. "...there are real problems with Thompson's defence of that 'dialogue between model and evidence' which, for him, constitutes the basis of the historical method. Whence do models arise? They cannot arise from evidence itself, since this is what they are tested against ."⁴³

Hall at this point criticizes the ongoing confirmatory relationship between the concepts and the evidence proposed by Thompson. According to him, this situation raises the problem of the relation between "theory" and "practice"⁴⁴, which Thompson cannot solve with the model he proposes. Thompson's maneuver, according to Hall, "...is tantamount to saying that 'the evidence' speaks it meaning transitively, without mediation of concepts: it provides its own 'models'. Like it or not, this represents, theoretically, a conflation of 'thought' and 'real'. It entails 'empiricist' theory of knowledge..."⁴⁵

⁴³ Stuart Hall, "In Defence of Theory", In *Peoples History and Socialist Theory* , by Raphael Samuel, (London: Routledge,1981), 382

⁴⁴ Hall, "In Defence of Theory", 382.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Clearly, Thompson commits this error when he accuses Althusser of confusing reality and thought. With the model he proposes to solve the theory's distorting effect on reality, conversely, reality now distorts the theory that allows us to make sense of it. In direct contrast to Althusser, he actually suggests a passive knowledge-generator subject instead of the passive raw material. Instead of resolving the dilemma between the subject and the concrete relations, this situation allows this dilemma to continue and remains unresolved.

Thompson, who opposes that facts are only concepts, which are social production and belongs to the world of knowledge, presented to the historian, on the contrary, says that facts come to the subject who produces knowledge in a given way. To justify this argument, Thompson divides facts into two categories. "evidential facts" and "historical facts". 'Evidential facts' are found in the sources. In the historian's knowledge production process, these facts are transformed into "historical facts".⁴⁶

Thompson introduces a new level, historical fact, which cannot be considered immune or innocent of theoretico-conceptual intervention and hence merely displaces but does not remove, the problems of relationship between concept and given data. It does not establish the epistemological point that Thompson wishes to make, that the evidence is a determinate measure of the 'real' past rather than a construction of historical thought.⁴⁷

The historical fact is promoted by Thompson as a third mediation. Seeing that emphasizing the passive knowledge-producing subject and active raw material causes an empirical knowledge production, Thompson uses the historical facts category to solve the problem of the subject who is perceived as inert knowledge producer.⁴⁸

One of the most important names of British Marxism, Perry Anderson has criticized Thompson's notion of concept. According to him, the purpose of the concepts used is to enable the object of history to be understood more clearly. This elastic concept structure provides historians with an inexplicable privilege.⁴⁹ Anderson makes a

⁴⁶ Alan Warde, "E. P Thompson and 'Poor' Theory", *The British Journal of Sociology* 33, no.2 (Jun 1982), 227.

⁴⁷ Warde, "'Poor' Theory", 227.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, (London: Redwood Burn Ltd, 1980), 11.

comparison between meteorology and history. Meteorology science data is more variable than historical science. However, meteorologists basically try to fulfill their scientific requirements, even if the weather is incomprehensible and uncontrollable. Using their new data constantly, they are trying to bring their approach closer every time. According to Anderson, this is valid for every science and also valid for history.⁵⁰ He argues that Thompson's understanding of the elastic structured concept will lead historiography to a deep relativity.

2.4 Conclusion

We can now conclude this brief survey of various Marxist positions regarding empiricism, theory and knowledge production.

Throughout history, people have revealed their past by forming them in various forms. Someone can reflect on the past by writing a poem. Another person can recall the past by writing memoirs. What distinguishes the profession of historiography from all these people is its attempt to objectively uncover the past. The historian's text must purify itself from the feelings of the poet or the past longing of the memoir writer. With the epistemological universe he created, Althusser has regarded the historian as almost equivalent to a poet who writes a poem about the past or to someone who writes memoirs history writing does emerge as a scientifically inadequate, overly subjective and useless field of knowledge production.

Therefore, in order to establish an objective relationship with his/her object, the historian must constantly consider its nature, competence, conditions of existence. Historians, however, generally do not think much about ontological and epistemological questions. Indeed, the nature of our view of the past and the forms in which we try to understand and transmit it has changed significantly from ancient Greece to the present. For example, the ancient Greeks has written history in poetic form. However, today we bring it out in scientific form. That is why, historians should always revise their perspective on the past. However, historians are generally uninterested such an intellectual activity.

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Arguments*, 11.

Seeing this danger, E.P Thompson as a historian engaged a discussion with a philosopher in the ground of ontology and epistemology. Speaking for theory, Althusser's notion of theory contains errors in many places. Thompson rightly makes a lot of criticism to this notion of theory. Because the source of theory, which expresses Althusser's second stage in the production of knowledge, is rather ambiguous. This situation leads to an idealism, and according to Thompson, schematic ideas in the mind of knowledge-producing subject are imposed on the past and this distorts objective nature of the past. With such a system of theory, the historian can never reveal the past objectively. In addition to these criticisms, Thompson's use of the elastic-structured concept instead of using theory causes the same problems. He could not resolve the tension between the object and the subject who produced his knowledge, even though he addressed important points for the writing of history as a result of all his attempts. It is an undeniable fact that historiography has shifted to a subjective sphere with E.P Thompson's excessively elastic concept structure. While trying to save history from the mind of the philosopher, he has made it a prisoner of empirical data. When we look at it in terms of the knowledge production process, Althusser's passive and ineffective raw material understanding again causes the same problems. The criticisms that Thompson says that raw data is not passive and ineffective seem quite right. If the raw material is passive and ineffective and does not impose determinations on the subject performing the intellectual operation, it again causes an idealism and relativism because of absence of determinations. With the critique of empiricism, the argument that the object or knowledge of object proposed by Althusser is completely different things has important results for historians. For empiricism, because knowledge produced by the historian must correspond exactly to the past. However, Althusser demonstrated to historians that this assumption was epistemologically impossible and a mistake. Also, Thompson does not deny this fact. If empiricism is an erroneous epistemological approach to the intellectual operation of historians, it cannot fully correspond to the knowledge produced by historians with real past. Therefore, the intellectual operation that historians do is not to reflect the past as it is. As a result of this, historian's activity on the past can be called as a process of construction.

As a result of this outcome, historians now have to face another problem. If the historical knowledge production process is a construction, a new field of discussion is formed about its content, limits and outcomes. This will be discussed together with postmodernism in the next section.



CHAPTER 3

POSTMODERNIST INTERVENTION IN HISTORY WRITING

3.1 Introduction

Postmodernism is a very broad movement. This movement, which started in the mid-90s, showed its effects in many areas. Most fundamentally, postmodernism, which emerged against modernist narratives, put forward shocking criticisms of the basic assumptions in many fields from philosophy to art, from literature to architecture. The most important representatives of this trend were thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard.

Postmodernist thinkers brought severe criticism to understanding of reality, which is the fundamental basis of modernism and Enlightenment. For the postmodernists, the thinking subject and the purely awaiting object, ready for the intellectual operation, were no more than a ridiculous presumption. Because these two things, that is, the thinking subject and the object that is the focus of knowledge production, are entirely interwoven with the discourse, cultural values and ideological structures of the time. Therefore, postmodernist theorists argued that the main purpose of the intellectual operation is to decipher the knowledge formed by discursive patterns, cultural features and ideological structures, and to reveal this network of relations.

Postmodernist thinkers has claimed that the reference point of truth is language and text. That is, they have equated the truth with language and the text. According to them, one can never talk about a truth outside of the limits of language and text. Historians and historiography have had their share from this scathing attack on conventional forms of thinking about truth. For example, Keith Jenkins argues that

there is an ontological distance between the past and history (historiography)⁵¹. History amounts to a discourse or a language game.⁵² Therefore, no historical methodology is superior to others.⁵³ Furthermore the problem of causality in history is doomed to remain unsolved.⁵⁴ In a similar vein, Mark Poster criticizes the traditions of social and political history for being humanist. For both traditions, the notions of 'truth' and 'reality' are basic reference points in their approach to the past.⁵⁵ Challenging the distinction between fiction and reality, he recommends historians acknowledge the 'creative materiality of text' and focus on 'the constitution of the subject' as a field of study.⁵⁶

The postmodernist equation of truth with language, and the pattern of this equality with ideology, cultural features, and discursive constraints, therefore, challenged the most fundamental grounds on which historians have relied. The impossibility of truth outside of language and text separated historians from their main object, the past, as the basic assumption of historians is their alleged ability to objectively reveal and reconstruct whatever happened in the past. However, the results of their intellectual operations are in the form of text, and their most basic sources are in written form, that is, text. As a result of postmodernist challenge, they have faced the criticism that both their sources and products are under influence of a certain patterns and power relations. That is why they are far from objectivity. The article written by Roland Barthes, "The Death of Author", can actually be adapted to historians as a result of these criticisms as "The Death of Historian as an Author". In this article, Barthes says argues that by giving the text itself complete autonomy, the author actually had no effect on the text that the author wrote. The author can never fully dominate his interpretations. In other words, he argued that the author could never reflect his full

⁵¹ Keith Jenkins, *Tarihi Yeniden Düşünmek*, (Ankara: Dost Kitapevi,1997), 31.

⁵² Jenkins, *Tarihi Yeniden Düşünmek*, 44.

⁵³ Jenkins, *Tarihi Yeniden Düşünmek*, 27.

⁵⁴ Jenkins, *Tarihi Yeniden Düşünmek*, 63.

⁵⁵ Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism, and History: Mode of Production Versus Information*, (Cambridge: Polity,1984), 4-6.

⁵⁶ Poster, *Foucault, Marxism, and History*, 10.

intention in the text.⁵⁷ Likewise, the historian, who is an author, can never reflect their objective purposes in his text. The historian can never be neutral and will want to reflect his value judgments and interpretations into the text, but he will not be able to fully achieve this.

Although Barthes's argument was completely devastating for historiography, another postmodernist, Hayden White, made more constructive and contributory work on the texts produced by historians. He is one of the most important representatives of the postmodernist intervention in historiography. In the next section, Hayden White's intervention and initiative in historiography will be examined.

3.2 Metahistory: Structural Elements in Historical Writing

Hayden White published a book called *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* in 1973, a path-breaking work for the philosophy of history. Generally speaking, philosophy of history can be divided into two traditions: classical philosophy of history and analytical philosophy of history. The former can be described as the efforts to apply a logical pattern to historical development and historically driven forces, as in the case of Hegel, Kant and Marx. For example, Karl Marx has applied linear time to a final destination, which is classless society. The analytical philosophy of history focuses on how historians can write proper history. The main purpose is to provide historians with a variety concepts to guide in writing their histories. Michael Stanford's book "A Companion to the Study of History" can be considered a typical example of analytical philosophy of history.

Metahistory has offered something different to history writing. For the first time, White has tried to analyze the texts produced by historians with a postmodernist orientation. White's was a pioneering work was part of a broader movement in social sciences, called "Linguistic Turn". "Linguistic turn" is the term that denotes the impact of the transformations in cultural anthropology, post-orientalist and post-colonialist critique, the new historicism in literary studies, deconstructionism,

⁵⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image, music, text*, (London: Fontana, 1977), 142-148.

popular culture studies and the complex post-modernism literature on social sciences.⁵⁸ Considering the two traditions of philosophy of history, I might argue that White's work is closer to the analytical one. He considers his own work as a guide to historians since historians can be aware of using tropes which function to form their historical imaginations and view of reality. While in this sense he is closer to the analytical tradition, his of treating history writing, which was supposed to be authoritative representations of the past, as literary texts are what makes his intervention quite radical. It is also significant that this intervention came in 1973, so he could be considered as *the* vanguard of postmodernist intervention into the discipline of history.

This chapter therefore is devoted understanding the challenge White has posed to historians' practice. In addition to discussing his *Metahistory* and its theory of tropes, I focus on two very influential articles, "Fictions of Factual Representations" and "Historical Texts as Literary Artefact", published in his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* in 1986. The goal of this chapter is evaluation of constructivist elements in historians' text which is mentioned in the first chapter.

