

# History and Politics

# CGS Studies

Edited by

Ralph Schattkowsky and Miloš Řezník

Volume 6

Managing editor

Adam Jarosz

# History and Politics:

## *Remembrance as Legitimation*

Edited by

Katarzyna Kącka and Ralph Schattkowsky

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



History and Politics: Remembrance as Legitimation  
Edited by Katarzyna Kącka and Ralph Schattkowsky  
Series: Copernicus Graduate School Studies (CGS Studies)

Reviewed by:  
Sylvia Grochowina  
Adam Hołub

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2017 by Katarzyna Kącka, Ralph Schattkowsky  
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0558-8  
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0558-2

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
--------------------	---

## **Part One: History as Argument**

Chapter One.....	11
“History as Argument” as the Poor Relative in Modern Historical-Political Research: State of the Art and a Proposal of a New Approach Manuel Becker	

Chapter Two .....	25
The Postcolonial Aftermath of Genocide: The Politics of Heritage in Namibia and Germany Reinhart Kößler	

Chapter Three .....	45
Russian Imperialism or Communist Revolution? The Historiographical Debate about Russian Expansion Wolfgang Mueller	

Chapter Four .....	61
Rewriting the History of Vilnius Theodore R. Weeks	

Chapter Five .....	71
The Warsaw Uprising of 1944 in Commemorative Speeches by Roman Herzog and Gerhard Schröder Wiesław Waclawczyk	

## **Part Two: History as Instrument**

Chapter Six .....	85
Memory as a Transnational Heritage of Europe: A Critical Evaluation of Slovenia’s 70th Second World War Commemoration Ksenija Vidmar Horvat	

Chapter Seven.....	101
Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past in West German Visual Culture, 1945–1948	
Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska	
Chapter Eight.....	117
The Necessity and Legality of Present War Crimes Trials in Germany	
Martin Luber	
Chapter Nine.....	137
The Democratic and Socialist Exploitation of History: Dealing with World War Two in Post-war France and Czechoslovakia	
Ulrike Lunow	
Chapter Ten .....	161
Decommunization and Lustration: Dealing with the Past in Poland	
Laura Koba	
Chapter Eleven .....	171
History and Politics—Remembrance as Legitimation: The Uses of the Past amongst the Lokpa of Bohoumdo in Northern Benin	
Essoham Solitoke	
Chapter Twelve .....	185
The Gliniany <i>Rokosz</i> : How the Tradition of Rebellion against the King in the Polish- Lithuanian Commonwealth was Established	
Joanna Orzeł	
<b>Part Three: History as Science and Politics</b>	
Chapter Thirteen.....	211
The Politics of History: Creators, Tools, Mechanisms of Action— Poland as a Case Study	
Katarzyna Kačka	
Chapter Fourteen .....	231
Between Science and Politics: Włodzimierz Bączkowski and the Polish Eastern Europe Research	
Ralph Schattkowsky	

Chapter Fifteen .....	249
The Question of Historicization of the Third Reich and the Holocaust in the Context of Post-Enlightenment and Post-Redemptive Memory: Reflections at the Margins of Saul Friedländer's Historiography Maciej Sawicki	
Chapter Sixteen .....	269
Memories of the Displacement: The Presidential Election of 2013 in the Czech Republic through the Lens of Historical Anthropology Josef Kadeřábek and Zuzana Skořepová	
Chapter Seventeen .....	281
The Politics of History in Hungary after 2010 Péter Vágó	
Chapter Eighteen .....	293
Civil Society by Hegel Ilona Balcerczyk	



# INTRODUCTION

KATARZYNA KAÇKA  
AND RALPH SCHATTKOWSKY

History and politics are interlinked with unbreakable bonds, as is manifested primarily in the use of historical arguments in political disputes. Regardless of the ideological views represented, time, and geographical location, politicians consistently and frequently use such arguments with a high degree of effectiveness. Driven by different motives, they use the category of the past, (re)interpret it, and decide what should be remembered and what should be removed from the so-called collective memory. In practice, this means that a properly prepared and delivered narrative of the past can become a powerful instrument in the hands of the ruling, influencing social and political reality of the country concerned. Control of the past and its “correct” reconstruction can thus effectively contribute to gaining, boosting, and consolidating power by a political entity. An appropriately shaped awareness of the past thus serves an only ancillary role to politics, satisfying social expectations and ideological visions. Thus, the past, or rather the memory of it, when becoming a topic of interest in the domain of politics, forces the creators of the politics of history to improve the tools and mechanisms they wield to ensure its more efficient use.

These non-obvious relationships between history and politics have for years inspired representatives of various scientific disciplines to undertake multi-faceted research on related topics. Thanks to various tools and research procedures, they provide evidence for the impact of the past still felt in the present, showing how it can affect contemporary political processes and methods of shaping social identity. Continued interest in this subject results in the publication of interesting and original research results that are—importantly—free from emotional bias and ideological generalisations.

