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## Inquiring into the political dimension of History classroom practices: Suggestions for epistemological criteria and analytical concepts

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, three epistemological criteria are suggested against which analytical frameworks for studying the political dimension of history classroom practices can be deemed viable. The suggested criteria - (I) the primacy of practice, (II) the primacy of empirical openness and (III) the primacy of the political - are articulated by conducting critical and affirmative readings of previously established concepts, primarily historical consciousness. To clarify their application, the criteria are positioned in relation to the premises and concepts of a potential framework; namely, the logics of critical explanation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), the viability of which is argued for theoretically and empirically.

**KEYWORDS:** History Education; History Wars; Politics; Classroom Practice.

### Introduction

Research on the political dimension of teaching and learning about the past is, by now, a well-established feature in the scholarly field of history education. Itself a multifaceted term, *the political dimension* can refer to educators teaching political history as a subject content or it may denote the political orientations that students of history develop over the course of their education. More often, however, the term is used to describe the multitude of *public debates, contestations and conflicts* that surround the aims and contents of history education in many national settings (Parkes, 2011; Taylor & Guyver, 2012). Although such contestations (collectively labelled as the history wars) ultimately remain specific to their respective contexts, they are commonly enacted in the form of clashes between progressive and conservative educational forces who champion competing and profoundly different visions of what constitutes a desirable history curriculum.

For example, the public contestations have, in the past, (at least in many Western societies, such as Australia, Canada and the Nordic countries) focused on the issue of whether factual knowledge or critical competencies should be the priority in history education (Elgström & Hellstenius, 2011; Samuelsson, 2017; Sheehan, 2012). In other instances, the contentious issue has been whether unifying national narratives or multicultural perspectives that take the

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history of ethnic minorities into consideration should be promoted (Clark, 2009; Parkes, 2007). Drawing on this extensive literature, the present paper departs from an understanding of history as a fundamentally contested issue. Specifically, it follows Robert Parkes's (2011) post-structuralist understanding of history curriculum as containing *the discursively contested signifiers around which antagonistic or adversarial relationships are articulated*. In a broad sense, the political dimension of history education is here defined as a term that denotes the *conflicts* that surround and permeate the subject in school, as well as in society.

Despite the recent wealth of studies investigating the history wars at the level of public debate, comparatively little is known about how conflicts about history are played out in the actual classroom practices of teachers and students. In fact, scholars have only to a limited extent investigated the political dimension of history classrooms *in-situ*; that is, by observing and analysing student-teacher interactions with this dimension in mind. Although few and far between, such studies are essential if the research community is to facilitate history educators to reflect on and respond to the contestations that may arise in their professional practices (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that studies of history classroom practices in general are uncommon. Such studies are, on the contrary, plentiful, and often provide detailed analyses of students' learning in terms of their historical thinking (e.g. Demers et al, 2015; Havekes et al, 2017; Stoel et al, 2015). However, such studies largely depart from the assumption that teaching and learning history is an exclusively congenial or consensus orientated activity. Consequently, they less often investigate the classroom practices from the point of view of the subject's political dimension. A potential explanation for this shortcoming could be that scholars (through the use of the historical thinking framework) possess the adequate analytical tools, such as first order substantive and second order metahistorical concepts (Lee 1983; 2004), for grasping students' learning, but lack an equally adequate vocabulary for inquiring into the controversies enacted in the classroom. Thus, before the scholarly community can engage fully with the empirical research gap outlined above, there is a need to identify feasible analytical frameworks for the task and, more importantly, to clarify the epistemological requirements that such frameworks ought to meet.

With these considerations in mind, the purpose of this paper is to suggest three criteria against which analytical frameworks for studying the political dimension of history classroom practices can be deemed viable. To clarify their usefulness, the criteria are applied to a potential framework, namely the logics of critical explanation (LCE), developed by post-structuralist scholars Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007), the viability of which is illustrated theoretically and empirically throughout the paper.

