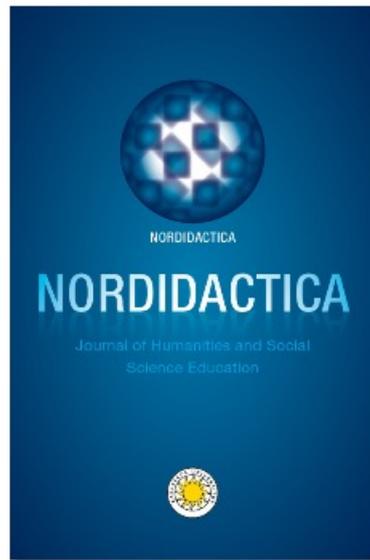


# **Between stability and contingency: A case study of the social, political and fantasmatic logics of Swedish history classroom practice**

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## **Between stability and contingency: A case study of the social, political and fantasmatic logics of Swedish history classroom practice**

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*Abstract: This study explores the political and ideological workings of history classroom practices enacted in the context of Swedish upper secondary education. Using the post-structuralist logics of critical explanation framework (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), the paper reports on a series of video-recorded observations and outlines the discursive logics found to constitute the studied practices. At the heart of the analysis are the socially shared assumptions, political relationships of us-and-them, and ideological narratives that alternately furnish the history classroom practices with stability and contingency. The results encompass three case-specific logics: (I) a social logic demonstrating that the stability of the studied classroom practices rests on shared assumptions about historical idealism and partial progress, (II) a political logic indicating that the classroom practices are unsettled when students establish temporal equivalence between past and present us-and-them relationships, and (III) a fantasmatic logic showing that teachers and students become ideologically invested in said practices through narratives emphasizing the need to prevent the repetition of past injustices.*

KEYWORDS: HISTORY DIDACTICS, CLASSROOM PRACTICE, POLITICAL DIMENSION, LOGICS

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## Introduction

Following the expanding literature on the so-called History Wars,<sup>1</sup> it has become well-established that the past, as an educational matter, is inclined to stir political conflict. This certainly is the case at the level of public debate where contestations over the aims and contents of history curricula have arisen in a number of national settings, including Sweden where the subject also is political in the sense that it plays a crucial role in citizenship education (Samuelsson, 2017; Sandahl, 2014; Taylor & Guyver, 2012). Equally well-known is the tendency of history textbooks to present ideologically infused narratives that lend legitimacy to national identities and the preservation of contemporary power relations (Carretero, Asensio & Rodriguez-Moneo, 2012; Danielsson Malmros, 2012; Spjut, 2018). Thus, it is safe to say that history education presently is imbued with political and ideological dimensions. However, the enactment of these dimensions at the level of the classroom has only recently, and to a lesser extent, been explored empirically through in-situ observations (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017; Chhabra, 2017).

Of course, studies of history classroom practices in general are not uncommon. Recent studies have, for instance, examined the existential aspects of teaching and learning history (Persson & Thorp, 2017), as well as issues of how lesson design facilitates students' historical thinking in terms of second-order concepts, such as causality, agency, continuity and change (Johansson, 2014; Lilliestam, 2013; Stoel et al., 2015). Although these studies offer vital insights into how knowing and doing history are conditioned by what goes on in the classroom, the studies less often set out to address the political or ideological workings of those very same practices.

Thus, two prevalent and distinct themes in research on history education — the subject's political and ideological dimension and the subject's classroom practices — rarely overlap empirically. Arguably, however, if the scholarly community is to provide answers to questions of didactical importance (such as “what aspects of the educational content are taken for granted in practices of teaching history?,” “how are conflicts about history established and handled in the classroom?” and “why, or by which rationales, are practices of history education continuously conducted?”), there is a need to unite these two interests. Addressing such questions is especially important in the present considering that the past continues to be a contested issue, and subsequently, a challenge that history teachers must negotiate in their professional practices (Parkes, 2011). The Swedish syllabus, for example, emphasizes that the politics of history in society constitute an integral part of the subject's core content (Curriculum for the upper secondary school, 2011). Thus, reflecting on the subject's political and ideological dimensions is not optional for educators teaching in the Swedish context. From a didactical perspective, then, it is essential that the scholarly community offer knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Colloquially, the concept denotes the public contestations over history in general and history education in particular that lately have taken place in many Western societies (Taylor & Guyver, 2012).

about the way these dimensions work in history education in general and in history classroom practices in particular.

With such queries and considerations in mind, this study aims to outline the discursive logics understood as socially, politically and ideologically constituting a selection of history classroom practices enacted in the context of Swedish upper secondary education. To this end, the paper reports on a series of video-recorded observations and applies the analytical vocabulary of the logics of critical explanation framework (Glynos & Howarth, 2007) to articulate the socially shared assumptions, us-and-them political relationships and ideological narratives that alternately furnish the examined classroom practices with stability and contingency. Or, put differently, the inquiry seeks to answer three research questions:

- I. *What* shared and sedimented assumptions about the subject content of history are present in the examined classroom practices?
- II. *How* are political relationships of us-and-them established and disestablished in the studied history classroom practices?
- III. *Why*, or through which ideological narratives, do the educators and the students invest themselves in teaching and studying history?

By addressing these research questions the paper can be understood as contributing to the small yet burgeoning body of literature that empirically investigates the history classroom from the point of view of its political and ideological dimensions.

## **Analytical framework**

Following the example set by Robert Parkes (2011) in his book *Interrupting History*, this study takes its theoretical starting point in a post-structuralist frame of reference. Specifically, the paper adheres to the anti-essentialist ontology of political discourse theory (PDT) which conceptualizes discursive practices as fundamentally constituting social relations, history and society (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2014). Practices of this sort are, however, contingent and subject to being dislocated (i.e., unsettled or disrupted) in moments of political conflict. Here, PDT distinguishes between the concepts of *politics* and *the political*. Whereas the first denotes the formal processes of legislative assemblies, the latter is understood in ontological terms as the ever-present possibility of antagonistic us-and-them relations being established in any given context (including classrooms) and around any given societal matter (including the teaching of history). Using the somewhat “brute” concept of antagonism in an educational paper may seem unjustified, and for that reason, in the following I refer to the political in its democratic mode, that is, agonism. This is because political conflicts in education usually are not acted out violently between enemies but democratically between adversaries that, while disagreeing, regard each other as legitimate opponents sharing certain basic values, such as liberty and equality for all (Mouffe, 2005; Ruitenberg, 2009).