The present tome fits very well into this research trend. The authors of individual chapters—nationals of different countries, representing a variety of disciplines—attempt to showcase the complex relationships between

history and politics, arguing that memory can be an effective tool in the hands of the ruling elite. The book is divided into three thematic blocks. The first, *History as Argument*, consists of five chapters and is dedicated to the issue of the use of historical arguments to achieve political objectives. The opening study by Manuel Becker is an attempt to explain what exactly are and what role is played by historical arguments in the political arena. His analysis is based on examples drawn mainly from the German political scene. Becker argues that the use of these mechanisms is not limited to a specific political option, and does not always lead to strengthening of radical positions. Furthermore, he shows how the process of using the past to attain particular goals is interpreted and discussed by local German scholars, and consequently what the challenging topics various scientific disciplines still need to tackle in this respect are. The next chapter by Reinhart Kößler is devoted to the problem of genocide in Namibia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and modern modes of its interpretation. The result of the establishment of a German protectorate over the coast of Namibia was the creation of a southwest African colony in 1886. This resulted in a massive influx of new settlers from Germany who were interested in the exploitation of resources of this territory, especially mining the diamond deposits. The strict laws and policies implemented by the colonial authorities led to several uprisings of the native population. As a result of their bloody suppression, the population of the Herero people living in the territory was decimated. The author shows how these events still affect contemporary relations between Germany and Namibia, how they are commemorated, and how the issue of reparations was approached in Germany. In the next chapter, Wolfgang Mueller makes an ambitious attempt to prove how important the past is for the functioning of a state. He argues that to be able to correctly interpret contemporary politics and policies, one needs to know a state's history. In his opinion, this position is perfectly supported and illustrated by the example of Russia. Through a historical analysis, Mueller explains the current Russian policies (e.g. towards Ukraine), proving the impact of the past on the present. Drawing on both tsarist and Soviet traditions, Mueller convincingly shows the current ambitions and political aspirations of Russia against this backdrop. The next study by Theodore R. Weeks focuses on the history and the present of the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius. Using this example, the author explains how contemporary city planning may serve political purposes and illustrate the historical narratives preferred by the ruling. Weeks reflects on forms of communication between the authorities and society, and argues that public space and its arrangement are excellent tools for strengthening the official narratives, as

their influence is subconscious and unobtrusive, but still consistent and effective. The author touches also on the interesting topic of the memory of the current and former residents of Vilnius, emphasising how past images affect one's sense of identity. Weeks compiles and compares various images or dimensions of Vilnius (historical/geographical and imagined), showing its complicated history and multicultural traditions. Finally, he asks a rhetorical question: which image of Vilnius is the true one? In the following chapter, Wiesław Waclawczyk discusses the topic—important from the Polish perspective—of the Warsaw Uprising and its reception in Germany. Being aware of the importance of the right delivery of the adopted and supported vision and narrative, he analyses the anniversary speeches of two German politicians: President Roman Herzog and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder on the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the uprising, respectively. Using these examples, Waclawczyk asserts the importance of historical arguments in the international sphere, and in particular as concerns Polish-German relations. The analysis of both speeches uncovers a surprising number of references to then-current political issues, once again proving that close bonds exist between history and politics.

In the second part of the volume, in seven chapters collected under the heading *History as Instrument*, the authors attempt to analyse the phenomenon of the instrumentalisation of history in politics. Ksenija Vidmar Horvat analyses the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War Two in Slovenia. The Balkans is a region of Europe devastated by internal conflicts; most of them steadily—with greater or lesser intensity—escalated, affecting the local populace. World War Two was of course one of the cruellest experiences in the history of that region. It is therefore no wonder that the war-torn past systematically returns as a topic, and is used in the political arena. The author suggests that a solution to this problem would be, as proposed by some intellectuals, to consider the war experience as a common European transnational heritage. The highly interesting topic of the presence of the Nazi past in West German visual culture in the 1945–8 period is discussed in the next chapter by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska. She posits that, for the German society, the Nazi past was something to “reconcile” with, or otherwise come to terms with. It was also part of the re-education policy pursued by the Allies in their respective zones of occupation (most intensely in the American one). The Allied functionaries photographed the effects of Nazi activity, such as concentration camps and cemeteries, and showed them to the Germans to visualise the scale of Nazi crimes. According to the author, the most extreme manifestations of this re-education attempt were political caricatures, for example ridiculing and exposing weaknesses of Adolf Hitler, which—

