

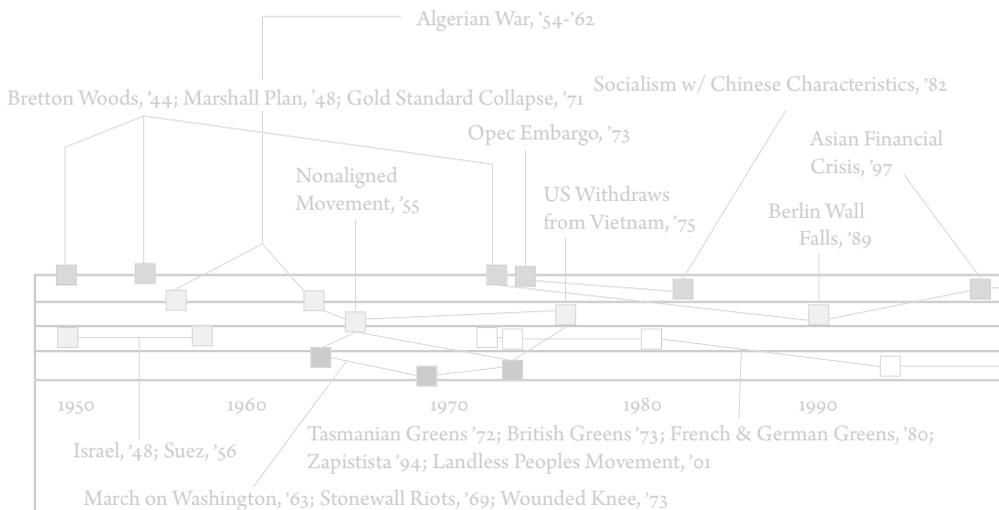
Elizabeth A. Povinelli



Economies of Abandonment

Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism

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Keynesian Economics

White Man's Burden

Neo-Liberalism

Cultural Recognition

Wages & Prices Accord, '84; Workplace Relations Act, '96;
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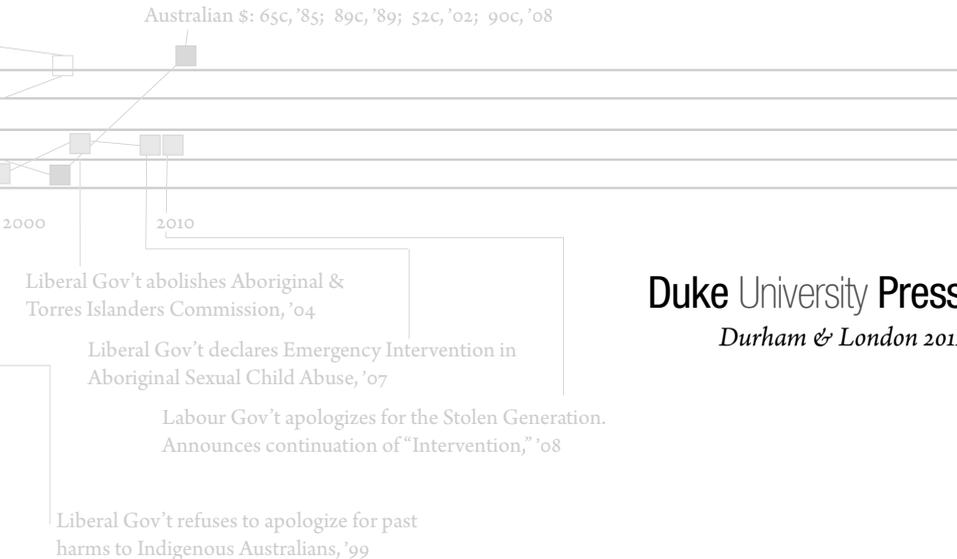
Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism

Elizabeth A. Povinelli



Anarcho Liberalism

Civilizational Securitization



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To Nuki Bilbil
May she rest in peace
Even if she is not
Where I wish she were

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Preface

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the
beginning and the end,
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always
substance and increase, always sex,
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a
breed of life.

WALT WHITMAN, *Song of Myself*

This book is a meditation on alternative worlds in the shadow of contemporary transformations of late liberalism, a phrase I will explain more fully in the introduction, but which can here be understood as the governance of social difference in the wake of the anticolonial movements and the emergence of new social movements. It looks at shattered lives and exhausting struggles, at discourses that deflect ethical and social responsibility for crushing if at times imperceptible harms, and at scholarly attachments to miracles of

enduring difference. Ethnographic material is culled from a variety of personal and professional relationships I have had in the United States and Australia and culminates as one moves through the chapters. This material is situated in a variety of discursive fields including political theory and philosophy, anthropology, and cultural and legal studies, and also through academic and activist thought and writing. One reader of this text described it as “austere ethnography,” a description meant to indicate a move away from a now longstanding commitment in anthropology to thick description. I myself like a term that James Clifford used, during a dissertation hearing, “sociography,” to describe a way of writing the social from the point of view of social projects.

