Reconfiguring the Relationship Between Democracy and the State

In political theory, the modern state has long served as democracy's institutional framework—anchoring representation, law, and sovereignty. Yet current diagnoses of democratic crisis invite a more fundamental question: Is democracy necessarily bound to the framework of the state? Must it always take the form of *state democracy*—or does this identification contribute to the very crisis it faces? In the face of today's challenges, it is the task of political theory to move beyond the mere defence of liberal-democratic institutions and to question the state-form as democracy's unquestioned horizon.

This panel seeks to investigate the relationship between democracy and the state as a crucial site of theoretical and political transformation. Radical democratic theories—ranging from post-foundational and decolonial approaches to anarchist thought—have long insisted that democratic politics exceeds the institutional logic of the state. They highlight practices of assembly, resistance, and collective self-determination that unfold beyond or against statist frameworks, inviting us to rethink democracy not as a fixed institutional arrangement, but as a dynamic and conflictual practice of self-rule that continually contests its own boundaries.

At the same time, radical democratic theory has been criticized for a deficit in state theory. This panel takes that critique seriously and calls for renewed engagement with state theory in dialogue with democratic theory. By interrogating the evolving and often fraught relationship between democracy and the state, this panel contributes to the conference *Backsliding, Resilience, Renewal? Democracy in Eras of Transformation* by asking whether democracy's renewal depends on its preservation within the state-form, or on its capacity to transform or even transcend it.

We invite contributions that explore the transformation of democracy through theoretical reflection, historical analysis, or empirical case studies. Particularly welcome are papers that engage in dialogue with anthropology, sociology, and political philosophy, as well as those which develop transnational perspectives beyond Eurocentric models of statehood. Possible questions include:

- What does it mean to think democracy outside, beyond, or at the limits of the state—and how can we define "the state"?

- How have historical or contemporary movements enacted democratic practices that challenge the state's claim to exclusive political legitimacy?

- Should democracy be renewed through reform of its institutions, or through emancipation from them?

Panel format: Semi-open panel, 4 speakers.

Confirmed Participants:

1. <u>Leire Urricelqui</u>

– Paper title: *Errant Politics: Democratic Living and Acting Despite the State*

– Bio: Leire Urricelqui is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Chair of Philosophy at the University of St. Gallen. She wrote her PhD thesis between the University of Lucerne, CNRS Paris, and the University of Amsterdam. Before her current position, she worked as university assistant to the chair of Social and Political Philosophy at the University of Graz. Her research focuses on questions of political violence, dehumanization, and radical democratic theory.

2. <u>Mathijs van de Sande</u>

– Paper title: *Radical Subsidiarity. Nationalism, Democracy and the Federalist Utopia*

– Bio: Mathijs van de Sande is Assistant Professor of Political Philosophy at Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands). In 2021-2025 he worked on an interdisciplinary research project on "communalism" and the impact of the Paris Commune of 1871 on radical theory and practice in the past 150 years (funded by the *Gerda Henkel Stiftung*). His main research interests are radical democracy, political representation and the democratic role and legitimacy of protest.

Moderation: Christian Leonhardt (University of Bremen) and Anna-T. Steffner de Marco

Organisation: Anna-T. Steffner de Marco (University of Vienna)

– Bio: Anna-Teresa Steffner de Marco (MA in Political Science) is a doctoral candidate at the University of Vienna, completing her PhD under the supervision of Oliver Marchart on the relationship between democracy and anarchy. Her research focuses on radical democratic theory, state theory, feminist theory, and questions concerning the political aspect of art and culture. She teaches regularly at institutions including the Berlin University of the Arts, the Braunschweig University of Art, and the University of Vienna. Recent conference presentations: 6th Vienna Conference on Citizenship Education (2024), Political Theory in Times of Uncertainty, Bremen (2023).