In short, the argument offered here is that, by considering the suggested criteria and framework, scholars can begin to engage with conflicts about history as they are enacted and dealt with by students and teachers. Or, put differently, the paper aspires to contribute to research on history education by *initiating a methodological discussion* about how researchers can approach the political dimension of history classroom practices. To be clear, the term classroom practice is here broadly defined as any enactment of teaching and learning wherein educators and students jointly and *purposefully* engage with a given curricular content in the context of *institutionalised* schooling (Öhman, 2014). This means that classroom practices are understood to encompass the multitude of actions and experiences that make up the fabric of everyday life in school. For instance, teachers giving lectures or conducting discussions and students writing essays or taking tests, are all examples of activities understood as classroom practices.

Following this introduction, the paper proceeds in several sub-sections. Initially, the suggested criteria – (I) the primacy of practice, (II) the primacy of empirical openness and

(III) the primacy of the political – are articulated by presenting critical and affirmative readings of previously utilised concepts, primarily historical consciousness as formulated by Jörn Rüsen (2005, 2017).<sup>2</sup> Next, and against the background of the first criterion, the paper offers a theoretical argument that relates the premises of the LCE framework to the recent ‘practice turn’ in education and in theory of history curriculum. The second criterion is illustrated by applying the analytical concept of social logics to an empirical excerpt of history classroom practice enacted in the context of Swedish upper secondary education. As the paper draws to a close, the third criterion is exemplified in relation to the concept of political logics, as well as two fictitious but plausible classroom scenarios. The paper concludes with some remarks that outline suggestions for future research.

### Three epistemological criteria

#### *I – The primacy of practice*

At present, it is safe to say that the theoretical concept of historical consciousness provides many scholars of history education with an analytical guidance in their empirical endeavours. As it has been defined by Rüsen (2005), this concept essentially denotes the mental operations through which humans establish relational links between the past, the present and the future. In this way, historical consciousness is understood as vital to the human condition and as essential to our ability to establish identities that span more than one temporal dimension. Furthermore, historical consciousness constitutes an integral part of people’s moral deliberations. This is especially evident in Rüsen’s positioning of narration as the primary mode of historical consciousness:

The linguistic form within which historical consciousness realizes its function of orientation is that of the narrative. In this view, the operations by which the human mind realizes the historical synthesis of the dimensions of time simultaneous with those of value and experience lie in narration: the telling of a story. (Rüsen, 2005 p. 26).

From this, Rüsen (2005; 2012) goes on to argue that historical narratives grant us coherence and meaning in what may otherwise be an incomprehensible existence, although the narratives, themselves, may have different content and purposes. For instance, they can serve an *exemplary* role by establishing the continuity of certain codes of moral conduct over time, or they can function as *critiques* of traditions and generally accepted historical truths. Furthermore, they can also be of a *genetic* type that acknowledges the very historicity and temporally changing character of morality. Partly because of this emphasis on history’s moral dimension, historical consciousness has gained wide recognition by scholars as it moves history education beyond issues of teaching certain skillsets and into the realm of identity and ethics (Seixas, 2012).

For the argument of this paper, however, it is important to acknowledge that the concept also has been claimed difficult to operationalise for empirical research purposes. According to Niklas Ammert (2017), this is due to the challenge inherent in the fact that consciousness can only be investigated *indirectly*, through its manifestations. As such, a scholar who makes use of historical consciousness in an empirical study ultimately faces the task of deciding how one or another form of historical consciousness is discernible in his or her empirical data.

In response to this challenge, Robert Thorp (2014a, 2014b), has moved to articulate an epistemological theory of historical consciousness by outlining some of the manifestations that can be said to represent this mental operation. By building on Rüsen’s theory, Thorp argues that historical consciousness not only manifests itself through narratives, but also

through the *artefacts of historical cultures* and the ways in which *history is used or abused* for various purposes. In considering history textbooks as an example of empirical data, Thorp (2014b) subsequently argues that they are artefacts of an historical culture, while the narratives that they contain represent how and for what ends history has been used. From this, he suggests that historical consciousness stands in a *causal relationship* to its manifestations and claims that “How an individual uses history is determined by what kind of historical consciousness she has” and that “it can be possible to show how a certain use of history *emanates* from a certain historical consciousness” (Thorp, 2014a p. 24, emphasis added).

