

In fact, the history of ignoring national minorities in the New World is inextricably tied up with European beliefs about the inferiority of the indigenous peoples who occupied the land before European settlement. Until recently, they were seen as 'wards' or 'subject races', lacking the political development to qualify as nations, incapable of self-government, and needing the paternalistic protection of their white 'superiors'. Traditional international law did not regard indigenous populations as subjects of international law, and treaties signed with them were not viewed as treaties according to international law, but unilateral acts pertaining to domestic law. These racist attitudes are slowly fading, but they have often been replaced, not with the recognition that indigenous peoples are distinct nations, but with the assumption that they are a disadvantaged 'racial minority' or 'ethnic group' for whom progress requires integration into the mainstream of society. While government policy toward Indians has run the gamut of genocide, expulsion, segregation, and assimilation, the one constant is that governments have never 'genuinely recognized Aboriginal peoples as distinct Peoples with cultures different from, but not inferior to, their own'.<sup>12</sup>

It is wrong, therefore, to say that the New World lacks national minorities—even as a rough generalization. The historical genesis of that claim lies in racist attitudes towards the indigenous peoples, and it continues to perpetuate the invisibility of their claims of justice.

Most countries in the Americas are both multinational and polyethnic, as are most countries in the world. Yet very few countries are prepared to recognize these facts. In the USA, there is ample recognition that the country is polyethnic, but difficulty accepting that the country is also multinational, and that national minorities have special claims of cultural rights and self-government. Countries like Belgium and Switzerland, on the other hand, have long recognized that they contain national minorities whose language rights and self-government claims must be respected. But they have trouble admitting that they are increasingly polyethnic, and, as a result, their traditional conceptions of citizenship cannot fully accommodate immigrants. Canada, with its policy of 'multiculturalism within a bilingual framework' and its recognition of Aboriginal rights to self-government, is one of the few countries which has officially recognized and endorsed both polyethnicity and multinationality.

It is important to note that national groups, as I am using that term, are not defined by race or descent. This is obvious in the case of the majority anglophone society in both the United States and Canada. In both countries, there have been high rates of immigration for over a

century, first from northern Europe, then from southern and eastern Europe, and now mostly from Asia and Africa. As a result, anglophone Americans or Canadians who are of solely Anglo-Saxon descent are a (constantly shrinking) minority.

But the same is true of national minorities as well. The level of immigration into French Canada was low for many years, but is now as high as English Canada or the United States, and Quebec actively seeks francophone immigrants from West Africa and the Caribbean. There have also been high rates of intermarriage between the indigenous peoples of North America and the English, French, and Spanish populations. As a result, all of these national groups are racially and ethnically mixed. The number of French Canadians who are of solely Gallic descent, or American Indians who are of solely Indian descent, is also constantly shrinking, and will soon be a minority in each case.<sup>13</sup>

In talking about national minorities, therefore, I am not talking about racial or descent groups, but about cultural groups.<sup>14</sup> Of course, some national groups define themselves in terms of blood. The most obvious case is Germany. Membership in the German nation is determined by descent, not culture. As a result, ethnic Germans who have lived their whole lives in Russia, and who do not speak a word of German, are automatically entitled to German citizenship, while ethnic Turks who have lived their whole lives in Germany and who are completely assimilated to German culture are not allowed to gain citizenship.

The Afrikaners in South Africa also have a descent-based conception of their nation. They sought to prohibit mixed-race marriages, and excluded the children of such marriages (the 'Coloureds') from their neighbourhoods and organizations, even though the language and culture of the Coloureds are essentially identical to their own. (These residency restrictions, which were allegedly aimed to protect the Afrikaner culture, were never applied to white anglophones who do not speak a word of Afrikaans.)

Such descent-based approaches to national membership have obvious racist overtones, and are manifestly unjust. It is indeed one of the tests of a liberal conception of minority rights that it defines national membership in terms of integration into a cultural community, rather than descent. National membership should be open in principle to anyone, regardless of race or colour, who is willing to learn the language and history of the society and participate in its social and political institutions.

Some people suggest that a truly liberal conception of national membership should be based solely on accepting political principles