3.2.1 What is Metahistory?

What is Metahistory? Simply, it means beyond history. For historical writing, one might argue that it implies an overarching structure covering historical writing and historian's imagination and reality conceptions. White, however, did not coin the concept. In 1920's and 1930's, 'Metahistory' was used by Jewish and German thinkers who used it to emphasize history as divine providence. As such, it represented the messianic hopes of Judaism and the Christian idea of the return of Jesus Christ. In the introduction to *Metahistory*, White says that the concept refers to the "precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively 'historical explanation should be". But Metahistory is not similar to Hempel's covering law theory or

⁵⁸ Geoff Eley, "Playing it Safe. Or: How is Social History Represented? " *History Workshop Journal* 35, (1993), 206.

Marx's base and superstructure dialectic. This is because the theory of tropes is not deterministic and contains elective affinities.⁵⁹

In the book White focuses on four historians: Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville and Burchardt and four philosophy of history: Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Croce. White's main focus is language as he asserts that language shapes the writing of history. White says that: "This act of prefiguration may, in turn, take a number of forms, the types of which characterizable by the linguistics modes in which they are cast".⁶⁰ White argues that historians select theoretical concepts and narrative structures, and these tools give them frameworks to analyze historical events.⁶¹

Histories combine a certain amount of 'data', theoretical concepts for explaining these data, and a narrative structure for their representation...In addition, I maintain, they contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic in nature, and which serves as the precritically paradigm of what a distinctively 'historical' explanation should be. This paradigm functions as the 'metahistorical' elements in all historical works that are more comprehensive in scope than the monography or archival report.⁶²

White emphasizes that the formation of historical work just consists of raw data, processed data, concepts for analyze and interpretations. Historians have to convert chaotic chains of events into a coherent story. This means that they have to give representability to raw data. But the form of representation is necessarily poetic and figurative, and contains tropes, which are rhetorical devices. According to White, four tropes exist as are underlying structural elements in history writing.

According to White, historians choose what tropes to use in order to construct their representations, which they do this consciously or unconsciously. With the argument around the four tropes, he strongly underlined the relationship between history and literature. He has also intended to reveal historian's consciousness with rhetorical

⁵⁹ Herman Paul, "Metahistorical Prefigurations: Towards A Re-Interpretation of Tropology in Hayden White," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Archaeology* 1, no.2, (2004), 3-4.

⁶⁰ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth- Century Europe*, (Baltimore& London: The Johns Hopkins University Press,1973), x.

⁶¹ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 206.

⁶² Green and Troup, *The Houses*, 206-207.

devices. Commenting on Ranke, one of the founders of modern history writing, he highlights the two tropes:

So, Ranke prefigured the historical field in the mode of Metaphor, which sanctioned a primary interest in events in their particularity and uniqueness, their vividness, color, and variety, and then suggested to the Synecdochic comprehension of it as a field of formal coherences, the ultimate or final unity of which could be suggested by analogy to the nature of the parts.⁶³

According to White, Ranke believed that historical events are unique and particular. At the same time, historians can see patterns in the great diversity of events. Ranke assumed that all historical particulars took part in a universal development of the human spirit through the course of time. White asserts that these two preconceptions could be characterized in the mode of metaphor. Using metaphors indicates particularity of historical events. In addition to the metaphor, Ranke employed Synecdochic comprehension. In Ranke's view of reality, interrelations between the particular and the general require using the mode of synecdoche. Moving on to other writers White has analyzed, he argues that Marx used the mode of metonymy, Hegel, metonymy and synecdoche and lastly, Burckhardt employed irony.⁶⁴

White's theoretic apparatus does not just consist of tropology. There are three layers in his analysis of the structure of historian's text: "Mode of Emplotment", "Mode of Argument", and "Mode of Ideological Implication."⁶⁵

These three modalities, chosen by historians, determines their historical imaginations and style. But the historians are not totally free in selecting modes. There are selective affinities between three modes.⁶⁶ Each mode needs to certain modes to provide coherence and persuasiveness. To return to Ranke, an ideological implication indicates Ranke's social and political ideals. Ideological implication contains Ranke's convictions about good and healthy aspects of European civilization, which according to White, are conservative convictions. Ranke also

⁶³ Paul, "Metahistorical Prefigurations", 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁵ Green and Troup, *The Houses*, 208.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

believed that nation state is culmination of final goal.⁶⁷ Secondly, Ranke employed the comic mode of Emplotment. In the comic mode, men are capable to achieve harmony from disparity. This is actually very appropriate for of Ranke's narrative of political ideas such as seeing the nation state historical peak point. Lastly, Ranke used Organicist mode of argument. Unique particularities are part of integrity. Similarly, an organism which consists of the particular but as whole particularities are part of a working system, Ranke used to Organicist metaphor to indicate historical development as a working system.⁶⁸

Ranke employed four layers of narrative strategy and constituted his own reality perspective. This shows that history writing is not only matter of using data correctly or being objective but also of representation style and other linguistic determinants. With the theory of tropes and modes, White seems to have a very relativist view of history writing. Given the importance of linguistic determinants, even if two historians focus on same issue with same data, they can tell different stories. This idea very much contradicts the ethos of the modern historian the original source of which is Ranke.

3.2.2 Boundary between History and Fiction

After the publication of *Metahistory*, White continued his work on the philosophy of history. In *Metahistory*, by posing tropes in the representation strategy as a main determinant, he had asserted that historical representations are figurative and poetic in their nature. White in another book, *Tropics of Discourse*, wrote two articles about the boundary between histories and fictions. In those articles, named "The Fictions of Factual Representation" and "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact", White further investigates what he considers as the inseparable relations between fiction and history.

White's epistemological approach in these works largely depends on Foucault and in understanding the process of constructing historical knowledge, he embraces

⁶⁷ Paul, "Metahistorical Prefigurations", 8.

⁶⁸ Green and Troup, *The Houses*, 208.

Foucault's notion of episteme. The indefinite relationship between referentiality (the main purpose of language) and empiricist correspondence, deception in covering law (Grand Narrative) and Foucault's notion of episteme helped White develop his theory about historical writing. Foucault's notion of episteme is mainly about the relationship between the past and narrative form. Thus, White sees historical writing as literary artefact and as construction instead of a reflection of empirical, contextualized and accurate experiences. Using 'episteme', White once more recognizes the past as the textual product of historians.⁶⁹

Such an understanding, specifically that the historian does not produce past as actual empirical experience, but as more text and literary artefact can raise the question about what fiction is. To address this point, one must first understand White's view of fiction:

Most people understand that the concept of fiction has two different meanings. In philosophy and in law fiction is just hypothetical construction. In law we have the fictions of corporation. It is called a legal fiction. Although it is fiction, it is real...Bentham's idea is that hypothetical possibility. Another meaning is 'something fantastic', 'an imaginary thing...When I was using the notion of fiction, I was trying to include all of those meaning. For most historians when you say 'literature' you mean 'fiction'. I want to suggest that the literary writing may not be about imaginary entities, but about the real things. History is about real world, and it can be presented in the artistic way without turning the historical writing into imaginary...When we want to get to past, we have to use literary techniques as substitutes for the facts.⁷⁰

Differences between historical events and fictional events have been defined by Aristotle: historical events are about the factual but fictional events are about the imagined. This distinction seems clear, but both the history writer and the poet have similar methods and strategies in the writing process.⁷¹ This has led White to argue that historical narrative is just another form of fiction.⁷²

⁶⁹ Alun Muslow, *Deconstructing History*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 151.

⁷⁰ Jakub Muchowski, "I am not Interested in Truth. I am Interested in Reality. A Conversation with Hayden White", *Studia Metodologiczne* 42, Special issue (2012), 91-92.

⁷¹ Hayden White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation", in *The Houses of History*, selected and introduced by Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 218.

⁷² Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 5.

White argues that fictive features of history writing had been accepted by historians before the modern times. But, in the nineteenth century, historians began to recognize fiction as the opposite of truth.⁷³ This was because historians could not escape the allure of Rankean-style historiography, which itself was under the illusory influence of scientism. He criticizes historians for abandoning the wisdom of rhetorical devices for scientific objectivity: “they did not realize that the facts do not speak for themselves, but that the historians speak for them, speaks on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is-in its representation- a purely discursive one.”⁷⁴

While rhetorical devices are necessary to write history, nineteenth-century historians hoped to be scientists and therefore dismissed using poetic devices in history writing. They, however, also failed to form new style of representation in the modern scientific sense.⁷⁵ While historians rejected artistic ways to be scientific, they could not create a technical language to represent past which has validity of all historians. This was because they mainly saw their discipline between art and science and wanted to gain privilege both from art and science. This moderationist self-defense indeed served a good purpose as it protected history writing from philosophical idealism and scientific positivism. But this attitude also made historians very conservative and blocked self-criticism.⁷⁶

3.2.3 Using Figurative Language in History Writing

In the article “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” White has produced further arguments against the opposition between historical and literary texts. Historian’s task is to make sense of historical facts into coherent story. Historical knowledge is not absolute or certain, it consists of interpretation of events. White underlines that the chronological set of historical events do not constitute a story.

⁷³ White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation”, 216.

⁷⁴ Paul, *White*, 94.

⁷⁵ Hayden White, “Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality”, *Rethinking History* 9, no.2-3 (June 2005),149.

⁷⁶ Hayden White, “The Burden of History”, in *Tropics of Discourse*, by Hayden White, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press,1986), 28.

The events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of a certain of them, and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the Emplotment of a novel or play.⁷⁷

Without violating the chronological order, authors can emplot events with different meanings. Thus, the relations between these set of events are not inherent in themselves. Historians with different figurative approaches can give an event privilege over others.⁷⁸ As a series of events do not constitute a story itself, similarly events are not tragic or comic in their nature: “No historical event is intrinsically tragic; it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within the context of a structured set of events of which it is an element enjoying a privileged place.”⁷⁹

Therefore, historical sequence can be narrated in distinct ways, be subject to distinct interpretations and show itself with different meanings. For example, Michelet and Tocqueville both wrote histories of French Revolution. But they emplotted their stories in different ways: Tocqueville employed ironic tragedy and Michelet, romantic tragedy. This was not a result of their discovering different sets of data. They focused on different data because they had different stories to tell.⁸⁰

According to White, therefore, historians put seemingly chaotic chain of events in order and ascribe them meaning. What they do is far from reflecting the empirical reality of the past in text. To discuss the process of ascribing meaning, White offers an analogy between psychotherapy and historiography. Psychotherapy functions to familiarize the events with which the patient is obsessed. In a sense, the psychotherapist tries to change the meaning of events to familiarize patients. In the same way, historians want us to refamiliarize with events. To do so, they have to use figurative language because history does not have an accepted technical language.

⁷⁷ Hayden White, “the Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, in *The Modern Historiography Reader*, by Adam Budd, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 358.

⁷⁸ White, “Literary Artifact”, 359.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 353.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 354.

Therefore, historian's language must be figurative language and the texts produced by historians must be recognized verbal artifacts. For example: "a historian writing about Napoleon in a narrative has to turn the real Napoleon into the figure in order to place it in the narrative. Only figures can have a function in the narrative. Real people can't." ⁸¹

The mostly used representation technique among historians is narrative. Unlike technical language, figurative language does not have direct contact to empirical reality. Figurative language converts real entities into figures to place them into narratives.

3.3 Historians' Reactions to White

Historians reacted to criticism of postmodernism, especially that of Hayden White, to historiography in two ways. One response was not to participate in intense theoretical and epistemological debates and basically wait for these criticisms to disappear themselves. Another group of historians took the threat posed by postmodern criticism seriously and developed various responses by getting involved in the relevant debates. These historians have claimed that postmodernist criticisms were not constructive but destructive. They argued that the discipline of history should defend itself against such destructive criticisms. ⁸²

As we have seen, White's attitude to the representation of the past has been essentially relativist. His skepticism about the scientific production of historical knowledge led many historians to show hostility against this relativism about representations of the past. For example, even a nonconventional historian such as Carlo Ginzburg has stood up against this radical relativism. "Against White's methodological skepticism Ginzburg insists that the referential dimension of historiographical discourse can be brought under control through diligent textual

⁸¹ Muchowski, "Conversation with Hayden White", 95.

⁸² Perez Zagorin, "History, the Referent, and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now", *History and Theory* 38, no.1, (Feb.,1999), 2-3.

criticism.”⁸³ Ginzburg has had his criticism against conventional historiography, some of which we shall discuss in the next chapter. He, however, in the last instance, believed in the possibility of accurate production of historical knowledge. Ginzburg criticizes White in that he eliminates the main objective of historical research: accessing the truth in historiography.