Building on these ontological premises, Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007) developed the logics of critical explanation (LCE) framework to aid empirical

researchers in analyzing the many ways in which social, political and arguably, educational practices operate. For Glynos and Howarth, the explanatory concept of logics is vital as it denotes “[...] *the rules or grammar of the practice, as well as the conditions which makes the practice both possible and vulnerable*” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007 p. 136, italics in the original). In this sense, logics is an analytical concept applied to clarify the internal discursive workings of a given practice. Therefore, approaching practices, including educational ones, through the LCE framework is not about establishing a set of external determinants or causal laws. Instead, this approach entails outlining the *guiding principles of discourse* that constitute a specific practice (Glynos & Howarth, 2007).<sup>2</sup>

To this end, Glynos and Howarth (2007) distinguish among three kinds of logics each of which adds to the analysis of a practice by highlighting its social, political and fantasmatic (i.e., ideological) dimensions. In the following, these logics and their particular use in this inquiry are accounted for.

First, the concept *social logics* is applied to describe the over-arching discursive coherence of a practice. Using this concept entails that the researcher fleshes out what is commonly rendered intelligible by the practice’s articulatory regularities and shared sedimented assumptions. Here, social sedimentation refers to the absence of political conflict and the state at which a practice is self-evident to its participants. Thus, social logics aid the researcher in seeking out the stability of a practice in terms of that which is repeatedly taken for granted and commonly held to be true (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). In the present paper, this concept is subsequently used to direct analytical attention toward what *shared and sedimented assumptions* constitute practices of teaching history as a particular curricular content.

Second, the concept *political logics* account for how practices are dislocated and consequently, shown to be contingent in moments of contestation. Essentially, such moments entail a simplification of the practice in the sense that the otherwise great diversity of identities, arguments and societal demands are discursively *arranged* into only two opposing camps separated by a political frontier. This constitutes an adversarial us-and-them relationship in which the identities, arguments or demands on each side are joined together and articulated as equivalent in the face of their shared adversaries, that is to say, the identities, arguments or demands on the other side (Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

Simply put, practices operate according to a political logic when equivalence dominates its discourse and frontiers are drawn between adversaries. Conversely, practices are de-politicized when equivalence is broken apart, and differences are no longer downplayed. Thus, and for the purpose of this paper, political logics is applied to determine how *adversarial relationships* are established or disestablished in the history classroom, or how equivalence or difference is articulated between discursive elements particular to the practice of teaching history.

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<sup>2</sup> To be clear, this paper concerns the discursive logics constituting history classroom *practices* and not the logics of history per se (cf. McCullagh, 2004).

Finally, inspired by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Glynos and Howarth (2007) introduce the concept *fantasmatic logics* which is employed to grasp why individuals continuously invest themselves in a given practice. Simply put, fantasmatic logics denotes the *ideological grip* that a practice holds in its discourse. However, the concept does not refer to a false consciousness on behalf of the subjects but rather highlights the articulatory mechanism that covers up the contingency of a practice. Thus, ideology is not understood as a collection of beliefs that distort the true state of things, or as positions along a traditional left and right political spectrum, but as *a function of discourse* informing individuals to ignore that their practices could be carried out differently.

Fantasmatic logics functions mainly through beatific or horrific narratives that either make utopian promises or threaten with dystopian scenarios if a given challenge is not overcome. A common element of these narratives is the articulation of a metaphorical “thief”, meaning that traits are projected on individuals thought to be either stealing the participants’ enjoyment of a promised utopia or causing misfortune (Glynos, 2008; Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Thus, and in the context of the present paper, the concept captures what students and teachers come to fear or desire in the process of dealing with history as a curricular matter. Or put differently, fantasmatic logics is applied to determine why and through which rationales educators and students continuously engage in teaching or studying the past.

To be clear, using the concept “narratives” in this sense is not synonymous with how it is conventionally thought of in continental research on history didactics, that is, as the general mental and linguistic forms of historical consciousness (Rüsen, 2017). In this study, the concept is instead reserved for understanding the ideological visions of what will come to pass if history is, or is not, properly taught and studied. Thus, the present paper deviates from Rüsen’s (2017) notion of the political-ideological dimensions of historical consciousness and historical culture. For him, the politics and ideology of history education are mainly defined in terms of the societal legitimacy created and upheld through different uses of the past in present schooling. In contrast, this paper departs from a conflict-oriented perspective and applies the term “fantasmatic” to signal a *particular* understanding of ideology grounded in the post-structuralist notion of a de-centred subject that, in discursive practices, is both promised (through beatific narratives) and denied (through horrific narratives) a mythical fullness, be it either an ideal society or a fully sutured identity (Glynos, 2008).

To conclude, the use of the LCE framework should be understood in relation to the aim of the study as they both position *practices* as their primary object of inquiry. Furthermore, the paper positions *the political and ideological dimensions* of the classroom as an educational problem in need of empirical investigation, and the LCE framework offers a conceptual vocabulary suitable for this task.<sup>3</sup> With these

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<sup>3</sup> Although “logics” is new in history education research, this concept has been proven fruitful in analyses of other educational issues, including the marketization of schooling (Harling & Dahlstedt, 2017) and education for sustainable development (Andersson & Öhman, 2016).

considerations in mind, the next section elaborates the study's method, data and analytical procedure.

## Method

The empirical data for this study was generated via the use of field notes and video-recorded observations of history classroom practices. In total, the data consists of 20 hours of recorded student–teacher interaction spread out over 12 occasions. The observations were conducted at an upper secondary school located in rural Sweden and centered on the classroom practices of two history teachers, here called Robert and Sonja. Both teachers had roughly 10 years of professional experience and taught in higher education preparatory programs, which included 33 first- and second-year students in the Social Science Program, 26 first-year students in the Arts Program, as well as seven second- and last-year students in the Humanities Program.