contrasted with his image as presented by the German propaganda—must have been truly shocking for the public. The history of World War Two is also the key topic of the next chapter by Martin Luber, in which the author analyses the history of the post-war trials of former war criminals, starting from Nuremberg and ending with those of the twenty-first century. Luber repeatedly returns to the media and the scientific community, asking whether war criminals should still be punished decades after the war. The history of trials presented by Luber leaves no doubt that the living victims of World War Two, as well as their descendants, are still demanding justice, even if only in a symbolic sense. The next article by Ulrike Lunow contains an interesting comparative analysis of the use of memory of World War Two in politics in democratic and socialist conditions. On the basis of the analyses of the politics of history implemented in France and Czechoslovakia, she argues that war, regardless of the ruling political system in a given state, has become an effective political instrument. In practice, this means that almost every historical event, if placed in the appropriate context and properly communicated to the recipients, can serve the particular purposes of the ruling elite, both positive and negative. In the next study by Laura Koba we move away from war in the analysis of two phenomena present in post-1989 Poland: decommunization and lustration. The author argues that none of these two processes have been properly finalised in the country, and effective legal solutions have not been implemented for either. The solutions put in place frequently served to only demonstrate the weaknesses of state institutions which, faced with the problems of lustration, proved to be helpless in many cases. Unfortunately, international experiences provided few good examples for Poland to follow. For Koba, it seems that nowadays the problem of the so-called post-communist legacy in Poland is unsolvable, especially as generations increasingly disinterested in these issues become a voice to be reckoned with. The following chapter by Eshoham Solitoke demonstrates that the instrumental approach to history is omnipresent, no matter the location. The author analyses the relationship between history and politics, studying the uses of the past amongst the Lokpa of Bohoumbo in north Benin. A clear value of Solitoke's work is the use of oral history examples present in the local society. Oral history is a great source of knowledge about the history of countries such as Benin. The last chapter of this thematic block in the publication takes the reader further back in time; the author proves, however, that the use of history as an instrument of politics is a phenomenon that is independent of chronology. Proof of how significantly myths impact society is presented by Joanna Orzeł in the chapter closing this part of the publication, discussing the legend of the so-

called Gliniany Rokosz (rebellion). This mythical Rebellion of Gliniany was said to have happened in the fourteenth century, its causes the abuses committed by the administration of King Louis I of Hungary, also controlling Poland at the time. The event was created in the seventeenth century and served as a founding myth for slogans lauding the system of Golden Liberty, also known as Noble's Democracy in Poland. This fictitious event has long perpetuated in political narratives of the First Polish Republic, and was used to achieve particular political goals. Presenting the history of this legend, Orzeł posits that the instrumental treatment of history is truly a timeless phenomenon.

The last section of the publication contains studies collected under the heading History as Science and Politics. Seven authors in six chapters undertook an analysis of the place of history in science and politics. The chapter by Katarzyna Kačka discusses the Polish politics of history with the aim of presenting its real creators, as well as analysing the tools and mechanisms remaining at the disposal of states for its implementation. The author shows that the politics of memory is a deliberate management of memory by specialised state institutions. Their primary tool consists of carefully selected and appropriately interpreted historical narratives. Regardless of the time and current political system, the politics of history has an objective. It is above all driven by a desire to influence the behaviours and attitudes of people, which would in turn lead them to making the desired political decisions. The next chapter by Ralph Schattkowsky focuses on the activity of Włodzimierz Bączkowski, one of key representatives of Polish Prometheism, a European political movement in the years 1921–39 popular amongst intellectuals, aimed at bringing about pro-independence changes in the Soviet Union. This political project was established mainly through the efforts of the Government of the Ukrainian People's Republic in Exile in Warsaw and Paris. Bączkowski, with his work as a writer and scholar both at home and abroad after the war, was a significant contributor to the development of Sovietology research around the globe. His work has had an unquestionable impact on generations of researchers studying the Soviet Union. In the following chapter, Maciej Sawicki poses some valid questions linked to historiography focused on the history of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. He shows diversity and the multi-faceted nature of research on these topics, arguing that it has undeniably influenced the public perception of these issues. Indirectly, Sawicki is looking to shed more light on the author-reader relationship, which is in fact a very close one. Only seldom do we realise just how strongly that sender and recipient affect one other. The author also shows how science and politics mutually

influence each other, proving that the ties between them are much tighter than we would normally be ready to admit. The next chapter by Josef Kadeřábek and Zuzana Skořepová discusses the mechanisms of the use of historical themes in the 2013 Czech Republic presidential election. A clear strength of this study is the interesting methodological approach, examining the topic through the prism of historical anthropology—unlike traditional anthropology, its main focus of interest concerns culture and identity. The authors show how important the past turned out to be in the campaign narratives, finding two key circumstances that contributed to this fact. Firstly, the 2013 election was the first direct general presidential election in the Czech Republic, triggering a more spontaneous public debate that put historical topics on the table. Secondly, in the Czech Republic the wartime past of the country continues to cause controversy, translating into a search for “compromising” elements in the biographies of individual politicians. Kadeřábek and Skořepová focus their analysis on the particular combination of these two phenomena. Péter Vágó discusses the role of history in contemporary politics in the next chapter, illustrating his arguments with the interesting case study of the politics of history in Hungary after 2010, i.e. after the re-appointment of Viktor Orbán of the national conservative Fidesz party as prime minister. The author argues that the past and its interpretation as compliant with popular expectations have helped the politician and his party to attain and maintain power. An appropriately shaped historical narrative continues to help Fidesz garner a high level of support, and Orbán is considered to be one of the most effective European politicians. The closing chapter by Ilona Balcerczyk touches on philosophical topics. The author analyses the works of Hegel to consider who we are without history, and whether we can be anyone at all. She attempts to answer the persistent question of whether knowledge of one’s own history is a prerequisite for the proper understanding of the history of the world. Is it true that knowing who you are means knowing who you were? After Hegel, Balcerczyk clearly maintains that the process of becoming aware of oneself is necessarily a historical process. The author presents the values crucial for Hegel’s philosophy, such as truth, history, identity, and freedom, and attempts to explain what civil society is using these categories.

