

Who Are Minorities, and How Are We To Think Them?¹

François Laruelle
(Translated by Taylor Adkins)

Description: Laruelle's essay from 1987 strives to scientifically describe the individual experience of minorities distinguished from the State's point of view, including political philosophy. This essay pairs well with Laruelle's texts written around this time, including *Le principe de minorité* (Paris: Éditions Aubier, 1982), *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities* (Paris: Éditions Aubier, 1985; trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet, Cambridge: Polity, 2017), and *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy* (Paris: PUF, 1986; trans. Rocco Gangle, London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

François Laruelle is professor emeritus at Université de Paris X-Nanterre and progenitor of non-philosophy and non-standard philosophy. Author of over 25 texts, Laruelle is also a co-founder of Organisation Non-Philosophique Internationale (ONPhI). His latest works are *Philosophie non-standard. Générique, quantique, philo-fiction* (Paris: Kimé, 2010) (where the portmanteau *Oraxiom* was created) and *Tétralogos, un opéra de philosophies* (Paris: Cerf, 2019) François Laruelle's cogito is not only philosophical, but also philo-musical. For this purpose, he articulates philosophy with other disciplines, in particular quantum, which replaces natural objects with states and operators. Using these operators and the generic, Laruelle constructs a technique of ascent from the world to the universe, then a long descent towards humans, distinct from philosophical subjects. Forthcoming: *Le nouvel Esprit technologique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, collection "l'Ane d'or").

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Minorities represent a certain type of problem that is both insistent or inevitable and never resolved. For political science, one might say it is a crux, a theoretical impasse. The same goes for political practice. What is the source of this difficulty? There are several reasons. First, for a political reason, it became a problem or a question. The problem of Minorities emerged as such with the history of the great modern States with which it is coextensive and whose constitution it accompanies. Perhaps it was a less critical or less obvious problem with the great Empires wherein Minorities were recognized *de facto* and sometimes repressed. But in the 19th century with the establishment of unified and somewhat centralized States, they became *a question as such* for political theory, which is simultaneously the sign of their problematic nature and the beginning of their recognition as such.

Afterwards, it has become not simply a political problem but a social one, too. I believe that it is important for reflection and theory and completely necessary for philosophy to overcome the political limitation of the concept of “Minorities” to which it is still too often restricted. The problem has developed an incredible extension with the appearance of a totally different type of Minorities than the national and political. No doubt they arise as political and historical problems, but they now undergo new experiences and require more extensive and not simply political definitions.

This extension beyond their political origins must therefore be considered, even if historians are not in agreement: the new Minorities are social and moral, they arise within the social body, which is supposedly homogeneous from the outset. They are defined according to age class (the “youth” or the “Third Age”), social class (the “Fourth World”), what could be called sexual class (“women,” homosexual Minorities), and not simply in line with political power, but

with social, religious, cultural behaviors as such, i.e. according to a power which is not always political. I realize that this extension can be denied; but, on the one hand, they themselves lay claim to the status of new Minorities; on the other hand, they offer, so as to be thought, the same theoretical difficulties as political Minorities; lastly, it is difficult to contest the fact that the modern social body is increasingly less homogenous, increasingly reticent to define itself by the political point of view alone, and increasingly demanding. There is a veritable *continuous social production of new minorities*, and it is tied to the emergence of the social beyond the political and to the emergence of the individual and the emergence of particularity beyond the social. The transformation of social relations is accompanied by a continual growth of new demands formulated in terms of *difference, identity, and right: de facto* differences; *de jure* differences; but also right to difference, the celebrated “right to difference” which is the foundation of all current claims of identity. How do we summarily characterize these phenomena now that the political veil has been lifted from their definition? Do they have anything in common, and what makes them difficult theoretical objects?

1. The concept of Minority is unstable, poorly defined, with a tendency to be unlimited because it seems that new Minorities are born in quick succession (there is no definitive threshold based on which a minority exists).

2. Minorities, whether political or not, always present themselves as multiplicities; they are several by definition and are themselves constituted by a plurality of individuals as such; this is an important phenomenon if we consider the centralizing and unifying inclination of modern States.