Since publication of *Metahistory*, several other historians negatively responded to White’s critical framework. In 1995 Arthur Marwick wrote an essay called “Two approaches to Historical Study: The Metaphysical and the Historical.” In the essay, against White’s relativism, Marwick defends absolute historical truth. Against White’s speculations about relativist nature of historical knowledge, Marwick argues that if one really wants to reach historical truth, he accesses it with the proper tools.⁸⁴

Georg G. Iggers has criticized White for ignoring the author's intention. For him, the latter’s biggest mistake is that the answers to his questions are not found in the text itself. The main answer to the questions is the author's intention. Iggers admits that the author cannot fully control his/her intention. But if we completely exclude the author's intention and rely solely on the text itself, the text becomes open to an infinite number of interpretations. Even if the text is complex and incomprehensible, the focus of basic methods of text analysis should not be the intention of the text itself, but the intention of the author.⁸⁵ “Text have no intention although they and the intentions of the writers expressed in them are open to interpretation.”⁸⁶ Here Iggers criticizes White's disregard of the historian who produced the text as subject and taking the text itself as a reference point. The displacement of the intention of the subject brings the analysis of the text to an absurd point in an extreme relativism.

⁸³ Wulf Kansteiner, “Hayden White’s Critique of the Writing of History”, *History and Theory* 32, no.3 (Oct.,1993), 274.

⁸⁴ F.R. Ankersmith, “Hayden White’s Appeal to the Historians”, *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (May,1998), 186.

⁸⁵ George G. Iggers, “Historiography between Scholarship and Poetry: Reflections on Hayden White's Approach to Historiography.” *Rethinking History* 4, no.3 (2000), 378.

⁸⁶ Iggers, “Reflection on Hayden White”, 378.

In France, the country where many of the postmodernist ideas had been first formulated, historians have shown various reactions to White. While some historians agreed with some of White's arguments, admitting that some of the problems White has focused on had always existed within the discipline of historiography, they at some points they disagreed with White's allegations.

Bernard Lepetit, for one, admits that there is no boundary between history and fiction. However, according to him, it is no longer useful to make this distinction because the nature of historical studies has changed. Even if the narrative model established by White is sufficient and explanatory for the 19th century, it is not a useful concept set for the 20th century.⁸⁷ Unlike Lepetit, Roger Chartier argues strongly that factual representations are different from fictional representations. In the first place, history writing has an intention and an understanding of truth on which it is based. This understanding of truth is beyond discourse because historians can verify these truths with their procedures. Historians can make various statements about the past and can verify them.⁸⁸

Antoine Prost agrees with Hayden White's main arguments. Historians always approaches their object with presuppositions and build history around these. Historian, like poets, are the creators of their narratives. Thus, Prost finds remarkable the relationship between historical texts and fictional texts. However, like Chartier, he criticizes White's ignoring of the evidence, verification, and interpretation of evidence, that is, what distinguishes historical writing from fictional writing.⁸⁹

It is of course neither possible nor necessary to provide a full account of the responses of historians to White's intervention. But the ones we have discussed so far should suffice to provide a general picture. White has argued that historians have general assumptions and that the ideology in which these assumptions are formed is formed by the influence of the network of discourses. With these assumptions, the

⁸⁷ Philippe Carrard, "Hayden White and / in France: receptions, translations, questions*", *Rethinking History* 22, no. 4 (2018), 583.

⁸⁸ Carrard, "Hayden White", 584.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 585.

historian shapes his/her raw material, so whatever the content of the raw material, the author's intention determines the result. Here the intention of the historian is also not autonomous and is shaped by external influences. In other words, the historical text emerges with the historian's non-autonomous intention and this non-autonomous intention imposing its designs on the raw material. Therefore, he concludes, our only reference point in historical analysis should be the historical texts that these two factors combine in.

In response, many historians saw in White's arguments a great danger to their profession. Even though White points to some of the problems that are constantly present in historical writing, White's approach does not solve them. Instead, it makes history writing impossible. Hence, against this menace historians have put their old weapons to use. Historians has claimed that what they write is not fiction because they have evidence that they use, and that the evidence can be tested and verified. It is to this point that the chapter now turns.

3.3.1 Historical Facts and Evidence as Referent Point

In order to defend themselves against postmodernist attack, a large number of historians have pointed out that their reference points are not the text as postmodernists claim, but the evidence and facts that are to be found in history and are subject to observation today. In the criticism of postmodernists, the past is no longer the object of historical knowledge. So, the reference point of historiography should not be the past itself. The historical text is separated from the past, is therefore reduced to an ordinary literary genre. In addition, postmodernist approaches suggest that the determining and limiting factors in historical writing are the structure and structural constraints of language. As a result, the historian invents the text he wrote and imposes it on the past.⁹⁰

At this point I will focus on Zagorin's argument against the postmodern approach to history writing as a representative voice of historians who stress the importance of evidence. According to Zagorin, this approach offers the historian a rather arbitrary

⁹⁰ Zagorin, "the Referent", 13-14.

way, in which facts, evidence, and events could themselves form a coherent text in a certain scheme. As such, the texts produced by historians are now in the same category with the texts of an author who sits at the table and produces his texts by dreaming. Zagorin continues:

...historical facts are not mere isolated entities but can be seen to exist in an immanent relationship to other facts and to exhibit an intelligible structure and order which allows the historian to treat them as distinctive subjects. The development of the atomic theory of matter, or Roman law, or Gothic architecture, or republican institutions, or the doctrine of the divine right of kings, or Renaissance humanism forms in each case an intelligible order of interrelated facts which, as histories, imply their own criteria of relevancy.⁹¹

Zagorin points out here that historical facts are tightly intertwined and therefore cannot be bent with cognitive intervention, as White and postmodernists say. In other words, evidence and events found in history can impose their validity and causal relationships on the historian. And historians reveal connected events and facts by grouping and presenting them with each other.

Zagorin's second objection revolves around narrative. According to him, many products of historical writing can no longer be considered as narrative. So, these are not story-based texts. For example, there are historical studies that explain the variables of a time period, explain the change it shows over time, how an institution was born and how it works. Even though some parts of these texts still use narration, they are basically no longer narratives.⁹² This is why the Hayden White's and postmodernist narrativist approach are ineffective for many historiographies.

Moreover, the records of historical facts preserve themselves in the archive and in various documents. These documents are subject to investigation by historians every day. New resources unearthed also bring about the change of historical explanations.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid, 20.

⁹² Ibid, 21.

⁹³ Joseph M. Byrant, "On sources and narratives in historical social science: a realist critique of positivist postmodern epistemologies*" *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 3 (Sep,2000), 498.

⁹³ Byrant, "On sources and narratives", 499.

⁹³ Ibid, 500.

Ongoing research continuously yields discoveries, large and small, supplying new evidentiary fragments that enrich our developing comprehension of the complexes investigated and of their various components. Skeptics need only reflect on how our understanding early Christianity and Judaism has been altered and refined by discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi texts...⁹⁴

Here one can see how the newly discovered documents and evidence has changed the structure of the past and the narrative as well. The structure of the narrative and the past changes not under the effect of the linguistic tools that historians use in their narratives, but on the new discoveries and their analysis. This shows us that there is no linguistic necessity that is above everything and covers everything, and that evidence and facts play an active role in the text created by the historian with their determinant features.

Another example is the democratization movement that took place in the Ancient Greece. This situation, called the 'Hoplite revolution', expresses a transition period. In the early stages of the 7th century, a new war model emerged, and the Hoplites that were born as a result of this, weakened the aristocracy and brought about democratization. The reconstruction of the past done in this way is not based on linguistic tools. It is based on the sum of the evidence, their tracing and interpretation.⁹⁵ In other words, historians do not impose this change on the period; rather, based on the concrete evidence they have, they establish a cause-effect relationship and put forward their arguments and create texts.

Another problem according to the postmodern approach is that an infinite number of comments and redefinitions can be made about some facts. Yes, it is possible to redefine everything, but it is not likely to happen in any way.⁹⁶ For example, "If the Amazon River is the longest river in the world, it can be redescribed as located in South America, as flowing through several different countries, and in many other

⁹⁵ Perez Zagorin, "Rejoinder to a Postmodernist", *History and Theory* 39, no. 2 (May,2000), 205.

⁹⁵ Zagorin, "Rejoinder", 206

ways as well, but it can't be redescribed as the shortest or the next longest river in the world...’’⁹⁷

The redefinitions and interpretations one make are in constant verification with the facts and evidence itself. As a result of this relationship of checking, one decides that some arguments are true, and some are false.

3.4 Conclusion

Postmodernist criticism has put the aims and motivations of historians into a dead end. Their criticisms were very devastating and attack the basic assumptions of historians. They said that the reference point for historiography was not the past, but the texts produced on this past. In those texts, they stated that they were under the influence of the network of discourses surrounding the person who produced it. The whole consequence of these was very deep relativism and the argument that the real past could never be revealed by historians.

Against all the arguments, historians have defended their own fields. They rejected the fully autonomous nature of language and text. They argued that their texts reconstructed the past in an opaque way through empirical control.

Even though the criticisms and suggestions of postmodernists, especially Hayden White, are so devastating and make history writing impossible. But their contribution to history writing cannot be denied. On the contrary historians who are focusing just historical evidence and the process of checking those evidence, at fetish level, they showed new dimensions that should be taken into account in history writing. Historians now understand that when they do an intellectual operation about the past, they must take into account not only certain procedures, but also the structural features of the language they use. Furthermore, they accepted that narrative method, as proposed by Hayden White, was the best way to represent the past for the discipline of history.

However, it is obvious that postmodernism's extreme constructivist understanding of representation of past cannot be accepted for history writing. Because this understanding leaves the construction of history entirely to the subject own sake. As a result of this situation, the discipline of history systematically ceases to be a discipline that has its own truths and methods. On the contrary to constructivist approach, historians have emphasized that historical writing is not a construction process but rather a reconstruction process.

The emphasis history as reconstruction against constructivist emphasis of postmodernism reached its peak point with the understanding of microhistory that emerged in Italy. Microhistorians especially Carlo Ginzburg argued that the main goal of the historian is the reconstruction of the past. In the next chapter, this view will be discussed and evaluated specifically around microhistory and Carlo Ginzburg.

CHAPTER 4

TRIUMPH OF EVIDENCE AND FACTS: THE RISE OF MICROHISTORY

4. 1 Introduction

After the postmodern criticism of conventional ways of history writing, historians generally defended themselves on a methodological level. They thought that the methods employed to reach objective nature of historical facts and evidence was sufficient to dispel the postmodern skepticism against historiography. This emphasis on historical evidence and facts saw its peak point in Microhistory school that emerged in Italy and proposed a quite different approach to history. Microhistorians have not completely ignored postmodern criticism. However, they stood against the postmodernists in terms of producing objective knowledge of the past, which is the main point of historical writing.

However, in order to do this, Microhistorians also brought great criticism against the Annales school, which was ineffective against postmodern assault and was the dominant historiographical school of that period in Europe. Microhistorians opposed the large-scale investigation methods and argued that the scale of inquiry should be reduced. they underlined that people who were invisible to the historian's eyes in large-scale studies should again become the historian's main focus. To achieve this goal, they developed a new research methodology. According to this, the main task of the historian was to reconstruct the past through a method based on in-depth examination of historical evidence and facts and sensitivity to detail. At this precise point they stood against the postmodernist intervention which considered history writing as a mental and literary construction process. However, microhistorians, most famously Carlo Ginzburg rejected this a priori constructionist view. He stated

that, on the contrary, history writing is *reconstruction* process in which facts and evidence derived from facts assure its validity and objectivity.

This chapter starts with the criticisms directed by microhistorians against the Annales school. Then, in the context of Ginzburg and his famous book *The Cheese and the Worms*, the research methodology of Microhistory school and their view of history as reconstruction are to be discussed. The discussion will refer to points where the Microhistory school diverges from the postmodernist critique.

