

From Nation States to Communities of Interest: Solidarity and Human Rights Declarations in Wolfgang Fischer's *Styx*

Isabell Sluka

Abstract

This article examines how human rights and rightlessness in particular are negotiated in Wolfgang Fischer's film *Styx* (2018), the story of one German woman's tragic maritime encounter with a group of African refugees fleeing to Europe. Drawing primarily upon Hannah Arendt's (1951, 1958, 1963, 1968) and Seyla Benhabib's (2004) political thoughts as well as the "political practices of founding human rights" that Ayten Gündoğdu (2015) proposes in her reading of Arendt, I argue that the film engages with human rights critically and calls attention to grievances but also offers an alternative conception of what political action may look like in practice. The film scrutinizes in particular the notion of "the right to have rights" (Arendt 1951) as a prerequisite to human rights, emphasizing that their accessibility must not be based merely on a good faith belief in state interventions for the latter are bound to citizenship all too often. Instead, my analysis, in a profoundly Arendtian sense, suggests that *Styx* emphasizes the role of individuals as active citizens who through declarations of human rights establish communities of interest, and thereby expand the accessibility and, ultimately, the potential effectiveness of human rights.

The article asserts that (a), under the premise of such a reconceptualization, a pragmatic faith in human rights can be justified even if recent conflicts and crises have tested the faith of many; and that (b) film as a medium can play an important role in human rights discourses, not only through denouncing violations, but also because it can imaginatively offer concrete proposals for how to rethink and rewrite human rights, solidarity, and civic engagement.

Keywords: Human Rights, The Right to have Rights, Hannah Arendt, Solidarity