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BRADY G'SELL. *REWORKING CITIZENSHIP: RACE, GENDER AND KINSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA*. STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2024. 312 P.

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Decades of disillusionment with the post-apartheid promise of democracy, which ignited in South Africa during mass protests in 2021, underpin *Reworking citizenship: race, gender and kinship in South Africa*. Based on two decades of engagement with the country and one spent in the Point neighbourhood of Durban (57), Brady G'sell deftly ties literature on race, gender, and labour into a well-considered discussion of 'relational citizenship' (204-205). *Reworking citizenship* is anchored around the notion of kinshipping, or 'the formation and solidification of relationships expressed in a kinship idiom' (5). For her informants, social and political belonging was 'constituted through […] relationships that were insecure' (186). Forging these webs of relationships with family, neighbours, lovers, and the state becomes 'the very structure by which economic resources are distributed and social reproduction is enabled' (16). Kinshipping becomes a way of creating and maintaining those relationships, of making them feel more secure through reciprocal economic, affective, and political obligations. Methodologically eclectic, G'sell provides a textured account of the increasingly politicised category of motherhood through oral histories, participant observation, archival research, and interviews.

The first three chapters provide historical and contemporary context, while the last three explore different livelihood strategies. Chapter 1 lays out the Point neighbourhood as 'segregated yet heterogenous, interdependent yet discordant, and poor yet rich in resources' (58). The resulting 'kinshipping in a kinless place' (42) makes livelihood strategies and their justifications starkly visible. Chapter 2 historicises the category of motherhood through an analysis of welfare policies. Apartheid was sustained through the welfare state, testifying to the anxieties of white national purity and maintaining race and class hierarchies. In Chapter 3, G'sell explores the crafting – and policing – of good motherhood through Children's Court cases from 1949 to 1998. The archival ethnographies of Grace, Magdalena, and Rosemary demonstrate how the shifting categories of race, gender, and class are also instrumentalised by women in the Point. With detailed ethnographic vignettes of the quotidian negotiations of Point mothers, Chapter 4 centres on the lives of 15 women and examines the 'repertoires of verbal and nonverbal expression' (137) characteristic of the fluid perception of motherhood. Chapter 5 takes us courtside, exploring Maintenance Courts as 'a performative sphere of democracy' (167) through which not only are claims for resources made, but the intimate economies of modern South Africa are renegotiated. The decision to take a former boyfriend to court was torn between longing for reconnection or retribution (171), providing another

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strategy for rhetorical empowerment, material redistribution, and ultimately reworking belonging in the nation. Chapter 6 describes another such livelihood strategy, investigating the often poorly perceived marriages between South African women and foreign African men. Her continued references to multiple interviews with social workers (Chapter 3) are particularly insightful. Their experience reminds us to investigate institutional oppression not solely through an ideological lens but also through the personal affective relationships that actors of the state build in their daily work. The overall emphasis on the social relations that signify political and economic belonging in South Africa provides compelling support for Nyamnjoh's advocacy of 'relational citizenship' premised on the interdependence of persons.

The transformation of citizenship captured by G'sell is acknowledged as being the result of global neoliberalisation and its restructuring of the nation-state as premised on economic participation (Brown 2015). This situates *Reworking citizenship* firmly within the now well-discussed turn to 'Dark Anthropology'. There is undeniable value in both those 'cultural critiques' that dissect the dark realities of the world we live in and the body of work which explores new social movements while critically unpacking monolithic assumptions about neoliberalism and capitalism (Ortner 2016). G'sell's work sits in the former category, and the potential Point mothers' claim-making offers for imagining alternative futures is not done justice. Despite being mentioned at the end of the conclusion (211-214), the activist outlook remains understated throughout the body of the monograph. *Reworking citizenship* could more effectively distance itself from being an ethnography of suffering that fringes on what could be read as 'voyeuristic quasi-pornography' (Kelly 2013).

Emphatically embracing the incompleteness of citizenship (Nyamnjoh 2022) forces us to reconsider hegemonic assumptions about the perfect citizen and their genealogies. Especially flagrant in a post-apartheid South Africa where the feeling of empty democracy is prevalent (1), 'no institution, however carefully thought through from the outset, is perfect' (Nyamnjoh 2022: 597). The axiomatic completeness of juro-legal citizenship obscures the potential affordances that characterise Point mothers' kinshipping. G'sell's discussion of the Muslim Sisterhood (Chapter 6) stands out here. Instead of being framed on what these relationships lack, she focuses on how important Zulu and Xhosa social values such as *ilobolo* (bridewealth payment) are renegotiated in light of cultural differences and the changing nature of labour. Paying *ilobolo* not only reinstated the social value of future wives (194) but also secured social reproduction and in doing so 'strengthened feelings of belonging within South Africa' (186). Instead of trying to simulate the social status of marriage and thus alleviating the burden of not conforming to modern citizenship standards, marrying foreigners becomes mobilised in transforming the very parameters of that citizenship. Moving beyond the bleakness felt throughout the chapters, 'hustling' and 'getting by' can thus be reframed as more than everyday weapons of resistance: they become methodological and theoretical tools in their own right. The various livelihood strategies described are no longer forms of strategic survival or simple examples of relational citizenship for Point women but become the way through which we should rethink the category of citizenship itself.

Overall, the historical depth of its highly textured ethnographic material makes *Reworking citizenship* a well-considered template for studies of South Africa and offers rich comparative perspectives for scholars deconstructing the rigid categories of citizenship more generally. Understanding social reproduction through the mobilisation of race, class, and the increasingly politicised category of motherhood is essential to seeing inequities only visible when considering 'citizenship as lived' (204). Relational citizenship, wherein Point mothers 'demanded collective recognition that they were not just autonomous subjects but relational persons' (32), provides a framework for subverting a Foucauldian governmentality that seeks to isolate political subjects. Yet, the richness of *Reworking citizenship* often dampens its

theoretical potential, leaving the reader contemplating the emptiness of a promised citizenship instead of embracing the productivity inherent in its incompleteness.

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