National Research University Higher School of Economics, St Petersburg
Department of History

MA Usable Pasts: Applied and Interdisciplinary History

2016-2017 academic year
1&2 modules

Historical Memory and Narratives of Identity
Dr Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov

**Course type:** compulsory, key course, 4 ECTS, 152 total hours
*Open to exchange students

**The prerequisites for this course** include introductory-level familiarity with modern history and critical and social theory.

**Outline**

This course is to introduce students to methodologies that are required for understanding history as a multiple, layered, and contested set of representations. The course is built as an in-depth series of case studies, with the aim of bringing together three distinct areas of analytical questions that are implied by its title's key terms: “history”, “memory” and “identity”: What are main approaches to social and cultural memory? What, and whose history is being remembered and narrated? How identity is understood?

1. Memory. This course gives a thorough grounding in classic work on memory from Durkheimian, psychoanalytical and Marxist perspectives, including Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, and contrasting it with the studies that draw on post-structuralist and cognitive approaches, as well as theories of affect and subjectivity.

2. History. The course asks what can be learned about societies from ways in which they are concerned with history. What are some of the types of historical consciousness and cultural notions of history, of lack thereof? How one can productively compare imperial and universalist notions of history as progress with ideas about historical and cultural uniqueness and exceptionalism, including nationalism, as well as with conceptualizations of history as justice, as trauma, and as objects of consumption. What are practices of production, exchange and consumption of historical narratives in education, tourism and politics?

3. Identity. This term has become one of the key categories in historical and social analysis. One of the goals of the course is to ask what identity is, and what approaches to identity are useful for understanding historical memory.

The course’ point of departure is Romantic and post-Romantic discourses on communities, uniqueness and exceptionality, including the myths of origin and discourse of cultural exclusivity, narratives of national history and pantheons of national heroes. It then moves on to empire and postcoloniality, (post)socialism and (neo)liberalism as equally distinct forms of historical memory organization, with their own repertoires of referential imagery and understandings of boundaries. It explores the issues of memory of war, including civil war and ethnic conflict. Archive, film, body and material objects, including buildings, are approached as culturally-specific memory devices and contested sites for historical memory. Genres of historical narratives, including historiography, ethnology and anthropology, and museum are discussed.
Methods of Instruction
The course consists of both lectures and seminars that will focus on marked* key readings for each of the themes (see the syllabus below)

Grading System:
- 15% seminar participation: seminar attendance, two presentations on readings of the course, and two review essays of key seminar readings that are due a week after the presentation
- 35% class assignments: one of the review essays of key seminar readings
- 50% take home final essay exam: this is essay-long discussion of randomly selected two questions from the list of exam questions. Exam asks students to debate across empirical material and different approaches covered in the course. Specifically, in answering each of these questions, students are required to use at least three individual pieces of writing from this course syllabus, not to repeat material in discussion of each of the two questions, and in answering both questions to draw on only one piece of readings that you presented on in class.
- late assignments will be marked down by 10% of the mark per day
- if you plagiarize, you fail.

Samples of final exam questions:
• Forms of memory are also forms of forgetting. Discuss.
• What do we learn from the contrast between official and unofficial memories?
• Does personal memory problematise the concept of collective memory?
• The past is a form of social organisation of the present. Discuss.
• The concept of the invented tradition implies that there are some traditions are not invented. Discuss.
• Protection always implies change of what is being protected. Discuss.
• Using empirical material, discuss how what is being remembered is shaped by “places of memory”, e.g. museums, memorial sites, exile, prominent persons, body, buildings, etc.
• Politics of identity are always politics of memory. Discuss with reference to two or more of the following: diaries, blogs, oral history, cultural property, truce and reconciliation, museums or tourist destinations, cultural purity
• What do we learn from studies of affective aspects of memory?

Syllabus

Part I Collective memory

1. Diary and blogs
2. Collective memory
Klein, Norman The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory. Verso 1997

3. The invention of tradition

Part II Realms of memory

4. Realms of memory

5. Purity and exile
Part III The economy of memory

6. Consumption

7. Heritage as property

Part IV Body, affect, necropolitics

8. Body and the gender of memory
Rouch, Jean 1955: *Les Maîtres Fous* (The Mad Masters) [film]

9. Affect

10. Necropolitics

Part V Ritual of memory

11. Ritual memory

12. Revision seminar