\*\*\*

*History and Politics. Remembrance as Legitimation* is the sixth publication in the Copernicus Graduate School Studies series. In dedicating it to the issue of the role played by the past in the present, we

are confident that the topic is highly important and still relevant today. The authors and editors of the volume hope that it will be of value to everyone interested in the mechanisms and tools used in the politics of history. We hope the presented analyses—both theoretical and practical—will inspire readers to continued scientific reflection and discussion.



## **PART ONE**

# **HISTORY AS ARGUMENT**



## CHAPTER ONE

# “HISTORY AS ARGUMENT” AS THE POOR RELATIVE IN MODERN HISTORICAL- POLITICAL RESEARCH: STATE OF THE ART AND A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW APPROACH

MANUEL BECKER

The topos “history as argument” represents a field that has been in existence the longest amongst the various scientifically-imbued attempts to conceptualise history seen as an element in political activities, since it was raised in the 1970s in the field of history didactics and history science in Germany. The main category in German scientific debate is the term *Geschichtspolitik*. It can be understood in a more general approach as all kinds of strategic or cultural relations to the past by current political actors and institutions. With this, we can distinguish between the pattern of where history is instrumentally used in politics and the pattern of where history in politics is used in a material matter. Talking of “history as argument,” we are facing the instrumental access of history in politics because history is either used affirmatively or negatively in political debates. Taking into account the vast majority of subjects addressed in German political research under the label of *Geschichtspolitik*, the topos of “history as Argument” plays a minor role.

The first part of this chapter aims to define what “history as argument” specifically involves and illustrate this context with concrete examples. Subsequently, an overview of essential aspects in light of current research in historical as well as political science is provided. The main thesis of this contribution, referring to “history as argument” as the stepchild or the poor relative of modern historical-political research, will be explicated. Based on this groundwork, a new conceptualisation proposal is devised in the third part. Giving rise to further scientific insight, emphasis will be placed on the following issues: What kind of argumentation patterns can be distinguished and how can they be characterised? What exactly are the

limits of argumentation referring to history? Which criteria can be used as a basis for the critical review of legitimacy and appropriateness? The chapter ends with some concluding remarks on the future significance and relevance of this research field.

### **What does “History as Argument” Mean?**

What exactly the statement “history as argument” entails and why a political-scientific approach is relevant can be best illustrated by an example: in 1999, the former German Foreign Secretary Joschka Fischer of the Green Party had to justify the first foreign deployment of German soldiers following World War Two to fight in the Kosovo conflict of the former Yugoslavia. If that wasn’t enough, there was also no UN mandate for this mission. It was due to the irony of history that this challenge had to be decided by a politician who was a member of a party that had always defined itself by uncompromising pacifism. When Fischer’s security-related, geostrategic, and responsible-ethical arguments, which mirrored the current situation, fell on deaf ears amongst his fellow party members, he started reasoning using a historic argument along the lines of him having two principles learned from history about never repeating a scenario like German National Socialism: not only no more war, but also no Auschwitz ever again. For him those two lessons from history belonged together.<sup>1</sup> Thereby, the Foreign Secretary referred to a wealth of traditions in the foreign policy culture of the Federal Republic.

A historical and argumentation theory related debate might well be raised as to whether the policy of ethnic cleansing pursued by Slobodan Milosevic might be put on the same level as the organised mass killing of European Jews reflected in the expression “Auschwitz.” At the end of the day, Fischer’s core idea was to legitimise a political undertaking that had been initiated by reason of the state in the eyes of the public, and particularly amongst his fellow party members, by appealing to consensual historic lessons on an abstract level.

Similar examples, along the lines of which “history as argument” plays a role against a political backdrop in German debates, are the speech of the Federal President on the occasion of October 3 or a debate of the Bundestag in the fight against right-wing extremism. Consequently, adopting the topos “history as argument” defines a political argumentation strategy in terms of which a historical fact, a historical link, or a historical interpretation is used to gain acceptance and legitimacy for a certain

---

<sup>1</sup> Extracts taken from Joschka Fischer’s speech in *Der Spiegel* (May 13, 1999).

political undertaking and boost the legitimacy for the same. In that respect, this is a highly relevant topic for political science.

## The Current State of Research in Germany

The mid-1970s initially saw some historians systematically turn to the issue of the political instrumental ability of history associated with the debate about objectivity and bias in historical science held in those times. In this early phase of scientific debate, the term *Geschichtspolitik* does not occur as a word itself, as it only started to take shape as part of the *Historikerstreit* a good ten years later.<sup>2</sup> The debate was labelled “history as argument” instead, which dates back to a 1972 monograph by ancient historian Alexander Demand addressing different types of a politically future-oriented mindset in ancient times.<sup>3</sup> Here we can see the oldest analytical and theory-based discussions of a field which was addressed again in the 1990s. The first associative approaches to political behaviour from historical conscience can be found in an essay by the well-known German historian Theodor Schieder from 1975.<sup>4</sup> The few research contributions to historical arguments in political debates were part of a research tradition on historical text exegesis. One example is from Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who analysed how the parliamentary elocution and rhetoric in the French Revolution worked and thereby also outlined one specific strategy of argumentation that recurred throughout history.<sup>5</sup>

The first systematic operationalisation attempt for empirical research was submitted by the historian Karl-Georg Faber in 1975.<sup>6</sup> Faber advocated a neutral scientific approach to history as political argument. Historians should reflect the link between history and politics in their research, and should not only condemn the inadequate use of historical arguments by politicians but also make it a theory-based topic in their research. He also developed a concrete analytical approach focused on

---

<sup>2</sup> H. Schmid, *Erinnern an den “Tag der Schuld”*: *Das Novemberpogrom von 1938 in der deutschen Geschichtspolitik* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2001), 23–32.