But this way of writing ethnographically—or sociographically—also presupposes an entire corpus of previous and projected writerly projects. Although certainly able to stand on its own, this book is the second in a series of books I am writing under the broad rubric of “Dwelling in Late Liberalism.” *The Empire of Love* was the first volume in this series and a subsequent volume will focus on an augmented reality project that this book mentions, if only glancingly.

Economies of Abandonment is conceptualized as an argument that builds across chapters, rather than as a set of thematically related essays. Material elaborated in an initial chapter is referred to in subsequent chapters. Material acting to support a point in one chapter is elaborated and made the center of a subsequent chapter. I have tried to make each chapter as self-contained as possible, which means that there is some repetition of information. And I have tried to allow for innovative readings, say, starting with chapter 3 on ethical substance and moving back to chapter 2 on recognition, camouflage, and espionage. Nevertheless, this is a book written to unravel an argument step by step. Two works of fiction frame this book: Ursula Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” and Charles Burnett’s 1977 film, *The Killer of Sheep*, the one written loosely within the genre of science fiction, the other, a quasi-documentary of the Watts neighborhood, the scene of the infamous 1968 black uprising. Le Guin’s story sets the framework for the introduction and first two chapters, Burnett’s film for the last three. Two other divisions mirror this one. First, while gesturing to the critical importance of eventfulness and ethical substance chapters 1 and 2 focus more heavily of the use of tense in

late liberalism, chapters 3 and 4 on ethical substance and eventfulness; chapter 5 draws these divisions together through a discussion of sacrificial love. Second, the first chapters focus more centrally on the governmental aspects of late liberalism and neoliberalism, the later ones on the nature of life within these governmental orders.

The introduction moves from Le Guin's short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," and discusses the specific social worlds and projects that interest this book; why I am interested in these kinds of worlds and projects; what this has to do with tense, eventfulness, and ethical substance. I then describe how the general space and time in which this book was written has made understanding these kinds of concerns unavoidable and make sensible why I use the chronotope of *late liberalism* rather than other available chronotropes such as liberalism, neoliberalism, postcolonial liberalism, or diasporic liberalism. Alongside "late liberalism" are other terms and phrases I will use in this book as a counterweight to "late liberal": "tense," "eventfulness," and "ethical substance." I will present what I mean by some of these and how the following chapters slowly unpack late liberal techniques of power that might make them useful framing devices.

Acknowledgments

This book emerged from the generosity of conversation and life. I would like first to thank members of the Karrabing Indigenous Corporation, in particular Linda Yarrowin, Rex Sing, Rex Edmunds, Cecilia Lewis, Trevor Bianamu, and Robyn Lane. Also essential were colleagues at the School for Social and Policy Research at Charles Darwin University, especially conversations with Tess Lea and David Lamb; the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University, especially Akhil Bilgrami, Craig Calhoun, Francis Ferguson,

Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Benjamin Lee, Charles Taylor, Greg Urban, Michael Warner, Lisa Wedeen; and the workshop on the Governance of the Prior, especially Glen Coulthard, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Andy Smith, Sandy Grande, Kevin Bruyneel, Robert Nicholls, Ned Blackhawk, Jessica Cattelino; I would also like to thank the members of the Short Mountain Sanctuary for their lived perspective on alternative publics.

Not least, I'd like to thank my oldest conversationalist and most rigorous editor, Susan Edmunds. Michael Warner kept insisting I let him be a good colleague. And he is, and has been, whether or not he read a stitch of this manuscript. Ditto Dilip Gaonkar. Stacey D'Erasmus suggested that I read Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas," which became a central framework for this book, which seems fitting, and right.

I received invaluable feedback on this manuscript from a variety of people. I am sure I am forgetting some essential voices, but let me single out the members of "Liberalism's Others" and the "Borders and Boundaries" projects at the Columbia Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference, especially Nadia Abu El Haj, Lila Abu Lughod, Liz Emens, Katherine Franke, Murat Guney, Claudio Lomnitz, Alondra Nelson, Mae Ngai, Anupama Rao, Audra Simpson, and Neferti Tadiar. I would like to thank Austin Sarat and Adam Sitze, who organized two separate workshops through the Department of Law, Jurisprudence, and Legal Studies at Amherst College; one on killing states and another on the work of Roberto Esposito were early versions of some of these chapters were presented and worked over. And not least, Liza Johnson and Michele Spano, who read various chapters and more generally were generous in their conversation; and my student Carolijn Trewindt for sharing her thoughts and research on radical ecological movements in the United States.

