

# REVIEWS



Amy Brandzel, *Against Citizenship: The Violence of the Normative (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2016)*, 210 p. ISBN 9780252081507.

The recent case of Shamima Begum in the UK has shown to stark effect the racialised dynamics behind citizenship in the so-called civilised world. For those of us who have always lived the tension between citizenship and belonging, the proof that we may have what amounts to second class citizenship may cause anguish, but will not have come as a surprise. Shamima Begum was one of three teenagers that joined ISIS in Syria during the height of its power, leaving behind the seemingly comfortable and settled life of a UK citizen resident in her own country. Following a highly publicised media interview the home secretary, Sajid Javid, stripped Begum of her citizenship. UK law prevents citizenship from being revoked if this would result in the person being rendered stateless, but in Begum's case Javid argued that her Bangladeshi heritage could allow her to claim citizenship in that country, meaning that she would not become stateless. Begum's is only one in a series of cases where racialised subjects have had their citizenship removed in the name of national security, as Nisha Kapoor has shown in her excellent book, *Deport, Deprive, Extradite*.<sup>1</sup> This weaponisation of citizenship is easily anticipated if we follow the logical conclusion to the arguments presented in Amy Brandzel's new book, *Against Citizenship*, which is a detailed and passionate account of the shortcomings of contemporary citizenship with a particular focus on the US. Brandzel argues that citizenship (or the promise of it) has been used to undermine diverse and intersectional coalitions across race, gender, class, and other lines, by promoting a single-issue approach that has not only served to atomise resistance, but has also actively harmed marginalised others. The three main chapters of the book make this argument via a close analysis of hate crime legislation, same-sex marriage law, and Native Hawaiian sovereignty.

There is much to admire in this book, which offers a carefully observed and balanced argument of the tension between the need for inclusion within citizenship for those who have been denied its many privileges, and the problems that such inclusion brings. There is also a passing critique of citizenship studies, whose exponential growth might be considered "a part of the governmentality of citizenship itself, whereby this scholarship can participate in the management of difference" (7). This resonates strongly

<sup>1</sup> Nisha Kapoor, *Deport, Deprive, Extradite: Twenty-First Century State Extremism* (London; New York: Verso, 2018).

with current critiques of migration studies, which is seen as taking advantage of the miseries of undocumented migrants, while at the same time contributing to that misery by being complicit in the policing of borders.<sup>2</sup> Brandzel's approach is therefore focused not only on providing an academic critique of citizenship, but is based on the work of social movements for justice through a close analysis of legislation and particular legal cases. The arguments in the book weigh up the many protections of hate crime legislation that nonetheless disavow the simple fact that the greatest perpetrators of hate crimes in the US are law enforcement officials. They tackle the hard won privileges of same-sex marriage next to the suppression of the "monstrous difference" that a queer politics cultivates.<sup>3</sup> And finally, Brandzel discusses the toxic way in which race and colonialism are set up against each other in denying Native Hawaiian sovereignty. Across these different examples, an argument unfolds that through incremental inclusion and legislative action, intersectional and complex demands become simplified in the name of one identity category, be it race, same-sex partnerships or indigenous sovereignty, with activists and campaigners couching their demands in language and through arguments that seek to make "monstrous difference" recognisable and therefore assimilable.

The first chapter offers a history of hate crime legislation from "data collection to sentence enhancement" (36) and to current understandings of its origin in the civil rights era. Yet, as Brandzel points out, the only point of reference is the Civil Rights Act of 1871, which focused on prosecuting organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan. What is elided in these comparisons are all the other laws that were directed towards federal and state authorities who could also be potential perpetrators of such criminal acts against African Americans. This has led to an implicit understanding that hate crime legislation is designed for nongovernmental actors, and yet as we know from recent and historical events, police brutality is and should be understood as a hate crime. It leads to "[...] the cruel paradox that hate crime legislation enhances the criminal justice system in the name of protecting those very same communities that they most actively criminalize and brutalize" (37). Brandzel also discusses a two-tier system within this legislation in the US, where protected identity categories are statistically tracked and federally prosecuted. Whereas traditional categories of race, colour, religion, and national origin can be prosecuted under federal law as hate crimes only, newer categories such as gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability require another law to be broken, such as an interstate crime being committed, before there can be a prosecution. The chapter, whilst critical of hate crime legislation, offers a balanced account, with the

<sup>2</sup> Joshua Hatton, "MARS Attacks! – A Cautionary Tale from the UK on the Relation between Migration and Refugee Studies (MARS) and Migration Control," *Movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018), pp. 103–29.

<sup>3</sup> Here Brandzel builds on Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai's analysis of how monstrosity has been mobilised in relation to the "war on terror" Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text* 20 (2002), no. 3, pp. 117–48.

author going to some lengths to show that the legislation has resulted in the training of police, the involvement of community groups in helping practice the legislation, and the tracking of statistics that have certainly contributed to better conditions for many racialised people in the US.

