



# Editorial: Injustices of Historical Kind

## EDITORIAL

**TUIJA PULKKINEN** 

**HUP** HELSINKI  
UNIVERSITY  
PRESS

It often happens that an issue of *Redescriptions* that was not intended to cover a particular theme nevertheless generates a reflection on a particular topic. This issue centres around remedies for injustices that affect large social groups, in particular, the classic European oppressed populations: the working class, Jews and women. While some articles cover the histories of the concepts and theories related to the struggles to overcome these injustices, others come closer to contemporary contests that highlight the continuum of the political scene that stretches over 200 years now.

The arena of the battles against modern injustices, that is, against the lack of the legal protection of rights and against the unequal distribution of wealth and the possibility of having a liveable life, began to condense into concepts during the late 18th and early 19th centuries in Europe. Insights into the unjust treatment of both women and labourers slowly grew into two powerful movements, the labour movement and the feminist movement, which both continue in politics today. Later, global injustices were added to the wrongs to be addressed by these movements. Simultaneously, ethnicised and racialized oppression of minorities have deep roots in Europe. While the 1920s and 1930s fascist regimes are the lowest point in the history of systematic oppression of minorities to date, the scenes of racialized and ethnised oppressions of minorities are far from being past in Europe and the United States. The battles around all of these injustices, which started 200 years ago, are all entirely contemporary issues.

More poignantly, it is evident that in none of these issues – the fair conditions of work, the injustices of gender, the wrongs against racialized and ethnicised minorities, or global injustices – lend themselves to those hopes of continuous progress that have so often animated the reformers. The remedies against the injustices are sought in the contemporary world through law, but the direction of change is not self-evident. Most shockingly, only a couple of days before the writing of this editorial, the decision made by the Supreme Court of the United States overturning *Roe v. Wade*, which had guaranteed women the right to an

### CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**Tuija Pulkkinen**

University of Helsinki, FI

[tuija.pulkkinen@helsinki.fi](mailto:tuija.pulkkinen@helsinki.fi)

---

### KEYWORDS:

Injustices; remedies; the right to abortion; the Supreme Court of the United States; the rule of law

### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Pulkkinen, Tuija. 2022. "Editorial: Injustices of Historical Kind." *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 25(1), 1–4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.382>

abortion in the United States, made it evident that the seeming progress in women's rights over their own bodies, after the struggles for more than 200 years, can be turned backwards.

The four articles of this issue weave together this history of injustices and remedies reaching from the first ideas of a 'working class' to the later notion of 'solidarity' between the labour movement and feminists around global justice; and from the persecution of racialized Jewish minority in Nazi Germany to the contemporary struggles for women's reproductive rights. In terms of remedies for injustices, the articles look at the formation of concepts that give agency to oppressed groups or express new coalitions, but also theories that explain the psychic mechanisms of persecution. The articles consider the remedy work sought through political parties, and also consider the workings of the systems of law, which should act as the guarantee of justice in modern democracies, which in principle are based on the rule of law and democratic legislation.

The two first contributions in this issue deal with the conceptual histories of central concepts in battles over justice. **Samuel Hayat's** article showcases scholarship on the very earliest phases of the formation of the concept of 'working class' in the beginning of the 19th-century France. The notion of working class as one group, which harbours a common interest and agency, was new with respect to the earlier workers' action conducted in the name of organizations of particular trades related to the *Ancien Régime* time of social and political structures. Hayat argues that the emergence of the notion of the working class as a unified subject in France was linked to transformations in how work was conceived. At the beginning of the July Monarchy, there were two different emerging notions of labour. One linked labour to poverty that was dangerous to the morality of the labourers who were deemed unfit for any political role and in need of control. The other took labour as the basis for the recognition of a common experience of harm, leading to a political role as a unified subject. However, what both notions had in common was the new idea of the working class as a single, unified entity, beyond trade differences. The transfer of artisan organizations to working class organizations later led to conceptions in which the political role of this working class was considered to be crucial. In this sense, Hayat's article also presents the French genealogy for subsequent Marxist developments of the concept of working class as a historical agent, and the hegemonic subject.

