

Citizenship

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The debates surrounding the theory and practice of citizenship have gained increased prominence in the last decade. They have been partially prompted by an increasing awareness of the role played by the civil society and its relationship to state apparatus. But the emergence of cross-border migration as a major feature of the post-Cold War era has also aided this phenomenon.

Women as Citizens in Australia

With a large number of individuals and groups migrating across the globe due to a variety of political, economic and social reasons, issues have emerged surrounding the rights and responsibilities of citizens, natives and denizens. That analysts are grappling with the effects of these changes is apparent in the publication of a number of good books on citizenship in the last ten years. Will Kymlicka, for instance, has delved into the question of multicultural citizenship, whereas Thomas Janoski has investigated the linkages between civil society and citizenship.¹

The project on 'Women and Citizenship' at the University of Western Australia is attempting to contribute to this renewed investigation into the theory and practice of citizenship, placing a special emphasis on women. The project, consisting in two distinct phases, has been funded through a Large grant from the Australian Research Council since 1995. Professor Trish Crawford and Dr Philippa Maddern of the History Department, University of Western Australia, directed the first phase, which lasted from 1995-97. It focused on the theoretical issues of citizenship and its implications for women in Australia during the last century. The second phase, currently being directed by Dr Samina Yasmeen from the Department of Political Science, University of Western Australia, is concerned with assessing the views of women from ethnically-diverse backgrounds on being Australian citizens.

To this end, the methodology developed to assess the settlement needs of Muslims in the Perth metropolitan area has become a valuable tool for investigating attitudes towards citizenship among women.² Initiated in 1994, the project relied heavily on detailed qualitative interviews that enabled the respondents to identify their most pressing settlement needs and elaborate the reasons behind their specific choices. It also encouraged Muslim women to discuss their own specific needs instead of articulating their views on the needs of other Muslim women and men. The data thus collected indicated significant differences in the manner in which Muslim men and women understood and articulated their settlement needs and elaborated on their relationship to their adopted homeland, Australia. While Muslim men focused on education and employment as their most pressing needs, their female counterparts treated their settlement needs in an integrated and holistic manner. For them, access to female health professionals, availability of halal food, and safety were as important as the educational needs of their children. Significantly, unlike men, who were concerned about preserving the Islamic identity of Muslims living in Australia, women were more concerned about their day-to-day living. This involved their concerns about the acceptability of Muslim women who wore *hijab*, obviously subscribing to a different dress code. Cumulatively, the data collected indicated that Muslim men focused more on the economic and political aspects of citizenship, whereas Muslim women attached equal importance to the psychological aspect of being an Australian citizen.

These ideas raised a number of questions of linkages between religion, ethnicity, gender and citizenship. Why do women migrate to liberal democracies? How do they define their

identity? To what extent are their views influenced by their experiences in their home countries? What role does religion play in formulation and articulation of identity? How significant is culture in determining women's notion of citizenship. The methodology used in the project also indicated the value of in-depth interviews in which women were encouraged to voice their opinions on numerous issues without the interference or presence of other members of their family. The experience thus gained has formed the basis for a large-scale sociological survey to ascertain the views of immigrant women on being Australian citizens. A questionnaire has been developed which consists in two parts. The quantitative part deals with the demographic profile of the respondents and uses indices that facilitate placing the information gathered within the larger Australian and Western Australian context. The second part of the questionnaire is essentially qualitative in nature. It is designed to elicit the views of the interviewees on what it means to be an Australian, and how they perceive themselves in relation to other Australians. The respondents are also asked to discuss their conceptions of their rights and duties as Australian citizens and the extent to which they are willing and able to act on the basis of these conceptions. These data are being used to assess linkages between migration, ethnicity, religion and citizenship among Australian women.

With the exception of its native inhabitants, the aborigines, Australians are essentially a nation of migrants. While selecting a sample of immigrant women, therefore, the project on 'Women and Citizenship' has chosen to assess the views of Anglo-Celtic women as well as those from other ethnic communities. The list includes women from Afghanistan, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand and the United Kingdom. The sample is not restricted to Muslim women and includes representatives from all major religious groups such as Baha'is, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs. A number of research associates are employed to interview representatives from these communities. They are also entrusted with the task of interpreting the data by using a qualitative data analysis programme, Nu-Dist.

