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## BOOK REVIEW

**Alice E Finden\***

**Rosemarie Buikema, Antoine Buyse and Antonius C.G.M Robben (eds),  
Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights (Routledge, 2020) 258 pp. ISBN 978-0-367-18561-9 (hbk) ISBN 978-9-429-19858-8 (ebk) (paperback)**

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The disparities between the unhindered movement of capital and the stymied movement of people are becoming all the more apparent and violent in the contemporary moment. From the bolstering of physical walls to the continuous repetition of symbolic violence; practices of bordering are perhaps the primary characteristic of the neoliberal nation state. For newer migrant and asylum-seeking communities, the borders of citizenship are becoming increasingly solidified as Europe continues to function in a permanent state of emergency. At the time of writing, the world is eight months into responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, which itself poses new questions about what citizenship means.

The volume *Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights* edited by Rosemarie Buikema, Antoine Buyse and Antonius C.G.M Robben makes a timely contribution in this context. This interdisciplinary collection of works explores the acceleration of neoliberal performances of the crisis narrative with regards to shifting forms of citizenship. Through its engagement with temporality, the volume importantly reminds us that practices of bordering are not an

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aberration of our time. Indeed, nearly thirty years ago Stuart Hall's article 'Europe's Other Self' already warned that the terms 'refugees' and 'fundamentalism' were the favourite discursive markers with respect to the construction of Europeanness.<sup>1</sup> While it shows how the borders of citizenship are shifting along with the upsurge in right-wing populism, the volume also demonstrates how the negotiation of citizenship entails the creation of new forms of solidarity, belongingness and futurity.

This edited collection represents the product of a multi-year interdisciplinary research project based at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Containing chapters that speak across multiple disciplines including human rights law, conflict resolution, anthropology, history, media studies, gender studies, critical race and postcolonial studies, the editors have curated an expansive and varied volume that primarily highlights the shifting forms and boundaries of citizenship in contemporary neoliberal societies. Buikema, Buyse and Robben have carefully organised chapters into three different sections: mediation, sovereignty and contestation. When read together, and especially across sections, the contributions clearly build upon, complicate and add nuance to and between one another.

As a highlight of its interdisciplinary approach, the volume offers space for imagining beyond the liberal project of citizenship. By foregrounding mixed methods approaches, interrogating the boundaries of 'acceptable' knowledge production, and working with alternative epistemologies, the volume works within, alongside and beyond the framework of human rights. It offers simultaneously pragmatic and utopian visions of freedom that speak to other scholarly reimaginings of the human rights project.<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff's chapter on the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA is both a product of his own digital editing methods and an engagement with bodily and visual acts of resistance. Mirzoeff traces how the 'co-presence between physical and digital spaces' is generative of freedom for the performance of Blackness (16). Black

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Europe's Other Self' (1991) *Marxism Today*. <

[http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/91\\_08\\_18.pdf](http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/91_08_18.pdf)> accessed 13 May 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ratna Kapur, *Gender, Alterity and Human Rights: Freedom in a Fishbowl* (Elgar Studies, 2018).

Lives Matter use the continual remembering of the past and the creation of archives in order to imagine alternative futures.

By expanding the understanding of citizenship from a fixed model of civic rights to an assemblage of performative cultural, religious and political acts, we are better able to understand why, as Dirk van Miert puts it in chapter eleven, 'people who have the full legal status of a citizen do not participate fully in society' (202). Many of the chapters work from understandings of fragmented sovereignty which, in moving significantly beyond Schmittian and Agambenian constructions of sovereign power, allow us to frame the political and the agential within the personal and the everyday. In chapter five, for instance, Gregory Feldman understands love as transcending the traditional boundaries of politics, producing newness from levels of the erotic to collective action. While Feldman's chapter provides an affective approach to politics and revolution, he still maintains a divide between spaces of erotic desire and the political. This chapter suggests a need for engagement with queer and feminist work that not only locates politics within erotic, non-normative love, but also examines the political economy from a variety of emotions.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the chapters highlight the increasing trend towards a 'culturalization of citizenship'. This is primarily understood across the volume as a form of belonging and a set of rights shaped through the intersections of race, religion and nation. Birgit Meyer explores this in chapter four by following how Dutch Christian memorabilia have come to be re-used in secular settings. Meyer's chapter illustrates the racialisation of a 'progressive citizenship' that is marked by the ability to tolerate blasphemy: where those who are hurt by the defamation of religious symbols are labelled as intolerant and uncivilised. In chapter two, Lola De Koning, Elaine Nolten and Koen Leurs explore similar themes of cultural difference in their research into the acts of inclusion performed by local community and grassroots radio stations in The Netherlands. While the stations provide platforms to express different acts of