<sup>3</sup> A. Demandt, *Geschichte als Argument. Drei Formen politischen Zukunftsdenkens im Altertum* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> T. Schieder, “Politisches Handeln aus historischem Bewußtsein,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 220 (1975): 4–25.

<sup>5</sup> H. U. Gumbrecht, *Funktionen parlamentarischer Rhetorik in der Französischen Revolution. Vorstudien zur Entwicklung einer historischen Textpragmatik* (München: dtv, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> K.-G. Faber, “Zum Einsatz historischer Aussagen als politisches Argument,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 221 (1975): 265–303.

three cases of parliamentary debates in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hereby, he distinguished between the isolated use of individual historical cases and the introduction of comprehensive historical sense interrelations.

However, his typology of discourse strategy was no longer pursued in research. Only the political-scientific study conducted by his student Wolfgang Bach produced links to Faber. His study included a recourse to history by looking at certain foreign policy debates in the German Bundestag.<sup>7</sup> Bach names four types of historical conscience where history as political argument plays a role: history as a process, history as an event, history as a metaphor, and denying arguments depending on history. According to Bach, the different forms of using history in arguments are extremely varied and heterogeneous. He underlines that history as a political argument, as well as every other political argument, can always be seen as an instrument to outplay the political opponent, and finding truth is so far not a category in the political context. Therefore, in his eyes, it seems reasonable to propose some so-called “rules of the game” in order to at least condemn the misuse of historical arguments in political debates.<sup>8</sup>

The historian Christoph Steinbach selected a broader framework of research than Faber and Bach, analysing historical arguments connected to the 30th anniversary of the German unconditional surrender that ended World War Two in 1945, not only in parliamentary debates but also in newspaper articles and political speeches in general.<sup>9</sup> He criticises many one-sided and distortive aspects of historical events and contexts, which are presented as “historical truth” in diverse articles and speeches. Very often, there was no clear separation between facts and interpretation.<sup>10</sup> The problem of the missing “rules of the game” was therefore still to be addressed.

This issue of referring to history in argumentation was raised early by the Berlin historian Jürgen Kocka. He countered the dichotomic approach of objectivity, which was prevailing in the 1970s, with a biased depiction of historical artefacts using a gradually tiered perspective. It is not Kocka’s intention to draw a line that clearly demarcates legitimate and illegitimate

---

<sup>7</sup> W. Bach, *Geschichte als politisches Argument. Eine Untersuchung an ausgewählten Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>9</sup> C. Steinbach, “Historische Argumentation in politischen Reden und Leitartikeln zum 30. Jahrestag der deutschen Kapitulation von 1945,” in W. van Kampen (ed.), *Geschichte in der Öffentlichkeit. Tagung der Konferenz für Geschichtsdidaktik vom 5.–8. Oktober 1977 in Osnabrück* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), 237–62.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 245–53.

argumentation, but instead—holding a more modest attitude—to probe the limitation of scope between the appropriate and inappropriate reference to history in the political debate. For this purpose, three key epistemological assumptions are taken for granted: first of all, each historical argument would be selective with respect to its historical artefact, which necessarily leads to the conclusion that different interpretations of the same artefact are always possible; secondly, historical argumentations are always influenced by the overall societal context of the arguer, including their moral concepts and interests, and thirdly the historical argument serves a political purpose.<sup>11</sup>

Jürgen Kocka introduces different lists of characteristics applying to the three fields, which, at least in principle, allow legitimate and illegitimate argumentation patterns to be demarcated. In the given context, Kocka’s suggestions in regard to boundaries set between fields within the realm and those beyond science are of significance. It does not always have to be the case, but it may well be legitimate to use historical understanding for any subsequent justification of political objectives. Nevertheless, the scope between the two would be exhausted if historical knowledge ran into a conflict of objectives with political intentions and this discrepancy would be cleared to the detriment of the historical statement, as well as if historical knowledge was used for purposes that would overrule the framework according to which historical science would be able to exist.<sup>12</sup>

The rare approaches to the topic of “history as argument” from the 1970s made their way into an article by Jörg Calließ, who identifies four typical shapes of historical arguments: (1) the introduction of historical examples (*argumentum ad exemplo*); (2) the construction of analogies (*argumentum ab analogia*); (3) the presentation of trends and processes belonging to the genesis of present reality (*argumentum a progressionem*); and (4) the claim of framework and sense context that constitute history as a process (*argumentum a processe*).<sup>13</sup>

The methodological dedication of “history as argument” in the field of political science is set in at a later time. The first study worth mentioning dates back to the year 1989 and was conducted by Katharina Oehler, who addressed the topic of historical reasoning in parliamentary debates from

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Kocka, “Angemessenheitskriterien historischer Argumente,” in R. Koselleck et al. (eds.), *Objektivität und Parteilichkeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1977), 469–75, 470–1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 472–3.

