CHAPTER 4

# After Belonging: Aileen Moreton-Robinson's 'I Still Call Australia Home'

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It is a truism that students need belonging. The concept of belonging 'often describes feelings of approval and comfort', write Guyotte et al. (2021, p. 544), 'as well as the process of gaining acceptance among peer groups in which meaningful relationships are developed'. Belonging is commonly understood as a constituitive feeling that mediates all other aspects of learning, including confidence and trust in one's abilities, and the capacity to feel empowered through learning as a collective experience. In the Australian context, a normative conception of belonging emerged in the 1990s as a framework for supporting student experiences and communities in higher education, and has evolved to become the cornerstone of whole-of-institution strategies for social transformation to foster diversity and inclusion (see Wilson et al., 2018). These latter include special projects organised around the theme of enhanced belonging, such as the Belonging Project at RMIT (e.g. Morieson et al., 2013), Translating Belonging at the University of Queensland, the Building Belonging initiative at the

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University of Technology Sydney, the creation of an Equity and Belonging unit at the Australian National University, and an Inclusion and Belonging unit at Victoria University, among others. Whatever we put inside the broad concept of belonging, recent evidence suggests that such initiatives are widely beneficial for students (see Pedler et al., 2022, p. 388; Rowan et al., 2021).

Once belonging is understood normatively, unbelonging becomes legible only as a deficit. If there are causes for this deficit, these causes must be removed and replaced by new arrangements that foster more belonging. This approach is sometimes appropriate: when students feel isolated from other students, or lack self-trust in their academic skills, there is undeniably a lack to be filled. Nevertheless, some scholars have also recognised that there are different *kinds* of belonging relating to conflicting experiences of social and cultural connectivity, and that correspondingly, unbelonging may express some of this complexity. 'To know belonging we must know not belonging', observes Guyotte et al. (2021, p. 556), 'and such feelings cannot be mutually exclusive … they are always in relation'. Furthermore, those who do not feel they belong may become reflexively attentive to their own situation and experience in its wider context:

> Times of not belonging can indeed be productive, they might spur students to question their choices looking back and moving forward. For multiple reasons then, some students may resist institutional or normative conceptions of belonging, or community, and may prefer to form informal alternative connections and networks. (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022, p. 1389)

Unbelonging may be a productive site from which to think through the role of curricula and classrooms in disrupting existing social arrangements and hierarchies. Conversely, feelings of belonging may contain negative elements, such as excessive attachments to these same arrangements and hierarchies.

These concerns about belonging in institutions draw on a longer history of critical engagement with the term, both inside and outside of studies of education. Ambivalences around belonging have been registered in feminist and cultural studies scholarship (e.g. Probyn, 2016) and have come recently to the fore in scholarship on 'safe spaces', which has often identified the need to lay bare discomfort and disagreement as a means to create genuinely open, inclusive, and inventive classroom environments (see Arao & Clemens, 2013; Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019). Feelings of discomfort around belonging are not necessarily problems for universities to simply eradicate. A classroom that can navigate the complex interplay of belonging and unbelonging may be better equipped to support difficult scholarly conversations around identity and inequality.

This chapter argues that ongoing tensions between belonging and unbelonging acquire particular significance in settler colonial classrooms, where feelings of 'belonging' can produce both positive and harmful attachments to place, community, and nation. This argument has been developed in response to several years of teaching 'I Still Call Australia Home', the opening essay in Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (2015),[1] to students enrolled in a large undergraduate communications subject at an Australian metropolitan university. Building on a conversation around belonging that developed in critical whiteness scholarship in Australia since the 1990s (see Horáková, 2015), Moreton-Robinson addresses belonging both as a problem of thinking and as a problem of being, inviting an alternative orientation to knowledge *tout court*. As a non-Indigenous teacher, talking about this piece with students has generated difficult discussions both about the role of the university classroom in housing this knowledge and about the role of non-Indigenous teachers mediating or transmitting Indigenous knowledges disembodied from particular communities of knowers. If a non-Indigenous teacher claims expertise through tacit adherence to the protocols of non-Indigenous institution, a shift in this sense of belonging may require a shift in the orientation of scholarly expertise itself. This chapter therefore begins by asking: what can 'I Still Call Australia Home' tell us about ways of doing theory in classrooms shaped by the historical exclusion of Indigenous sovereignties from the academic notion of theory? In posing this question in this way, I position Moreton-Robinson's work as an entry point to a second question: how can social theory help to develop alternative understandings of belonging and unbelonging outside of a deficit model?

