

International Conference on 'Decolonising Minority Rights Discourse'

9-10 May 2025 | Cluj/Kolozsvár, Romania

Call for Papers

Deadline for submitting abstracts: 13 January 2025

The Tom Lantos Institute, Birmingham Law School (University of Birmingham), Sapientia University, and the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities are jointly organising an international conference on 'Decolonising Minority Rights Discourse' to be held at Sapientia University, Romania on 9-10 May 2025. The conference aims to bring together scholars from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds but with a common interest in decolonial and minority rights issues. Early career researchers are especially encouraged to participate.

Background

Despite formal decolonisation processes, colonial connotations such as the 'standard of civilisation' or the presumed incapacity of certain people to govern their own affairs, continue in more subtle forms to inform, shape, and govern current global affairs and institutions to the disadvantage of already marginalised communities. In recent years, calls have been made to proactively look into ways in which colonial legacies can be undone and how colonial links can be de-linked, if possible at all. As part of this 'decolonising' agenda, it is necessary to investigate what a decolonising project in the field of minority rights would look like.

Mainstream discourse on minority rights embodies a series of normative biases and assumptions, which ignore the centrality of power-relations, subaltern agency, political economy, hegemonic global governance structures, and patriarchy, among others, to the conceptualisation of the minority and its protection. As a result, some of the core concepts such as the definition of minority, statehood, discrimination, violence, and protection, are often archaic, mono-dimensional, and marked by colonial understandings. Hence, there is an urgent need for decolonising foundational tenets in contemporary minority rights discourse. In doing so, it is imperative to critically examine relations of power and subaltern agency in the working of minority rights and, in this connection, to expose the kind of discourse they produce ([Shahabuddin, 2023](#)).

For example, the very conception of the minority needs to be critically reevaluated through decolonial lenses to expose a sense of 'otherness' and/or 'backwardness' embedded in the concept. Also, the decolonial project requires a critical examination of the reification of the state itself, as part of a much broader notion of decolonising the state as a prerequisite for decolonising minority rights discourse. The agenda of decolonising minority rights also needs to mainstream the often-ignored aspect of resistance by minorities. Going beyond an elitist discourse on minority rights and minority protection within institutional sites, the decolonial project demands a sharp focus on learning from grassroots practices. It is in everyday struggles of minorities to protect their lives and livelihood that actual decolonisation is taking place. In this connection, the project needs to critically engage with the perception and role of law in minority rights protection and reflect on how legal concepts and categories themselves can be tools of oppression in some cases. This will then help underscore the strategic use of law as a site of contestation and also explore other possible languages of resistance, such as social movements, outside the domain of law. In decolonising minority rights discourse, it is also vitally important to take seriously the political economy of violence and expose how minorities suffer economic marginalisation at multiple levels by powerful states, international financial

institutions, postcolonial states, and national and transnational corporations. Compared to civil and political rights, this is rather an ignored area in contemporary minority rights discourse demanding adequate attention. Similarly, the role of history and knowledge production, political symbolism, alternative notions of advocacy and participation, and the conception of culture and the relations of power embedded in it are all intrinsically connected to the project on decolonising minority rights discourse. The conference is designed to offer an opportunity for much-needed discussions and debates on these issues and also to identify and investigate other innovative ways of decolonising contemporary minority rights discourse.

Conference Themes

We welcome submissions from all regions and from all relevant disciplines with any research approach as long as they focus on decolonial and minority rights issues. Papers may fall under one or more of the following indicative themes:

- Definitional debates and categorisation of minorities
- Historiography and knowledge production
- Eurocentrism and minority rights discourse
- Intra-European developmental hierarchies and minority rights discourse
- Statehood and the 'minority question'
- Imperial, post-immigrant, and autochthonous minorities
- Minorities and indigenous peoples
- Decolonisation, minorities, and the postcolonial state
- Minority protection beyond protectionist rhetoric
- Promises and perils of the right to self-determination
- Resistance and social movements
- Effective participation and minority agency
- Ethics of activism
- Role of law and legal institutions
- Political economy of minority oppression
- Intersectionality
- Minorities and global governance
- Transitional justice and reparations
- Minority rights and climate justice

Application processes

Please submit an abstract of your paper using this [online form](https://forms.gle/pA47itG5SvZCpG67A) (<https://forms.gle/pA47itG5SvZCpG67A>) by 13 January 2025. Successful applicants will be notified by 3 February 2025.

It is our intention to publish an edited volume with selected conference papers. We welcome draft papers (c. 6,000 words), preferably at least two weeks before the conference.

Logistics

The conference registration fee is 100 EUR. This includes participation in all conference sessions and lunches and tea breaks during the conference. Participants are responsible for organising their travel and accommodation.

A limited number of scholarships are available to cover full or part of travel and accommodation costs and registration fees. Preference will be given to participants from the Global South and Eastern and Central European countries.

Contact: All queries should be sent to: info@tomlantosinstitute.hu