

Within these lines of differentiation further distinctions need to be taken into account. The native peoples comprise several different groups including the Métis population. The anglophone-francophone distinction cuts across the other lines of diversity. The anglophone community is highly differentiated ethnically; so is the francophone community, although much less so. Other ethnic groups are numerous. They exhibit a considerable range of variation in factors such as size, acculturation, complexity of social organizations, and geographic concentration.

Despite such internal variations, at a general level there are a number of issues that pertain to all three axes of diversity. Among these is the question of patterns of inequality across ethnic and linguistic groups, and their impact on the cohesion of society.

There is also the matter of the modes of incorporation of members of different ethnic or linguistic communities into the political, economic, educational, and other institutions of the country. Not all communities are integrated into Canadian society in the same way. Their relationship to institutions are not the same. This is also a matter that has considerable bearing on the cohesion of society.

Another issue is the degree of contact and cross-cultural communication across communities. The development of a common culture that each collectively shares and the common symbols with which each identifies is an issue that is related to that of cross-cultural communication. The survival of ethnic and linguistic groups as distinct socio-cultural entities is another matter of relevance for societal cohesion.

These are some definitions that need to be expanded on in the legislation.

Please allow me to give you some history of the native heritage in aboriginal Canada. As European explorers and fur traders began to move into what is now Canada in the sixteenth century, they encountered a number of native cultures that because of their technological simplicity were thought to be uncivilized and backward. There was no system of writing, no metallurgy beyond the pounding of copper in one or two regions, no practical use of the wheel, and virtually no domestication of animals, except the dog.

Government Orders

Only recently has the ingenious nature of native cultures been recognized, particularly their value as adaptive strategies to deal with regional or local environmental conditions; natural conservationists. Native languages were thought to be rudimentary, primitive, and not really worth learning; religions were thought pagan; and social and political structures almost non-existent, based upon custom rather than a coded system of law. Although there were diverse societies speaking in a variety of languages across Canada in aboriginal times, culture and language played almost no part in the official definition of an Indian developed by the federal government.

This definition grew out of the first Indian Act of 1876 in which the principle of patrilineal descent was used to determine who was eligible for registration. This principle is still in force and has been interpreted to mean that only those persons of native ancestry who can trace their descent through the male line to a person originally entitled to be registered are Indians for purposes and benefits of the Indian Act.

An analysis of ethnic differentiation is useful in considering what makes aboriginal issues different than other minorities. There are major differences and these have to be examined.

First, the native communities are in fact not yet fully incorporated into our society. Indeed they exist as a cluster of satellites at the margin of the wider society. Second, native groups have a long historical background as ongoing societies on this continent. Because of this, they are nations, rather than ethnic minorities in the usual sense of the term. I come from a group called the Dene Nation.

This historical background also carries with it an internal diversity. This is a third element of their situation; it is appropriate to talk of native peoples because there are several of them. The diversity is also increased by the presence of non-status Métis and other categories of people of Indian ancestry. A fourth element is territory. It constitutes an important basis of native communities in their economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions. Fifth, both in absolute and relative terms, the population of people of Indian ancestry is quite small.