The teachers and all but one of the students gave their informed consent to participate in the study. The student who declined to participate stated that he was uncomfortable with being recorded. Consequently, he was not filmed, and his utterances were disregarded during the verbatim transcription process. In this respect, the present study adheres to the guidelines for ethical sound research formulated by the Swedish Research Council (2011). Of course, bringing cameras into a classroom always carries the risk of disrupting the everyday dynamic of the student–teacher interaction. However, when this issue was discussed with the educators, both stated that they had not noticed any substantial change in their students' behavior. Therefore, there is good reason to believe that the practices captured on camera represent the ordinary interaction of the teachers and the students.

The observed classroom practices all drew on elements of the core educational content stipulated by the Swedish history syllabus, including potentially political topics, such as the social movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, the history of science and philosophy from the Renaissance to the present and the history of nationalism and genocide. Additionally, both teachers incorporated various perspectives in teaching these topics, including intercultural comparisons, as well as aspects of local history and gender relations, which are also represented in the syllabus (Curriculum for the upper secondary school, 2011). From the diverse topics taught it also followed that the respective aims of the teaching practices differed. For example, when the teachers lectured about genocides or social movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, the educators told their students that the purpose was to engage them in a general overview of these particular topics. In other instances, when the students were asked to first write essays and then comment on each other's work, the stated aim was to develop the students' critical competencies and to emulate the academic procedures that the students may encounter if they attend university.

In the present study, retroduction served as the guiding methodological principle for analyzing the generated data. Generally, this entails examining a particular practice by first reviewing its facts, then adopting a theoretically informed but preliminary

analytical account and lastly, revising this account continuously by testing each iteration against the empirical data. The process of revision is repeated until the analysis has been modified enough to be considered convincing in relation to the context of the studied practice (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Thus, the logics outlined in this paper are the result of me, the scholar, oscillating my analytical efforts between the empirical data and the concepts of the LCE framework discussed in the previous section. Following this principle, the analysis was conducted in three steps.

First, the material was reviewed in its entirety, and recorded classroom situations were initially selected according to a purpose-related selection process. This meant identifying the *didactic events* or moments that offered the most information relative to the aim of the study (Patton, 2002; Quennerstedt et al., 2014). Locating such events required viewing the material repeatedly and searching for situations that appeared to have important significance for the enactment of the practices. Given the aim of this paper, the events selected for further analysis were those in which teachers and students explicitly expressed shared understandings of the educational content, engaged in heated debate about history or referred to the purpose of teaching and studying this subject. In total, 23 such didactic events, each encompassing about 10 minutes of recorded classroom interaction, were chosen for in-depth analysis. That is, approximately one fifth of the recorded data turned out to have *direct* relevance for the purpose and research questions guiding the inquiry.

The second step of the analytical procedure involved categorizing each event as being primarily social, political or fantasmatic. This categorization was grounded in whether the individual moments were most likely to be adequately grasped by the conceptual elements associated with social, political or fantasmatic logics. Consequently, and at this point, the theoretical premises of the analytical framework were applied to *sort* the data.

In the third step of the analysis, the recurring and most prolific themes present in each category were discerned. Here, the empirical data worked reciprocally to *rearticulate* the elements of the LCE framework into a set of empirically grounded logics contextually specific to the observed classroom practices of teaching history at a Swedish upper secondary school. At this point, the analysis focused on exactly what the assumptions about the subject content consisted of, precisely how equivalence or difference between arguments, identities or demands was established and with which particularly horrific or beatific narratives teachers and students engaged in the practices. As soon as a pattern or theme (i.e., a preliminary logic) was discerned in one or several didactic events, it was tested against the remaining segments to determine whether the theme could be corroborated, needed to be adjusted and renamed or rejected altogether as insignificant. Also during this step of the analysis, previous research was employed to assess each logic's reasonableness in relation to the specific context of history education. Thus, to alternately substantiate and contrast the discerned logics, previous relevant studies are discussed throughout this paper.

In sum, using the methodological principle of retroduction together with the LCE framework and previous research facilitated the articulation of the three logics outlined and discussed in the following section.

## Findings

### **Social logic: assumptions of historical idealism and partial progress**

As stated, social logics outlines the articulatory regularities and assumptions that furnish practices with coherence and stability (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). In the context of education, logics of this kind can, of course, vary. For instance, they can refer to the general conversational *form* of the practice and subsequently, focus on who among the participants dominate the classroom interaction. However, the present analysis focuses on the subject *content* (i.e., the didactical *what*), meaning that the regularities specifically imbedded in the educative articulation of history are of interest.

From this point of view, the prominent social logic of the studied practices is labelled *assumptions of historical idealism and partial progress*. This logic contains two basic elements. Starting with the first, the findings suggest that the classroom practices are sustained by teachers and students articulating humankind's ideas, attitudes and changing collective consciousness as the primary driving force of history. Not only is this an articulatory regularity that is frequently featured in the classroom, but more importantly, it also accompanies a variety of educational topics being taught.

For instance, using Robert's teaching practices as examples, articulations of this sort underpin open-ended classroom discussions of social movements and lectures on the history of science. Depicted below is one such lecture in which Robert specifically addresses the influence Friedrich Nietzsche's thinking has had on the secularization of Western society:

*Robert: One consequence of Nietzsche's thoughts is that, from the Industrial Revolution of the mid-19th century and onward, we've become more secularized. [...] Nietzsche criticized the Christian church for forcing people into a system of belief that not only inhibited their own will but also was difficult to break with. And you see, these thoughts generated consequences in the sense that when enough people eventually questioned the power of the church we got a new kind of society. [...] Do you understand now the kind of consequences a system of belief has on a society as more and more people ascribe to it?*