## On White Possession

Foundational to Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive* is the racialised logic of possession. It is not a description of 'who owns what', but a development of 'possessive logics' as a concept, to 'denote a mode of rationalisation … that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control, and domination' (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. xii). Possession is a political concept relating to the ontology of settler colonialism in Australia:

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[1] An earlier version of this essay had been previously published in 2002 as part of the proceedings from the *Critical Contexts and Crucial Conversations: Whiteness and Race* symposium at Coolangatta, Queensland.

> [Signs] of white possession are embedded everywhere in the landscape. The omnipresence of Indigenous sovereignties exists here too, but it is disavowed through the materiality of these significations, which are perceived as evidence of ownership by those who have taken possession. This is territory that has been marked by and through violence and race. (2015, p. xiii)

In drawing on the layered meanings of 'possession' itself, Moreton-Robinson connects this broader political context to everyday enactments of racialised proprietariness. '[White] possessive logics are operationalized', writes Moreton-Robinson, 'as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions' (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. xii). Within this repertoire of commonsense, a special place is reserved for feelings of belonging.

'Belonging' can be understood broadly as the '*practice* and *performance* of commonality, reciprocity, and mutuality' (Mattes et al., 2019, p. 301, emphasis in original). Dominik Mattes et al. (2019, p. 301) note that one tends to link belonging to 'people's affective, partially pre-reflexive attachments to places, landscapes, languages and material objects', and in this aspect, 'belonging' differs from affiliation or community and is more likely to subsume a sense of ownership around place or locality (see Jakubowicz et al., 2014, p. 11). This pre-reflexive and place-based aspect also lends to belonging its distinct quality as a natural feeling of comfort and ease. Correspondingly, if one cannot question feelings of belonging because these feelings are understood to be natural, it becomes difficult to historicise or overturn dominant modes of belonging.

Moreton-Robinson identifies this naturalisation of beloning with commonsense practices of white possessive logics in Australia:

> In the Australian context, the sense of belonging, home, and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject – colonizer/migrant – is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our rights under international customary law. It is a sense of belonging derived from ownership as understood within the logic of capital, and it mobilizes the legend of the pioneer, "the battler," in its self-legitimization. Against this stands the

> Indigenous sense of belonging, home, and place in its incommensurable difference. (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 3)

Feelings of belonging may not have a singular causal origin, but can instead be split into at least two modalities: ontological belonging, or belonging that is embedded in the constitution of Indigenous connection to Country and the Dreaming, and belonging within non-Indigenous communities as a secondary effect of a 'feeling of attachment … to a racialized social status that confers certain privileges' (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 4). These latter attachments, in turn, may give rise to feelings of guilt or to worries that one's attachments might be 'stolen' (see Moreton-Robinson, 2020 [2007]; see also Nicoll, 2004).

What does it mean to think from a place that one does not belong, or from within a desire for belonging has been obstructed? 'I Still Call Australia Home' invites the kinds of thinking needed to begin the wider project of decolonising or postcolonising:

> Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are situated in relation to (post) colonization in radically different ways – ways that cannot be made into sameness. There may well be spaces in Australia that could be described as postcolonial, but these are not spaces inhabited by Indigenous people. It may be more useful, therefore, to conceptualize the current condition not as postcolonial but as postcolonizing with the associations of ongoing process, which that implies. (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 10)

Moreton-Robinson identifies a collective potential to transform colonial relations and legacies, without this transformation being premised upon, or dissolving into, a 'sameness' between parties.[2] In a later essay commenting on Vernon Ah Kee's installation *Cantchant* (2007), Moreton-Robinson reflects on the role of Indigenous artists in opening space for different expressions of belonging:

> [A] video clip intermittently echoes the sounds of the land and water with the song "Stompin' Ground," sung by Warumpi Band, an Indigenous band. The song's message to its audience: if you want to know this country and if

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[2] This is one reason why, as Moreton-Robinson (2015, pp. 13–16) later argues, feelings of homelessness or migrancy among non-Indigenous Australians are not the same as homelessness or migrancy experienced by Indigenous Australians living on Country, despite the shared element of displacement.

> you want to change your ways, you need to go to the stomping ground for ceremonial business. Ah Kee performatively reiterates Indigenous sovereignty through the use of this song, which offers its white audience a way to belong to this country that is outside the logic of capital and patriarchal white sovereignty. (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 45)

This is perhaps a postcolonising moment: not because Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences share the same relationship to the Warumpi Band, but precisely because they do not. This difference creates the space for Ah Kee to make his offering, which begins with Indigenous sovereignty, rather than the Australian nation-state, as the ground of belonging.

