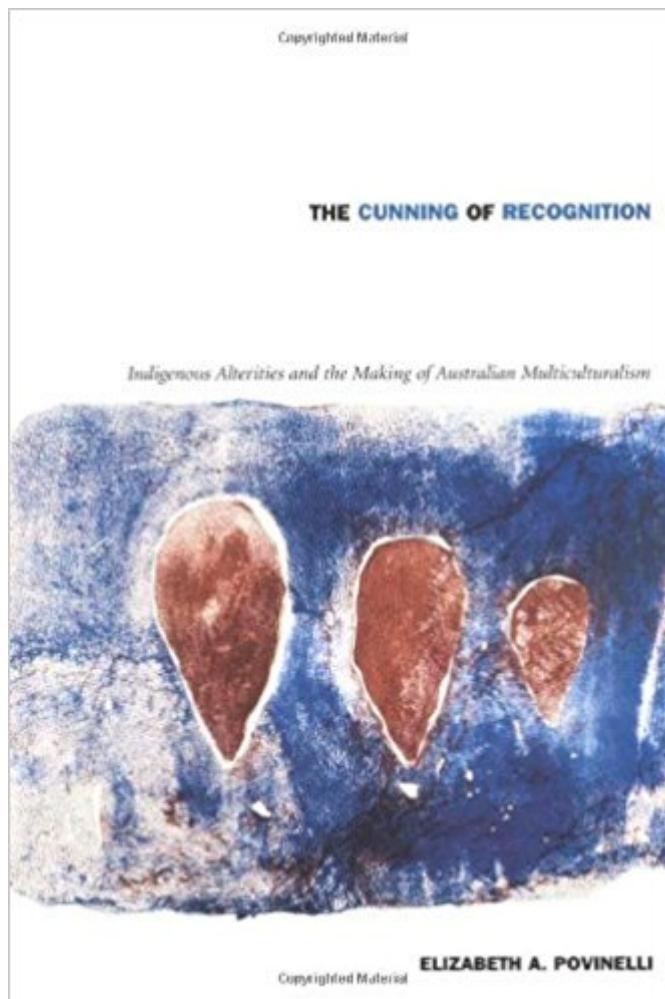


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# The Cunning Of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities And The Making Of Australian Multiculturalism (Politics, History, And Culture)





## Synopsis

The Cunning of Recognition is an exploration of liberal multiculturalism from the perspective of Australian indigenous social life. Elizabeth A. 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.

## Book Information

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“An intelligent, valuable, and absorbing study. Povinelli relentlessly dissects the legal and affective bases of contemporary multicultural liberalism, while bringing the Australian case squarely into an ethics debate that has up to now been dominated by the North American experience.” •James Ferguson, coeditor of *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* “Elizabeth Povinelli’s *The Cunning of Recognition* is a breakthrough work that has major implications for redefining the relations between cultural studies and anthropology. With a consistently high level of intellectual excitement and commitment, Povinelli draws together work from a variety of fields in new and provocative ways.” •Benjamin Lee, author of *Talking Heads: Language, Metalanguage, and the Semiotics of Subjectivity* “The Cunning of Recognition is one of the most challenging books I have read in years, a passionate and moving account of what the practice of multiculturalism looks like on the ground. Along the way, Povinelli inventively reframes debates within anthropological theory over kinship, culture, and the state. Without platitudes or readymade postures of critique, she shows us an impasse in liberal thought that stems not from its weaknesses, but from its strongest ethical sense of obligation toward those who are different. This is dialectical thinking at its best, painfully and excitingly honest.” •Michael Warner, author of *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*

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the star is still rising of this brilliant anthropologist and superb writer. her academic quality is indisputable, her charm inescapable, and her wit sincere as it is sharp.

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