

Issue 1/2025, editors: Claudia Kraft (Vienna) and Tim Neu (Vienna)

It's complicated. Social Struggles and the Entanglement of Political Participation and Fundamental Rights

The phrase “democracy and human rights” is ubiquitous today. In public debates as well as academic discussions, it is often simply assumed that these two concepts are inseparable. It even seems self-evident that democracy and human rights mutually presuppose and advance each other. However, wherever things are taken for granted, for ordinary and natural, historians must become suspicious and begin to “make things strange” (Carlo Ginzburg). Thus, while it seems strange at first glance to tell the story of something that is treated and experienced as self-evident, that is precisely the point: How can the entangled history of democracy and human rights be written? What contexts and processes are hidden in the only seemingly innocent “and” that connects democracy and human rights as much as it separates them?

The planned issue of the *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (OeZG) aims at reflecting on the relationship between political participation and fundamental rights across regions and epochs and thus in a more differentiated way. In recent years, research on human rights has in many cases produced new periodizations and constructed or deconstructed “breakthrough narratives” (Möckel 2020, 476-480). However, debates continued to focus spatially on the Euro-Atlantic world, temporally on the period since the end of the 18th century, and methodologically on the history of ideas. In order to advance the debate, we are interested in historical cases in which conflicts or processes such as the “combination of conflict and institution” or the “dialectic of insurrection and constitution” are analysed (Balibar 2014, 4-6). The focus is on ‘social struggles’ in a broad sense, involving both political participation and fundamental rights. These are intense forms of social practice that have performative effects, insofar as these struggles give rise to new notions of rights and participation (Fraser/Honneth 2003, Fraser/Jaeggi 2018, Werron 2010). This praxeological approach makes it possible to thoroughly historicize the abstract ideas of rights and political orders. We are not interested in the history of ‘breakthroughs’ or of extensions of supposedly universal rights, but in the de-centering of this history: How is the relationship between fundamental rights and political participation negotiated in social struggles, or how contested is the relationship?

By adopting a historicizing perspective in this way, we can examine rights beyond the modern claim to universality. In doing so, we avoid seeing the assertion of human rights and increasing political participation as inseparable. Instead, we focus on the practices in which equality and participation were demanded and established, and which very often simultaneously brought about new exclusions and made it clear that equal rights and equal participation are not always compatible. Our aim is twofold: to 'provincialise' the Euro-Atlantic world, which has been too much at the centre of the debate, and to open up the debate on rights and participation to the times before the Atlantic revolutions. With contributions that explore how political participation and fundamental rights have been entangled in social struggles, especially those waged outside the modern Euro-Atlantic world, we aim to continue and intensify the debate on democracy and human rights.

Colleagues who are interested in the tense relationship between political participation and fundamental rights and who would like to shed light on this relationship from a praxeological perspective are invited to contribute articles to the **2025/1 issue** of the *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (<https://journals.univie.ac.at/index.php/oezgj>): short abstracts (approx. 5,000 characters including spaces) should be sent in **until 31 December 2022** to claudia.kraft@univie.ac.at and tim.neu@univie.ac.at. If a proposal is accepted, authors will write a **first draft of their paper by 30 April 2023**. These drafts will be discussed at an **authors' workshop in Vienna (30 June – 1 July 2023)**. After submission of the final version of the texts at the end of 2023, they will undergo an **external peer-review** process.

Étienne Balibar, *Equaliberty. Political Essays*, trans. James Ingram (Durham / London: Duke University Press, 2014).

Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke (London / New York, NY: Verso, 2003).

Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism. A Conversation in Critical Theory*, ed. Brian Milstein (Cambridge / Medford, MA: Polity, 2018).

Benjamin Möckel, 'Endtimes of Human Rights? Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte der Menschenrechte', *Neue Politische Literatur* 65 (2020): 473–501.

Tobias Werron, 'Direkte Konflikte, Indirekte Konkurrenzen. Unterscheidung und Vergleich zweier Formen des Kampfes', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 39, no. 4 (2010): 302–18.