

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

Recognizing Difference/Achieving Equality: Multiculturalism and Gender Justice

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Summary

This paper examines the history and current contours of the debate over cultural diversity and sexual equality in political theory and practice, with particular attention to the Canadian dimension. Although some scholars contend the two cannot be reconciled, the author argues that the work of feminist multiculturalists and others engaged in these conversations offer a basis for rethinking the connections between gender justice and cultural pluralism. Canadian scholars have been at the forefront of multiculturalism theory and practice, as well as feminist multicultural critiques. Although Canadian scholarship and practice have much to contribute to the debate, it is also true that Canada's unique pluralistic context – particularly the centrality of Quebec and First Nations peoples throughout its history – has profoundly shaped Canadian approaches to these issues. Moreover, although Canada's model of multiculturalism is relatively progressive, it fails to be inclusive enough, in part because its understanding of “culture” is overly narrow. These observations both open possibilities for and place important limitations on efforts to “globalize” the Canadian pluralism experience.