While such an argument is compelling in relation to history textbooks, this paper posits that an alternative approach is necessary when it comes to in-situ studies of history classroom practices. Because, if such inquiries were to use the concept of historical consciousness, they would, from the outset, observe one phenomenon, i.e. practices, with the intention of drawing conclusions about another, that is, teachers’ and students’ mental operations. This, consequently, implies that the classroom practices are not viable objects of inquiry *in their own right*. More importantly, the potential discrepancy between that which is observed and that to which conclusions are drawn would also make the analysis greatly *dependent* on the scholar’s ability to argue why a given pattern of student-teacher interaction accurately corresponds to one form of historical consciousness but not another.

However, the epistemological challenge identified above can arguably be avoided if the researcher restrains his or her conclusions to concern only that which is directly observable, i.e. the actual classroom practices in which history is articulated (and occasionally contested) by teachers and students. In a word, although the concerns raised by Ammert (2017) and Thorp (20014a; 20014b) are warranted, the solution to the problem they present could be conceived differently. Instead of trying to articulate epistemological theories that would work to ‘translate’ what is observed in classroom practices into historical consciousness, it may be more reasonable for history education research to simply start drawing conclusions about the practices, themselves.<sup>3</sup> Of course, empirical research on students’ historical consciousnesses is already a common feature in the field of history didactics. Often, however, such research is conducted through interviews and questionnaires or via analysis of written examinations for the purpose of determining what type of historical consciousness students possess and how this intersects with their conceptions about ethnicity, culture and the nation (see Angier, 2017; Holmberg, 2017 and Lévesque, 2017 for some recent studies that exemplify this tendency). By comparison, the analytical use of historical consciousness in classroom studies is relatively limited, which speaks in favour of the argument that it is somewhat challenging to reconcile this concept with practice-oriented research interests.

As such, it is perhaps symptomatic that while arguments for placing analytical emphasis on practice and action have been put forth in other educational research fields, such as sports pedagogy (e.g. Quennerstedt et al, 2011) and education for sustainable development (e.g. Rudsberg & Öhman, 2010), similar propositions have yet to be made a serious topic of discussion in history education research. Against this background, I find it both possible and desirable to articulate the first criterion that frameworks for the study of the political dimension of history classroom practices ought to meet; namely, that a framework is viable if it not only facilitates the inquiry of practices but also encourage conclusions to be drawn about that very same object. In the present paper, this criterion is labelled as *the primacy of practice*.

## ***II – The primacy of empirical openness***

Despite the above-mentioned issues, Rüsen's (2005; 2012) concept of historical consciousness does not give the impression of a theoretically closed totality. Rather, he can be read as suggesting an open-ended theory through which the researcher can treat the fundamental elements of history education as issues in need of empirical investigation. This is evident in the way he stresses the contingent interplay between the temporal dimensions of the past, the present and the future. In essence, Rüsen's (2005) account positions these dimensions as simultaneously present and mutually constitutive of each other, meaning that none can be given precedence over another on theoretical grounds alone. How the actual relationship between them is configured, and whether one temporal dimension dominates the others at a given time, appear instead to be questions that are contextually dependant and, hence, best settled empirically.

Given this tendency in Rüsen's account, it becomes possible to articulate the second epistemological criterion, which is that an analytical framework is viable if it regards the fundamental elements of history education (such as the interplay of temporal dimensions) as radically open-ended and empirical issues. In the present paper, this criterion is labelled as the *primacy of empirical openness*.

