

Research on Ethnic Diversity: Toward a Majority Moment?

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Over the last decades, research into ethnic diversity has mostly focused on immigrants and minorities, and rightly so. Integration, discrimination, recognition, civil rights, multiple identities, preservation of minority cultures, stereotypes, and unemployment are some of the pressing issues that have monopolized the agenda. However, I suggest that from now on, this focus should be enlarged so as to include majority cultures as a topic of analysis in and of itself. The motivation for this move is four-fold:

-The majorities' behavior, in response to diversification, has been the primary source of resistance to pluralism. There is room for a much better understanding of this negative response beyond the usual condemnation dictated by a normative approach. A deepest analysis of national myths could be an efficient point of entry to this territory.

-It is commonplace to blame the short-sighted, nationalistic views of the so-called silent majorities (or ordinary people) for the rejection of the Other. Actually, it is also a strategy used by the elites to conceal their responsibility since they are the ones who have developed, disseminated and inculcated these nationalistic views in the first place through powerful channels such as media, school, Church, novels, and so forth.

-The majority-minorities duality is a growing feature in western societies. This calls for an increased attention devoted to the power relationship through which majorities impose their culture on minorities and put them in a lasting disruptive social disadvantage.

-I believe that majorities have rights of their own. For instance, in specific circumstances and under well-defined conditions, it can be legitimate to grant a contextual, limited precedence to majority cultures. The preservation of mainstream cultural patrimony is one sphere where such a practice can be tolerated. The choice of national language and fundamental values to be enshrined in a charter of rights are other examples. The challenge here is to strike a fair balance between majorities' and minorities' rights.