A slightly shorter chapter follows on same-sex marriage, also tracing the evolution of legislation to show how marriage has been used as one of the most powerful means of producing a particular kind of normative citizen. Brandzel shows how this legislative success has served to blunt a queer politics that through exposing fears around perverse sexualities had been able to question the inclusionary claims of normative citizenship. This chapter outlines the beginnings and aborted promise of the sort of coalitional politics that is being called for throughout the book. Through a discussion of an earlier phase of the struggle, Brandzel shows how legislative cases in the 1970s exposed the fluidity of categories of sex, gender, and sexuality. For example, a case in Hawaii challenged the denial of same-sex marriage on the basis of sexual discrimination, leading to a convoluted argument over whether this was based on sexuality or what the court referred to as “sex.” As Brandzel states, this led to “*a necessary and appropriate* confusion about the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality, as well as the anxiety that these are, in fact, social constructs” (81). The Hawaii case led to the liberal compromise of offering same-sex couples similar rights, but preserving the institution of marriage for heterosexual couples only. In the rest of the chapter, Brandzel goes on to show how this initial compromise led to the expunging of the intertwined relationships between sexuality, class, race, gender, sexual deviance, etc. In one powerful example, Brandzel further shows how an argument for the civility of marriage and family life that has been central to the success of same-sex marriage legislation has undermined Native claims of sovereignty by disavowing kinship practices that do not fit this model.

The final chapter before the conclusion focuses on such claims of sovereignty in the case of Hawaii and the way in which race and indigeneity are brought together in opposition to each other in the machinations of US settler-colonialism. Through a close analysis of the Supreme Court ruling in *Rice vs. Cayetano* (2000), Brandzel shows how a discourse around colour blindness is mobilised as a colonial strategy against indigenous rights. The case was brought by a white resident of Hawaii with support from the Campaign for a Color-Blind America Legal Defense, challenging an attempt to limit voting rights for an Office of Hawaiian Affairs to those of Hawaiian descent. The arguments revolved around competing historical narratives that either attempted to erase or acknowledge the US colonial past and the Hawaiian struggle for self-determination that resulted in the liberal response of granting some exclusive rights to “Native Hawaiians.” This, of course, required Hawaiians to be classified through racial categories based on blood, meaning that Hawaiian claims to sovereignty were transformed into a question of civil rights through the racialisation of Hawaiians as “Kanaka Maoli.” The argument for the case created a false equivalence between the long struggle for voting rights in the US by African-Americans, which was based on a claim of racial equality,

and opposition to a law that aimed at empowering historically disenfranchised groups, based on the fact that the new law identified a disenfranchised group in racial terms. A second false equivalence that was invoked ostensibly in support of the Kanaka Maoli made analogies between them and Native Americans, who have been granted limited political status. Yet the simple choice between a racial and political identity serves to obscure the highly complex ways in which race, colonialism, slavery, and empire come together in indigenous lives. As Brandzel argues, this rewriting of history has led to an “anti-intersectional logic” that separates the processes of racism and colonialism, and has also resulted in the unfortunate consequence that some Hawaiian nationalists have reproduced this bifurcation to make highly racialised (and sometimes allegedly racist) claims not only against white settlers but also against other ethnic groups. What this chapter shows is the absolute necessity of not producing a hierarchy of subjugation within and across marginalised groups, but instead to aim for a transversal politics that creates alliances across diverse communities.

*Against Citizenship* is a call for such alliances based on a situated, intersectional approach to politics that is advocated insistently throughout the text. I agree with Brandzel’s intersectional critique of citizenship, but the book also leaves me wondering where we go from here. In shifting the critique away from the nation-state towards citizenship, I wonder if we may also lose sight of a way into the coalitional politics that Brandzel is calling for. Perhaps in our contemporary moment what is required is a consideration of how the environmental crisis speaks to the need for a new conception of citizenship. Does citizenship still hold the same exclusionary power when removed from the framework of the nation state? Can the increasingly fraught question of the environment and the dying planet we now inhabit allow us to reconceptualise our relationship to each other and to our collective home? Here I am following Gayatri Spivak’s critique of the notion of the global understood through finance capital and information technologies, and her call to think instead of the planetary as the figure of alterity. “The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan [...]. If we imagine ourselves as planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away.”<sup>4</sup> This sense of being inside but not completely of is an important mode for thinking a new conception of citizenship that does not attempt to make alliances based on recognition, but is instead an unhoming device. It deals with one of the problems, conceptually, with nation-state citizenship, where there is an artificial demarcation, or a bordering mechanism that is essential to delimiting the inside and the outside, what citizenship rights depend upon. Today, as we inhabit an ecological crisis of our own making, the outside, as in outer space, is precisely to where the colonising gaze has turned. I can think of many examples here: Elon Musk’s car stunt, or the recent news of an Israeli probe contaminating the Moon with tardigrades, or the Japanese landing

<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 72–73.

on a comet presumably for mining purposes. At this juncture, perhaps it is important to think our modes of belonging and citizenship, as demarcated by the bounds of our planet, which for me would mean that there might be something salvageable in the notion of citizenship thought as planetary, precisely for its provincialising capacities on the one hand and its profound alterity on the other.

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