3. They are born and manifest themselves through the mode of demand and struggle, toward a different identity that can be prolonged by violence, even terrorism; so that it may be a right, the “right to difference,” to au-

tonomy, to recognition must be acquired by an initial violence.

4. They always appear somewhat like phenomena of margins or marginality, fringes, periphery, and danger, simultaneously - indeed I say *simultaneously* - internal and external in relation to the unity of the social body or the centralized political body of the nation.

5. Lastly (and this follows from the preceding point), due to the centralized State and its agencies, they are regularly the object of a pressure hellbent on containing them, a pressure which is not always brutal, which can have the form of control and surveillance or indeed repression, in all kinds of forms (policing, administrative, cultural, linguistic, etc.) and which, nevertheless, ends in the negotiated granting of rights political, cultural, linguistic, etc., i.e. a generally *relative* autonomy within national unity.

This is a short description of a situation that everyone recognizes. But what is of interest here for the philosopher and politician? The interest lies in the fact that, on the one hand, Minorities manifest themselves as an improbable object through the mode of violence and conflict that is *simultaneously* internal or intestine (civil war at the limit) and external. And, on the other hand, because there is something unthinkable about them. I mean to stress that theoretical and political reflection on Minorities is rather impoverished and ill at ease. A recent “Encyclopédie des Minorités,” published by Caratini¹, defines them in this simultaneously vague and overly restrictive way: they are a historical subset of a nation and involve centrifugal-centripetal relations with the State. This definition perhaps does justice to the multiplicity of minoritarian groups, but it cursorily describes the mechanism that binds and opposes them to the State. The traditional political and theoretical means to which we are accustomed do nothing but vary/refine the first impression: these are the fringes, the margins or marginalities, the subsystems of the State or the subsets of the Nation.

¹ Éditions Larousse.

Political philosophy ultimately relies on three, and only three, ways to think them. The first consists in saying that Minorities are modes or *modalities* - just subsets! - of a centralized unity, State, or Nation; in other words, they are external secondary phenomena that do not have their own autonomy because they refer to the superior (i.e. *indivisible*) unity of the Nation or the State, which they suppose in every way. The second consists in speaking of “differences.” It will then be said either that Minorities are differences (of language, culture, sexual orientation, etc.) in the *interior* of/or *in* a set (which harkens back to our usage of “mode”); or, and this is already more interesting, it will be said that they are differences identical to the State (and not *under* it or *in* it), or at least that Minorities are what is *universal* in the social body, which must itself be interpreted in turn as minoritarian or as becoming minoritarian (I will come back to this conception).

Lastly, the third concept in use is that of the relic or archaism; they have been repressed on the Nation’s behalf and must still be repressed yet again. It will thus be necessary to contain them, to master them, and to integrate them - to carry out a veritable gestation of Minorities (which is also their protection) - by a politics simultaneously of firmness and of juridical/ political concessions by according them a relative (always partial and *specified*) autonomy. This is due to the fact that Minorities remain perceived as a residual phenomenon tied to the history of modern Nations and States in the 19th century - representing a perpetual danger of reactivating the hotbeds of political (and sometimes terroristic) effervescence - or to supposedly provisional and amendable social dysfunctionings. One point is particularly striking in these definitions. They remain content with describing what is seen or believed to be seen immediately; they basically perceive Minorities from the point of view of the State itself, which contains or represses them. In the same way that the State proposes to better

integrate them into its unity, these definitions integrate Minorities into political philosophies, which are always unitary schemas or schemas of unification, identification, and sometimes totalization. Philosophical reflection, above all in this form, flies to the State's rescue and prepares the way for it; it rarely allows itself to serve Minorities, despite certain appearances. And yet Minorities lay claim to their identity while refusing the identification proposed for them by the powers that be: this paradox must be explicated.

What makes it so hard to think Minorities? The common understanding wants clear and distinct definitions of separate and well-identified objects. But, precisely, the Minorities who claim their "identity" are not easily identifiable as such. They are only understood through *rappports, relations*, and relations of struggle with the State. But what is generally most difficult to understand is the war, the proportion of force, because it defies this general tendency to posit properly distinct identities. The political, historical existence of Minorities is inseparable from the struggle for recognition and sometimes for autonomy; and their theoretical existence is, on its side, inseparable from contradiction, which is the war in thought. Because they are politically unthinkable, demand or struggle is their only way of making themselves heard. Because they always emerge "out of order" [*en rupture*], they are politically unthinkable.