## ***III – The primacy of the political***

Returning to a critical reading of historical consciousness, it is worth reiterating that Rüsen (2005) establishes the relevance of the concept in relation to *moral orientation*. This is made clear by the quote given previously, and by the great number of recent publications that investigate how moral and historical consciousness intersect (e.g. Ammert, 2017; Ammert et al, 2017; Körber, 2017). As such, historical consciousness is undoubtedly a useful concept when morality constitutes the researcher's main interest. This, however, does not mean that it is of equal significance in every study concerned with history education. After all, the educative practices of this school subject do not deal exclusively with the morality of remembering and forgetting, but also address the political conflicts involved in the articulation of history (Parkes, 2011).

To be fair, Rüsen (2017) has in his latter works positioned his theory of historical consciousness in closer proximity to an understanding of historical culture and its politics. Most notably, he asserts that "*Historical culture is the product of our historical consciousness*" (Rüsen, 2017 p. 168, emphasis in the original), and goes on to state that every such culture contains five ideal typical dimensions – the cognitive, the aesthetic, the political, the moral and the religious dimensions – which each correspond to different functions in the human process of creating meaning. For Rüsen, the moral dimension pertains to the normative judgements presently made to distinguish between good and evil elements of the past, whereas the political dimension is largely about the societal *legitimacy* created and upheld via (ab)uses of the past in present schooling. He writes:

Historical thinking plays an essential role in [the] process of legitimation. It organizes the experience of the past, which is always an experience of (often inhumane) power and authority. It happens in such a way that legitimacy, and the need for legitimacy, represents the innate meaning of political action from the past, making the events of the past plausible and even obvious in the present. The legitimizing efforts that power relations must expend in order to persist are formidable. Without the temporal dimension of continuity, authority is vulnerable (Rüsen, 2017 p. 180).

Judging by this quote, Rüsen primarily conceptualises the political dimension of historical culture and consciousness in terms of maintenance of authority. Or put differently, the

political dimension is in Rösen's theoretical construct mainly understood in terms of the *absence or suppression* of contestation. From this, it follows that an empirical study that makes use of Rösen's typology will direct its attention towards the *legitimising function* of history education but will not necessarily delve deeper into the conflicts that precede the establishment of legitimacy or work to destabilise authority. Thus, if departing from an understanding of history as a fundamentally contested issue, as I and much of the literature on the history wars do (Parkes 2011; Samuelsson, 2017; Taylor & Guyver, 2012), then Rösen's typology may not be the most adequate conceptual framework for grasping the conflicts or controversies that may arise in history classroom practices.

More importantly, the critical reader could argue that any discrepancy established between the moral and political dimensions of history education (however defined) is difficult to uphold beyond heuristic purposes. Nevertheless, political theorists like Chantal Mouffe (2005) emphasise the need to preserve such distinctions in post-political societies, where conflicts are increasingly played out between *moral enemies* in the register of absolute good and evil, rather than between opponents that, although disagreeing, acknowledge each other as legitimate *adversaries*. Following in the steps of Mouffe, Claudia Ruitenberg (2009) has argued that the political dimension of education, as opposed to the moral equivalent, involves the production of collective identities, as well as emotional attachments that centre around *societal issues* rather than personal ones: "That is to say, one may feel angry with one's cheating brother's moral transgression and one may feel angry with the reduction in civil liberties as a result of anti-terror legislation [...] the [latter] object is political in the sense in which Mouffe has defined it, as necessarily bound up with the power relations in a society and with a substantive vision of a just society" (Ruitenberg, 2009 p. 277).

In short, placing analytical emphasis on the political dimension of history classroom practices entails regarding the contestations enacted there not as moral deliberations nor exclusively as acts of legitimation but as *struggles between adversaries articulating fundamentally opposing visions of the past*. Thus, by critiquing Rösen and building on Mouffe and Ruitenberg, it becomes possible to articulate the third and final epistemological criterion, which is that an analytical framework is viable if it facilitates the investigation of the political contestations that situate elements of history or history education as societal issues. In the present paper, this criterion is labelled as the *primacy of the political*.

