



Book review of Eichler,
Jessika and Topidi,
Kyriaki (eds.) 2022.
*Minority Recognition
and the Diversity Deficit:
Comparative Perspectives.*
Oxford: Bloomsbury
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BOOK REVIEW

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Minority Recognition and the Diversity Deficit: Comparative Perspectives, edited by Jessika Eichler and Kyriaki Topidi, thoroughly explores the current state of minority recognition and the necessary developments to advance equality frameworks. The volume provides a comprehensive and timely overview of plurality and recognition mechanisms for cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, as well as the potential of these mechanisms for reimagining and further development. This piece highlights two key themes: the structural barriers faced by minorities and the state-driven diversity deficit across societal levels. Drawing on cases from Latin America and Europe, the authors demonstrate how the concept of recognition must be reframed, considering contemporary political dynamics and persistent structural inequalities. Its comparative, empirically grounded approach, enriched by legislative perspectives and historical context, lends depth to the analysis and supports an effective argumentation.

The editors contextualise the discussion within the broader landscape of minority rights, noting both the lack of efficient normative recognition and the weak implementation of minority-related obligations, situating these shortcomings within their economic, social, and cultural contexts. They also provide encouraging examples from the ‘transformative constitutionalism’ of Andean states, referring to changes reshaping state structures and legal frameworks in ways that reflect decolonisation, acknowledge societal pluralism, and strengthen the recognition of indigenous peoples and their rights. A question of power lies at the core of minority recognition – who gets to define the existence and demarcation of the group. In relation to externally imposed definitions of minorities, the editors draw on [Taylor’s \(1994\)](#) concept of ‘misrecognition’, alongside the book’s central theme of ‘non-recognition’, both of which undermine minority protection. Eichler and Topidi ask ‘what conditions participation for minority members and which barriers should be removed to enhance it?’ (p. 12), positioning the state as the central

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analytical focus. Thus, the added value of the volume lies in its aim to reframe minority recognition by articulating grassroots expectations and translating them into tangible policy and sociolegal strategies.

Following the introduction, the book is divided into three sections. The first section, with Chapters 2–4, offers a theoretical exploration of minority rights. The discussions bring forward the underlying framework of the law, including related insufficiencies and essential procedural roles. Miodrag Jovanović begins the theoretical part by explaining the essentialisation of cultural identities. The author sees it as a consequence of being recognised and visible *to* and *in* law, recognising the negative effects of such generalisation and external interpretation of cultures, and suggesting multi-level actions to diminish their risks. The most intriguing theoretical discussion is done in Chapter 3, in which Sergio Costa analyses the emergence of politically relevant differences and the correlation of differences and inequalities. Drawing on the articulation theory (e.g., Grossberg 1996) and a case study of *quilombolas* – Afro-Brazilian communities whose contemporary claims for recognition build on a long history of struggles for land and rights – the chapter sheds light on the compound of social inequalities and cultural differences in political minority construction. The author argues that difference is produced through discourse and reflects subjects' position in social hierarchies. He highlights how differences become politically relevant only through specific national and international political and legal developments. The theoretical part concludes with Jessika Eichler's discussion of how the legal recognition of collective rights, together with the monitoring of international treaties, has helped strengthen states' obligations to protect minority rights.

The theoretical grounds are further developed through practical examples of minority rights in action in the next part of the volume. The section approaches the paradigms of minority recognition from both top-down and bottom-up standpoints in Europe. Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, in Chapter 5, offers insights into how the historical lack of minority consideration in the formation of European states is now backfiring in efforts to combat discrimination. The discussion continues with Balázs Vizi, who presents a case study on group rights of 'national minorities' in Hungary, focusing on practices of participation, cultural autonomy, and minority self-governance (Chapter 6). Contextualising minority governance with the historical developments, as done in Chapters 5 and 6, enriches the volume's contribution. The last part of the section takes a more theoretical turn, with first Kyriaki Topidi and subsequently Eugenia Relaño Pastor discussing religious diversity, multiculturalism frameworks (and their deficiencies), and secularism. The section addresses practical considerations by revisiting the basic principles of autonomy and freedom, and it illustrates through empirical studies how the recognition of differences and their peaceful coexistence underpin these principles.

The final part of the volume turns to sociolegal perspectives on minority recognition. The authors in this portion of the book examine the potential of specific human rights frameworks: Mia Caielli, in Chapter 9, focuses on freedom of expression, while Ceren Kasim, in Chapter 10, discusses anti-discrimination law. Both contributions demonstrate how these rights can serve as instruments for advancing and implementing minority protection, yet also how they may continue to enable exclusionary practices. The section's central theme, power asymmetry, is articulated with clarity and depth, revealing it as an underlying issue permeating debates on minority recognition and diversity deficits more broadly. Caielli's analysis of the tension between hate speech and freedom of expression offers a particularly nuanced account of how power imbalances are reproduced in public discourse. The discussion on labour legislation

further extends the volume's comparative approach by juxtaposing anti-discrimination law with the right to protection against dismissal. Through an exploration of legislative mechanisms, Kasim highlights how both frameworks address existing social power asymmetries while pursuing distinct goals, thereby illuminating their broader implications for equality and justice.

The volume's strength lies in its rich and diverse case studies, which offer valuable comparative insights. However, without formal concluding remarks, the connections between these examples remain somewhat implicit. A more explicit synthesis across chapters might have further enhanced the book's overall coherence and accessibility for a wider audience. Nevertheless, the closing notes of the final chapter aptly highlight the main insights drawn from the volume as a whole: to achieve *de facto* equality and freedom, the weaker party needs to be protected by harnessing and actualising the potential of legislation – an effort that requires rethinking how minorities and diversity are recognised.

Minority Recognition and the Diversity Deficit stands out for its strong multidimensional approach, progressing from theoretical to empirical considerations across all individual chapters. The argumentation is grounded in legal frameworks from soft law to international treaties and national legislation, while the depth of its analyses stems from going beyond law to include historical explanations that illuminate developments and local constraints for minority recognition. Social scientific and philosophical perspectives on equality, justice, and human differences further enrich the analysis, and the authors' well-supported arguments and extensive references guide readers into broader scholarly debates. Although the volume offers rich perspectives on participation and recognition, these terms are not defined at the outset. Instead, their meaning unfolds gradually. The reader ultimately gains a coherent understanding of the concepts, though earlier clarification might have improved clarity.

The book advances new ways of recognising and rethinking minorities and human diversity. It provides a counterbalance to the growing securitisation of minorities, which restricts rights and amplifies divisions between groups (Cesari 2013). Internal exclusion also undermines democratic relations (Chin & Levey 2023). The authors imply that diverse and genuinely effective participation, facilitated by legislative tools that help balance power asymmetries, can contribute to the realisation of democratic principles and a more peaceful society. Nevertheless, the volume maintains a realistic perspective on the limitations of equal recognition, such as the gap between nominal and actual political representation.

Furthermore, the authors' emphasis on the autonomy and self-determination of minorities makes a noticeable contribution to an awaited paradigm shift, from a state-centric society to a human-oriented approach that recognises diversity. The claim is not new, as acknowledged in the introduction of the book, and the call for significant minority rights to achieve equal recognition has been a central part of minority studies (e.g., Patten 2014). Still, the volume advances it by examining constitutionalism in depth and identifying omissions, achievements, and potentials for developing sociolegal strategies of recognition. Overall, the volume offers valuable insights for scholars of law and social sciences and encourages further multidisciplinary work.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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