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Abstract:

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

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 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.