With the three epistemological criteria now laid bare, the remaining sections of this paper will be dedicated to detailing their applicability. Throughout the rest of the paper, this is accomplished by successively introducing the LCE framework and discussing the extent to which its premises and central concepts can be said to illustrate and meet the requirements outlined above.

## **The logics of critical explanation - a viable framework for history education research**

### ***The primacy of practice and the concept of logics***

The application of the first criterion, the primacy of practice, is best illustrated in relation to the ontological and epistemological rudiments of the LCE framework. In the following, I will therefore demonstrate in what way the framework can be understood to exemplify, as well as meet, this criterion by being fundamentally oriented towards practice.

Mainly, the framework can be understood as such because it stems from the ontology of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985/2014) political discourse theory, which positions articulatory practices as *the* constitutive element of social relations and of society as such.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, all human practices are articulatory in the sense that they render disparate elements of language relational to each other, thereby establishing temporary totalities, i.e. discourses. Articulatory practices are, however, also contingent in that they are not pre-determined to be carried out in only one way. Rather, practices are marked by a pluralism of meaning and are thus susceptible to both continuity and change through the subjects' actions and use of language. Put differently, articulatory practices do not rest on any ontological essence, but are instead, themselves, the very contingent foundations on which society is discursively made and re-made.

Building on this post-structuralist ontology, Glynos and Howarth (2007) have developed the LCE analytical framework to be used when a researcher wishes to explain *the articulatory workings* of a set of practices, be they social, political or educational. In a pertinent manner, they define the framework's most central concept, i.e. logics, accordingly: "[...] *the logic of a practice comprises 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, emphasis in the original). In this way, analysing practices with the aid of the LCE framework does not mean that the researcher aspires to establish some causal laws or external determinants. Rather, logics is a concept that the researcher uses in order to grasp *the guiding principles of discourse* that make a specific practice work the way that it does.

The concept of logics will of course be further specified in the coming sections. However, at this point, and in relation to the paper's first criterion, it is important to emphasise that it is with reference to the constitutive function of practices that the LCE framework positions them as a primary object of inquiry, as well as that which the researcher should attempt to explain (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). From this, it follows that practices are regarded as an explanandum in its own right and not as a mediating manifestation in the study of some other phenomenon, such as peoples' consciousness or conceptual thinking. Simply put, using the LCE framework requires that the researcher not only observe and analyse practices but also manages to strictly keep his or her conclusions situated in proximity to the investigated practices.

In an educational context, the framework could be well suited for grasping the workings of a classroom, considering that contemporary educational theories following 'the practice turn' regard teaching and learning as what is carried out through the individual and collective speech-acts of educators and students. In a general sense, the practice turn entails a critique of essentialism and dualisms (such as the rationalistic body-mind dualism) coupled with the re-evaluation of human *action* and language as the foremost constitutive elements of reality. From this point of view, empirical research in education tends to focus on that which is both constitutive and directly observable, i.e. teachers' and students' actions and their consequences. In a word, the turn to practice in educational theory means that it is what teachers and students *do*, as well as the experiences that follow from the doing, that counts as valid objects of empirical inquiry (Öhman, 2014).

To be fair, the constitutive function practice has not gone unnoticed in theoretical research on history curriculum. Parkes (2011), for one, has asserted that following 'The End of History' and the death of the grand narratives, history education needs to incorporate historiographic perspectives and accentuate the way historical representations are continuously de-constructed and reconstructed by teachers, students and the public. Naturally, this has consequences for history education scholars because, as Parkes (2011) puts it, "[...] it leaves us with only the *practices* and forms of historiographic representation." (p. 130, emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> Given the argument offered here, such a statement should not be seen as problematic, but could instead be regarded as an opportunity for researchers to acknowledge the concrete practices of teaching and learning history as their most central object of inquiry.