*[The students nod and mumble "mmm" quietly].*

Of particular interest here is the teacher's tendency to articulate the spread and entrenchment of ideas as the primary causal force of historical change, capable of generating major changes in society. As seen above, the teacher explicitly (but somewhat rhetorically) asks whether the class understands the consequences a system of belief can have, prompting the students to nod along and take this as a given truth. Similarly, in another lesson, Robert conducts a class discussion about the social movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries via a closer examination of excerpts from the Swedish novel *Hertha* written in 1856 by women's emancipation activist Fredrika Bremer. Thus, the class discusses the issue of marriage and women's economic dependency, but in keeping with the social logic of the practice, does so by assuming

that consciousness-raising was (and still is) the most adequate means for accomplishing historical and social change:

*Robert: What did the other women think of Hertha's [the novel's titular character] suggestions for women's right to an education and economic independence? [Points at a student raising her hand] Yes, Laura?*

*Laura: There were some women who agreed with Hertha. One of the housewives listening to her speech said that marriages often would become unhappy.*

*Robert: That's right, in some sense Hertha manages to influence the other women to reflect on their own lives. But what did she mean by saying that marriages often would become unhappy?*

*Laura: Well, I guess she meant that it's not right to marry just so that you could have an income while the relationship itself isn't working.*

*Robert: And of course, it becomes difficult to be in a marriage where there is no love whatsoever. This is really the fact that the other women have disregarded when they've accepted their role, but it is also obvious that when Hertha starts to question this then the other women begin to reconsider.*

As the conversation continues, Robert turns to comparing the use of consciousness-raising during the 19th century with its contemporary relevance:

*Robert: So, if a daughter married into money, this would spill over to her relatives, and that was how it worked back then. This was well before we had a functioning social security system, and you instead had to rely on relatives taking care of you. [...] Besides, this is something that still goes on in some places around the world. We actually have students at this very school that have gone to other countries, where their parents are from, and have been forced into a similar system although they live here. So, you see, this isn't something you get rid of overnight but something that requires raising people's consciousness in order for them to dare to object, just as Hertha does in the novel.*

Together, the excerpts further exemplify that historical idealism is sedimented and continuously accepted as the norm, while alternative ways of articulating the subject content (for instance, along the lines of a mutual interplay between thoughts and material conditions) are largely absent from the teaching practices. In this way, and considering that idealism is left unquestioned in relation to several topics, it can be said to constitute a commonly held truth that furnishes the practices with coherence and stability.

Of course, it remains a possibility that the students simply accept Robert's statements because of the asymmetrical power relations that exist in most educational settings. In addition, the students may simply have yet to experience and actively reflect on other ways of conceptualizing historical change. However, drawing such conclusions from the excerpts would be precarious as this inquiry does not aspire to look into the minds of the students and determine their previous experiences or their intentions for acting in a certain manner. What is important (and observable in the data), however, are the

*consequences* of their actions, namely, that the practice is granted a measure of stability as the students passively accept the idealistic view of history offered by the teacher.

The previous excerpt also points toward the second element of the social logic, that is, the articulation of history as advancing in terms of *partial progress*. By this, I mean that although history is mainly articulated as a steady and gradual development, this is mitigated by statements stressing that progress has yet to reach its supposed end-state, namely, a fully just and equal society. This is exemplified above as the teacher underscores the social achievements accomplished during the last 150 years while simultaneously affirming that some issues concerning equality remain to be solved. Later on in the same lesson, this tendency is further illustrated as the class returns to the question of whether Hertha's arguments for women's rights have any validity in contemporary society:

*Robert: Are any of Hertha's arguments still relevant today? [...] Judging from your own and your friends' families, is there a general conception saying that men should work more and earn more money than women? And if so, how come we have allowed this to happen? [Several students begin talking at once, but the teacher points at one who has her hand up] Yes, Alice?*

*Alice: I was going to say something else, but I guess because men often have higher salaries they also have more money.*

*Robert: That's right, this is still something we find ourselves in, and much remains to be done in relation to that. What else remains to be done of the things Hertha suggests? How about marriage, for instance? [The teacher gets no response from the students, so he continues to speak] Well, in some sense we have made such progress in Sweden that we would find it difficult to imagine a marriage in which love is not involved.*

*Eddie: Well, generally speaking, it is perhaps less common that people today get married and have children in "holy matrimony". I mean, it's common that couples aren't married.*

*Robert: Yes, that's right. Is it all right to have children and not be married in today's society...*

*Students: Yes.*

*Robert: ... or do you give those people funny looks?*

*Students: No.*

*Robert: Is it all right to marry if you don't want children?*

*Students: Yes.*

*Robert: Do you give them funny looks?*

*Students: No.*

*Robert: Is a marriage between two men or two women okay?*

*Students: Yes. [Some students giggle]*

*Robert: We've talked about this several times before. It was absolutely not okay in this country only a few years ago. This is also one of the things that has changed gradually because our perceptions of each other have changed.*

In this excerpt, the teacher enumerates several things that have changed for the better since the mid-19th century. Most notably, he explicitly states that progress has been accomplished in terms of equality and tolerance “because our perceptions of each other have changed” which again exemplifies the logic’s element of historical idealism. However, the transcript also indicates that the teacher and his students share the understanding that equality has only *partially* been achieved. This is most evident in the exchange between Alice and Robert, where the former states that men still have higher salaries and the latter responds by saying that “much remains to be done in relation to that”.

Articulations of this kind occur regularly in the studied practices. For instance, in a different class, Robert is once again teaching history of science, but this time focuses on the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir. In connection to this topic, Robert and the students again emphasize the partial social progress that has been achieved following the end of the Second World War:

*Robert: [Points at a picture displayed in his PowerPoint presentation] This is Simone de Beauvoir, who was a very important philosopher and women’s rights advocate. She wrote a book titled The Second Sex that deals with this issue. [...] she is the one who said that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. What do you think she meant by that?*

*Karim: She introduces new ideas...*

*Lily: ...that we all are free.*

*Robert: Yes, it’s correct that we as humans are all free, but still there were some ideas about men being superior to women. [...] This is what she criticized, and said that people had to break away from their old conceptions. In short, she said that it is socially constructed norms that dictate what it means to be a woman, and [that] women could not become truly free to do what they wanted unless these norms were dismantled. [...] Of course, this is something that still is in development. Do you girls think that you have the freedom over your own lives?*

*Elena: Not completely.*

*Robert: But do you, in spite of this, think that you have equal opportunities? Are you, for instance, allowed to apply for the same jobs as the boys?*

*[Several female students mumble “mmm” affirmatively]*

*Lily: Well, we have the right to apply, but...*

*Elena: If we do get the job, we’d almost certainly get paid less.*

*Robert: And there it is! Much remains to be done, but now at least you are aware of your situation in a way that women in the past weren’t.*

Similarly to the previous excerpts, the teacher and students share an understanding of history as largely encompassing the societal improvements made in the name of equality. At the same time, however, the female students express skepticism about whether their opportunities are truly equal to boys’, and the teacher again proclaims that “much remains to be done”. In short, articulations of *relative* or *partial* social achievements seem to constitute an accepted truth informing the classroom practice.