However, philosophy, more so than the discourse of political action, has the means to think them. Political reflection often remains content with a historical *description* and acknowledges struggle; but it does not understand that struggle is a necessary mechanism for the emergence of new Minorities. I would like to describe the four theoretical schemas, the four operative ways of understanding Minorities and of doing them justice.

1. The most conservative and classical way of conceiving Minorities is to turn them into re-

sidual, secondary, external phenomena of relics and archaisms, i.e. ultimately irrational phenomena. Two presuppositions are behind this:

a) Political rationality is represented by the Nation or State as unifying, if the meaning of politics is unification;

b) Politics is itself understood as the reason wherein everyone must fulfill themselves.

If we accept these presuppositions, then Minorities will in fact be vanishing² phenomena at the limit of nothingness; they will only have a political least-being, and, at the limit, they will have no political future, no historical destiny, no creative signification for national culture and unity. But, precisely, too often philosophy and political philosophy overemphasize unities either global (People, Nation, State, Sovereign, Country) or specific (a Mother Tongue, a Tradition, a common History, a Culture, etc.). From their point of view, the particularity of such unities is that they involve an apparently simple relation to Minorities, but this relation, unbeknownst to them, is in fact complex. From their point of view, everyone who lays claim to an existence outside or in the margins of these unities has no (political, historical, cultural, etc., i.e. philosophical) existence proper: they are particular deficient modes, modalities of these Unities. They must be understood and reduced as such. And because they have no real existence, there is consequently not even a violent and conflictual *hierarchy* with Minorities. Minorities are *vanishing* and condemned to disappear the moment they manifest themselves on the periphery of the social body. They are political nothingnesses; simple limits by way of absence, privation, political *insufficiency*. Here, politics still has not encountered real opposition, but simply the nothingness or absence of existence. Consequently, there is no longer a proper efficacy or political causality of

² [This notion should be understood in the sense of algebra, i.e. of or relating to a quantity that indefinitely diminishes as it approaches zero - Trans.]

these Minorities; the only causality is that of the unitary social body represented by the sovereign (man, people, State). Political efficacy as a whole goes in a single and linear direction: from Unity towards the vanishing periphery and therefore nowhere. There is a *de jure* impossibility of fixing, placing, and identifying Minorities: their existence is annulled by decree (all political identity comes from elsewhere). The logic of power is to be coextensive with logic. *Minorities are analytically contained in sovereign unitary power, they bring about nothing new = real.* Power is master of itself and therefore master of the political real. *The political auto-determination or auto-position of the sovereign includes Minorities.*

2. A revolutionary conception in the broad philosophical (not simply political) sense of Minorities is much more modern. Minorities will finally have an autonomous existence here, almost as strong as that of the State, but only in the form of a fringe of the State. Their relation to the State would by definition always be a relation of force or tension. Their existence would be non-manifested, not as manifest as that of the social body, but it would act through violence, conflict, the risk of destabilization and “blind” or “primary” terror. Given their reality and thus the constitution of the social relation as a relation of force or hierarchy, it is necessary to examine this relation from two points of view, for there will be a *double causality, both on the one hand and on the other.*

From the State's point of view: a double and no longer single action; *ensemble of the very gesture* specific to any hierarchy, the State can only try to repress them (as Other, Stranger, Unclassifiable) and integrate them through force and violence, be it that of right, which is still a force.

The action of the state is double and single: repress, exclude, internalize. This double relation wherein the social body is *in fact directed by what it represses* is a *symptom*. The social body does not

see Minorities in their reality, does not see what it does, and this double-edged or contradictory repression weighs down on it. It would be necessary to study this complex mechanism of repression or of self-defense, of conflictual repression.