To a certain extent then, history education and the analytical concept of logics can be said to *converge* on the primacy of practice, which effectively makes the latter suitable for studying the former. In this respect, LCE constitutes an example of a framework that not only illustrates the application of the first criterion, but also meets it. Departing from this conclusion, the following sections will turn to engage with the two remaining criteria and the framework's analytical concepts of social and political logics.

### ***The primacy of empirical openness and the concept of logics***

In contrast to the theoretical argument given above, the application of the second suggested criteria, i.e. the primacy of empirical openness, is best illustrated with the help of a small-scale analysis of a student-teacher interaction. As such, this part of the paper will exemplify how the LCE framework can aid the researcher in approaching history classroom practices in an open-ended manner.

In their work, Glynos and Howarth (2007) break down the concept of logics into three types: social logics, which are used to outline the discursive coherence of practices; political logics, which are employed to investigate the moments where conflictual frontiers between adversaries are drawn, potentially causing practices to change direction; and fantasmatic logics, which are used to analyse the ideological rationales that convince individuals to immerse themselves in the practices at hand. In this paper, however, only the first and second concepts are discussed in detail. This is because, although fantasmatic logics constitute an important element of the LCE framework, it is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper to offer a thorough account of the concept of ideology.<sup>5</sup> In fact, an epistemological discussion on this dimension of history education warrants a paper of its own and it would be unsound to treat its theoretical complexity in an all too abbreviated form.

For the purpose of the paper it is, however, important to acknowledge that, while the analytical purpose and function of the logics remain the same, they are ultimately re-articulated by the researcher into *case-specific logics* when used in the concrete analysis of a set of practices (Glynos & Howarth 2007). For example, a study of classroom practices that articulate gender history will most likely result in the naming of a set of social, political and fantasmatic logics that are specific to these practices, whereas inquiries investigating intercultural aspects of history education may find such practices underpinned by a different set of logics (consequently named differently). In short, logics are *content- and context sensitive concepts* that are re-articulated into empirically grounded results when applied by the researcher to his or her data. Thus, there is a measure of empirical openness to the LCE framework.

In further addressing the second epistemological criterion, the concept of social logics becomes relevant, in that it enables research questions like “what counts as valid history or historical knowledge in classroom practices?” to be addressed empirically as open-ended questions. This is because the concept is designed to characterise the overall coherence of a practice in terms of the *articulatory regularities and assumptions* that furnish it with consistency and stability (Glynos & Howarth 2007). In short, social logics help the researcher to seek out and define that which is commonly taken for granted in a set of practices. In the excerpt provided below, we will see exactly what kind of insights this concept can generate and how it relates to the criterion of empirical openness.

Before continuing this line of thought, it is necessary to make a short methodological note, given that the excerpt presented has been generated through video recordings of history classroom practices. The data encompasses 90 minutes of recorded classroom interactions and

is, as such, somewhat limited. Nevertheless, the data can be said to speak in favour of the LCE framework, in that its viability can be illustrated using a rather small sample. Furthermore, the choice of which excerpt to present was made primarily through a purpose-related selection process, meaning that it is the recorded segment most relevant for addressing the research problem of this paper that has been reproduced below (Patton 2002).

The following transcript represents a student-teacher conversation about the Swedish novel *Hertha*, written in 1856 by women's emancipation activist Fredrika Bremer. The lesson in question was part of a larger curricula segment that positioned the social and political movements of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe as the main educational content. However, the lesson was distinct in that it contained a classroom discussion that specifically focused on gender equality and gender history. As is evident below, the teacher and students come to discuss why women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had to marry in order to lead financially stable lives but do so mainly in the light of present-day notions of love and marriage.

- Robert (teacher): [...] 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.
- Agnes (student): I would feel worthless if I only married someone for their money.
- Robert: Aha! Then we return to what Hertha is saying. She says that you end up in a subordinate position and feel inferior if you only marry for money. Even if you love your spouse you would feel inferior because much of our society is controlled by money. And this was precisely the problem in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well. [...] Do you now understand the connection to today? [Several students nod and mumble “mmm” affirmatively] 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.

