

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

Pluralism as Process: Places and Spaces for Managing Diversity

Jane Jenson

Canada Research Chair in Citizenship and Governance
Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada

Summary

This essay comments on the themes emerging from the four papers – by Abu Laban, Good, Bowlby, and McAndrew – examining the processes by which a pluralist society such as Canada manages its diversity. Since its inception, Canada has continually been preoccupied with the state of its identity and maintaining unity within diversity. Given that xenophobia continues to exist and that diversity has not been universally valued, maintaining unity not been easy. Canada's public institutions of liberal democracy, education, cities, and religious pluralism have all functioned as key spaces for managing diversity. Pluralism is played out within civil society as well as in public institutions. The essay highlights three ideas raised in all four papers: first, that the patterns of pluralism, as well as the spaces for managing diversity, change over time; second, that social imaginaries play a key role in shaping the spaces, places, and repertoire of action of Canadian pluralism; and third, that it is institutional configurations rather than individual public-policy interventions that matter for success or failure in the managing of diversity.