From Minorities' point of view: what is the response?
It is double:

a) Through reversal and terror; they are the source of heterogeneity and conflictuality. This is the flipside of repression. Reversing the hierarchy of relations of force is the only strategy possible; there is no other solution (if at least Minorities exist-as-repressed). The reversal (destabilization as *inversion* of all social relations) is inevitable and positive;

b) Through the global displacement of the Unity of the social and political body which is reorganized otherwise, or whose economy of internal relations is modified. Unity is reconstituted, must be reconstituted in the form of a *global political order* that will be different, wherein Minorities will be heard and their claims will be partially taken into account in the general economy of the forces of a society. These (double) effects signify that global functioning is not much different, yet it is modified. If the claims of regional or popular cultures are taken into account as well as those of social groups primarily perceived as deviant or anomic, what changes is the general tonality of a society. Everything has slowly shifted around, even if whole blocks of social relations have remained as they are.

Here the novelty is the discovery of the *political relation of force* as such, *power as real power* and no longer *logical* or identical to the logical *unity* of the social body. Minorities are no longer analytically contained in socio-political Unity, they are external and necessarily = structurally given in competition with the State and *affect* the political body with finitude.

This conception, which winds up in a quasi-dualism, discovers the *relation of force* as indivisible autonomy, as the only reality. Minorities are simultaneously outside and inside the State and therefore all the more dangerous; what is real is the conflict common to the State and Minorities. The State is condemned to self-defense, but for Minorities it is the other way around. They constitute a sort of Other of the State, a political unconscious of the Nation and even an *other-than-political* unconscious: linguistic, sexual, social, cultural, economic. This unconscious is all of that, masked or disguised by all of that, but globally anti-political. Minorities cannot simply be political, for they are conveyed and masked by all types of social relations. They are individual, but like the Other can be, thus always also *anonymous* like the Other: this is an opaque, obscure, unintelligible power [*puissance*], albeit effective by way of its immediate political non-rationality, by way of this moment or this virtuality of radical terror. Minorities are consequently an instance of *Antipolitics* simultaneously relative and absolute in the political intelligence of a society. But, at the same time, this structural moment of unintelligibility, which is *itself incomprehensible* in its unity with the social body, re-establishes a unity or a new hierarchy with it.

This conception is much more subtle, differentiated, and realist than the preceding one, which is a dogmatic metaphysics of politics. It gives right - right of existence - to Minorities and to their multiplicity as such. *But this is at the price of rendering them unintelligible, obscure like a primary process of force. Hence a third conception that synthesizes the first two by conserving, from the first, its sense of unitary political intelligibility and, from the second, its sense of multiplicity (heterogeneity, alterity), but without turning it into an external unconscious.*

3. Consequently, a third, equally contemporary solution: the synthetic conception of Minorities as “difference.”

It will therefore be acknowledged that we have to think *together* the socio-political Unity, represented by the State or embodied by it, and, at the same time, the heterogeneous multiplicity of individuals, cultures, languages, peoples, sexes, and *therefore*: we have *to think the unity of the individual* (in a broad sense) and the State. Here still and as always, *this identification is not called into question*: the most individual forces can demand their autonomy, but they can only do so in view of the State, a new unity, or a relation ultimately better accomplished by the State. The presupposition is the same: *Minorities* indeed have to struggle against the State, or rather simply struggle against some of its old forms; they are ultimately and even initially inseparable from it, for one continues here more than ever to define Minorities in terms of *force*, struggle, and combat, and therefore in globally political terms.

What, then, is specific to this identity of the State and Minorities? It is difficult to say. Between them, a smaller distance or exteriority is supposed than previously. Minorities are indeed always those who bring about distance, distension, and the risk of ruptures in social relations or in consensus. *But they do nothing but bring it about*, and they alone are the ones who can bring it about everywhere: everyone is minoritarian, there are nothing but Minorities in all social relations: the State is the ensemble of their functioning. There is no longer, as before, a distance between a State supposed given, already there, and Minorities already given but as unconscious. *There is no longer this quasi-duality of realities here, these two modes of heterogeneous realities* that was supposed earlier, including the political and the non-political (the unpolitical is as non-negotiable as ever), but a *single* type of *reality*, which is the political. Hence a return to a conception of the *political-All* or *social-All*, like in the first solution, *where everything is again grasped in Unity and thus also in rationality and intelligibility*. There is indeed a multiplicity, an unconscious if you will, but it is *immediately* embodied by this

