Proposal for “Surfing Social: Challenging Identities and Spaces”

2016 Symposium, University of Waikato, New Zealand

Panel: Surfing and State Theory

Paper Title: States of Surfeminisms

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What might recent feminist theories of the state offer any of us trying to theorize the state at present? If state theory looks X way and does X things, what do “feminist states” offer? To open this discussion, I share the genealogy of the term “surfeminism” and present arguments about women surf activist projects in northern California, as sources for what a “feminist state” might look like or do. This work comes out of engaged research and a current Public Humanities initiative called The Institute for Women Surfers, as well as a book in progress, *The Feminist States of Critical Regionalism*.

I am interested in what I see as the formation of contemporary political imaginations that join practices of critical regionalism with hopes for structures for adjudicating justice, called here in shorthand “feminist states.” I start from the observation that it is not only, or even especially theorists, who engage current conceptions of the state. Writers and filmmakers, as well as activist projects and storytellers, engage in grassroots state theory-making.

Classic feminist theorists of the state like MacKinnon or Brown show the state as a source of political hope, or (following Foucault) as productive of the very problem of gender/sexuality. My work falls between these poles. Particular focus for Waikato would fall on concepts crucial to state theory – sovereignty, security, and geography. Ashwini Tambe, for instance, brings together recent thinking in the field of development and poverty studies as well as work on violence against women to show how it reformulates understandings of “security” for state theory so they speak beyond security as a military concern to address issues of bodily integrity and safety, as well as the provision of basic needs. Surf projects and state-thinking address issues of security and sovereignty through emphases on well-being, female embodiment, decolonial notions of place, and redistributive resources.