4.2 From Nation-state to the Global: Scale of History from Ranke to Annales School

In history writing, there are numerous approaches to the reconstruction of the past. Leopold von Ranke who is accepted as the founder of modern history writing explicitly rejected teleology. He, however, having considered the nation-state form as the high point of civilization, indirectly introduced a teleological standpoint. After von Ranke, historiography went beyond his suggestions of nation-state as the focus of historiography. Annales school is the best example of this attempt to supersede the domination of nation-state in historiography. Annales historians have offered a scale and perspective much larger than the Rankean suggestion.⁹⁸

The journal *Annales* was founded in 1929 March Bloch and Lucien Febvre at the University of Strasbourg. In the mid-1930's, journal moved to Paris. Bloch and Febvre's main purpose was "to create an open forum for interdisciplinary research and to promote concrete, collaborative work that would not be tied to the 'positivism' of traditional historical scholarship in France."⁹⁹ According to Jacques Revel, in Annales schools methods and formulations, of course there were some innovation and changes but some fundamental features can be traced back to the Durkheimian sociologist François Simiand.¹⁰⁰ Annales School which offered an

⁹⁸ Norman James Wilson, *History in crisis?: recent directions in historiography*, (N.J: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 71-72

⁹⁹ Lynn Hunt, "French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the Annales Paradigm", *Journal of Contemporary History* 21, no.2 (April 1986), 209.

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Revel, "Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social", In *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, by Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, (New York: New Press, 1995), 493.

enormous area to study to historians, with the influence of Simiand, turned its face from understanding of uniqueness and particularity of historical events and phenomena to their repetitiveness and regularities. In such a movement, of course, it is not surprising that there is the impact of natural sciences. “In their eagerness to prove themselves scientific, French historians ignored the critiques of positivism developed by Dilthey and other German scholars.”¹⁰¹ Jacques Revel points out the scientific voluntarism of Annales historians:

... Simiand argued, historians would have to turn their attention from unique and accidental (that is, from individuals, events, and singular cases) to that which alone could be the object of true scientific study, namely, the repetitive and its variations, the observable regularities from which laws could be inferred. This initial choice, which the founders of the Annales and their successors largely made their own, sheds lights on the fundamental characteristics of French-style social history: the emphasis on the study of the largest possible aggregates; the priority granted to measurement in the analysis of social phenomena; the choice of a time frame long enough to large scale transformation visible.¹⁰²

This intervention in favor of “longue duree”, higher scales, larger geographical areas and repetition and regularities introduced crucial changes to history writing. Looking into repetitive phenomena and measurement of regularities into general laws mean that singular events and narrative must be largely excluded from history writing. Events are unique and particular that is why by definition they cannot be measured by general laws. Secondly, Annales historians have abandoned narrative because they wanted to analyze structures and structures can hardly be narrated. Instead of narrative, they have employed analytical history writing.

The Annales rejection of the stress on the event had far reaching methodological consequences for the profession of history. They rejected event history. Annales historian though that enquiry on events is useless. “The critique of *histoire evenementielle* was reflected in the movement’s decided animus against political history.”¹⁰³ The Annales historian attacked the Rankean tradition of history writing and with this attack, focal points of history writing shifted from state and politics to human oriented history. Accordingly, the Annales opposed the professionalism

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 64.

¹⁰² Revel, “Microanalysis”, 493.

¹⁰³ Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 66.

among historians such as the divisions into social, political and economic history.¹⁰⁴ Instead, they tried to cover the vast area of social sciences and always emphasized interdisciplinary research. The ultimate goal was to conduct Total History.¹⁰⁵

This fundamental objection to conventional history and social sciences created an enormous influence on history writing not only in France but globally as well. The leadership of Fernand Braudel carried the impact of Annales school on historiography and social sciences to its peak level.

4.2.1 Questioning Macrohistorical Concepts, Questioning the Social: The Linguistic and Cultural Turns

From 1970s and 1980s, the macrohistorical and long duree based history writing began to decline and Macrohistorical concepts came to be questioned and challenged. First, fragmentation began in the Annales School. With quantitative method, collection of large serial data such as prices, marriages, and books, due to absence of specific focus of research, entered a vicious cycle. “A newer, more technologically advanced form of positivism replaced old one.”¹⁰⁶ According to Revel, rapid technological advances also led the historians to review their practices.

Computers made it possible to record, store, and process much greater volumes of data than in the past, yet many historians felt that the questions they were asking had not kept pace with this technological progress, and that their vast quantitative projects had begun to come up against the law of diminishing returns.¹⁰⁷

In the same period, the world was faced with problems and crisis. But a belief in understanding of the social declined as response to problems. One can talk about a tendency to abandon the understanding of the social as a whole.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the belief in the revolutionary transformation of the existing world also began to dissolve. “... since the 1970s and 1980s were almost universally crisis for the prevailing belief that the world would be rapidly and radically transformed along

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *History in crisis?*, 74.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Hunt, “French History”, 213-214.

¹⁰⁷ Revel, “Microanalysis”, 494.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 495.

revolutionary lines”.¹⁰⁹ The decline of grand models to understand reality and grand schemes to transform the world were thus closely connected. But according to Giovanni Levi “events and realities which very far from conforming to the optimistic models proposed by great Marxist or functionalist system.”¹¹⁰

The decline of the belief in progress and transformation along revolutionary lines has presented itself as challenge to social history tradition. Of course, there is methodological side to the objections against the prevailing paradigm. Some felt that Marxist history and social history have failed to reveal ‘ordinary people’. They have fallen into the same error with old conventional political history by just focusing on high echelons of the society and the mighty.¹¹¹

As we have seen in the previous chapter, postmodernist turn in social sciences also influenced historiography. Especially important works are Jacques Derrida’s and Michel Foucault’s works. Derrida’s poststructuralism underlined the importance of language and helped foment the linguistic turn in history and historical thought. Such ideas were put into practice by several new generation historians.¹¹²

In addition to Hayden White’s intervention, anthropological insights into history, especially the compelling ideas of Clifford Geertz brought culture into the fore in humanities and social science. This ‘cultural turn’ challenged the previous approaches to the social. The impact of the work of Pierre Bourdieu reinforced these trends.¹¹³

Under the impact of postmodernism, and the linguistic and cultural turns, focal points of historiography changed. The biggest challenge probably concerned existing macrohistorical assumptions. In the works of Le Goff and George Duby, narrative

¹⁰⁹ Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory”, In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, by Peter Burke, (PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 97-98.

¹¹⁰ Levi, *On Microhistory*, 98

¹¹¹ George G. Iggers, *Historiography in the twentieth century: from scientific objectivity to the postmodern challenge*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 102

¹¹² , Sigurdur Gylfi Magnusson. “The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory Within the Postmodern State of Knowledge”, *Journal of Social History* 36, no.3 (Spring, 2003), 707.

¹¹³ Magnusson, “The singularization of History”, 707.

and individual came play a crucial role. Geertz introduced 'thick description'. In Germany Hans Medick used thick description in his works. Most importantly, in Italy, the school of Microhistory emerged, which challenged macrohistorical approach in most fundamental ways.¹¹⁴

4.3 A Reaction against Social History: Microhistory

In 1970s, a group of Italian historians began to defend a new way to interpret the archives. This new way of studying and writing history took shape in the journal *Quaderni Storici*. The best-known representatives of this new historical approach were Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi and Eduardo Grendi. The most influential books of what came to be called microhistory were Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* and Giovanni Levi's *Inheriting Power*.

The founding historians of the Microhistory tradition such as Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, Carlo Poni and Edoardo Grendi were Marxist. But they challenged the dominant understanding of Marxism in two way. First, they opposed the main policies of the Italian Communist Party. Second, they insisted on their loss of faith against macrohistorical conceptions. Their main argument was to bring back human face in humanities. Therefore, they rejected the traditions of Marxist history writing, the Annales school and analytic social sciences.¹¹⁵

This rejection was executed through two steps: stressing narrative and reduction of scale. The first one actually is not a new tool for history writing. Narrative has long occupied historiography as a tool of construction of the past. With narrative, the authors presented chaotic chain of events in meaningful sequence and conveyed them to the reader. The decline of narrative in using humanities had begun with Marxist social history and the Annales school. Focusing on structure instead of agency in the structure-agency question in social sciences, they dismissed narrative from history writing; structures could not be narrated. Microhistorians claimed that they brought back human face to history writing; for this reason, they equipped themselves with

¹¹⁴ Iggers, *Historiography in the twentieth century*, 104-105.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 107.

narrative. For example, Carlo Ginzburg wanted to reconstruct an Italian miller's mental state. This type of transformation from focusing on structures to humans required narrative. That is why they employed narrative as a weapon in methodological ground.

The most characteristic and challenging innovation by Italian microhistorians to historiography is the reduction of scale. Ginzburg and Poni accepted that serial and quantitative research provide powerful investigative tools. But quantitative and serial studies of extended and vast scales can distort facts.¹¹⁶ "In looking at extended period of time... it is difficult to understand the day-to-day problems of survival."¹¹⁷ Actually, in his famous book *The Cheese and the Worms* extraordinary man Menacciho would be invisible to quantitative enquiry. Instead, Ginzburg used hermeneutic approach and reconstructed miller's mental world.

Microhistorical approach of reduction of scale is similar to looking an object. If you look an object from a distance, you cannot recognize its distinctive features. But if you get closer the object, you can recognize important things and you reveal something crucial for the object like detectives.

The thick description introduced by Geertz also attracted the attention of microhistorians. Actually 'thick description' was first formulated by philosopher Gilbert Ryle. Geertz borrowed term and adapted it to anthropology. Basically, 'thick description' means ascribing intention to one's action.¹¹⁸ Levi argued that microhistory present more reliable approach than Geertzian interpretive anthropology. Geertz and him followers tend to describe particularities in homogenous cultural context. But microhistory on conflicts and solidarities.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and The Game: unequal exchange and the historiographic marketplace", In *Microhistory and Lost People of Europe* edited by Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 3.

¹¹⁷ Ginzburg and Poni, "*The Name and The Game*", 3.

¹¹⁸ Joseph G. Ponterotto, "Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept "Thick Description", *The Qualitative Report* 11, no.3 (2006), 539.

¹¹⁹ Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 76.

4.3.1 A Radical Historian: Carlo Ginzburg

Ginzburg, born in April 15 in 1939 in Turin, acquired fame in the academic and popular world with his *Il formaggio ei vermi* (The Cheese and The Worms). Ginzburg's family background could partially explain his intellectual career and the particular path of history writing he adapted. "My father is a novelist. So, in many ways I started out involved in literature and maybe above all-in fictional literature. My father, however, was also a historian; he wrote historical essays."¹²⁰ This kind of intellectual environment is an important factor for the formation of an extraordinary historian. The second crucial factor in the formation of his thought is philosophers' historians from whom he was greatly influenced: Michael Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, March Bloch, Thomas Kuhn and Delio Cantimori.

Ginzburg and his colleagues constituted the *Quaderni Storici* where they suggested a new type of history writing. The new wave of historian objected the conventional historiographical schools in various grounds. Ginzburg's enterprise aimed make those who were at the margins of the society visible. Ginzburg has argued that "a close reading of relatively small number of texts, related to a possibly circumscribed belief, can be more rewarding than the massive accumulation of repetitive evidence."¹²¹ In addition, he introduced the *evidential paradigm* as an alternative in interpreting historical evidence.¹²²

As an extraordinary historian, Carlo Ginzburg selected extraordinary subjects to investigation: religious radicals, witchcraft, iconography, and historiography.¹²³ His book *The Night Battles* well illustrates this choice of subjects as well as reduction of scale and his hermeneutics.

¹²⁰ Keith Luria and Romulo Gandolfo, "Carlo Ginzburg: An Interview" *Radical History Reviews*, no.35 (Spring, 1986), 35.

¹²¹ Edward Muir, "Introduction: Observing Trifles", *In Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, edited by Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), viii

¹²² Muir, "Observing Trifles", viii

¹²³ Anne Jacobson Schuttle, "Carlo Ginzburg", *The Journal of Modern History* 48, no.2 (June,1976), 299.