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009); Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Duke University Press, 2011); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

citizenship, they simultaneously highlight the inclusive exclusion of migrant and diaspora communities. The authors chime with Ahmed's understanding of conditional hospitality, where a 'welcome in' is conditioned upon an integration into the whitened structures of the nation.<sup>4</sup>

While the volume focuses mainly on European states, it is reflective and self-critical of its Eurocentrism by highlighting the contested borders of Europe, transnational networks of solidarity and malleability of human rights. In chapter ten, from her fieldwork in Indonesia, Julie Fraser performs a detailed explanation of the interpretive approach of Islamic law to show how the religion's dynamism allows for adaptive and women-centred understandings of human rights. Fraser makes the argument that religion should be understood as a source and promoter of human rights. Together, chapters two, four and ten point to the need for engagement with Dutch coloniality as a basis for understanding contemporary citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

The volume is a significant read not only for those interested in the shifting boundaries of citizenship, but also for those with an interest in methodologies and methods. In chapter twelve, Sandra Ponzanesi considers the art of Ai Wei Wei as a powerful space of political change. Foregrounding art and citizen media, she makes the point that not only is intellectual labour also performed outside of academia, but 'that the myth of intellectuals is also informed by professions and market dynamics' (218). Dirk van Miert uses methods in a similarly critical way. In his chapter on the (lack of) space for women to participate in the Republic of Letters – a pan-European intellectual community between 1400 and 1800 – van Miert delves into the silences of the archives in order to wonder about structurally gendered obstacles. His work is relevant to the modern-day academy, where the boundaries of disciplines, knowledge production and funding continue to be porous primarily to the White European man. By utilising innovative methods, contributors to the

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<sup>4</sup> Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included, Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Duke University press, 2012) 43.

<sup>5</sup> See work, for example, work by Ann Laura Stoler.

volume navigate the difficult border that governs forms of knowledge within academia.

While *Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights* provides rich and varied texts on paradigm shifts in state attitudes towards migration, religion, race, youth and gender, reference to queer and LGBTIA+ minorities feels somewhat absent. The struggle for LGBTIA+ rights presents one of the most contested shifts in cultural attitudes that is still very much undergoing significant transformation. Queer and LGBTIA+ activists and academics have a long history of negotiating space both within and outside of the framework of citizenship and human rights. Today, queer and LGBTIA+ communities are facing a revival in crackdowns on rights and freedoms with the upsurge in right-wing populism in countries throughout Europe.<sup>6</sup> While LGBTIA+ rights are often framed as being in conflict with religious freedoms, this argument not only has little ground, but also helps to bolster racist frameworks and physical and symbolic borders. Further engagement with this citizenship frame is crucial.

Buikema, Buyse and Robben's volume is a perfect example of how interdisciplinary thinking acts as a basis for open-minded research. The combination of contributions provides complex and overlapping understandings of citizenship that are attentive to intersectional forms of oppression. By questioning the boundaries of knowledge production, the volume is appealing to a wide audience that extends beyond the academic sphere. Its interdisciplinarity and mixed-methods approach galvanises new questions and provides a space to think beyond current limited frameworks of citizenship towards new imaginations of freedom.

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<sup>6</sup> ILGA Europe, 'Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia' (ILGA, 2020) <<https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Annual%20Review%202020.pdf>> accessed 13 May 2020.