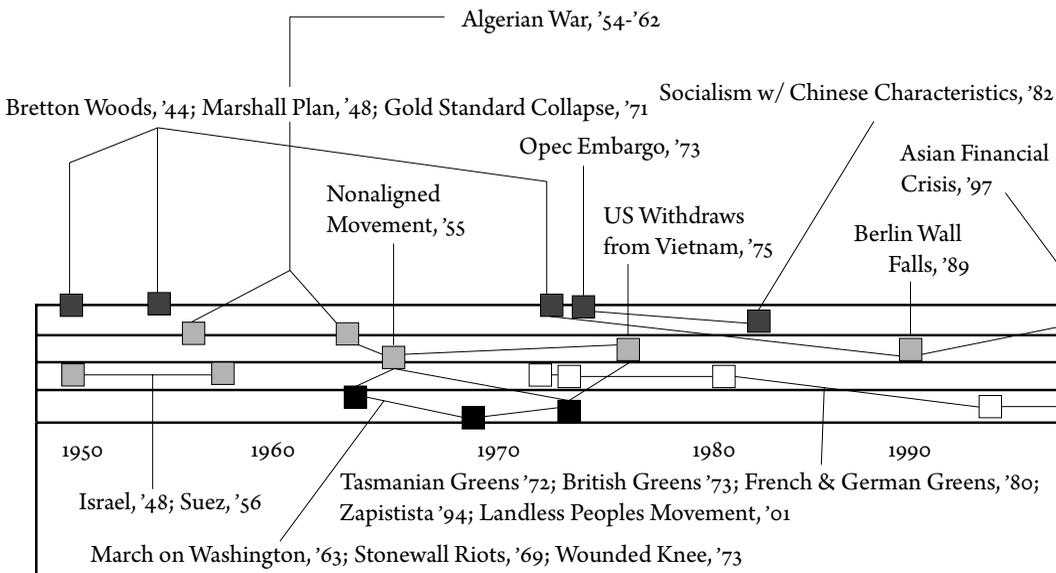
Certain people slogged through an entire manuscript draft; these include Saba Mahmood and Eric Fassin and the two reviewers at Duke University Press. Their comments have made whatever insights are expressed in this book deeper and more coherent.

This coherence would never have been possible without the continued support and tug of war with Ken Wissoker, who is ever diligent and hopeful that my prose will one day reach beyond the whirligig of my mind.

Although sometimes anonymous, the audiences who were kind enough to listen to spoken versions of this book were also invaluable.

These include audiences at the Department of Musicology at New York University; the Department of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Helsinki; the University of Montreal; the Center for Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz; the Department of Comparative Literature, “Humanism in the Humanities” Lecture Series at the University of California, Los Angeles; the Simpson Center for the Humanities at the University of Washington, Seattle; the Center for Contemporary Critical Theory at the University of Chicago; the Subaltern and Indigenous Critical Theory Workshop at the Humanities Center at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; the Gender and Women’s Studies Program at Duke University; the Committee on Social Theory at the University of Kentucky; the Institute for Comparative Modernities at Cornell University; the Critical Theory Workshop at New York University; the Institute of Anthropology, Forum on Political Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen; the Danish Research School for Anthropology and Ethnography and the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims, Sølyst Kursus og Konfernce Center, Denmark; the Westminster International Law and Theory Centre at the University of Westminster; La Sapienza at the University di Roma; L’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales; the Women and Gender Studies Program at Princeton University; Department of Anthropology at York University; and the Cogut Center at Brown University.

