

E. A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2011; pp.236; RRP \$22.95, paperback.

In her latest examination of the modes of governance of contemporary worlds, critical theorist and Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies Elizabeth A. Povinelli approaches liberal imaginary visions of tense, eventfulness, and ethics through an inspiring study of current social and political theory. *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* makes a profound statement on the dynamics of the concept of belonging within a world of social difference plagued by the irregularities of liberal policy. The reader of this book is taken on an unexpected journey of different case studies (real, imagined, and textual) and theoretical and philosophical frameworks which set the scene for a thought provoking discussion of social difference, alternate social worlds and liberal politics.

Economies of Abandonment begins with an extensive introduction within which the author defines the pivotal concept of her study: late liberalism. This term is used instead of chronotropes such as liberalism, neoliberalism, postcolonial liberalism, or diasporic liberalism. In general terms, Povinelli tries to redefine the shape that liberal governmentality has taken since the late sixties as it responds to a series of legitimacy crises in the wake of anticolonial and anti-imperial social movements, most recently the threat of radical Islamist organisations. She traces a deep line between what has for the last four decades been an effort of anticolonial social movements to redefine ethics, particularly in relation to what she calls the 'imperial arts of paternalist civilizational governance' (p.25) and the practical politics of late liberalism that still overshadow them. Within this liminal groove, Povinelli unravels her compelling argument on endurance, potentiality and abandonment.

The tone of the first half of the book (introduction and first two chapters) is set through references to Ursula Le Guin's *Those Who Walk Away From Omelas*, a short story about an imagined city's happiness depending on a child's confinement to a small, dark and putrid broom closet. The story acts as a suitable starting point for Povinelli's discussion of humans' relationship to unequal distributions of life and death, of hope and harm and of endurance and exhaustion in alate liberal socio-politics. The first two chapters demonstrate the common policing function operating in social and political debates involving sexual and social panics in Australia and the US. The former concerns the intervention of the Australian Howard government in Northern Territory Indigenous affairs in 2007 through law enforcement due to reported child abuse in certain Aboriginal communities. The latter is popularly known as *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente União do Vegetal*, a case decided by the United States Supreme Court involving the Federal Government's seizure of a sacramental tea, containing a Schedule I substance, from a New Mexican branch of the Brazilian church União do Vegetal (UDV). Rather than re-create the more common underdog debate of an ill-treated minority oppressed by governmental (paternal) security measures, Povinelli seems more interested in unveiling the inconsistencies of the political behaviour used to deal with these issues. The two minorities, framed by the author as the 'part that has no part,' are discussed as trapped between governmental policing and politics which support and subsequently assault their rights and traditional values. This somewhat schizophrenic response is, according to Povinelli, symptomatic of the incoherence of a late liberal philosophy caught between cultural recognition (multiculturalism) and liberal defensiveness

(defence of western liberal principles). A similar observation could indeed be made about the European continent.

Chapters three and four, perhaps the most accessible of the five, focus on the concepts of endurance and exhaustion as they examine how this 'part that has no part' perseveres in alternative social worlds. The argument is framed within another suitable textual counterpart, Charles Burnett's 1977 film *The Killer of Sheep*, a meditation on race, poverty, and hope. Subsequently, the concept of 'lethality,' presented as stemming from conditions of 'state killing and letting die,' is wisely and meticulously explored with references to an issue evidently close to Povinelli's heart: Indigenous Australians. It must be noted that relevant theoretical brushstrokes from the likes of Foucault, Deleuze, and Fanon enrich this study and are skilfully used by Povinelli to reinforce her points (see p.118).

In the final chapter and conclusion Povinelli takes a more direct tone with the reader in order to draw insightful conclusions to her deliberations. This is done in a seemingly contradictory way as Theodore Adorno's concept of 'negative dialectics' is introduced to shed light on the positive content of alternative forms of social life. Yet in such a way Povinelli points out the discussed contradictions between what late liberal politics claim and what they actually deliver. The techniques of power that allow the 'claimed' world to appear not only as the 'actual' but 'best' of all worlds are dispelled in this final section as Povinelli again turns our attention to the very economies of abandonment, endurance, and potentiality which infuse a sense of hope in the lives of those inhabiting alternate worlds. Thus Povinelli's Indigenous friends survive on the basis of refusing to accept aid, as does the central character of *Killer of Sheep*, who returns to living by accepting the difficulties of his social world. Accordingly, Povinelli returns to Le Guin's book, laying emphasis on the citizens of Omelas' not knowing where they will go, but going somewhere nonetheless. It is here, in this 'no man's land' of social and political inconveniences, that Povinelli locates alternate social worlds both living and renegotiating their relationship to normativity.

Economies of Abandonment is weakened by a very long introduction and at times difficult terminology. The inexperienced reader would benefit from a second reading of the text to fully grasp the anthropological concepts Povinelli weaves throughout her work. Having said that, this is a wonderful piece of work from a leading expert in Anthropological studies.

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