

Gov 62 Section 8

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Archival Research

Qualitative historical analysis - “a methodological approach that employs qualitative instead of quantitative measurement and the use of primary historical documents of historians’ interpretations thereof in service of theory development and testing”

Historiography: the writing of history based on a selective, critical reading of sources that synthesizes particular bits of information into a narrative description or analysis of a subject

Problem: How do we choose historical evidence that will best help us develop or test theories? Or even just describing a set of events?

Archival Research

Two kinds of events:

- ▶ Manifest events
 - ▶ Clearly observed by contemporaries
- ▶ Latent events
 - ▶ Contemporaries not fully aware as it happened

Archival Research

- ▶ Primary sources: the original source material on an event, including all evidence contemporary to the event
- ▶ Secondary sources: everything that has been written about the event subsequent to that time
- ▶ Distinction can be fuzzy in practice

Evaluating Primary Sources

- ▶ Inherent bias
 - ▶ Sample of available primary sources likely not representative of entire population of potential sources
 - ▶ Limited resources, language barriers, inequalities in preservation, propaganda
- ▶ Authenticity
 - ▶ Probably not an issue, but be wary of highly suspicious information
- ▶ Assess reliability of the account
 - ▶ Who said what to whom under what circumstances and with what purpose?
 - ▶ Evaluate relative to what is known about the actors, their intentions, their interactions, and the situations they find themselves in
- ▶ Triangulate by using a variety of types of primary sources to produce a more accurate representation
- ▶ Talk to experts

Evaluating Primary Sources

tl;dr: Consider ways that the documents you select as evidence may (mis)represent the event you're discussing (and how others may perceive this!)

Evaluating Secondary Sources

“The work of historians is not understood by historians to be, and cannot legitimately be treated by others as, an unproblematic background narrative from which theoretically neutral data can be elicited for the framing of problems and the testing of theories.”
(Lustick 1996)

Evaluating Secondary Sources

Two concerns:

- ▶ Bias of historian drawing on primary sources
 - ▶ Misinterpretation, exclusion or falsification of evidence
 - ▶ Omitted relevant causes
 - ▶ Presentism and hindsight bias
 - ▶ Biases in research agendas/motivation
 - ▶ Bounded by available evidence
- ▶ Selection effects introduced by social scientist (us!)
 - ▶ Confirmation bias (desire to demonstrate validity of theory) - imagine you're a psychologist observing subjects
 - ▶ Turning stylized facts into absolute facts
 - ▶ Inaccurate statements or interpretations of historical evidence
 - ▶ Lightly researched cases
 - ▶ Failing to take context and limits of evidence into account

Evaluating Secondary Sources

How to address bias?

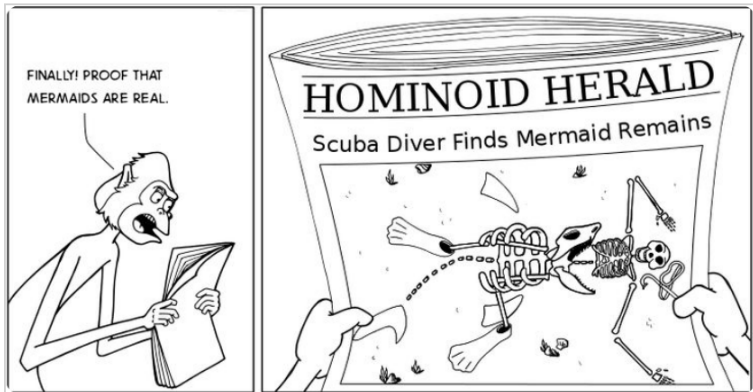
- ▶ Cross-reference with other historians in same or different traditions
- ▶ Look for indicators of presentism
- ▶ Be wary of accounts that claim to simply report the facts
- ▶ Be aware of disciplinary influences
- ▶ Start with recent contributions and work backwards

Evaluating Secondary Sources

How to address selectivity?

