

RICE UNIVERSITY
Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality

THE POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY: SUBJECTS, BODIES, COMMUNITIES

Friday, November 13, 2009
4pm - 5:30pm, HUM 117

Public Lecture:

Elizabeth Povinelli, Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University

The Part that has no Part: Sexuality, Autology, Genealogy and the End of Recognition in Contemporary Australia

The talk centers on the declaration, on 21 June 2007, from the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, of a “national emergency in relation to the abuse of children in indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.” Howard’s declaration came in the wake of the “Little Children Are Sacred” report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse. In the name of this national emergency, Howard’s government assumed broad and unprecedented powers over indigenous affairs in the Northern Territory including indigenous welfare, education, land tenure, and health.

The talk examines what makes the emergency a sensible good, a form of life-enhancement rather than state killing, in the light of repeated statements that life will indeed be harder for indigenous Australians. What discourses of social belonging and abandonment made the emergency intervention necessary, and by making it necessary, allowed the Howard and the subsequent Rudd governments to create a narrative form that conjured away the social harm of the durative present?