<sup>13</sup> J. Calließ, “Geschichte als Argument,” in K. Bergmann (ed.), *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik*, vol. 3, (Düsseldorf: Kallmeyer, 1985), 55–9.

1949 to 1979.<sup>14</sup> She uses a far-broader empirical base than Wolfgang Bach, as all legislative periods are taken into account in the choice of debates. This leads to the methodical difficulty of simultaneously considering the comparability of debates and choosing those kinds that can stand as examples for the given legislative period. Oehler solves this problem by choosing each introductory speech of a new chancellor and the last budget debate of each legislative period. According to the criteria to bring historical arguments into order, she offers two different perspectives: (1) on the qualitative pattern, arguments can be arranged according to periods of political history in Germany. Additionally, it seems plausible to frame abstract categories such as “nation” or “party” for specific arguments, which do not match with German history itself but refer to general aspects of history; (2) On the quantitative pattern, Oehler denies an exact definition due to basic methodical problems. She does not name and count every individual argument but focuses on the structural summary of argument contexts.<sup>15</sup>

Dieter Langewiesche, who chose an entirely different approach, traces history not as arguments brought forward in parliamentary debate but in speeches held by German Bundespräsidenten.<sup>16</sup> This approach makes sense in so far as the office of the German Bundespräsident, who has no real executive powers, is dependent on the power of speeches and the art of political rhetoric in general. Every German Bundespräsident has to be good in political rhetoric if they want to be a good president.

Matthias Rensing raises Langewiesche’s research topic in his 1996 dissertation and deals with the historical consciousness in speeches held by German Bundespräsidenten, ranging from Theodor Heuss to Karl Carstens.<sup>17</sup> However, the historical argument is not assessed with a view to its inherent coherence and appropriateness in light of a certain situation but instead is used to reconstruct the view of history inherent in a political figure’s biography. This way, Rensing focuses on a different research object to Faber, Bach, Steinbach, and Oehler. He uses an investigative horizon, which may well be of significance for the political biography.

---

<sup>14</sup> K. Oehler, *Geschichte in der politischen Rhetorik. Historische Argumentationsmuster im Parlament der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Hagen: Rottman, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–6.

<sup>16</sup> D. Langewiesche, “Geschichte als politisches Argument. Vergangenheitsbilder als Gegenwartskritik und Zukunftsprognose. Die Reden der deutschen Bundespräsidenten,” *Saeculum* 1 (1992): 36–53.

<sup>17</sup> M. Rensing, *Geschichte und Politik in den Reden der deutschen Bundespräsidenten 1949–1984* (Münster: Waxmann, 1996).

An explorative analysis to the relation of reform politics and history as argument in the first coalition of CDU and SPD between 1966 and 1969 was provided by Harald Schmid. He explains the instrumental use of history in the speeches of Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger, observing a quite defensive position out of which the governments of Kurt Georg Kiesinger and Willy Brandt outline their arguments. Schmid’s conclusion is that in a time of future-oriented concepts history only played a minor role.

To make the picture complete, a small number of studies should be mentioned that are dedicated to analysing parliamentary debate or the overall political discourse on relevant topics in historical politics.<sup>18</sup> It can be noted that all introduced approaches have never been able to move beyond the status of a marginal area of research that has so far attracted only little attention, and which is why its designation of being the poor relative of recent historical-political research seems justified. There is a lack of both specific research as well as theoretical elaborations.

### **“History as Argument”: a New Approach**

The purpose and value of a methodologically sound analysis of historical argumentation patterns for political science can be summarised in two key research objectives: first of all, it is about investigating the assumptions, procedures, and effect mechanisms of the instrumentalisation of historical events and contexts. This way, those mechanisms can be logically and functionally decrypted. Secondly, it is about looking at the various historical argumentations with a critical eye. In terms of this, serious researchers must not shun assessment. Similar analyses are in fact obliged to remain committed to a scientific approach of democracy. All modern

---

<sup>18</sup> S. Weinfurter, F.-M. Siefarth (eds.), *Geschichte als Argument. Berichtsband, 41. Deutscher Historikertag* (München: Oldenbourg, 1997); H. Altrichter (ed.), *Gegen Erinnerung. Geschichte als politisches Argument im Transformationsprozeß Ost-, Ostmittel und Südosteuropas* (München: Oldenbourg, 2006); C. Weiß, “Eine Leitwissenschaft für Europa? Historische Argumente in den deutschen Diskussionen zum EU-Beitritt der Türkei 2002–2006,” in C. Kühlberger, C. Sedmak (eds.), *Europäische Geschichtskultur, europäische Geschichtspolitik. Vom Erfinden, Entdecken, Erarbeiten der Bedeutung von Erinnerung und Geschichte für das Verständnis und Selbstverständnis Europas* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2009), 186–201; M. Wiczorek, “Revolutionszeiten brauchen leitende Weltanschauungsgedanken. Geschichtspolitische Argumentationen in der Weimarer Nationalversammlung,” in C. Fröhlich, H. Schmid (eds.), *Jahrbuch für Politik und Geschichte* 3 (2012): 113–30.