By grasping this excerpt with the concept of social logics, it becomes clear that several *shared assumptions* constitute the coherence of the teacher-student interaction. To begin with, a general acceptance of same sex marriage is present, as is the notion of marrying for love rather than money which, taken together, establishes a shared base of values between the teacher and his students. The sharedness of these values is especially evident from the fact that the teacher asks several “Is it all right to”-questions, to which the students respond in unison.

More importantly, however, the use of social logics makes it possible to analyse the relationship between the temporal dimensions (i.e. the past, the present and the future) that are essential to the practice of teaching history. As seen throughout the excerpt, the teacher mainly makes gender history intelligible by referring to the progress that has been achieved during the last two centuries. Most notably, he takes his point of departure in *contemporary*

gender relations by stating that “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”. Next to this, he also mentions some of the similarities that present Swedish society shares with its 19<sup>th</sup> century counterpart. This is particularly well illustrated by his statement “this was precisely the problem in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well [...] Do you now understand the connection to today?” to which the students respond affirmatively. As such, the past is interchangeably articulated as being different and like the present, which consistently makes the latter temporal dimension the *point of reference* against which the former is understood. By contrast, the future is scarcely discussed at all by the teacher and the students, which relegates this temporal dimension to the fringes of the practice.

The conclusion that the present constitutes the referential and dominating temporal dimension is thus a consequence of me, the researcher, applying the concept of social logics to highlight that which is taken for granted within the practice. To be clear, this conclusion is not reached by having presentism built into the analytical framework. On the contrary, the use of social logics enables me to *empirically* determine which temporal dimension is prioritised by focusing on the shared assumptions of the practice, meaning that the analysis is conducted in an open-ended manner. Of course, the concept of social logics is not limited to highlight only shared values or the interplay of temporal dimensions but can also help to direct analytical efforts towards other articulatory regularities, such as teachers’ and students’ epistemological convictions (cf. Chhabra, 2017). However, for the purpose of this paper and given the illustration offered above, it is sufficient enough to say that the LCE framework meets and exemplifies the applicability of the second suggested criterion, i.e. the primacy of empirical openness.

### ***The primacy of the political and the concept of logics***

In this final section, the paper returns to the third criterion and clarifies how the LCE framework can be said to meet its requirements through the concept of political logics. In contrast to its social counterpart, which is employed to describe the stability of a practice, political logics help the researcher to explain how moments of contestation bring about changes in its operation. According to Glynos & Howarth (2007), such moments are understood as dislocatory, meaning that the stability of a practice is disrupted when adversarial relationships are articulated.

Also according to Glynos & Howarth (2007), such moments of contestation entail a signifying simplification of a practice, meaning that the multitude of participants’ identities, demands and arguments are downplayed and *arranged* into only two opposing camps, consequently establishing a political frontier between an ‘us’ and a ‘them’. In these instances, the otherwise disparate discursive elements (e.g. the participants’ varied identities, demands and arguments) in one of the camps are linked together and made equivalent with regard to their common negation, i.e. the identities, demands and arguments that are found on the other side of the frontier. Thus, practices are politicised when equivalence dominates its discourse and, vice-versa, when difference rules the practice moves towards becoming de-politicised.

Concretely, using the analytical concept of political logics means that the researcher accounts for changes in a practice’s operation by paying attention to the interplay between *equivalence* and *difference*, or put differently, that he or she pays attention to the way in which discursive elements are alternately linked together and separated with the consequence of either strengthening or weakening the distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In short, its use entails that the scholar first pinpoints the societal issue that evokes contestation, then

determines which case-specific adversarial camps are (dis)established and, finally, answers the question of how the political conflict alters the direction of the practice.