From the 1570s to 1640s, the Inquisition in the Friuli (near Venice) investigated some 850 villagers for witchcraft. The inquisitors, trained in demonology, expected a certain behavior from witches. They asked the accused about their involvement in sabbats, but they received were baffling. The villagers did not see themselves as witches but rather as *benandanti*, good walkers or good-doers. They were a selected group-only those born with a caul qualified. They did not participate in Sabbats, but armed with stalks of fennel, their souls left their bodies on Thursday nights during the Ember Days to combat witches armed with stalks of sorghum. If they won, the harvest would be good; if they lost, their neighbor faced a lean year.¹²⁴

In historical as well as historiographical works, Ginzburg objected to the unquestioned trust in knowledge produce by modern scientific reasoning. He is also known for his articulation of an alternative form of knowledge, labeled conjectural.”¹²⁵ In the article, ‘Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method’, he actually offered a new sort of interpretation of historical evidence. According to him, the root of conjectural model goes into primitive people who has lived by hunting. In order to catch their prey, they learned to analyze the animal’s traces and signs. With this way, “they were able to reconstruct the appearance of an animal they’d never set eyes on.”¹²⁶ That is, hunters produced conjectures about the way of their prey moved and acted. Ginzburg called them as the first story tellers. because by analyzing the prey’s signs, they could form patterns for chain of events. He further stresses that conjectural paradigm is “... the usual approach in a number of spheres of activity: physicians, historians, politicians, potters, joiners, mariners, hunters, fisherman and woman in general.”¹²⁷ But in 16th century Galilean scientific method focused on repetitive phenomena using mathematical and experimental methods. In order to acquire the knowledge of the general, the new scientific method sacrificed the individual. The revival of the conjecture model emerged in 19th century. Ginzburg mentions three figures in relation to this revival: Morelli, Freud and Conan Doyle. Morelli offered focusing on unimportant details instead of general features of an artwork in order to find out

¹²⁴ Keith Luria, “The Paradoxical Carlo Ginzburg”, *Radical History Review* 35, (1986), 81.

¹²⁵ Paolo Pallandino, “Ginzburg in Harlem: History, Structure and the Politics of Primitivism”, *Culture, Theory and Critique* 49, no.2 (Oct,2008), 203.

¹²⁶ Carlo Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Methods”, *History Workshop*, no.9 (Spring,1980), 13.

¹²⁷ Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes”, 15

about its authenticity. This was because the imitator does not attribute importance to small details in the artwork. In the same way, Conan Doyle's fictional character, Sherlock Holmes avoids starting from the general impression to solve his cases. Ginzburg argues that same method can be implemented to historical evidence: "starting an investigation from something that does not quite fit, something odd that needs to be explained."¹²⁸

Although skeptical of the scientific techniques that the human sciences had borrowed from natural sciences, Ginzburg is also against postmodern skepticism. He offers a model for finding evidence and this means that under the guidance of this model, truth is accessible. He also uses very strong language against the impact of poststructuralism on historical studies: "I am deeply against every kind of Derrida trash, that kind of cheap skeptical attitude. I think that that is one of the cheapest intellectual things going on."¹²⁹ In the same way, he objected Foucault's intervention:

For Foucault, Edward Muir notes 'theories cannot be verified because standards of verification come from a modern scientific discipline that makes the past conform to the present. Correctness means conformity to an order of thing that has been defined by a discipline or an institution.' For Ginzburg and Levi this is an evasion. Correctness must be determined by the concrete, physically real evidence the past present us.¹³⁰

It has been argued that his conjectural model and the rejection of postmodernist influence actually makes Ginzburg a realist and positivist historian.¹³¹ This seems paradoxical as, one of the methodological points of microhistorians has been that positivism should have no place in history writing. On the other hand, whether successful or not, his approach to the question of evidence and its relation to past reality aims at going beyond the positivist paradigm in social sciences.

¹²⁸ Matti Peltonen, "Clues, Margins and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research", *History and Theory* 40, no.3 (Oct. 2001), 349.

¹²⁹ Luria and Gondolfo, "An Interview", 100.

¹³⁰ Iggers, *Historiography in the twentieth century*, 110.

¹³¹ Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 79.

4.3.1.1 *The Cheese and The Worms*

In this book, Carlo Ginzburg has tried to reconstruct mental world of an extraordinary miller who lived in the 16th century in Italy. The protagonist of the book is Domenico Scandella known as Menocchio, who was a heretic miller.

After investigation of the trial records, Ginzburg examined the miller's environment. Some of his views could be connected to the Reformation movement. But although his ideas have some resemblance to the Reformation ideas, Reformation cannot solely explain the originality of Menocchio's ideas. Ginzburg differentiated between elite culture and peasant popular oral culture. "Ginzburg asserts, it becomes possible to differentiate between the two cultural levels and hence to see one aspect of popular culture more or less in its original form."¹³² Menocchio's peculiar ideas about God, Jesus Christ and the creation myth is a combination of the "encounter between printed and the oral culture."¹³³ As in the *Night Battles*, Ginzburg here speculates on the possible ancient origins of such 'strange' beliefs. In particular, Ginzburg was struck by the way in which Menocchio's cosmology paralleled the beliefs of certain Vedic myths. Menocchio, Ginzburg claimed:

Unknowingly echoed ancient and distant myths. The origin of the universe is explained in an Indian myth in the Vedas by the coagulation-similar to that of milk –of the waters of the primordial sea, beaten by the creator gods. ... It's an astonishing coincidence... It can't be excluded that it may constitute one of the proofs, even though fragmentary and partly obliterated, of the existence of a millenarian cosmological tradition that, beyond the differences of languages, combined myth and science... In Menocchio's case, it's impossible not to think of a direct transmission-an oral transmission from generation to generation.¹³⁴

In the Preface, Ginzburg emphasizes Berthold Brecht's "literate worker" as a manifestation of his work. Ginzburg points out that the practitioners of history focused on "the great deeds of kings" for many years. But now, they are shifting and turning their face to subordinated people.

¹³² Schuttle, "Carlo Ginzburg", 304.

¹³³ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, translated by John and Anne Tedeschi, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 33

¹³⁴ John Martin, "Journey to the World of Dead: The Work of Carlo Ginzburg" *Journal of Social History* 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1992), 615.

Demonico Scandella was born in 1532. He lived whole life in Montereale except two years. He was a miller, carpenter and mason. In the trial, he argued that he was earning living by doing many things. On 28 September 1583, Menocchio was denounced to inquisition. He was accused of saying perverse and blasphemous things about Jesus Christ. Moreover, he had tried to spread his ideas by preaching as he was associated with a church.

Menocchio was no ordinary heretic. According to him, blaspheme was not a sin. “Everybody has his calling, some to plow, some to hoe, and I have mine, which is to blaspheme”.¹³⁵ He also had interesting ideas about the presence of god. “The air is God...the earth is our mother.”; “Who do you imagine God to be? God is nothing but little breath, and whatever else man imagines him to be”; “Everything that we see is God, and we are gods”; the sky, earth, sea, air, abyss, and hell, all is God”.¹³⁶ Menocchio’s views about the birth of Jesus Christ were also striking. “What did you think that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary? It’s impossible that she gives birth to him and remained virgin. It might very well have been this, that he was a good man, or the son of a good man”.¹³⁷ In addition, Menocchio had developed a peculiar creation myth in his mind.

I have said that, in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed- just as cheese is made out of milk-and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels. The most holy majesty decreed that these should be God and the angels, and among that number of angels, there were also God, he too having been created out of that mass at the same time, and he was made lord, with four captains, Lucifer, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.¹³⁸

During the preliminary hearing, the vicar asked Menocchio to confirm that he is serious about his statements. The vicar also asked whether he is in his right mind or not. Menocchio answered both in the affirmative. Menocchio declared that had told his fellow countrymen that “Would you like me to teach you the true way? Try to do good and walk-in path of my ancestors, and what Holy Mother Church

¹³⁵ Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 5-6.

commands”.¹³⁹ According to Ginzburg, Menocchio probably lied. Because in fact, he taught in the opposite direction. For Ginzburg the actual question is “But what made him so sure of himself? With what authority was he speaking?”¹⁴⁰ In the trial, when asked, where these ideas coming were from, he replied he was deceived by satanic soul. But afterwards, he explained the source of these ideas as his head. According to Ginzburg, this is a crucial point since the miller did not say that something inspired him to say these words. Emphasizing his own mind differentiated Menocchio from preachers, prophets and seers who invariably claim that they have divine inspiration.

Investigating the sources of these ideas of is the main purpose of the author. Actually Ginzburg, similar to a detective, chases the clues to find the sources of these ideas. The first conjecture is the possibility of Menocchio’s relationship between reformist groups. Ginzburg argues that there is some resemblance between the ideas of Menocchio and the Anabaptists. But there is some serious divergence, too.¹⁴¹

The second conjecture is the books read by Menocchio. According to Menocchio, the source of these opinions is his head. But there are books read by Menocchio. Most of the time he gave books as source of his ideas. There is no list of books but Menocchio, in his first and second trials, mentioned 11 books. While Menocchio used books as a source to legitimize his ideas, Ginzburg thinks that the texts themselves are not that important because Menocchio had already has some hypotheses before reading the books; he approaches the texts with some presuppositions.

More than the text, then, what is important is the key to his reading, a screen that he unconsciously placed between himself and the printed page: a filter that emphasized certain words while obscuring others, that scratched the meaning of a word, taking out of its context that acted on Menocchio’s memory and distorted the very words of the text.¹⁴²

In the conclusion, Carlo Ginzburg writes that “It was the encounter between the printed page and the oral culture, of which he was one embodiment, that led

¹³⁹ Ibid, 27.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 27.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 18.

¹⁴² Ibid, 33.

Menocchio to formulate –first for himself, later his fellow villages, and finally for judges –the opinions... (That) came out of his head.”¹⁴³

After the first trial, Menocchio was imprisoned for 2 years. Then he wrote a petition for the forgiveness and he was released to society. But after his return, a new denunciation arrived to inquisition. After the second trial, he was declared a heretic and executed.

4.4 Conclusion

Microhistorians opposed the postmodernist stress on the impossibility of objective historical writing and of access of historians to the past. However, they also made various modifications to their historical methodology by taking into account the postmodernist criticism. For example, in historical writing, as Hayden White suggested, they preferred narrative rather than the distanced scientific language adopted by the Annales historians. In addition, they directly criticized the Annales school regarding the use of narrative.

In the face of postmodernist criticisms, historians tend to be either silent or they responded those criticisms the methodological level. On the other hand, microhistorians wanted to reconsider the relations of the historians with the past. They said that the product that emerged at the end of the historical research was not a copy or a construction of the past, but a reconstruction. Carlo Ginzburg showed the best example of this approach in his book *The Cheese and the Worms* by reconstructing the thought universe of a religious heretic miller who was a minor figure of the period. Ginzburg was so assertive in his methodological claims even claimed that he understood the miller's life better than the miller did.

Criticisms of history writing coming from outside, that is, from philosophers or philosophers of history, are often perceived as hostile by historians. However, even though these criticisms seem destructive and seem to undermine history writing as a discipline, they force historians to reconsider their relationship with their sources of investigation and object of research. As a result of these reconsiderations, new

¹⁴³ Ibid,33.

methods and emphases are introduced to the historical research, as microhistorians have done. Consequently, some events, figures and people of the past that could not even be the subject of historical investigation, could be brought to light. Whether fully justified or well-grounded or not, external criticism of historiography, therefore, helps historians to revise themselves and the emergence of new methods in historiography.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

To conclude the foregoing discussion, it could be argued that the criticisms of history writing directed by structuralists and postmodernists, and the responses of historians to these criticisms, clearly have the potential to highlight some important issues and lead to important conclusions regarding the historian's craft.

First of all, it is obvious that there are many problems with the attitude of Louis Althusser's knowledge generation scheme toward the raw material and his inability to explain the source of the theoretical operation. In particular, in terms of this scheme, the subject producing knowledge in a quite a priori way imposes his/her own truth against the object he/she the knowledge of which produces. As a result, idealism replaces a sound inquiry into the reality as the latter is distorted by the subject. Furthermore, this situation causes loss of control and arbitrariness in terms of methodology. Although E.P. Thompson's criticisms of these problems in the Althusserian perspective seem quite justified, the model Thompson proposes against this scheme risks empiricism.

Althusser's criticism of empiricism at the philosophical level has important consequences in terms of history writing and the relationship of historians with the past. In order for the claims of historians to reflect the past in an objective way to be realized, historical knowledge must be produced in an empiricist way. However, the possibility of unmediated contact with the past in an empiricist way is impossible due to the nature of history writing. This impossibility shows itself in Thompson's model proposed against Althusser. Historical facts and evidence from the past to the present, which the historian can observe and examine, can only be a part of the historical study with the correct questions that the historian will ask them. These

questions of the historian will naturally be filled with various assumptions, presuppositions, and judgments. In other words, these questions, which enable the historian to connect with the past, and mediate, consist of subjectivities. However, empiricism does not accept any subjectivity in the knowledge production process. It seems clear that the historian's relations with the past and the knowledge that emerge as a result of this relationship are far from fitting an empiricist understanding. Therefore, even if the most basic assumption of historians to reflect the past as it is seeming methodologically possible, it is not philosophically.