To the reader unfamiliar with the Swedish context, it may appear peculiar that so much of the history classroom interaction is devoted to issues of contemporary society. However, I would argue that the teacher follows the syllabus quite closely by teaching almost as much about the present and the future as about the past. In fact, the concept of historical consciousness is formally incorporated into the syllabus which states that the chief purpose of the subject is to develop students' abilities to establish connections between the past, the present and the future (Curriculum for the upper secondary school, 2011). In this capacity, history as a school subject in Sweden is not exclusively directed toward (re)producing factual knowledge or promoting competence in historical method but also directed toward fostering citizens capable of orienting themselves temporally in society (Samuelsson, 2017; Sandahl, 2014).

Additionally, the findings presented here parallel previous studies conducted in the Swedish context. For instance, Ingmarie Danielsson Malmros (2012) shows in her analysis of history textbooks that the overarching national narrative shifted from the 1970s and onward, gradually nuancing the previously promoted exceptionalism of the Swedish welfare state with critical interjections claiming that social equality remains elusive despite many accomplishments. In this particular respect then, the teaching practices do not differ substantially from the textbooks. Instead, the articulations observed in the classroom practices are quite reasonable considering the Swedish curricular context and previous research. However, the present analysis also adds to Danielsson Malmros' study by suggesting that the conceptualization of history as relative progress, at least in the practices studied here, is coupled with notions of historical idealism.

In sum, the logic presented above should be understood as social precisely because it features regularly in relation to various educational topics and rarely is reflected upon or brought into question. Or put differently, ideas being the vehicle of history and partial progress its vector are two fundamental assumptions about the subject content that furnish the examined classroom practices with coherence and stability.

### **Political logic: temporal equivalence of us-and-them relations**

In contrast to social logics which outlines the stability of practices, political logics account for how moments of contestation dislocate them and reveal their contingency (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). In the present study, the political logic of the classroom practices is labelled *temporal equivalence of us-and-them relations*. By this, I wish to draw attention to how political frontiers are established between students as they not only negate each other's statements in the present but also equate their own arguments and societal demands with those made by historical agents in the past. Simply put, the political logic of temporal equivalence refers to the case-specific articulations that position identities, arguments or demands of the present and the past as interchangeable, temporarily downplaying any potential differences that may exist between them.

Although the studied classroom practices generally were enacted amicably, conflicts occasionally came to the fore. In the following, one such extensive didactic event is

discussed as it illustrates the practices' political logic.<sup>4</sup> The scenario in question is from one of Sonja's lessons that positioned the Swedish social movements of the 20th century as the primary educational content. The lesson formed the concluding part of a larger curricula segment in which the students had written essays about the movements' activities in the local community. In the transcript, one such essay about a women's organization for wartime preparedness is discussed among three students. Two (Julia and Felicia) authored the essay, and one (Ali) was asked to comment on it. The teacher mainly served as a moderator of the students' discussion. Of particular interest here is how the topic establishes an agonistic us-and-them relationship between the students as they discuss the Swedish women's rights movement within the greater context of gender history and contemporary gender equality:

*Ali: When I'm reading the essay, I get the impression that the women of the organization wanted validation from men. Is there perhaps some truth to this?*

*Julia: Well, women shouldn't really need to be validated by men. We shouldn't... They said that it shouldn't matter if you were a man or a woman because your labor is of equal worth. I mean, perhaps it is about validation to some extent but only because they felt that their work should be acknowledged as a matter of course.*

*Sonja: Perhaps they wanted society's validation?*

*Felicia: Yes, they wanted to show the whole of society, not just the men.*

*Ali: You write here that women joined the organization because they wanted to change their position and work towards a society where all labor was regarded as equal, but that they also joined because they valued charity work and helping others.*

*Sonja: I think we have to put this into context and think about what it was like in Sweden during the 1940s...*

*Julia: [interrupts and raises her voice at Ali, but quickly calms down] Another thing was that they had recently gotten the right to vote and knew that it was possible to accomplish change, but if you still wonder whether women sought validation from men, I think that says more about what you think of the issue but I wouldn't say that was the case. [...]*

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<sup>4</sup> Compared to the number of didactic events understood as social (12 in total), the moments of contestation were relatively few (three in total). This is not surprising considering that compared to other societies (such as Finland, South Africa and the states of the former Yugoslavia), Sweden's modern history has not been characterized by internal strife (cf. Ahonen, 2013). Thus, there is little reason to expect Swedish history classroom practices to exhibit an *excess* of contestations.

Nonetheless, in addition to the extensive segment analyzed here, disagreements between students also occurred when Sonja's class discussed the responsibility European countries have for the many atrocities carried out in post-colonial Africa. Additionally, when discussing the Social Democratic welfare state of the mid-20th century, the students in Robert's class disagreed about the extent of government interference.