mass ideologies, no matter if they are right wing or left wing, have been striving for a view of history ruled by governmental ordinance. Likewise, it is specifically the objective of political science to unveil any generalising interpretations of history and keep historical politics open. These two research objectives can be transferred into a two-step procedure aimed at the academic research of history used in argumentation:

(1) To decipher the logic and function of historical arguments, we can basically distinguish between specific substantive arguments and formal argumentation strategies. Specific content-related arguments, for example Fischer's aforementioned statement, have to be seen in the respective context depending on the researched case study and subjected to a texture-critical examination, which assumes specific knowledge of the historiographic field as well as political-scientific expertise. The following typology is suggested for use in the categorisation of historical argumentation patterns in the political discourse. In this, two different reference modes on history in a political context can be distinguished: recourse to a particular historical example, and reference to a historical context. In addition to these two fundamental ways of referring to history as part of political argumentation, there are three varieties of historical argumentation:

(a) the version of historical superelevation geared towards convincing majorities of a political venture and inspiring those who are undecided or even those who object to it. This is a field where politicians in most cases use a large chunk of emotionalism. In his speech held at the 1999 EU Summit in Helsinki, Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder considered the enlargement of the European Union by the Eastern European states the fulfilment of the fall of the Berlin wall, which was a symbol of the end of the Cold War, the remains of which it was now time to finally get rid of.<sup>19</sup>

Two weeks later, the last session of the German Bundestag in the twentieth century was being held. Emotions were flying high at the debate and almost all speakers felt obliged to refer to "broad outlines" and "historical dimensions."<sup>20</sup> From the very beginning of his governmental declaration on that day, Chancellor Schröder pointed out that Helsinki had brought some results that with hindsight would surely be considered historical.<sup>21</sup> He chose the so-called "spirit of Helsinki," as it had

---

<sup>19</sup> German Bundestag, Stenographic record of the 77th session of the 14th German Bundestag dated December 3, 1999, 7059–7120, 7061–7062.

<sup>20</sup> This applies in particular to Gerhard Schröder, Wolfgang Schäuble, Peter Struck, Ulrich Irmer, and Joschka Fischer. In detail hereto German Bundestag, Stenographic record on the 79th session of the 14th German Bundestag of December 16, 1999, 7211–7357, 7212, 7216, 7219, 7222, 7224.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7213.

manifested itself in the Helsinki Final Act, to link himself with Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt’s historical tradition, itself linked with the peaceful revolution of 1989. He considered himself as the person who made this line up complete.<sup>22</sup>

Historical strategies of superelevation have their limits, however. From time to time they present potentially substantial inflation. The adjective “historical”—having almost been banned in the public discourse due to widespread overuse—is often and readily used in a semantic sense prior to a political decision or the laying of important groundwork. Here, the commentator anyway runs the risk of quickly being labelled as an implausible exaggerator or scaremonger when they do go too far. Thus, our vision of factual political issues may be blurred when the overly burdensome element of history is applied.

(b) The version of historical analogy formation. In the field of science, the historical comparison is a highly demanding procedure entailing stringent methodological requirements.<sup>23</sup> In a highly emotional political debate, historical comparison is often done in a broad-brush manner. One example is the recommendation given by SPD Member of Parliament Markus Meckel to solve the Cyprus dispute between Greece and Turkey pursuant to the historical example of integrating the citizens of the former GDR into the EU. However, such historical cross-comparisons are often misleading, since any historical reference initially depends on specific underlying conditions which are very difficult to apply to different scenarios.

Consequently, the historical comparison in light of political argumentation is constrained by narrow boundaries as well, which means that there are only very few cases which can be put forward as successful and meaningful analogisations to history. If one tries to draw a parallel to history, it should at least be done on a modest scale and not by means of a statement that relates to universal history or even aims to make predictions. The arguer will indeed be skating on thin factual ice if they perform such stretching exercises in prophecy, however well the arguments may have been phrased in terms of stylistic devices and semantic consideration.

(c) The version of reasoning citing authorities. Reasoning citing authorities can be referred to when historians and intellectuals are called upon to give testimony as a principal witness to underpin one’s own

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 7212–7213.

<sup>23</sup> Details in M. Becker, *Ideologiegeleitete Diktaturen in Deutschland. Zu den weltanschaulichen Grundlagen im “Dritten Reich” und in der DDR* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2009), 28–33.

opinion. Referring to pundits makes sense for politicians mainly on the grounds that they can bestow themselves a sound factual integrity which is to some extent free from any ties to a political party. Although historians or political scientists do not always take the role of being experts that have not been imbued with a political notion, the academic authority has ascended to an elevated status in the public discourse, giving evidence showing that such techniques have proven to be highly effective. A professor of history has always earned a great deal of social recognition, going back as far as the days of the Empire.