Postmodernist criticism of historians and historiography has been met with hostility among historians. Against these criticisms coming from the same direction as Althusser, that is, from the philosophical ground, historians have again considered it appropriate to give methodological answers, in a rather conservative manner. Against postmodernists who have criticized the most fundamental validity of truth and reality, historians have continued to defend themselves in a similar fashion to the model proposed by E.P Thompson, with the presupposition that truth already exist objectively, without ever entering into these debates. Even if they have accepted the existence of subjective assumptions and judgments of the historian involved in the formation of their historical knowledge, they have argued that the subjectivity of the historian could be brought under control with the empirical control of facts and evidence. Hence the insistence that the discipline of history had access to objective knowledge of the past continued.

Italian Microhistory school has challenged the argument about the impossibility of historical truth by proposing radical changes in history writing. Although historical events and phenomena cannot be reflected by historians as the same as the past, they have argued that history could be written in the form of reconstruction. To achieve this, microhistorians have opted to narrow down the scale of research in their historical methodology. In particular, this methodological change has made it more possible for the historian to access historical reality. However, even if microhistorians have made progress in answering postmodern challenge by narrowing and lowering the scale, they have largely ignored the fundamental

questions asked about the nature of historical facts and evidence used while reconstructing history.

After all these discussions, it becomes quite clear that the historians cannot reflect the past as it is, and they can just reconstruct the past. Despite the impact of philosophical criticism of historiography, historians respond to these criticisms on a methodological level and position themselves in a firm methodologically entrenched position. This is problematic because even though many problems in historiography can be discussed and solved at the methodological level, some problems only need intervention and questioning at the philosophical level. Starting from E.P Thompson and coming to microhistorians, the method of uncovering historical facts and evidence by asking the right questions, which are the most fundamental points of this historiography's own defense line, must indeed pass-through philosophical inquiry. However, neither E.P Thompson nor microhistorians address this situation, which requires a philosophical and theoretical debate about the content of these questions, what will remain outside these questions, or even how to validate and control these questions.

With the exception of debates within the methodology of history, issues in which philosophical and theoretical inquiry are necessary are usually ignored among historians. At the points where philosophical and theoretical debates are inevitable, however, it is very important to engage in these debates in order to revise and renew historiography. While some problems of history writing can be and are solved at the methodological level, there are fundamental problems that can only be addressed in philosophical and theoretical terms.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Tarihçilerin araştırma alanlarıyla, yani geçmişle ilişkileri her zaman farklı olmuştur. Bununla birlikte, bu durum hakkında genel bir ifade kullanmak gerekirse, tarihçilerin araştırma alanlarına ilişkin görüşleri genellikle ampirist bir zeminedir. Çünkü her zaman tarihçilerin argümanı, geçmişte olanların nesnel olarak geçmişten çıkarılabileceğidir. Ek olarak, teorinin geçmiş gerçekliği çıkarma sürecinde kullanılması gereken bir aracılık aracı olarak kullanımına her zaman şüpheyile yaklaşılar. Bunun nedeni, teori kullanımının her zaman gerçek olarak kabul edilen ampirik gerçekliği çarpıtma olasılığına sahip olmasıdır. Bu durum muazzam tartışmalara ve neredeyse çözülmez sorunlara yol açar.

Tarihçiler geçmişle ilişkilerini nasıl inşa ettikleri ve geçmişten bilgi üretmek için ne tür bir entelektüel işlem uyguladıkları bu tezin ana araştırma alanı olacaktır. Bu sorgulamanın daha doğru ve kapsamlı olmasını sağlamak için tarihsel metodoloji çerçevesinde kalmamaya çalışılacaktır. Tarihsel metodolojinin yanı sıra ontolojik ve epistemolojik alanlar tartışmaya dahil edilecektir. Bu çok boyutlu tartışmayı yalnızca tarihsel metodolojiyle sınırlamak, kısır ve verimsiz bir tartışmaya girmemize neden olacaktır. Sonuç olarak tartışmadan yapılacak çıkarımlar tek boyutlu ve yetersiz olacaktır. Bu tehlikeyi önlemek için tarihçilere kendi disiplinleri dışından gelen eleştiriler tartışmanın bel kemiğini oluşturacak şekilde açıklanacaktır.

Bunu başarmak için, bu tezin ilk bölümünde Fransız yapısalcı filozof Louis Althusser'in ontolojik ve epistemolojik girişiminden bahsedilecektir. Bu girişim tarihçiler için önemli sonuçları ortaya çıkardı. Bu sonuçlar, etkili İngiliz tarihçi Edward Palmer Thompson'ın verdiği cevaplarla tartışılacaktır. İkinci bölümde, tarih yazımının yapısalcılardan sonra en sert eleştirilerini getiren postmodernist müdahalenin en temel argümanları, postmodern tarih felsefecisi Hayden White ile

tartışılacaktır. Buna ek olarak, yine tarihçilerin postmodern müdahaleye karşı tepkileri bu bölümde yer alacaktır. Son olarak üçüncü bölümde İtalya'da ortaya çıkan mikro tarih anlayışının tüm bu eleştiriler karşısında tarihçilerin geçmişle ilişkilerine nasıl yeni bir bakış açısı getirdiği sorgulanacaktır. Tarihçilerin geçmişle kurduğu ilişkilere bazı katkılarda bulundular. Ancak mikro tarihçiler bazı problemleri çözmede etkili olsalar da bazı problemler hala çözülmemiş ve daha fazla açıklığa kavuşturulması gerekmektedir.

1960'lar ile 1970'ler arasında yapısalcı Fransız filozof Louis Althusser, entelektüel dünya arasında oldukça ilgi gördü. Marksizm'i derinden etkileyen üstbelirleme, görelî özerklik gibi yeni kavramları tanıttı. Althusser, ortaya koyduğu bu yeni kavramlara ek olarak epistemolojik alanda birçok çalışma yapmıştır. Ampirist bilgi üretimine büyük eleştiri getirdi. Ampirist bilgi üretimine karşı, kendi bilgi üretim şemasını üretti. Bu şemada, bilgi üretimi için teori kullanımına büyük bir ayrıcalık atfetti. Althusseryan dili ve yeni tanımlanan kavramları kullanarak birçok entelektüel bol miktarda metin üretti. İngiliz Marksist ünlü bir tarihçi olan Edward Palmer Thompson, bu yeni moda ve epistemolojik yaklaşımın hem Marksizm hem de tarih yazımı için tehlike oluşturduğunu gördü. Thompson'a göre, Althusseryan bilgi üretimi, onun hammaddeye yönelik tutumu ve öznenin oluşumu, doğrudan tarih alanını tehlikeye attı. Bu nedenle "Teorinin Sefaleti" adlı bir kitap yazdı. Kitabında, Thompson'ın tüm niyeti, Althusser'in epistemolojik girişimini tamamıyla çürütmektir. Yani "Teorinin Sefaleti" tarih yazım alanının savunması olarak görülebilir. Bu kitabın yayınlanmasından sonra Perry Anderson ve Stuart Hall bu tartışmaya katıldılar.

Bu bölümde, Althusser'in deneycilik eleştirisi ve bilgi üretim şeması incelenecektir. Daha sonra Thompson'ın karşı eleştirisiyle, Althusser'in tarih yazımı konusundaki epistemolojik yaklaşımının geçerliliği sorgulanacaktır.

Marksizm'e yaptığı orijinal katkılarla bilinen Louis Althusser ile E.P Thompson arasındaki bu tartışma dönemin siyasi ve politik özellikleri ile örüntülü olsa bile bunlar bir kenara bırakılarak sosyal bilimler için oldukça faydalı olabilecek çıkarımlar ortaya çıkarılabilir.

Bu bağlamda Althusser'in ortaya attığı “pratik” kavramı oldukça önemlidir. Althusser için pratik belirli bir hammaddenin üretim araçları kullanılarak insan emeği ile uğradığı dönüşümü ifade eder. Buna göre ideoloji, siyaset, bilim ve felsefe pratiktir. Ortak özellikleri, önceden var olan malzemeleri bir yöntemle işlemeleri ve yeni malzeme yaratmalarıdır. Örneğin, bu üretim ekonomik uygulamada çok belirgindir. Teorik bir uygulama olmayan ekonomik üretim süreçlerinde doğal malzemeler işçilikle işlenerek belirli yöntemlerle ortaya çıkmakta ve yeni ürünler ortaya çıkmaktadır. İdeolojik, bilimsel ve felsefi uygulamalar ise teorik uygulamalardır. İdeolojik alanda üretim, ekonomik alan olarak işlev görür. Althusser'in ekonomik, politik, ideolojik, felsefi ve bilimsel olarak tanımladığı tüm bu seviyelerin ortak bir özelliği vardır: “Üretim”. Ekonomik düzeyde bu üretim somutta gerçekleşir. Ancak ideolojik, bilimsel ve felsefi düzeylerde üretim daha soyut bir şekilde gerçekleşir. Bu uygulamaların kendilerini diğer uygulamalardan ayırdıkları nokta bilgi üretmeleridir.

Bu bilgi üretim şeması birkaç önemli konuyu ortaya çıkarır. Birincisi, hammaddenin ideolojik yapısı ve mevcut kavramların hammadde içeriği olarak kabul edilmesidir. Bu, Althusser'in mevcut konseptler dışındaki her şeyi hammaddeden çıkarması anlamına geliyor. Bu, pek çok tartışmayı beraberinde getiriyor ve tam da bu noktada E.P Thompson'ın itirazını davet ediyor. Çünkü hammadde içeriğinin sadece mevcut kavramlardan oluşması, tarih çalışmalarında kullanılan çoğu malzemeyi tarihçilerden uzaklaştırmaktadır. İkinci konu, Althusser'e göre hammaddenin oldukça pasif olmasıdır. Hammaddeyi son derece devrimci bir teori ile incelemesek ideolojik olarak bizlerle konuşmaya devam edecektir. Ancak bu devrimci teorinin nereden geldiği sorusu E.P Thompson tarafından sorgulanmaktadır. Althusser'in aksine, Thompson ham maddenin oldukça aktif olduğunu düşünüyor.

Althusser'e göre ampirist bilgi anlayışı böylece bir yanda özne ile nesne, diğer yanda somut ve soyut arasında bir ikilem yaratır. Ampirizme göre, bilgi üretimi, gözlemcinin verili olan nesneyi doğrudan gözlemlemesi ile başlar. Özne bu nesneden yani bilgiyi oluşturan kısımlardan gerekli yerleri alır ve gereksiz kısımları dışarıda bırakarak bilgiyi oluşturur. Gerçekliğin özünü görmemizi engelleyen kısımları kaldırarak, bize nesneyi yani bilgiyi verir. Althusser, buradaki sorunun, ampirizmin

bize bilgi olarak sunduğu şeyin gerçekliğin yalnızca bir parçası olması olduğunu vurguluyor. Gerçek ve düşünce arasında sorunlu bir ilişki kurar ve düşünceyi açıkça gerçeğe indirger.

Althusser'in ampirizmi reddetme biçimi, yani hammadde olarak yalnızca mevcut kavramların kullanıldığını vurgulaması, tarih yazımı üzerinde önemli yansımalar sahiptir. Tarihçiler geçmiş hakkında bilgi üretmek için ampirist prosedürleri takip ederler. Kullandıkları hammadde, öznenin katılımı olmaksızın kendinden şeyinde var olduğu varsayılan verilerdir. Althusser'in bilgi üretiminin referans noktası olarak ampirik gerçekliği reddetmesi, tarihçilerin yüzleşmesi gereken kritik bir noktayı ortaya çıkarır. Althusseryan yaklaşımda, bilimsel pratiğin hammadde olarak aldığı ampirik veriler ve halihazırda var olan kavramlar pasiftir. Sonuç olarak, bu ideolojik olarak kirlenmiş ve pasif veriye aynı teori ile gidersek, bize her zaman aynı şeyleri söyleyecektir. Bu nedenle, pasif verilerin tutsağı olarak tarih yazımı, zaten var olan kavramları tekrar etmekten öteye gidemez. Başka bir deyişle, tarihçiler zaten ideolojik olarak 'kirli' ve pasif olan verilerden teoriler ve kavramlar yaratırlar. Aksine Althusser, ampirik verilere devrimci bir kavram veya teori ile yaklaşılması gerektiğini savunuyor. İdeolojik olarak kirlenmiş ve pasif verilerin teori üzerindeki hegemonyasına son verilerek yeni bir yaklaşım ancak bu şekilde ortaya çıkarılabilir.