*Ali: Have you given any thought about why women worked together in this way?*

*Julia: I guess because they wanted to succeed. I mean, even though some are right-wing and some are left-wing, they're still guided by the same ambition of women gaining more power. [...] Women have always... I guess there have never been a woman who wanted less power and strives backwards. All are guided by the same ambition, and if you join together, then you can have more influence in society. [...]*

*Ali: So, was charity work an instrument to generate sympathy for women's cause and to show that they actually were generous?*

*Julia: To show that they actually were generous? That sounds like they aren't! It seems like you're being demeaning to women by saying that we are not generous!*

*Ali: I meant that they did charity work, and the men didn't.*

*Julia: I rather believe that they did it because they themselves found it to be important at that time [...] I don't think they set out to gain sympathy. If anything, they perhaps felt sympathy for others that were worse off.*

*Ali: I think this could have been better explained in the essay.*

*Felicia: But we have explained that!*

*Ali: Well, I wanted more of an analysis. [...] Another thing that I wondered about was... you make a statement in your introduction where you say that "women lacked access to governmental agencies and important organizations which were all dominated by men, and that we still see traces of this as many professions today are male-dominated", but you do not quote any source to support this.*

*Julia: That's because it's common knowledge.*

*Ali: [looks at the essay and then at the teacher with pleading eyes] Isn't this meant to be an academic essay?*

*Julia: [raises her voice while also pleading with the teacher] You don't have to look it up! If it's common knowledge, then...*

*Sonja: If it's common knowledge, then you don't need to quote a source. Just recently, I believe it was the day before yesterday that the news talked about how university professors in Sweden mostly are men.*

*Julia: That goes for politicians as well. Many professions are still male-dominated!*

*Ali: Well, in Sweden men and women have equal opportunities.*

*Julia: No, because if you apply for a job, and both a man and a woman with exactly the same education are up for it, then "chance" favors the man for some reason. [...] I am sure that this could be proven scientifically if you want to look into that!*

*Ali: All I'm saying is that it would have been better if one or two sources were included to support it.*

*Julia: For the last time, it is common knowledge!*

*Sonja: I think so as well, and as you make this statement in your introduction, you are allowed to include some personal reflections. It would've been more of a problem if you had made this claim in the end of your essay and not cited a source regarding which professions were and still are male-dominated. In that case, a reference to a source would've definitely been necessary.*

As seen in the excerpt above, contestation and heated debate arise between the students over the issue of gender history and whether continued efforts for equality are needed. In this particular context, the political logic of temporal equivalence highlights the dislocation of the practice as one of the students, Julia, gradually comes to equate her own position with that of the women's rights movement of the 20th century. Initially, this is evident from her tendency to alternatively speak of the movement as "they" and "we", and from her tendency to articulate the societal demands of women past and women present as interchangeable. As seen above, she explicitly claims that the women's movement wanted a "society where all labor was regarded as equal", while only moments later, she stresses that contemporary labor relations and many professions still are male-dominated.

Julia then articulates that all women, regardless of their political leanings and historical contexts, have demanded the same thing, namely greater influence and acknowledgment in society. This is evident from her statements stressing that "even though some are right-wing and some are left-wing, they are still guided by the same ambition of women gaining more power" and "I guess there have never been a woman who wanted less power and strives backwards. All are guided by the same ambition [...]".

Of course, this is a simplification on behalf of the student who downplays the differences between women living under disparate historical conditions, but in doing so, she also constitutes women as a *temporally united* "we" located on one side of a political frontier that expands beyond the present as a singular temporal dimension. The opposing side of this frontier is, in the conversation, represented by Ali who negates Julia's demands by saying that "in Sweden men and women have equal opportunities" implying that although there once was a need for gender equality initiatives, they are no longer warranted. In short, while Julia acts to establish equivalence between women's demands past and present, Ali tries to emphasize the differences that may exist between them (cf. Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

Here, a clarification about the character of the contestation is necessary, because the exchange between Julia and Ali could easily be interpreted as a consequence of the students having different stances toward history, to use Keith Barton and Linda Levstik's (2004) terminology. One could argue that Ali takes an analytical stance as he questions the veracity of the essay by applying several basic principles of historical method, and that Julia takes an identification stance as she passionately and affectively defends her paper. Therefore, a possible interpretation of the excerpt could be that Julia and Ali simply misunderstand each other because they perceive history and their assignment differently.

Although such an interpretation may be reasonable in part, the excerpt *also* indicates that the students disagree on *the very issue* of gender equality and whether further efforts for its realization is necessary. Consequently, the conflict cannot be reduced to mere dissimilarities in the way history is perceived by the students as this would imply that their contestation is purely academic. Instead, I argue that the students' disagreement is *politically genuine* in the sense that it is grounded in a societal issue that historically has been and remains contentious.

Interpreting the excerpt in this way finds support in previous research. Keith Barton and Alan McCully (2012), for instance, showed in their study of history education in Northern Ireland that students often must navigate between competing historical accounts offered by their schools and their local communities. At the heart of such competing narratives is, however, always *an actual societal issue* that either has been continuously contentious (as in the case of nationalist–unionist relations in Northern Ireland) or recently rekindled as such.

Of related interest here is the manner in which the teacher eventually breaks down the political logic and brings the practice back to working amicably. As seen at the end of the transcript, the teacher intervenes when the discussion turns to the issue of whether historical and contemporary gender inequality should be considered common knowledge or whether such statements need to be corroborated by sources and references. Here, the teacher principally sides with the female students but not without underscoring that their claims about contemporary inequality are acceptable only on the grounds that the claims were made at the beginning of the essay where “personal reflections” are allowed.

Considering that the teacher finally closes down the contestation, the result of this analysis is comparable to Zvi Bekerman and Michalinos Zembylas's (2017) study of how Cypriot and Israeli history teachers handle their students' political statements. Essentially, they find that teachers tend to silence students by conducting a monologue of their own or if that fails, tries to incorporate any potentially political utterances into a state-sanctioned history (see also Chhabra, 2017 for similar examples of how Indian history teachers handle politically controversial topics in practice).

This contrasts with the present study, where the teacher instead handles the political contestation partly by personalizing the issue and partly by rearticulating it as a technicality of academic writing. Thus, while history classroom practices in conflict-ridden societies such as Israel and Cyprus are depoliticized through state narratives consuming personal ones, the opposite seems to be true for the practices investigated in this paper where contestations, at least in part, are depoliticized by being made a matter of personal opinion. In relation to this, it is important to once again acknowledge that conflict does not constitute the default mode of the examined practices, but a *possibility* (or a risk) that alternately is opened up and closed down through the actions of the teachers and the students. Or, put differently, the political logic outlined here relates to those particular *moments* when space for contestation about society and history is given.