The results of individual sub-projects will be published as an edited volume. The preliminary results, however, have already led to a number of interesting observations. To begin with, a large majority of women interviewed have immigrated to Australia as part of a family unit. Irrespective of their socio-economic background, most of the women interviewed have not dealt with the question of citizenship at a conceptual level. Hence, when asked to define their identity with respect to 'a perceived Australian identity', they refer to the experience of living in a space as the evidence of their 'Australian-ness' rather than discussing the legal rights and duties conferred upon them as Australian citizens. Beyond the existential aspect of their citizenship, however, differences do exist in the manner in which women from different ethnic backgrounds define their identity. An assumed, but not clearly articulated, hierarchy of citizens seems to exist. Those from Anglo-Celtic background,

including women who have migrated from Britain, feel more accepted and acknowledged than, for instance, women from Iran, Egypt and even Italy. The level of belonging changes with the duration of stay and is closely linked to the socio-economic background of the respondents. Interestingly, however, Afghan women who migrated since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan do not fit into this pattern. Aware of the impossibility of returning to their home country, these women demonstrate a distinct ability and willingness to operate in both the market and public spheres and ensure that the state structures are aware of their specific needs. They have achieved this in less than 20 years. In fact, these women also are different from a large majority of other Muslim women who shy away from participating in the political and economic spheres.

Equally interestingly, for some women the legal act of being conferred citizenship is not an essential prerequisite for feeling and being an Australian. For instance, some Malaysian and Indonesian women have lived in Australia as permanent residents and chosen not to forego their Malaysian and Indonesian citizenship for economic and legal reasons. Nevertheless, their sense of belonging and willingness to be active members of civil society have not been compromised. 'We feel homesick for Australia when we are away in our home country' is a remark heard from these women.

Culture appears to be the main area in which women tend to distinguish themselves from other fellow Australians. While acknowledging that they are all Australians, most of the women, including immigrants from England, emphasize the differences between themselves and the 'others' in Australia. So dominant is this emphasis on culture that sometimes it even ignores religious differences. Women from Egypt and Iran, for instance, rely more on their cultural identity than their religious identity to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Australians. Similarly, women from India and Pakistan acknowledge the religious and political differences between their home countries, but often refer to the common cultural context in which they operate as citizens in Australia.

This is not to deny the role played by religion in defining a respondent's sense of identity. Rather, the interviews suggest that the women's cultural identity incorporates their religious identity and guides them in the extent to, and the manner in, which they move beyond the private sphere into market, public and state spheres. Nor is it to suggest that religion is always subservient to cultural identity. A number of Muslim women interviewed do refer to themselves as, say, Pakistani, Afghan or Iranian. But for some other women, Islam emerges as the main defining feature of their identity. Some of the Muslim women interviewed, for instance, belong to such nascent Muslim organizations as the Muslim Women's Support Group and the Sisters-in-Islam group. Their social interactions are restricted to these groups which also emerge as a main source of information on Islam for these women. Both these women and others who are not members of associations tend to explain their attitudes towards, and opinions on, social, economic and political issues in terms of Islamic teachings. Religious affiliation and ideas, how-

ever, also creates differences among these women and their sense of identity. Some Muslim women, for instance, regularly attend luncheon seminar sessions organized at neutral venues such as educational institutions or government support centres. Others insist on gathering only in places that are clearly 'Islamic' and unquestionably serve halal meals. To put it differently, the data collected for Muslim women through the 'Women and Citizenship' project builds on the knowledge acquired through the project on 'Gender-Based Assessment of Settlement Needs of Muslims Living in Perth Metropolitan Area'. It suggests that while Islam plays a unifying role for Muslims living in Western Australia, different interpretations of Islamic teachings intermingled with cultural differences can also contribute to divisions among Muslim women. These different interpretations can also form the matrix within which Muslim women define their identity as Australian citizens. ◆

For further information, please check our web-site. This can be found by looking up 'projects' at <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/>

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Notes

1. Will Kymlicka (1995), *Multicultural Citizenship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Thomas Janoski (1998), *Citizenship and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Other examples of good works on citizenship include J.M. Barbelet (1988), *Citizenship: Rights, Struggle and Class Inequality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Bryan Turner (1993), *Citizenship and Social Theory*. Newbury Park, California: Sage; and Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller (1993), *The Age of Migration*. New York: Guilford Press.
2. Samina Yasmeen and Salma Al-Khudairi, *Gender-Based Assessment of Settlement Needs of Muslims Living in Perth Metropolitan Area*, Research Report submitted to the Department of Immigration, Government of Australia, Canberra, 1998.