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## The representation of Women

### The author

**Elisabeth A. Povinelli** is Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University where she has also been the Director of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and the Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Law and Culture. She is the author of numerous books and essays as well as a former editor of the academic journal *Public Culture*. Povinelli's work has focused on developing a critical theory of late liberalism that would support an anthropology of the otherwise. This critical task is animated by a critical engagement with the traditions of American pragmatism and continental immanent theory and grounded in the circulation of values, materialities, and socialities within settler liberalisms. Her first two books examined the governance of the otherwise in late liberal settler colonies from the perspective of the politics of recognition. In particular, they focused on impasses within liberal systems of law and value as they meet local Australian indigenous worlds, and the effect of these impasses on the development of legal and public culture in Australia. Her second two books, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* and *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Exhaustion in Late Liberalism*, examine formations of the Late Liberal Anthropocene from the perspective of intimacy, embodiment, and narrative form. Povinelli has also explored these questions in the short film, *Karrabing, Low Tide Turning*, selected for the 2012 Berlinale International Film Festival, Shorts Competition. *Karrabing* was co-directed with Liza Johnson and written with the *Karrabing Indigenous Corporation*. Povinelli also appeared in the documentary film *Apparition of the Eternal Church* (2006), directed by Paul Festa, about the French composer Olivier Messiaen's organ work. She was the recipient of the German Transatlantic Program Prize and Fellow at the American Academy in Berlin for Fall 2011.

### Link

Website: [elizabethpovinelli.com](http://elizabethpovinelli.com)

Friday October 11<sup>th</sup> 2013 | 7.30pm | NYLA

### Zoom

***Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*** (Duke University Press. Duke University Press, 2011)



In *Economies of Abandonment*, Elisabeth A. Povinelli explores how late liberal imaginaries of tense, eventfulness, and ethical substance make the global distribution of life and death, hope and harm, and endurance and exhaustion not merely sensible but also just. She presents new ways of conceptualizing formations of power in late liberalism; the shape that liberal governmentality has taken as it has responded to a series of legitimacy

crises in the wake of anticolonial and new social movements and, more recently, the "clash of civilizations" after September 11. Based on longstanding ethnographic work in Australia and the United States, as well as critical readings of legal, academic, and activist texts, Povinelli examines how alternative social worlds and projects generate new possibilities of life in the context of ordinary and extraordinary acts of neglect and surveillance. She focuses particularly on social projects that have not yet achieved a concrete existence but persist at the threshold of possible existence. By addressing the question of the endurance, let alone the survival, of alternative forms of life, Povinelli opens new ethical and political questions.

### Bibliography

-***Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*** (Duke University Press. Duke University Press, 2011)

-***The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*** (A Public Planet Book. Duke University Press, 2006)

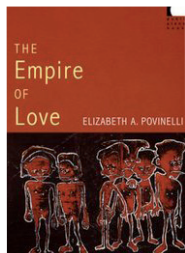
-***The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*** (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002)

-***Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action. Chicago*** (The University of Chicago Press, 1994)

# Elisabeth Povinelli

## USA

**The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality** (A Public Planet Book. Duke University Press, 2006)



In *The Empire of Love* anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli reflects on a set of ethical and normative claims about the governance of love, sociality, and the body that circulates in liberal settler colonies such as the United States and Australia. She boldly theorizes intimate relations as pivotal sites where liberal logics and aspirations absorbed through settler imperialism are manifest, where discourses of self-sovereignty, social constraint, and value converge.

For more than twenty years, Povinelli has traveled to the social worlds of indigenous men and women living at Belyuen, a small community in the Northern Territory of Australia. More recently she has moved across communities of alternative progressive queer movements in the United States, particularly those who identify as radical faeries. In this book she traces how liberal binary concepts of individual freedom and social constraint influence understandings of intimacy in these two worlds. At the same time, she describes alternative models of social relations within each group in order to highlight modes of intimacy that transcend a reductive choice between freedom and constraint.

**The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism** (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002)

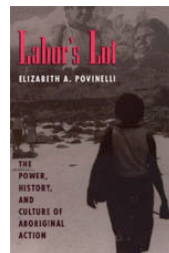


*The Cunning of Recognition* is an exploration of liberal multiculturalism from the perspective of Australian indigenous social life. Elizabeth Povinelli argues that the multicultural legacy of colonialism perpetuates unequal systems of power, not by demanding that colonized subjects identify with their colonizers but by demanding that they identify with an impossible standard of authentic traditional culture.

Povinelli draws on seventeen years of ethnographic research among northwest coast indigenous people and her own experience participating in land claims, as well as on public records, legal debates, and anthropological archives to examine how multicultural forms of recognition work to reinforce liberal regimes rather than to open them up to a true cultural democracy. *The Cunning of Recognition* argues that the inequity of liberal forms of multiculturalism arises not from its weak ethical commitment to difference but from its strongest vision of a new national cohesion. In the end, Australia is revealed as an exemplary site for studying the social effects of the liberal multicultural imaginary: much earlier than the United States and in response to very different geopolitical conditions, Australian nationalism renounced the ideal of a unitary European tradition and embraced cultural and social diversity.

While addressing larger theoretical debates in critical anthropology, political theory, cultural studies, and liberal theory, *The Cunning of Recognition* demonstrates that the impact of the globalization of liberal forms of government can only be truly understood by examining its concrete and not just philosophical effects on the world.

**Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action.** Chicago (The University of Chicago Press, 1994)



How does an Aboriginal community see itself, its work, and its place on the land? Elizabeth Povinelli goes to the Belyuen community of northern Australia to show how it draws from deep connections between labor, language, and the landscape. Her findings challenge

Western notions of "productive labor" and longstanding ideas about the role of culture in subsistence economies.

In *Labor's Lot*, Povinelli shows how everyday activities shape Aboriginal identity and provide cultural meaning. She focuses on the Belyuen women's interactions with the countryside and on Belyuen conflicts with the Australian government over control of local land. Her analysis raises serious questions about the validity of Western theories about labor and culture and their impact on Aboriginal society. Povinelli's focus on women's activities provides an important counterpoint to recent works centering on male roles in hunter-gatherer societies. Her unique "cultural economy" approach overcomes the dichotomy between the two standard approaches to these studies. *Labor's Lot* will engage anyone interested in indigenous peoples or in the relationship between culture and economy in contemporary social practice.