In sum, the analysis presented above concludes that the practices of teaching history are dislocated through a political logic of temporal equivalence that refers to acts of articulating past and present societal demands as interchangeable, effectively creating

us-and-them relationships between those who make the demands and those who oppose the demands. However, the analysis also shows that such a logic is tentative and can be counteracted partly by articulations that stress historical differences and partly by articulations that personalize the political issue at hand.

### **Fantasmatic logic: the fear of past injustices being repeated**

Moving on from the social and political logics that respectively account for the stability and contingency of a practice, fantasmatic logics signifies the ideological grip that is exercised in its discourse. As stated, logics of this kind concern the beatific or horrific narratives by which participants rationalize their continued engagement with a practice (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). In what follows, one such logic is presented. The narrative in question is primarily horrific in character as it suggests to teachers and students the importance of engaging with history to avoid the repetition of injustices or atrocities. Consequently, the fantasmatic logic of the studied classroom practices is labelled *the fear of past injustices being repeated*.

This logic is constitutive of both Sonja's and Robert's teaching practices, although it is articulated with two slightly different emphasis. Starting with Sonja's practice, the logic suggests that history should be taught to safeguard the integrity of the individual against potentially malevolent authorities. This aspect of the logic is well exemplified in a lecture about the Swedish eugenics system, sterilization laws and the State Institute for Racial Biology that were in effect during the mid-20th century. Subsequently, and in relation to this topic, Sonja stresses education and an individual's critical disposition as crucial means for preventing repetition of state-sanctioned abuse:

*Sonja: Do you think people were more or less affected by the sterilization laws depending on whether they had a high or low level of education?*

*Maria: They were more affected...*

*Sonja: ...if they had a low level of education?*

*Maria: Yes.*

*Sonja: Why is that then?*

*Maria: Perhaps they were considered inferior.*

*Sonja: The people at the institute surely regarded them as such, yes. The victims themselves had, in a best-case scenario, attended elementary school. At this point in time, people had great respect for doctors and other authorities. Besides, the doctors often used Latin terminology, so the victims probably didn't even understand what was to be done to them. The level of education was, therefore, of great importance, because without an education you are easily misled. [...] I don't know what it's like today, but I guess you don't have the same amount of respect for doctors when you go to the hospital? Would you dare to question a doctor telling you that you're in need of an examination that you don't understand?*

*[The students nod and mumble "mmm"]*

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*Sonja: Can you perhaps also discern some other theme? What has been the common denominator throughout if we, for instance, consider men and women?*

*Victoria: I think that it doesn't matter.*

*Sonja: Well, in some cases perhaps, but I would say that women were more likely to become victims of forced sterilization. What about the people leading the institute?*

*Simon: They were almost exclusively men, and most of them were from rich families.*

*Sonja: That's right. They were mostly rich men while the victims often were poor, from social and ethnic minorities, ill or women that didn't dare to object nor had the knowledge to do so. So, a common theme is that it was wealthy men who abused those who lacked the knowledge to object.*

As seen above, the teacher repeatedly emphasizes the value of education by making statements such as “without an education you are easily misled” and “it was wealthy men who abused those who lacked the knowledge to object.” In conjunction with this, she reassures herself that her students have sufficient knowledge and courage to protect their individual integrity by asking whether they, unlike the victims of the historical injustices, would dare to question authority figures.

Thus, the excerpt exemplifies the practice's fantasmatic logic which implies the potentially horrific consequences of ignorance. Not only does this emphasize the importance of staying in school to the students, but it also constitutes a rationale for the educator to keep teaching the subject content at hand and to conduct the professional practice in its current form. Simply put, the ideological grip of the practice entails a dystopian or horrific narrative suggesting that if students are not offered a proper education and learn from past injustices, then they could potentially be repeated in the future.

To be clear, the purpose of Sonja's lecture was not to offer her students an ideological rationale for studying history. Her stated purpose was to discuss with them the Swedish eugenics system of the mid-20th century and its relation to societal conditions such as the level of education of women, ethnic minorities and the working class. This, however, did not mean that the students were *solely* taught insights related to that particular content. Instead, the ideological rationale outlined above can be thought of as an element of the practice offered to them *collaterally*. For, as John Dewey (1938/1997) puts it, “Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. [The] formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or the lesson in geography or history that is learned” (p. 48). In short, this excerpt exemplifies that the teacher taught two things simultaneously: the given curricular content explicitly and an ideological narrative collaterally.

Parallel to Sonja's practice, Robert and his students articulate a similar fear of the past repeating itself, although their concerns are mostly about losing their current democratic society to authoritarian forces. This is best exemplified by the conversation

depicted below in which the class reflects on the Holocaust, Nazi Germany and the overall importance of studying history:

*Robert: What's the point of studying history, would you say? [He points at one of the students] What do you think, Elena?*

*Elena: Perhaps the point is to learn from history so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past.*

*Robert: And do you think we do that?*

*Elena: Well, perhaps not at the moment.*

*Robert: Could you perhaps give an example that you know of? It doesn't matter if it's a major or minor one.*

*Elena: Well, of course I come to think of the Holocaust...*

*Robert: It's not uncommon that this is mentioned.*

*Elena: ... and the ideas and thoughts behind it. In a way, it feels like society and the world is moving in that direction again, or maybe it's already characterized by the same ideas, and that makes me uncomfortable.*

*Robert: And from this we could draw the conclusion that we haven't learned from past mistakes, or am I wrong?*

*Elena: Well, in school we are taught that we should always pay attention to these tendencies, but it seems to happen anyway.*

*Robert: How come?*

*Elena: Well, far from everyone cares about this.*

*Robert: And then we obviously haven't learned from our mistakes, right? [Elena hums affirmatively while Robert turns his attention to the rest of the class] So then we return to what you all said earlier about the meaning of society, and how you wish you could achieve safety, peace and consensus. [Robert pauses for a moment of contemplation before again turning his attention to Elena] If you imagine that you were thrown back in time, do you think you could have served as a concentration camp guard in Nazi Germany?*

