Women—State—Citizenship: Selected Bibliography on the Politics of the Production of Knowledge

Helene Moussa

This bibliography reflects my readings during the year that I held the Kathleen Ptolemy Research Fellowship (1993–94) at CRS. The purpose of my research project was to examine the effectiveness of the implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) Guidelines issued by the IRB Chairperson on Guidelines on Women Refugee Claimants Fearing Gender-Related Persecution (March 9, 1993). A "simple" approach would have been to analyze positive and negative decisions and come to some conclusion(s). While such a study would have produced interesting and useful information, I decided to remove myself from policy discourse so as to raise "different" questions as a social scientist and as a feminist.

The priorities in the selection of the literature were: (1) to explore feminist literature (production of knowledge) on citizenship, the state, and the law, and (2) to examine literature by women (and men) from the South on their realities. A strong emphasis in the selection of readings was postmodern literature. The reason for this "bias" is that postmodernists challenge commonly held meanings, among other questions that can unravel the politics of the production of knowledge in dominant discourse(s).

I also decided to contextualize my readings by focusing on the literature on gender, women, and Islam. This decision was motivated by a concern about the intensive and highly negative media reporting on Islamic states and Muslims in Canada and abroad, exemplified by a critical article in the Toronto Star (1992) titled "demonizing the Arab." My questions were, how the ideological perspective of IRB members and lawyers influences their decisions when they listen to refugee women's stories, and how these decisions get generalized because of "culture." A forthcoming publication of Professor Sherene Razack (OISE) on this topic will certainly reveal how dominant (colonizer) ideology filters the perspective of legal discourse, and the implications of these decisions for the "colonized."

This bibliography is by no means exhaustive. If I have missed some important literature it may be because I read them prior to fall of 1993 (only five of these resources are included); I may not have "found" them; or because I was highly stimulated by my readings and ready to integrate them in my continued research project. One of my concerns continues to be the highly legal discourse of the IRB literature and practice, as well as what I, as a sociologist, would name the "cultural environment" of the IRB. The question here focused on the constraints of this "culture," while recognizing that "justice" is the intended goal. Posed another way, the question is how the humanitarian principles of the Convention fit in the implementation of the IRB Gender-Related Persecution Guidelines. The headings of this bibliography reflect themes I found critical in this exploration. Had I remained in Canada I would have followed up this review of the literature with an "organizational culture" study of the IRB as an institution.

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INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS: FOCUS ON YOUTH

The Centre for Refugee Studies and the Centre for Feminist Research at York University will host a conference to raise awareness of issues surrounding human rights, labour, and exile with respect to youth and particularly young women and girls.

Date: Monday, March 6 — Wednesday, March 8, 1995
Place: York University • Toronto • Canada

Workshop areas include:
- Family law
- Child labour and adolescents in the workforce
- Race, class, ethnicity and religion
- Education and gender role stereotyping
- Health
- Post-conflict and children as peacemakers
- Sexuality
- Violence and violation
- Girls and adolescents as immigrants, migrants, and refugees
- The risk of being conceived female • The silencing of the girl child

For registration and further information on the conference, please contact:

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