E.P Thompson eleştirilerine Althusser'in bilgi üretim şemasını sorgulayarak başlar. Ona göre, ilk aşamada kullanılan ham veriler her zaman ideolojik olarak çarpıtılmış bir formda gelmezler. Deneysel bilimlerde ve beşeri bilimlerde kullanılan veriler, bilgi üretimi sürecinde büyük kontrol ve denetim altındadır. Althusser'in uyardığı şey astroloji gibi sahte bilim alanlarında ancak geçerli olabilir. Kullandığımız hammadde her zaman ideolojik ise, doğrulama ve denetleme prosedürleri asla işe yaramayacaktır.

İkinci sorun, Althusser'in ham verileri zaten var olan kavramlar olarak görmesi nedeniyle, teori oluşumundan ampirik verileri çıkarmasıdır. Gerçeklik ve düşünce oluşumu arasındaki ilişkiyi kıran Althusser, yalnızca bilginin referans noktasının gerçek olduğunu kabul eder. Ancak gerçek ile bilgisi arasındaki ilişki bir bilgi ilişkisidir. Bu, ikisi arasında sonsuz bir döngü oluşturur.

E.P Thompson bir tarihçi olarak bir filozofla ontoloji ve epistemoloji zemininde bir tartışma başlattı. Althusser'in teori kavramı birçok yerde hatalar içeriyor. Thompson haklı olarak bu teori kavramına çok fazla eleştiri getiriyor. Çünkü Althusser'in bilgi üretimindeki ikinci aşamasını ifade eden teorinin kaynağı oldukça belirsiz kalıyor. Bu durum bir idealizme gider ve Thompson'a göre bilgi üreten öznenin zihnindeki şematik fikirler geçmişe dayatılır ve bu da geçmişin nesnel doğasını bozar. Ancak tarih yazımının E.P Thompson'ın aşırı esnek kavram yapısıyla öznel bir alana kaydığı yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Son olarak Althusser'in önerdiği nesne veya nesne bilgisinin tamamen farklı şeyler olduğu argümanı tarihçiler için önemli sonuçlara sahiptir. Ampirizm için, çünkü tarihçi tarafından üretilen bilgi tam olarak geçmişe karşılık gelmelidir. Ancak, Althusser tarihçilere bu varsayımın epistemolojik olarak imkansız ve bir hata olduğunu gösterdi. Ayrıca Thompson bu gerçeği inkar etmiyor. Ampirizm, tarihçilerin entelektüel işleyişine hatalı bir epistemolojik yaklaşımsa, tarihçilerin gerçek geçmişe sahip ürettiği bilgiye tam olarak karşılık gelemes. Dolayısıyla tarihçilerin yaptığı entelektüel işlem geçmiş olduğu gibi yansıtmamaktır. Bunun bir sonucu olarak, tarihinin geçmiş üzerindeki etkinliği bir inşa süreci olarak adlandırılabilir.

Louis Althusser'in yaptığı eleştirilerden sonra postmodernistler tarihçilerin yatığı işin doğasını sorguladılar. En temelde, postmodernist düşünürler gerçeğin referans noktasının dil ve metin olduğunu iddia ettiler. Yani gerçeği dil ve metinle bir tuttular. Onlara göre hiç kimse bir gerçek hakkında dilin ve metnin sınırları dışında söz edilemez. Tarihçiler ve tarih yazımı, hakikat hakkında geleneksel düşünme biçimlerine yönelik bu sert saldırıdan nasibini aldı. Postmodernistler tarihçilerin bilgi üretim nesneleri ile ontolojik bir bağlantılarının olamayacağını savundular. Gerçeğin dil ile postmodernist denklemi ve bu eşitliğin ideoloji, kültürel özellikler ve söylemsel kısıtlamalarla örüntüsü, bu nedenle, tarihçilerin dayandıkları en temel temellere meydan okudu. Tarihçilerin temel varsayımı olarak, dil ve metin dışındaki gerçeğin imkansızlığı, tarihçilerin temel varsayımı olan geçmişten, geçmişte olanları nesnel olarak açığa çıkarma ve yeniden inşa etme iddiasıdır. Ancak entelektüel faaliyetlerinin sonuçları metin biçimindedir ve en temel kaynakları yazılı biçimdedir, yani metindir. Postmodernist meydan okumanın bir sonucu olarak hem kaynaklarının hem de ürünlerinin belirli kalıpların ve güç ilişkilerinin etkisi altında olduğu

eleştirisiyle karşı karşıya kalmışlardır. Bu yüzden nesnellikten uzaktırlar. Postmodernist eleştirilerin içinde en yapıcı olanı ise Amerikan tarih felsefecisi olan Hayden White'a aittir. Hayden White en temelde tarihçilerin farkında olsunlar yahut olmasınlar çeşitli edebi ve dilsel teknikler kullanarak tarihsel olayları bunlara göre şekillendirdiklerini savundu. Bu durum tarihsel çalışmalarının odağını ampirik gerçeklikten daha çok metnin kendisine ve metnin yazarının yani tarihçinin kullandığı dilsel ve edebi tekniklere kaymasına sebep oluyordu. Bu yüzden Hayden White tarihçiler arasında oldukça düşmanca karşılandı. Tarihçiler, postmodernizm eleştirisine, özellikle Hayden White'ın tarih yazımına iki şekilde tepki verdiler. Tepkilerden biri, yoğun teorik ve epistemolojik tartışmalara katılmamak ve temelde bu eleştirilerin kendiliğinden kaybolmasını beklemektir. Bir başka tarihçi grubu da postmodern eleştirinin yarattığı tehdidi ciddiye almış ve ilgili tartışmalara dahil olarak çeşitli tepkiler geliştirmiştir. Bu tarihçiler postmodernist eleştirilerin yapıcı değil yıkıcı olduğunu iddia ettiler. Tarih disiplininin bu tür yıkıcı eleştirilere karşı kendini savunması gerektiğini ısrarla yinelediler.

Kendilerini postmodernist saldırıya karşı savunmak için çok sayıda tarihçi, referans noktalarının postmodernistler iddia ettiği gibi metinler değil, tarihte bulunan ve bugün gözlemlenmeye konu olan delil ve gerçekler olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Postmodernistler eleştirisinde geçmiş artık tarihsel bilginin nesnesi değildir. Öyleyse tarihyazımının referans noktası geçmişin kendisi olmamalıdır. Tarihsel metin geçmişten ayrılmıştır, dolayısıyla sıradan bir edebi türe indirgenmiştir. Ayrıca postmodernist yaklaşımlar, tarihsel yazımda belirleyici ve sınırlayıcı faktörlerin dilin yapısı ve yapısal kısıtlamaları olduğunu ileri sürer. Sonuç olarak, tarihçi yazdığı metni icat eder ve geçmişe dayatır.

Postmodernist eleştiri, tarihçilerin amaçlarını ve motivasyonlarını çıkmaza sokmuştur. Eleştirileri çok yıkıcıydı ve tarihçilerin temel varsayımlarına saldırıyordu. Tarihyazımının referans noktasının geçmiş değil, bu geçmiş üzerine üretilmiş metinler olduğunu söylediler. Bu metinlerde, onu üreten kişiyi çevreleyen söylem ağının etkisi altında olduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bunların tüm sonucu, çok derin görecelilik ve gerçek geçmişin tarihçiler tarafından asla açığa çıkarılamayacağı argümanıydı. Tarihçiler tüm tartışmalara karşı kendi alanlarını savundular. Dilin ve

metnin tamamen özerk doğasını reddettiler. Metinlerinin, ampirik kontrol yoluyla geçmişini opak bir şekilde yeniden inşa ettiğini savundular. Postmodernizm aşırı inşacı geçmiş temsili anlayışının tarih yazımı için kabul edilemeyeceği açıktır. Çünkü bu anlayış, tarihin inşasını tamamen öznenin kendi inisiyatifine bırakmaktadır. Bu durumun bir sonucu olarak tarih disiplini, sistematik olarak kendi hakikatleri ve yöntemleri olan bir disiplin olmaktan çıkar. Tarihçiler, inşacı yaklaşımın aksine, tarih yazımının bir inşa süreci değil, bir yeniden inşa süreci olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Postmodernizm inşacı vurgusuna karşı yeniden inşacı olarak vurgu tarihi, İtalya'da ortaya çıkan mikro tarih anlayışı ile doruk noktasına ulaştı. Mikro tarihçiler, özellikle Carlo Ginzburg, tarihçinin asıl amacının geçmişin yeniden inşası olduğunu savundu. Bir sonraki bölümde, bu görüş özellikle mikro tarih ve Carlo Ginzburg çevresinde tartışılacak ve değerlendirilecektir.

Geleneksel tarih yazım yöntemlerinin postmodern eleştirisinden sonra, tarihçiler genellikle kendilerini metodolojik düzeyde savundular. Tarihsel gerçeklerin ve kanıtların nesnel doğasına ulaşmak için kullanılan yöntemlerin, tarihyazımına karşı postmodern şüpheciliği ortadan kaldırmak için yeterli olduğunu düşünüyorlardı. Tarihsel kanıtlara ve gerçeklere yapılan bu vurgu, İtalya'da ortaya çıkan ve tarihe oldukça farklı bir yaklaşım öneren Mikro tarih okulunda doruk noktasını gördü. Mikro tarihçiler postmodern eleştiriyi tamamen görmezden gelmemişlerdir. Ancak tarih yazımının ana noktası olan geçmişe dair nesnel bilgi üretme konusunda postmodernistlere karşı durdular.

Ancak bunu yapabilmek için Mikro Tarihçiler, postmodern saldırıya karşı etkisiz olan ve Avrupa'da o dönemin baskın tarih yazım okulu olan Annalles okuluna da büyük eleştiri getirdiler. Mikro tarihçiler büyük ölçekli araştırma yöntemlerine karşı çıktılar ve araştırmanın ölçeğinin küçültülmesi gerektiğini savundular. Büyük ölçekli çalışmalarda tarihçinin gözüyle görülemeyen kişilerin yine tarihçinin ana odak noktası olması gerektiğinin altını çizdiler. Bu hedefe ulaşmak için yeni bir araştırma metodolojisi geliştirdiler. Buna göre, tarihçinin asıl görevi, tarihi kanıt ve gerçeklerin derinlemesine incelenmesine ve ayrıntıya duyarlılığa dayalı bir yöntemle geçmişini yeniden inşa etmektir. Tam bu noktada, tarih yazımını zihinsel ve edebi bir inşa süreci olarak gören postmodernist müdahaleye karşı çıktılar. Bununla birlikte, mikro

tarihçiler, en ünlüsü Carlo Ginzburg bu önsel inşacı görüşü reddetti. Aksine tarih yazımının, gerçeklerin ve olgulardan türetilen kanıtların geçerliliğini ve nesnelliğini güvence altına aldığı bir yeniden inşa süreci olduğunu belirtti.