Although the conceptual histories of many of the political terms are widely European and shared in several European languages and political histories, nevertheless the stories in particular political circumstances and languages are crucially different and interesting. **Karin Jonsson's** topic is the concept of 'solidarity' in Sweden at a much later point in the history of labour movement. Jonsson studies the particular role that the concept of 'solidarity' played in a new situation in which the social democratic party of Sweden found itself in the 1960s and 1970s when it was confronted with the new social movements of feminists, environmentalists, and global justice issues. 'Working class' and 'class struggle' appeared at this point as outdated concepts, and the rhetoric in the party documents that Jonsson has studied, took on the concept of 'solidarity' instead. Jonsson analyses the use of this concept and argues that the conceptual move to 'solidarity' worked to tie history to the present, national issues to international ones and the history of the labour movement to that of the nation.

The third article by **Magdalena Zolkos** looks at pre- and post-World War II Germany and the scholarship by a so-called second generation of psychoanalysts who responded to the authoritarian and fascist developments in Europe through analytical writings.

These authors, such as Otto Fenichel, Ernst Simmel and Rudolf Loewenstein, focused their critique on the persecutory, eliminatory and purificatory fantasies, which they saw as animating the fascistic movements in Europe, as well as on the stigmatising and extermination impulses within fascism, which put in a different light the question of minority populations. Zolkos argues that the psychoanalytic scholars asked about the political and ethical stakes of the fascist constructions of its ideal subject: one that was armoured against the threats of dispossession perpetuated by racialized minorities. While the writings by this group of psychoanalytical theoreticians offer a unique critical insight into the history of fascist popular movements and political ideology, Zolkos's analysis of them also resonates strongly in the present world in both Europe and the United States. It is worth considering politics with concepts of desire, irrationality, fantasy and affect not only in the historical times of fascism, but also today. This article also points to the fact that theory can work as a remedy of its own kind. When a minority is not powered by political strength to alter the law, a theory may provide a language of resistance, struggle, and a horizon for change. In conditions of totalitarian rule when the law does not provide protection for minorities, this is all the more crucial.

The final article by **Romina Rekers** looks directly at law and more precisely at the contemporary situation in the area of law, which remains unjust: women's reproductive and sexual rights. Rekers brings together two different areas of law, which practically seek to remedy injustices: transitional justice on the one hand, and the law on reproductive and sexual rights, which often suffer from testimonial injustice in processes, on the other. Transitional justice has traditionally been used in situations where there have been severe long-term injustices against parts of the population. These are typically situations such as racial oppression, genocide, or totalitarian rule, when much in the social fabric has been broken and the legal system attempts to take into consideration the lingering imbalances of power. Rekers suggest that transitional justice should be the framework upon which contemporary issues of reproductive rights for women should be based in the practice of law. The unequal position of women when reporting crimes such as sexual violence, and in cases where an abortion is needed, has to be acknowledged as a situation of long-term injustice in transition. Among other consequences of adopting its principles, Rekers argues that transitional justice would provide some remedy in abortion cases both in the countries in which abortion is guaranteed by law, and where it is not.

The guaranteed right to abortion is one of those issues of justice over which battles stretch right across the 200 years of democratization and ideals of the rule of law in Europe and the United States. Unfortunately, with the June 2022 decision by the Supreme Court of the United States of America, that country has just joined the ranks of those which do not provide this guarantee in law for women. One could argue that with this decision the United States has simultaneously joined the ranks of those countries in which the rule of law has been replaced by the rule of judges.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Tuija Pulkkinen  [orcid.org/0000-0003-0825-3259](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0825-3259)  
 University of Helsinki, FI

Pulkkinen  
*Redescriptions: Political  
Thought, Conceptual  
History and Feminist  
Theory*  
DOI: 10.33134/rds.382

**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Pulkkinen, Tuija. 2022.  
“Editorial: Injustices  
of Historical Kind.”  
*Redescriptions: Political  
Thought, Conceptual  
History and Feminist Theory*  
25(1), 1–4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.382>

**Submitted:** 30 June 2022  
**Accepted:** 30 June 2022  
**Published:** 04 August 2022

**COPYRIGHT:**

© 2022 The Author(s).  
This is an open-access  
article distributed under  
the terms of the Creative  
Commons Attribution  
4.0 International License  
(CC-BY 4.0), which  
permits unrestricted  
use, distribution, and  
reproduction in any  
medium, provided the  
original author and source  
are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

*Redescriptions: Political  
Thought, Conceptual  
History and Feminist Theory*  
is a peer-reviewed open  
access journal published by  
Helsinki University Press.