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Keynesian Economics

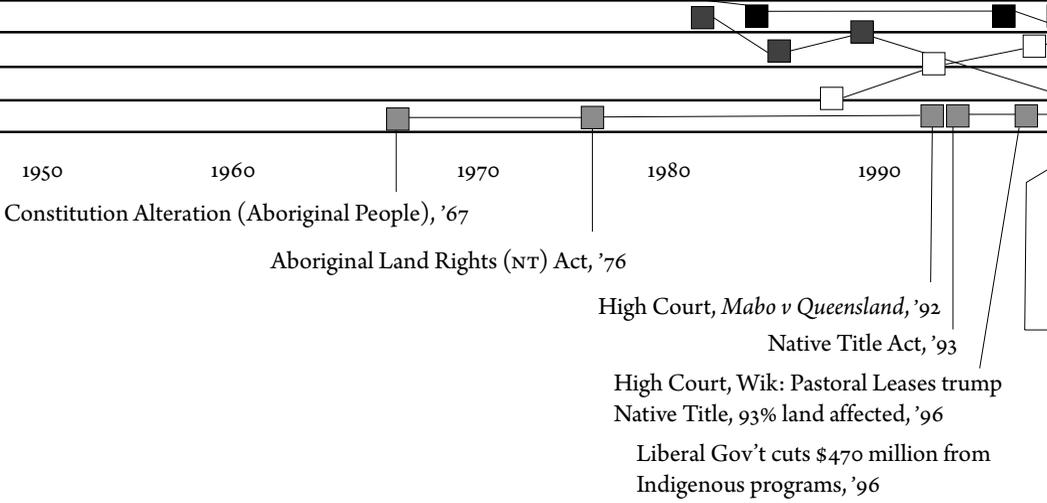
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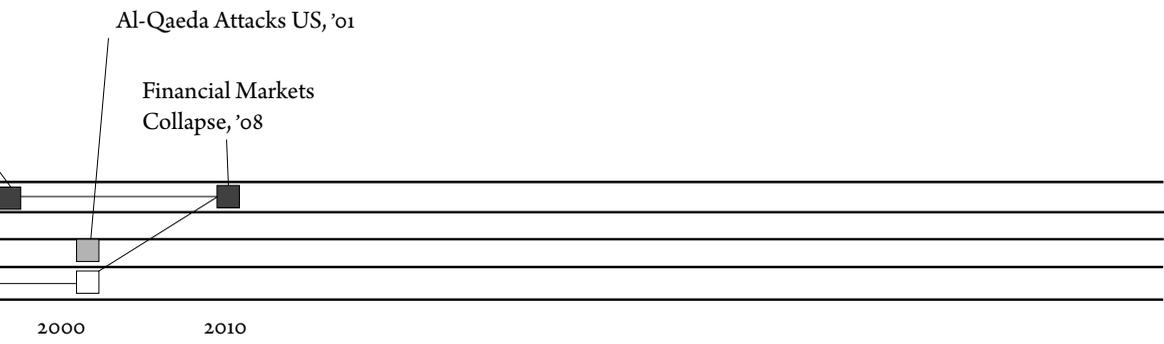
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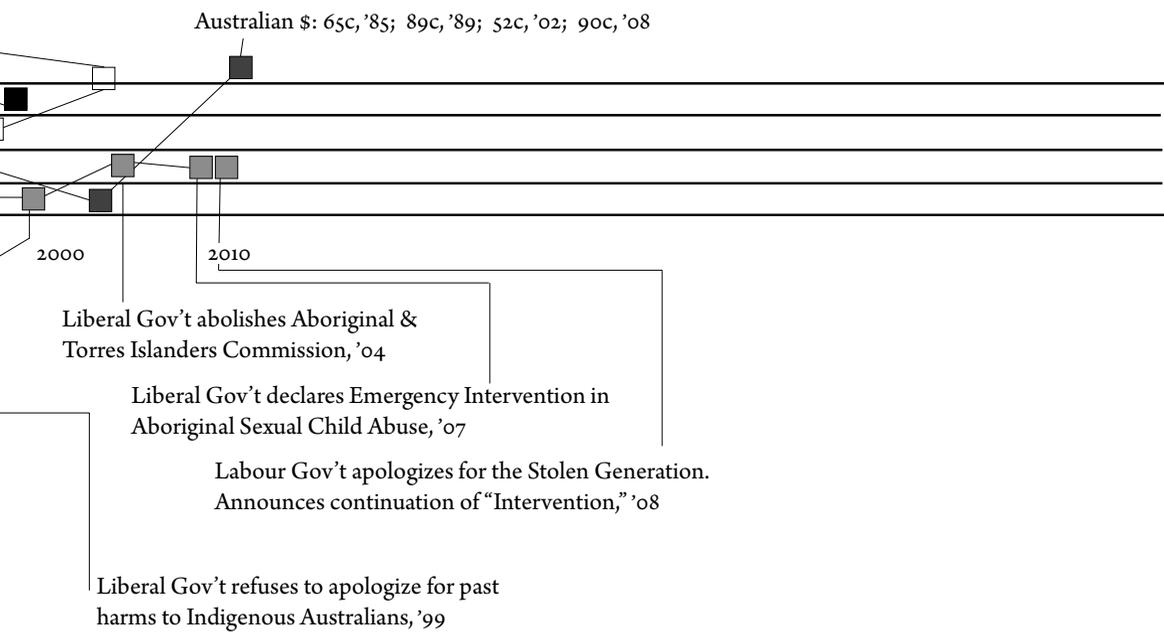


A Symphony of Liberalism



Anarcho Liberalism

Civilizational Securitization



Introduction

The Child in the Broom Closet

In the Broom Closet

Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" tells the tale of a city, Omelas, where the happiness and well-being of its inhabitants depend on a small child's being confined to and humiliated in a small, putrid broom closet. It is critical to Le Guin's fiction-based ethical wager that Omelas's happiness is not ideological in Louis Althusser's sense, nor naive. It is experientially unmediated, materially substantive, and morally desirable. This happiness is what every average Joe and moral philosopher might wish