

# Call for Papers

## Decolonizing Human Rights:

### Where Universalism Ends and Cultural Relativism Begins

We invite students, early-career researchers, scholars, practitioners, activists, and individuals with relevant lived or professional experience to submit papers for the online workshop and conference “**Decolonizing Human Rights: Where Universalism Ends and Cultural Relativism Begins,**” organized by **The Research Bridge** and taking place on **2 April 2026**.

Submissions are welcome from researchers based in all regions. However, we particularly encourage contributions from scholars and practitioners based in the **Global South** and **Eastern Europe**, whose perspectives remain underrepresented in many academic and policy discussions on international human rights frameworks.

The workshop aims to critically examine the colonial legacies embedded within international human rights law and governance, as well as the tensions that emerge when universal legal norms interact with diverse cultural, political, and social realities. Although human rights have been framed as a universal moral and legal framework, their historical development has been closely intertwined with Western epistemologies, legal traditions, and institutional structures. As a result, in many contexts human rights norms operate not only as mechanisms of protection but also as forms of governance that may inadequately reflect local knowledge systems, communal practices, or alternative understandings of justice and social order.

This workshop seeks to provide a platform for interdisciplinary dialogue on the possibilities and limitations of decolonizing human rights discourse. We welcome theoretical, empirical, and practice-based contributions that explore how international human rights frameworks intersect with local legal traditions, social hierarchies, and political struggles. Particular attention will be given to scholarship that foregrounds marginalized perspectives, including Indigenous knowledge systems, community-based governance structures, and alternative models of justice that challenge dominant universalist paradigms.

The organizers encourage interdisciplinary submissions from fields such as **law, political science, sociology, anthropology, history, gender studies, and related disciplines**. We also welcome contributions from practitioners and activists working in the fields of human rights advocacy, community organizing, or social justice.

**Potential themes** include, but are not limited to:

**Legal Pluralism:** navigating tensions between state law, customary justice systems, and international human rights norms.

**The Politics of “Harmful Practices”:** examining how the concept of “tradition” is mobilized both by local elites to maintain power and by international actors to justify intervention.

**Bureaucratic Violence and Administrative Governance:** analyzing how administrative systems such as identification regimes, census classifications, or welfare bureaucracies impose rigid categories on complex social identities, often resulting in forms of administrative exclusion or erasure.

**Epistemic Violence:** exploring how dominant Western legal frameworks and epistemologies marginalize Indigenous knowledge systems and alternative approaches to justice.

**Decolonizing Gender Realities:** examining the intersection between local gender norms and international legal instruments such as CEDAW.

**Social Hierarchies and Power Structures:** analyses of descent-based discrimination, racialized social stratifications, and the role of lineage, caste, or “bloodline” in determining access to political participation and rights.

**The “Universalist” Trap:** critical reflections on cultural relativism as both a strategy of resistance and a potential shield for the perpetuation of human rights violations.

**South–South Solidarities:** exploring pluralistic models of norm-building and legal imagination emerging from the Global South.

**Decolonizing Gender and the Body:** examining how women and marginalized genders negotiate rights within communal, spiritual, and traditional governance frameworks.

**Ecological Belonging:** Indigenous social movements that challenge the Western separation between “human” and “nature,” framing environmental protection as a collective and relational right.

### **Submission Process and Timeline**

Interested participants are invited to submit an abstract of approximately **300 words** **outlining their proposed contribution by 27 March 2026**. Abstracts should be sent via email to:

caty.nistor@researchbridge.org

Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be asked to prepare short visual presentation materials (PowerPoint slides) for the workshop by **1 April 2026**. If participants require assistance preparing visual materials, they may indicate this when submitting their abstract. The organizing team will be happy to assist by preparing a simple slide

template, a cover slide including the author's name and presentation title, or basic formatting of slides based on content provided by the presenter.

**The online workshop will take place on 2 April 2026.**

Following the workshop, participants will be invited to submit a full research paper of approximately **5–15 pages (Times New Roman, size 12)** by **1 May 2026**. Submitted papers will undergo a peer review process. Accepted contributions will be published on the **Research Bridge website** as part of a curated collection of conference papers.

Participants will receive reminders regarding upcoming deadlines throughout the process.

Questions regarding submissions or the workshop may be directed to:

emmahamurariu2000@gmail.com

matheusfrs2018@gmail.com