When arguing for the utilisation of this concept in the context of history education, we can imagine two plausible (and not uncommon) classroom scenarios in which adversarial relations are present. First, political logics can be useful for analysing moments when the educator *teaches politically*, either by reflected design or by habit. This refers to those instances in which the teacher opposes certain historical representations made by textbooks, external agents or by his or her own students. In these situations, political logics can be used to comprehend the teacher's discursive actions in terms of how he or she establishes equivalence between some historical representations while simultaneously juxtaposes these with another set of representations. In short, political logics can be useful for understanding *how* the teacher conducts his or her professional practice in an adversarial way.

Secondly, the analytical concept in question can be used to grasp those moments where *the educational content carries political connotations*, specifically focusing on how societal conflicts of the past play over into and continue in present educational practices. For instance, history lessons may very well review historical injustices enacted against a society's cultural or ethnical minorities, or they may examine unequal power relations in terms of gender or class hierarchies. As such, old conflicts can be reactivated in the history classroom and become a site of renewed contestation between students, to which the teacher must respond. Here, political logics can help the scholar to explain how, for example, disparate historical injustices and demands for reparations are articulated as equivalent and linked together on each side of an adversarial frontier. The concept in question is, thus, a tool that considers that practices of history education are not always stable or directed towards consensus but are instead marked by a measure of contingency and conflict (Edling, 2017). In sum, by fundamentally regarding issues, such as historical truth and justice, as not primarily individual and moral concerns, but as societal ones, political logics can be said to illustrate and meet the third epistemological criterion suggested in this paper.

## Concluding remarks

To conclude, this paper has argued the present need to articulate criteria against which potential frameworks for analysing the political dimension of history classroom practices can be identified and deemed viable. More specifically, the paper outlines three such criteria (the primacy of practice, the primacy of empirical openness and the primacy of the political) and exemplifies their applicability in relation to the premises and central concepts of the LCE framework.

However, the argument provided here only constitutes an initial foray into the epistemological domain of history education research and much remains to be done. For instance, although the empirical excerpt and plausible classroom scenarios presented in this paper exemplify the feasibility of the concept of logics, they are only small-scale illustrations. The conclusion that the LCE framework could be regarded as viable is therefore tentative and in need of further testing, preferably by using it in one or several large-scale empirical inquiries. Additionally, evaluating and possibly revising the suggested epistemological criteria in relation to frameworks other than the one addressed here would be another way in which future research could continue the discussion introduced in this paper.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Here, a caveat is necessary. It is, of course, possible to gain insights into the political dimension of history classroom practices by interviewing its main agents (i.e. teachers and students), as Clark (2009) does in her study.

<sup>2</sup> I am, of course, aware that competing (and competing) definitions of historical consciousness exist, most notably between European and North American theoretical traditions. Although sharing many similarities, these traditions tend to place varying emphasis on the empirical and philosophical dimensions of history education. Also, they differ somewhat on the issue of how historical consciousness relates to other concepts in history education research, such as collective memory (Seixas, 2004). For the sake of consistency, however, this paper follows only the European tradition as exemplified in Rösen's (2005, 2017) theoretical construct.

<sup>3</sup> To be clear, my argument is not an ontological one that denies the existence or the philosophical and pedagogical importance of historical consciousness. Rather, the objection is much more practical and questions its analytical value.

<sup>4</sup> In similar vein, Silvia Edling (2017) provides a philosophical account to argue that the dominance of consciousness in history education can be questioned on the grounds that its practices also involve teachers and students interacting ethically with both past and present *embodied* Others.

<sup>5</sup> For the sake of clarity, a brief definition of fantasmatic logics must, nonetheless, be provided. In short, the concept refer to the *ideological grip* that a practice holds in its discourse and it is, as such, often employed to answer research questions relating to *why* individuals continuously invest themselves in a given practice. This ideological grip is exercised through the articulation of beatific or horrific narratives that respectively make utopian promises or threaten with dystopian scenarios if a certain challenge is left unaddressed (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). As such, and in the context of history education, fantasmatic logics could aid the researcher in determining the rationales by which educators and students continuously engage in teaching and studying the past.

## About the Author

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