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1-1-2014

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Abstract

How does one conceive the settler colony within the framework of a globalizing, transnational geopolitical order? An initial question that could function as a precondition to locating settler colonial space within the global late liberal order might proceed in the following phrasing: how are we to conceive nation-states made up predominantly of European-descended settlers?

Keywords

settler, biopolitics, artifactualities, colonial, liberalism

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

Griffiths, M. R. (2014). Artifactualities: biopolitics and settler colonial liberalism. Postcolonial Justice. International Conference, Potsdam and Berlin (p.1). Germany: ASNEL/GASt.

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Artifactualities: Biopolitics and Settler Colonial Liberalism

How does one conceive the settler colony within the framework of a globalizing, transnational geopolitical order? An initial question that could function as a precondition to locating settler colonial space within the global late liberal order might proceed in the following phrasing: how are we to conceive nation-states made up predominantly of European-descended settlers? How indeed when such nation-states depend for their existence and international legitimacy on premises that occult structures of ongoing indigenous dispossession in a space inhabited by a panoply of diasporic, settler, and indigenous groups? The space which serves as a site of examination and exemplification in this study, Australia, can be conceived in a number of ways that don't sit easily alongside one another: a unified, federated, nation-state (after 1901), one which remains neither republican, nor independent, subsisting symbolically within the British Commonwealth, a state established on stolen Indigenous land, a pluralistic and multicultural society. This slippery southern land is at once a space in which a remote frontier existed at precisely the moment when the (post)colonial logic of liberalism began to shape the elaboration of liberal democracy for settler subjects. As such, in this paper, I do not describe this territoriality—strung between a settler sovereignty and a settler colonial biopolitics—as postcolonial. Rather, it is necessary to identify the emergence of this settler colonial biopolitics as it was applied to indigenous subjects between a certain colonial liberalism, a cultural logic of nationalism, and an imaginary postcoloniality, which follows either. It is for this reason that I will tactically refer to a settler colonial biopolitics retained within a (post)colonial nation state. In an ironic inversion of the bank circular, slipped in with the early Aboriginal census data—the enumeration and description of the Aboriginal population along with the surveillance, discipline, and biopower applied to the Aboriginal body—the (post)settler colonial nation came to describe itself as a liberal democracy wherein Aboriginal presence was first imagined and later engineered as absence, or, alternately, as alterity to be simultaneously normativized and fetishized. In making this argument, I retool and rethink the work of Agamben, Foucault, Schmitt, Patrick Wolfe, Elizabeth Povinelli, and others to ask: what artifacts remain from the settler colonial regimes of the past that spectrally haunt policy discourse in the present?