*Elena: No.*

*Robert: And why is that?*

*Elena: Because I don't believe in those ideas.*

*Robert: Aha! But the fact is that enough people did believe in those ideas to justify the atrocities. [...] And perhaps that is why we need to remember that the more people ascribe to all the good things you mentioned earlier, the more people will have learned from past mistakes. However, mistakes will also be made again and again by those who haven't realized this yet, and unfortunately, we have to come to terms with this while still being able to do something about it.*

In the excerpt above, the fantasmatic logic of the classroom practice is plainly exemplified by the student Elena who argues that the study of history is necessary “so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past”. Specifically, she references the Holocaust while expressing a genuine anxiety about the tendency that “society and the world is

moving in that direction again”. Although she does not specify what aspect of contemporary society brings her to this conclusion, she, nonetheless, articulates a horrific narrative in which past atrocities, injustices and totalitarian thoughts threaten to make their return.

Also of interest is the explanation that the teacher offers toward the end of the excerpt. He urges his students to remember that people will come to desire a society of peace and consensus if they simply start to learn from humanity’s mistakes, although some mistakes will likely “be made again and again by those who haven’t realized this yet”. Quite simply, the teacher establishes that those “others” who threaten the students’ enjoyment of a peaceful democratic society do so because they lack sufficient historical insights.

As the ideological narrative, in this way, rationalizes the need to give students a certain *mind-set*, the fantasmatic logic bears a close relationship to the practices’ social counterpart emphasizing historical idealism. Because, if ideas presumably constitute the vehicle of history, it is only reasonable that teaching this particular subject also entails an effort to instil students with the very conceptions and the consciousness believed to not only prevent the repetition of past injustices but also protect the progress hitherto made in the name of democracy. In extension is the fantasmatic logic then also aligned with the Swedish curriculum and syllabus which, according to Fredrik Alvé (2017), can be read as jointly mandating teachers to impart their students with a *democratically* imbued historical consciousness.

On a more critical note, one could argue that fearful narratives have no place in the history classroom and that the pedagogical judgment of the teachers subsequently should be called into question. However, I would argue that emotions such as fear are, somewhat paradoxically, essential to teaching practices like the ones depicted above. Because, if students were solely taught historical facts or methods and not what to fear or desire, teachers would run the risk of educating knowledgeable yet indifferent citizens (Barton, 2009).

Although a prerequisite for civic participation, knowledge alone is unlikely to mobilize action, and thus, it is equally important to make students *feel* a certain way about history and society. Of course, horrific or dystopian narratives are tolerable only as long as their aim is directed along the lines of a democratic curriculum. By this, I wish to underscore that fear, as an element of history education should be critiqued in relation to the purpose it serves rather than in and of itself. For as seen in the present analysis, the horrific narrative is *productive* in the sense that it rationalizes not only the importance of teaching and studying history but also a commitment to democratic society and individual integrity.

This conclusion partially parallels the findings presented in Anna-Lena Lilliestam’s (2015) study of in-training history teachers and their views on history education serving the combined purpose of fostering citizens with democratic dispositions and preventing past atrocities from being repeated. In relation to her findings, however, the present inquiry demonstrates that such rationales inform not only the didactical thinking of in-training teachers but also actual classroom practices involving students and experienced educators.

In sum, the studied classroom practices are constituted through a shared horrific narrative of the past repeating itself, although it is articulated with some variation. For Sonja and her students, the narrative focuses on the *individual's integrity* and the wish to protect this integrity from being compromised by state authorities, as has happened in the past. Robert and his students, however, fear losing their current *society* to authoritarian and historically ignorant forces threatening to undo democracy's achievements. Thus, although the narratives contain slightly different metaphorical "thieves" threatening to rob the participants of enjoying something dear to them, the narratives overlap in the fear of injustices being repeated unless history is properly taught and studied. In this capacity, the fantasmatic logic outlined above offers insight into the issue of why teachers and students ideologically come to invest themselves in practices of history education.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this paper aspired to provide empirical knowledge related to the enactment of history classroom practices, and in particular, their political and ideological dimensions. To this end, the paper reported on an observational study of classroom practices situated in the context of Swedish upper secondary education. Using the analytical vocabulary of the LCE framework, the findings suggest that the examined practices are constitutively guided by three discursive logics.

First, the analysis indicates that the practices are furnished with stability and coherence through a social logic labelled *assumptions of historical idealism and partial progress*. Simply put, this logic proposes that historical idealism, together with notions about history advancing in terms of relative progress, underpins the practices. Second, the findings show that the classroom practices are contingent and susceptible to being dislocated through a political logic called *temporal equivalence of us-and-them relations*. Essentially, this logic involves the establishment of an agonistic frontier between students who come to oppose each other by equating their own societal demands with those made by historical agents in the past. In this way, the us-and-them relationship that unsettles the classroom encompasses several temporal dimensions. Finally, the results indicate that the practices exercise an ideological grip through a fantasmatic logic labelled *the fear of past injustices being repeated*. This logic entails a horrific narrative that rationalizes for the teachers and students their continued engagement with the practices, suggesting their importance for avoiding the repetition of historical injustices.

Of course, this qualitative piece of research can claim only to offer a limited account of the discursive logics that constitute history classroom practices in general, and the findings, ultimately, remain specific to the context investigated. From this point of view, much scholarly work remains to be done. For instance, future research would do well to *test and adjust* the logics outlined above against the backdrop of other national settings and their respective history curricula. Because, although the LCE framework shows promise in generating detailed analyses of classroom practices and the way their

political and ideological dimensions work discursively, a single study can hardly speak for the logics' representativeness. Thus, additional studies applying comparative approaches or encompassing a greater range and variation of data are needed. In this way, the research community could gradually (and eventually) refine the results presented here and begin to construct a theory that facilitates teachers to reflect on and act in relation to the political and ideological dimensions of their professional practices.

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BETWEEN STABILITY AND CONTINGENCY: A CASE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL  
AND FANTASMATIC LOGICS OF SWEDISH HISTORY CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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