



## Migration History Talks

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**Wednesday, 1 December 2021**

**Minority and Majority as Asymmetrical Concepts: The Perils  
of Democratic Equality and Fantasies of National Purity**

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**Till van Rahden, Université de Montréal, Canada**

17:30 – 19:00 h

This talk will be held in person at the University of Neuchâtel, Louis Bréguet 2, Room 2.310, on WEBEX <https://unine.webex.com/meet/robin.stunzi> and be streamed on the nccr – on the move YouTube channel

The Migration History Series is co-organized by the History Department of the University of Neuchâtel and the nccr – on the move. For any further information regarding the series, please send an email to [jean-thomas.arrighi@unine.ch](mailto:jean-thomas.arrighi@unine.ch)

### **Abstract**

The conceptual couple of majority/minority is viewed as a harmless way of identifying an arithmetic relationship. The idea of a dichotomy between majority and (Jewish) minority as a short hand to describe relations between ethnic or religious groups, however, is recent. In fact, as it did not exist before 1919 when in the wake of World War I the idea of democracy and the idea of the homogeneous nation-state triumphed simultaneously. Prior to 1919, languages of difference invoked embedded concepts that referred to specific constellations and configurations, such as colony or community, churches, nations, races, or tribes. The opposition of majority and minority introduced a level of abstraction into struggles over recognition. “Minority” rights for Jews and others became a miracle cure in such conflicts and seemed to offer a universal formula promising an efficacious remedy.

### **About the Speaker**

Till van Rahden is a Professor of German and European Studies at the Université de Montréal where he held a Canada Research Chair from 2006 to 2016. In addition, he is also a Research Professor at Carleton University, Ottawa, and a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften in Bad Homburg. He earned an M.A. in American History at Johns Hopkins University and a Ph.D. in History (summa cum laude) at the University of Bielefeld. He specializes in European history since the Enlightenment and is interested in the tension between the elusive promise of democratic equality and the recurrent presence of diversity and moral conflicts. He has held visiting appointments at the University of Chicago, McGill University, the Graduate Institute in Geneva, Charles University in Prague, the universities in Graz, Innsbruck, and Haifa, and fellowships at research institutes in Berlin, Cologne, Freiburg, Mainz, and the “Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen,” Vienna.

### **Selected Publications**

- Till van Rahden (2019). *Demokratie: Eine gefährdete Lebensform*. Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag.
- Till van Rahden (2008). *Jews and other Germans: Civil Society, Religious Diversity and Urban Politics in Breslau, 1860-1925*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Till van Rahden (2022). *Vielheit: Jüdische Geschichte und die Ambivalenzen des Universalismus*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.
- Till van Rahden and Michael Stolleis (Eds.) (2021). *Emanzipation und Recht: Zur Geschichte der Rechtswissenschaften und der jüdischen Gleichberechtigung*. Frankfurt an der Main: Klostermann.
- Till van Rahden (2018). Lumpen sammeln: Siegfried Kracauer und die Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, *Historische Zeitschrift* 30, 319–340.