superior Unity, a single reality which can thus be read simultaneously as nothing-but multiple, nothing but heterogeneous or also even as nothing-but-statist or nothing but social. *There is no superior and central State on one side and peripheral and marginal Minorities on the other; this would still be to place an exteriority in them, a distance, that of a center fixed to its periphery or a Unity fixed to its margins.* There are nothing but partial sequences of connection that must be called *immediately and inseparably statist-minoritarian*. Every socio-political phenomenon can and must be read as statist or universal - creating a rule for other phenomena which are minoritarian in relation to it - and as itself minoritarian with respect to another that holds as a superior rule. There are *only Relations of force*, forces in relation, but in a greater and smaller distance than any *bond* or synthesis by way of a "generality." The buffer zones between the State and Minorities have been dismantled, including all the economic, institutional, political, and social generalities with which Minorities no longer identify and which they themselves even critique (destruction of the gregarious and intermediate generalities which *code* desire or statist-minoritarian flows), yet all the better to identify themselves with the State.

This is a complex and ambiguous position, for the revolutionary force of Minorities is indeed conserved, but it is limited to non-statist generalities rather than turned against the State itself. On the contrary, is devoted to becoming immanent to individuals and triumphing the ruins of the intermediate and middle bodies. Ultra-anarchism is identical to ultra-statism: an anarchism against the intermediate social forms, but so that Minorities themselves still incarnate the State. The statist-minoritarian complexes *revolutionize or reverse the entire social structure and the whole intermediate social base in a perpetual and unlimited way, all the better for the State to triumph.*

This is a purified position, the pure political diagram relative to the preceding position. But,

above all and consequently, it illuminates an aspect of the philosophical theory of Minorities. The statist-minoritarian connection is purified, manifested as such, relieved of its external forms. *What philosophy can do for Minorities is thus fully manifested.*

I believe that it is the individual who seeks to be heard in Minorities. But all these conceptions are similar because they posit that the individual is ultimately identical to the State, that the individual realizes herself in it, or despite it, but in every way *with* it, that the individual forms a system with the State for better or worse. I call these conceptions "mixed Minorities" or "statist-minoritarian Minorities," and I oppose them - this will be the fourth solution - to another conception, the nothing-but-minoritarian, which will give an absolute right to the individual's claim and would recognize the existence of Minorities absolutely autonomous with respect to the State. The first three conceptions describe the social body, and thus their point of view is still that of the unified social body or the social body of the state; they are on the side of the polis or political reason. This is why, on the one hand, they reduce the existence or reality of Minorities to their struggle - and in struggle it is always the State that is ultimately the victor with a few concessions; and, on the other hand, they remain content with describing the surface of the phenomena without explaining them. From my point of view, these are philosophical and not scientific theories of Minorities; they are engaged or partisan (simultaneously on the State's side and on the side of Minorities - thus still on the State's side, for if one gives a simply political meaning and struggle to Minorities, that would still be on the State's ultimate behalf). Certainly, one can remark that these solutions are increasingly on the verge of recognizing an autonomous reality to Minorities, not merely a right acquired or conquered in struggle, but a reality irreducible to the State, not relative to it, not accidental or irrational, and more so a reality of

opposition to it. Yet these solutions still concede to Minorities a reality of simple competition with the State and remain content with tracing in their concept the most external conflicts (social, cultural, etc.).

For both of these reasons, I prefer a scientific type of description, if possible, of Minorities. By *scientific*, I understand at least this - this is not all, but at least this: a description that would not reduce them to their struggle alone, thus to their relation to the State alone, that would attribute them a reality *before, prior* to their relation to the State, which does not mean that they do not maintain relations with the State! It is a requirement of their description to posit their autonomy. Just like any science implies, in opposition to philosophical and political partisanships, it recognizes an autonomy in its object without mixing its object with something else, a consistency by itself. From my point of view, only a science of Minorities as individuals rather than a political philosophy renders intelligible what is at stake in minoritarian struggles, what is concealed in them, the value of what announces itself, which is the recognition of the individual as such or in her multiplicity; it is the recognition of her reality, which is not necessarily political or cultural or linguistic, etc. Aside from the philosophical Minorities I have described, the only one still possible is *a science of man qua individual* that would replace the renowned “human sciences,” which do nothing but confuse man with her political, social, and historical forms of existence.