Despite all other breaches in the political cultural landscape, this element seems to have sustained up to now. In the parliamentary debate about Turkey's accession to the European Union, for example, Gerhard Schröder referred to the French intellectual and cultural philosopher Henri-Lévy in a government declaration while he was trying to promote the Turkish accession,<sup>24</sup> whereas the leader of the opposition, Angela Merkel, cited arguments by the historian Heinrich August Winkler, a member of the SPD since the 1960s, to underpin her reluctance.<sup>25</sup>

As far as the factual appropriateness of argumentation citing authorities is concerned, this version is also subject to tight limits. On the one hand, politicians cannot be expected to be well informed about the state of research in any academic discipline due to their regular workload. Giving an edited account of scientific posts is therefore taken for granted. On the other hand, a phenomenon called "experts' dilemma" takes effect. All opposing sides involved in a political quarrel will find a real or self-appointed "expert" who will, more or less objectively, acknowledge their position as being scientifically substantial. Consequently, argumentation citing authorities is ultimately a political power instrument that only has a limited means to bring the debate forward.

The typology, introduced here, cannot be more than a preliminary proposal to prestructure argumentation-theoretical analyses that refer to history. It ought to be consolidated by further empirical research and supplemented where appropriate.

(2) The decryption of formal argumentation strategies must be followed by a critical review of the same. As indicated above, it may not suffice to do without laying down normative rules of the game of how to use historical reasoning, but some soft criteria of appropriateness to assess the usage of historical arguments in line with Kocka should be devised. Kocka's abovementioned criteria catalogues were primarily designed with

---

<sup>24</sup> German Bundestag, Stenographic record of the 16th session of the 15th German Bundestag dated December 19, 2002, 1181–1311, 1184.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1189.

a view to history science and the role of the historian. What remains to be done is the compilation of standards of appropriateness of how a politician should apply historical argumentation:

(a) Fundamentally, it should be recognised that politicians in a pluralistic democracy are reliant on the fact that they need to consolidate their position by using arguments, and it goes without saying that they can reason by making use of history. However, this should not lead to their perspective becoming one-sided, as this is where we get into difficulties. If, for example, Joschka Fischer brings forward his abovementioned statement of never again war, never again Auschwitz as the one and only argument that is fit to serve the purpose of justifying a deployment in Kosovo, there is a risk of losing sight of present situations and needs for action. A politician should never justify their political undertaking by relying on historical argumentation patterns alone but instead strike a balance between past and present factual pros and cons (the criteria of weighting past and present).

(b) Furthermore, one must not forget the fact that referring to historical facts always provides ample scope for historical interpretation. For example, the German party DIE LINKE incorporates a certain sense of continuity to the former socialist SED party of the left-wing German dictatorship of the GDR, which ceased to exist with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the re-unification in 1989/90. The kind of interpretation derives from this mere fact as how to deal with this party in political terms is controversial today and must not be concluded one dimensionally. In other words, to reflect political activity against the backdrop of historical facts does make a lot of sense, but one needs to be extremely cautious when phrasing out a historical interpretation (the criterion of cautiousness when interpreting).

(c) Any responsible politician in a liberal democracy has to strike a balance between their own individual interest and serving the common good. Therefore, it is legitimate in light of commemorative intentions to pursue the interests of a particular societal group. At the same time, one’s continued awareness of those interests that may clash with the intention has to be raised. The following is an example to illustrate this in more detail.

The stakeholders of associations of the German expellees of World War Two, amongst them the Bund der Vertriebenen (BDV), had all democratic rights to demand an appropriate commemorative infrastructure

to commemorate their common historical fate.<sup>26</sup> However, the fact that the envisaged “Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen,” a “Centre against Expulsions,” could not be pushed through on the grounds of foreign policy without accounting for the national sensitivities of Polish and Czech people was overlooked at times. Therefore, historically legitimised projects always have to look at the complete picture of political interests (the criterion of multiple perspectives of interests).

## Conclusion

“History as argument” refers to a specific form of history as an element of political activity which is on a rhetorical level and therefore can be demarcated from the level of political action in a reasonable manner. As the overview of the state of the art has shown, all introduced approaches did not get any further than the status of a marginal area of research, noted and discussed by experts in the fields but which did not play a major role in research and teaching in German universities. There is a lack of both specific research and theoretical elaborations. This result applies to the field of academic history research as well as the field of political science. That is why we can call “history as argument” the stepchild or poor relative of recent historical-political research.

Historical arguments in political debates are part of the liberal democratic discourse and do not necessarily give evidence of fundamental undemocratic political action. They are rather a legitimate means that is present in a liberal democracy, which at least in principle allows for a fair political dispute. It would be naive to try to banish historical arguments from the political discourse. Since early history, the strategic use of historical legitimacy has represented a basic anthropological constant in overall human cultural activity. Historical arguments should not be accepted only because of their actual contingency but also regarded to create a normative intrinsic value as part of a well-understood modern pluralistic and deliberative community resource.

To enable historical arguments to fulfil this democratic function, they have to be verifiable in an argumentation-theoretical way. Political science is required to develop a manageable methodological instrument in this context. By laying the groundwork with the three argumentation strategies of historical superelevation, historical analogy formation, and argumentation

---

<sup>26</sup> See in detail regarding to this controversy M. Becker, *Geschichtspolitik in der “Berliner Republik”. Konzepte und Kontroversen* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013), 399–492.