1970'lerde bir grup İtalyan tarihçi arşivleri yorumlamanın yeni bir yolunu savunmaya başladı. Tarihi incelemenin ve yazmanın bu yeni yolu Quaderni Storici dergisinde şekillendi. Bu yeni tarihsel yaklaşımın en tanınmış temsilcileri Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi ve Eduardo Grendi idi. Mikro tarih olarak adlandırılan eserin en etkili kitapları Carlo Ginzburg 'un "Peynir ve Kurtlar" ve Giovanni Levi'nin " The Inheriting Power" dır. Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, Carlo Poni ve Edoardo Grendi gibi Mikro tarih geleneğinin kurucu tarihçileri Marksist'ti. Ancak Marksizm'in egemen anlayışına iki şekilde meydan okudular. Birincisi, İtalyan Komünist Partisinin ana politikalarına karşı çıktılar. İkincisi, makro-tarihsel kavramlara karşı inançlarını kaybetmelerinde ısrar ettiler. Ana argümanları beşeri bilimlerde insan yüzünü geri getirmektir. Bu nedenle, Marksist tarih yazımının, Annalles okulunun ve analitik sosyal bilimlerin geleneklerini reddettiler. Bu reddetme iki adımda gerçekleştirildi: anlatıyı vurgulamak ve ölçeğin küçültülmesi. İlki aslında tarih yazmak için yeni bir araç değil. Anlatı, uzun zamandır tarih yazımını geçmişin inşasının bir aracı olarak işgal etti. Yazarlar, anlatı ile kaotik olaylar zincirini anlamlı bir sırayla sunmuş ve okuyucuya aktarmışlardır. Beşeri bilimlerdeki anlatının düşüşü, Marksist sosyal tarih ve Annales okuluyla başlamıştı. Sosyal bilimlerde yapı-fail sorusunda fail yerine yapıya odaklanarak, anlatıyı tarih yazımından çıkardılar; yapılar anlatılamadı. Mikro tarihçiler insan yüzünü tarih yazımına geri getirdiklerini iddia ettiler; bu nedenle kendilerini anlatı ile donattılar. Örneğin, Carlo Ginzburg, İtalyan bir değirmencinin zihinsel durumunu yeniden inşa etmek istedi. Yapılara odaklanmadan insanlara bu tür bir dönüşüm anlatım gerektiriyordu. Bu nedenle anlatıyı metodolojik zeminde bir silah olarak kullandılar. İtalyan mikro tarihçilerin tarih yazımına getirdiği en karakteristik ve zorlu yenilik, ölçeğin küçültülmesidir. Ginzburg ve Poni, seri ve kantitatif araştırmanın güçlü araştırma araçları sağladığını kabul etti. Ancak genişletilmiş ve geniş ölçekli nicel ve seri çalışmalar gerçekleri çarpıtabilir. Ölçeğin küçültülmesine yönelik mikro tarihsel yaklaşım, bir nesneye bakmaya benzer. Bir nesneye uzaktan bakarsanız, ayırt edici özelliklerini

tanıyamazsınız. Ancak nesneye yaklaşırsanız, önemli şeyleri tanıyabilir ve dedektifler gibi nesne için çok önemli bir şeyi açığa çıkarabilirsiniz.

Tarih yazımının yanı sıra tarihsel çalışmalarda Ginzburg, modern bilimsel akıl yürütme ile üretilen bilgiye sorgusuz sualsiz güvene itiraz etti. Ayrıca, varsayımsal olarak etiketlenen alternatif bir bilgi biçimini ifade etmesiyle de tanınır. Ona göre varsayımsal modelin kökü, avlanarak yaşamış ilkel insanlara gider. Avlarını yakalamak için hayvanın izlerini ve izlerini incelemeyi öğrendiler. Bu şekilde, asla gözleri ile görmedikleri bir hayvanın görünümünü yeniden oluşturabildiler. Yani avcılar, avlarının hareket etme ve eyleme geçme şekli hakkında varsayımlar ürettiler. Ginzburg onları ilk hikaye anlatıcıları olarak adlandırdı. Çünkü avın işaretlerini analiz ederek olaylar zinciri için modeller oluşturabilirler. 16. yüzyılda Galileo bilimsel yöntemi, matematiksel ve deneysel yöntemler kullanarak tekrarlayan fenomenlere odaklandı. Yeni bilimsel yöntem, genelin bilgisini elde etmek için bireyi feda etti. Varsayım modelinin canlanması 19. yüzyılda ortaya çıktı. Ginzburg, bu canlanmayla ilgili olarak üç figürden bahseder: Morelli, Freud ve Conan Doyle. Morelli, özgülüğünü öğrenmek için bir sanat eserinin genel özellikleri yerine önemsiz detaylara odaklanmayı önerdi. Bunun nedeni, taklitçinin sanat eserindeki küçük ayrıntılara önem vermemesidir. Aynı şekilde Conan Doyle 'un kurgusal karakteri Sherlock Holmes, davalarını çözmek için genel izlenimden başlamaktan kaçınır. Ginzburg, aynı yöntemin tarihsel kanıtlara uygulanabileceğini savundu. Ginzburg, insan bilimlerinin doğa bilimlerinden ödünç aldığı bilimsel tekniklere şüpheci olmakla birlikte, postmodern şüpheciliğe de karşıdır. Kanıt bulmak için bir model sunuyor ve bu, bu modelin rehberliğinde gerçeğin erişilebilir olduğu anlamına geliyor.

Mikro tarihçiler, nesnel tarihsel yazmanın ve tarihçilerin geçmişe erişiminin imkansızlığı üzerindeki postmodernist sava karşı çıktılar. Ancak, postmodernist eleştiriyi de dikkate alarak tarihsel metodolojilerinde çeşitli değişiklikler yaptılar. Örneğin, Hayden White'ın önerdiği gibi tarih yazımında Annales tarihçilerinin benimsediği teknik bilimsel dilden ziyade anlatıyı tercih ettiler. Ayrıca, Annales okulunu anlatı kullanımıyla ilgili olarak doğrudan eleştirdiler. Tarih yazımının dışarıdan, yani filozoflardan ya da tarih filozoflarından gelen eleştirileri, tarihçiler

tarafından sıklıkla düşmanca algılanır. Bununla birlikte, bu eleştiriler yıkıcı görünse ve tarih yazımını bir disiplin olarak zayıflatıyor gibi görünse de tarihçileri araştırma kaynakları ve araştırma nesneleriyle ilişkilerini yeniden gözden geçirmeye zorluyorlar. Bu yeniden değerlendirmelerin bir sonucu olarak, mikro tarihçilerin yaptığı gibi, tarihsel araştırmaya yeni yöntemler ve vurgular getirilir. Böylelikle geçmişe ait, tarihsel araştırmaya bile konu olamayan bazı olaylar, figürler ve insanlar gün ışığına çıkarılabilir oldu. Tarih yazımına gelen dışsal eleştiriler, tamamen haklı veya sağlam temellendirilmiş olsun ya da olmasın, tarihçilerin kendilerini gözden geçirmelerine ve tarih yazımında yeni yöntemlerin ortaya çıkmasına yardımcı olurdular.

Sonuç olarak, Louis Althusser'in bilgi üretme şemasının hammaddeye yönelik tutumu ve teorik işlemin kaynağını açıklayamamasıyla ilgili birçok sorun olduğu açıktır. Özellikle bu şema açısından, bilgi üreten özne oldukça önsel ve bilgiyi ürettiği nesneye karşı kendi gerçeğini dayatıyor. Sonuç olarak gerçeklik, özne tarafından çarpıtıldıkça idealizme geçer. Ayrıca bu durum, yöntem açısından kontrol eksikliğine ve keyfiliğe neden olmaktadır. E.P Thompson'ın bu konulara yönelik eleştirileri oldukça haklı görünse de bu şemaya karşı önerdiği model ampirizmi andırıyor. Louis Althusser'in bilgi üretme şemasının hammaddeye yönelik tutumu ve teorik işlemin kaynağını açıklayamamasıyla ilgili birçok sorun olduğu açıktır. Özellikle bu şema açısından, bilgi üreten özne oldukça önsel ve bilgiyi ürettiği nesneye karşı kendi gerçeğini dayatıyor. Sonuç olarak gerçeklik, özne tarafından çarpıtıldıkça idealizme geçer. Ayrıca bu durum, yöntem açısından kontrol eksikliğine ve keyfiliğe neden olmaktadır. E.P Thompson'ın bu konulara yönelik eleştirileri oldukça haklı görünse de bu şemaya karşı önerdiği model ampirizmi andırıyor.

Althusser'in felsefi düzeydeki ampirizm eleştirisinin tarih yazımı ve tarihçilerin geçmişle ilişkisi açısından önemli sonuçları vardır. Tarihçilerin iddialarının geçmişle objektif bir şekilde yansıtabilmesi için, tarihsel bilginin ampirist bir şekilde üretilmesi gerekir. Bununla birlikte, geçmişle deneyci bir şekilde dolaysız temas olasılığı, tarih yazımının doğası gereği imkansızdır. Bu imkansızlık, Thompson'ın Althusser'e karşı önerdiği modelde kendini göstermektedir. Tarihçinin gözlemleyebileceği ve inceleyebileceği geçmişten günümüze tarihi gerçekler ve

kanıtlar, ancak tarihçinin kendilerine soracağı doğru sorularla tarihsel çalışmanın bir parçası olabilir. Tarihçinin bu soruları doğal olarak çeşitli varsayımlar, varsayımlar ve yargılarla doldurulacaktır. Diğer bir deyişle, tarihçinin geçmişle bağlantı kurmasını ve aracılık etmesini sağlayan bu sorular öznelliklerden oluşur. Bununla birlikte, deneycilik bilgi üretim sürecinde herhangi bir öznelliği kabul etmez. Tarihçilerin geçmişle ilişkilerinin ve bu ilişki sonucunda ortaya çıkan bilginin ampirist bir anlayıştan uzak olduğu açıktır. Dolayısıyla tarihçilerin geçmişi olduğu gibi yansıtmak konusundaki en temel varsayımı metodolojik olarak mümkün görünse de felsefi olarak mümkün değildir. Postmodernistler tarihçiler ve tarih yazımına yönelik eleştirileri, tarihçiler arasında düşmanlıkla karşılandı. Althusser ile aynı yönden, yani felsefi zeminden gelen bu eleştirilere karşı, tarihçiler yine muhafazakar bir şekilde metodolojik cevaplar vermeyi uygun gördüler. Hakikatin ve gerçekliğin en temel geçerliliğini eleştiren postmodernistlere karşı, tarihçiler kendilerini E.P Thompson tarafından önerilen modele benzer bir şekilde, bu tartışmalara hiç girmeden, gerçeklerin nesnel olarak zaten var olduğu varsayımıyla savunmaya devam ettiler. Tarihçinin tarihsel bilgilerinin oluşumunda yer alan öznel varsayım ve yargılarının varlığını kabul etseler bile, tarihçinin öznelliğinin gerçeklerin ve kanıtların ampirik kontrolü ile kontrol altına alınabileceğini iddia ettiler. Bu nedenle, tarih disiplininin geçmişte nesnel gerçeğe erişimi olduğu ısrarı devam etti. İtalya'da ortaya çıkan mikro tarihçiler, tarih yazımındaki köklü değişikliklerle tarihsel gerçeğin ve gerçekliğin imkansızlığı konusundaki eleştirilere meydan okudu. Tarihsel olaylar ve fenomenler tarihçiler tarafından geçmişle aynı şekilde yansıtılamasa da tarihin yeniden inşa şeklinde oluşturulabileceğini savundular. Bunu başarmak için, mikro tarihçiler tarihsel metodolojide araştırma ölçeğini daraltmak istediler. Özellikle bu metodolojik değişim, tarihçinin tarihsel gerçeğe ve gerçekliğe erişmesini daha mümkün kıldı. Ancak mikro tarihçiler, tarihi gerçeğe dönüştürme ve araştırma kriterini düşürerek gerçeğe ulaşma konusunda ilerleme kaydetseler bile, tarihi yeniden inşa ederken tarihsel gerçekler ve kanıtlar hakkında sorulan soruların içeriğinin bir kısmını görmezden gelmişlerdir.

Tüm bu tartışmalardan sonra, tarihçilerin geçmişi olduğu gibi yansıtamayacakları ve sadece geçmişi inşa edebilecekleri açıkça ortaya çıkıyor. Tarihçilerin bu durumu inkar etmesi zor görünüyor. Tarihyazımının felsefi eleştirisine rağmen tarihçiler bu

eleştirilere metodolojik düzeyde yanıt verirler ve kendilerini bu konumda konumlandırmak birçok sorunu beraberinde getirir. Çünkü tarihyazımındaki pek çok sorun metodolojik düzeyde tartışılıp çözülebilmesine rağmen, bazı sorunların yalnızca felsefi düzeyde müdahale ve sorgulamaya ihtiyacı vardır. E.P Thompson'dan başlayarak ve mikro tarihçilere gelerek, bu tarihçiliğin kendi savunma soyunun en temel noktaları olan tarihsel gerçekleri ve kanıtları doğru soruları sorarak ortaya çıkarma yöntemi, birçok yönden felsefi araştırmadan geçmelidir. Ancak ne E.P Thompson ne de mikro tarihçiler, bu soruların içeriği, bu soruların dışında neler kalacağı, hatta bu soruların nasıl doğrulanacağı ve kontrol edileceği konusunda felsefi ve teorik bir tartışma gerektiren bu duruma değinmiyor. Tarih yazımını bir bütün olarak düşündüğümüzde tüm seviyelerdeki eleştiriler yahut katkı önerileri tarihçiler tarafından ihmal edilmemeli ve yöntem bilimsel metodolojik tartışmalar haricinde bazı sorunların teorik ve felsefi tartışma ile çözülebileceğini düşünmeleri gerekiyor.

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