- ▶ Get to know your cases well
- ▶ Recognize limits placed on historical evidence
- ▶ Don't limit your search for evidence to only those that provide confirmation for your theory

Evaluating Secondary Sources



Another Way to Think About Sources

Two types of sources:

- ▶ Relics or remains
 - ▶ Offer clues about the past simply by virtue of their existence
 - ▶ Building materials, ruins, artifacts, etc.
- ▶ Testimonies
 - ▶ Oral or written reports that describe an event
 - ▶ Records of property exchange, speeches, commentaries
 - ▶ Provide information about what happened, how and in what circumstances the event occurred, and why it occurred

Another Way to Think About Sources

Three kinds of written sources:

- ▶ Narrative/literary - chronicles or tracts presented in narrative form written in order to impart a particular message
 - ▶ Could be motivated to inform contemporaries or succeeding generations, shape public opinion, persuade readers of the rightness of author's actions, entertain, deliver moral teachings, praise accomplishments
 - ▶ Intentionality is especially important for "ego documents" (about self)
- ▶ Diplomatic/juridicial - document an existing legal situation or create a new one
 - ▶ Charter, court case, legislation, etc.
- ▶ Social documents - products of recordkeeping by bureaucracies
 - ▶ Could come from state ministries, charitable organizations, foundations, churches, schools, interest groups, and more!
 - ▶ Provide information about agency proceedings, meetings, business policy, administrative structures, fiscal structures, social structures, political administration

Notes on using the press

- ▶ To use press as a source, historian must consider not just the content but also:
 - ▶ Author and issuer
 - ▶ Publisher and institutional location
 - ▶ Audience
 - ▶ Immediate (political/social/economic) context of the original publication
- ▶ Also, press reports can affect events being reported - sometimes can't clearly separate
- ▶ Be careful about distortion of information as it passes from hand to hand (like telephone!)

Holland (2017)

Question: What accounts for differences between Lima and Bogota in their response to street vendors?

Theory: The role of core constituencies explain variation in forbearance (allowing street vendors).

- ▶ Poor core constituency politicians more likely to support forbearance

Data:

- ▶ Government documents
- ▶ Interviews with mayors, leaders of street-vending associations, and city officials
- ▶ Newspaper accounts

What are the sources used for?

- ▶ Identifying whether mayors use forbearance or enforcement
- ▶ Capturing public reaction and sentiment
- ▶ Providing information about politicians' motivations

Holland (2017)

How does Holland choose newspapers?

- ▶ Decide which newspapers to look at:
 - ▶ *El Tiempo* (Colombia) and *El Comercio* (Peru)
 - ▶ National-level newspapers, high circulation, skew center-right
- ▶ Locate archives:
 - ▶ *El Tiempo* has an online archive covering time period
 - ▶ *El Comercio*'s online archive only begins in 2002, so use physical archive
- ▶ Problem?
 - ▶ Easier to locate brief mentions of street vending in online archive
 - ▶ Solution: only include articles from online archive that include substantial discussion of street vending

Holland (2017)

How does Holland use newspapers?

- ▶ Classify articles based on type:
 - ▶ News item; letter-to-the-editor; short note; platforms, speeches or interviews with politicians
- ▶ Code articles based on dominant theme:
 - ▶ Sympathetic or unsympathetic?
 - ▶ Narrative or polemic?
- ▶ Code articles based on specific type of issue mentioned

Holland (2017)

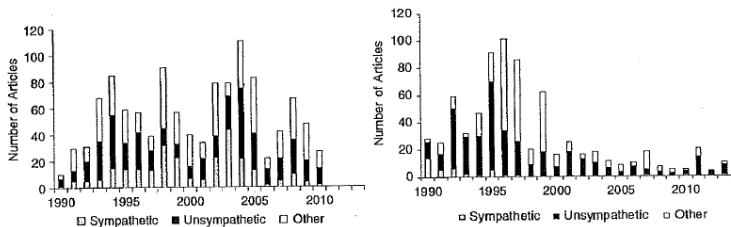


FIGURE 4.2 Newspaper Coverage of Street Vending in Bogotá (left) and Lima (right) by Article Tone, 1990–2010
Sources: Author's compilation from *El Tiempo* and *El Comercio*.

Group/Individual Activity

- ▶ Think of 2 potential sources for your thesis. These can be primary or secondary sources.
- ▶ For each source, answer the following questions:
 - ▶ What is the source? What kind of source is it? (Primary/secondary, etc.)
 - ▶ What is the context in which it was created? (What was the purpose or intention of the author?)
 - ▶ What might be some biases in it?
 - ▶ By examining this source instead of others, what information do you risk leaving out?