Moreton-Robinson's critique of belonging is not for or against enactments of belonging *per se*. Rather, she suggests suggests that non-Indigenous knowing cannot proceed, in any simple way, from a position of belonging in Australia. Disavowed elements of unbelonging haunt Western knowledge-making in Australia, and new thinking will necessarily involve some degree of discomfort and disorientation. 'The patterns of your language will change as you find ways to express the places you come into relation with', writes Tyson Yunkaporta (2019, p. 255), a member of the Apalech clan who explores questions of knowledge and place in *Sand Talk*: 'Your accent will change to reflect the landscapes you inhabit. Being in profound relation to place changes everything about you – your voice, your smell, your walk, your morality'. Like Moreton-Robinson, Yunkaporta invites the reader to think about belonging less as a problem of identity and recognition, and more as an epistemological orientation to place and community, with an understanding that knowledge systems can also communicate and interact across alterities.

Despite recognising the possibility of decolonising moments, 'I Still Call Australia Home' makes an ontological claim about the immutable character of knowers themselves. As Moreton-Robinson herself notes (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 12), this opens the essay to the charge of essentialism. This term is often used to criticise the invocation of categories—for example, around race, gender, sexuality, nationality—as historically unchanging and internally homogenous, therefore leading to a peculiar form of conservatism (see Gilroy, 1991, pp. 124–128). Moreton-Robinson does make a firm distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous belonging, and this raises questions about the kinds of belonging available to, say, Indigenous migrants from other countries living in Australia (e.g. Mlcek, 2017). The language of ontology itself seems to set up impermeable boundaries: this group will always act in such-and-such a way, that group will always hold such-and-such beliefs, and so on. Understood in this way, essentialist arguments may not contain enough incentives to pursue social transformation, to the extent that ontological differences place hard limits on the capacity of human social relations to change.

The raising of such issues does not undermine Moreton-Robinson's argument. In fact, the capacity to generate new questions about the meanings attached to commonly used categories can be an important part of a theory's impact. No theory can be applied mechanically to all circumstances without trouble, but some theories do contain enough insight and imagination that they can grow, adapt, and travel. *The White Possessive* has travelled very well. From Native Pacific studies to studies in Brazilian Indigenous education to studies on critical infrastructure in Canada, scholars engaged with the challenges of decolonisation have found inspiration in Moreton-Robinson's schema of white possessive logic and the ontology of place (e.g. Aikau & Aikau, 2015; Crosby, 2021; Ioris et al., 2022). Those worried about essentialism too often presume a monolithic reading of a text: 'Moreton-Robinson is basically saying X, isn't she?' Any such critic may be surprised to find this same text popping up somewhere entirely unexpected, being read in adventurous ways to pursue new political programmes or to articulate common challenges. Claims about the fundamental character of belongings have not prevented *The White Possessive* from making strong inter-Indigenous connections beyond a single categorical claim. Indeed, that is exactly what good theories can do.

## The Uses of Unbelonging

The argument that belonging is grounded in a politics of contested sovereignties is fundamental to Aileen Moreton-Robinson's 'I Still Call Australia Home'. This may seem a far cry from the uses of the term 'belonging' in educational contexts, and it may be that the coincidence of the same term across different discourses merely reflects the connotative breadth of 'belonging' itself. Nevertheless, I want to identify here some important points of convergence between Moreton-Robinson's argument and critical scholarship on belonging in classrooms and tertiary institutions more broadly.

There are at least two broad criticisms of the discourse of belonging in education. The first recognises students' differential capacities to achieve belonging and draws attention to variables—including racism, sexism, language barriers, and so on—that are neglected when belonging is considered in isolation from questions of social justice and inequality. 'Continuing to enact a politics of belonging that exclude, border, and other immigrant children of Color is to continue inflicting racialized harm', writes Souto-Manning (2021, p. 22) in the context of the United States, 'denying the humanity of these children and their families, and upholding white supremacy'. The second criticism does not accept the negative value attached to unbelonging *tout court*. To situate unbelonging in a classroom context, we might benefit from pedagogical scholarship that focuses on the uses of discomfort, unease, and even feelings of unsafety as important transformative tools for the social justice classroom. Reflecting on an experience of talking to students about hyphenated cultural identities and drawing directly on Moreton-Robinson, Elaine Laforteza registers this element of unbelonging:

> [Anglo students] experienced themselves as marginal players in a discussion they had no control over and/or could not understand. The possessiveness of a centralised speaking position was undermined by the inclusion of "other" voices. The danger here was the threat of traditionally marginalised voices (expressed by bodies that are not simply "just Australian") occupying the space of dominant audibility and visibility. This feeling of being displaced from a dominant seat of speaking-power demonstrates that this position is one that is already held. To fear losing something intimates that one already *owns* what is supposedly going to be *taken* away. (Laforteza, 2009, p. 6, emphasis in original)

It is peculiar to say that fear could be useful in the classroom, just as it is peculiar to question the virtues of belonging. We do not want fearful classrooms or classrooms to which students do not want to belong. But we might want classrooms where feelings of fear around loss of belonging, or feelings of unbelonging that come from relationships to multiple communities, can be *put to work*. Responding to the commonsense requirement that classrooms should be uniformly 'safe' spaces, Arao and Clemens (2013, p. 139) suggest that 'authentic learning about social justice often requires the very qualities of risk, difficulty, and controversy that are defined as incompatible with safety'. Difficult classrooms may be those where feelings of unbelonging can be given weight as forms of experiential knowledge, and where this knowledge can received as having value of a theoretical kind. Put another way, unbelonging can give rise to abstractions that help clarify essential elements of a situation.

The connection between experiences of unbelonging and opportunities for learning is far from predictable. For unbelonging to be something other than a deficit, it needs to be scaffolded. In particular, unbelonging may need a 'theoretical' home, in the sense that theories can give voice to latent discomfort and unease. Moreton-Robinson's 'I Still Call Australia Home' provides a home of sorts. It articulates an ontological ground for belonging within Indigenous communities and, in doing so, may invite Indigenous students to consider the varieties of belonging that they bring to the classroom, even if these varieties have been hitherto unacknowledged within university spaces. At the same time, Moreton-Robinson may push non-Indigenous students and non-Indigenous teachers towards unexpected feelings of unbelonging. The outcome of these intersecting moments—desires for belonging, the shock of unbelonging, the sudden awareness of others' belongings—may amount to more than a mess of contradictions. Such moments can provide the conditions for a better understanding of what Moreton-Robinson, following Métis scholar Chris Andersen, describes as the 'density' of 'lived subject positions within modernity', with special reference to Indigenous communities existing 'within and outside the Orientalist discourses producing Indigenous cultural difference' (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. xv).

I do not want to romanticise unbelonging as enlightened outsiderness or to dismiss demands for improving student services and pastoral care within universities. But if belonging is reduced to participation, at whatever cost, we miss important opportunities to think *with* unbelonging as a complex feeling that links to students' own experiences, communities, and perspectives. In this context, I want to turn to the second part of my argument, which concerns the capacity for 'I Still Call Australia Home' to provide a theory about the world. I want to suggest that reading Moreton-Robinson's work as a theory is particularly important at a moment when the relevance of theory in higher education is often placed in doubt.

## Plonking Theory in the Classroom

The notion of 'theory' in humanities and social science disciplines cannot be pinned down to a single intellectual paradigm, research programme, or even family of related terms (see Hunter, 2006, p. 80). Anecdotally, Judith Butler (2004, p. 245) has reflected quizzically on their sudden reputation as a theorist: 'Ah, yes, "the state of theory," I would say at the dinner table on such occasions, sipping my Chardonnay, and then look around anxiously to see whether there might be a kind soul there who might tell me precisely what this "theory" was supposed to be'. Despite a waft of uncertainty about the term, I want to follow Caribbean-American philosopher Charles Mills' understanding of theory as a modelling activity, one that seeks to express aspects of some phenomena in its 'essential characteristics' and that therefore tends towards a necessary degree of abstraction (2005, p. 166). A typical theory might be recognisable by its orientation towards essences, ideals, and figures and its aversion to the mess of the everyday.

The impulse towards theoretical abstraction has been subject to compelling criticisms from various positions. First, there is the risk that when drawing on precedents set in the Western philosophical tradition, theory for theory's sake would seek to centralise knowledge production in already-valorised disciplinary homes; to subordinate local experience and collective knowledges to abstract schemas; and to organise the priorities of thought and action according to a (relatively provincial) understanding of historical, economic, and intellectual progress (see Chakrabarty, 2000). For example, in her influential 1990 article 'The Race for Theory', African American literary scholar Barbara Christian characterised the language of literary theory as 'one that mystifies rather than clarifies our condition, making it possible for a few people who know that particular language to control the critical scene' (1990, p. 71). A second and related critique focusses on the activity of theory as a professional occupation. Theory would often seem to be the kind of dilettantism that appeals to those few incentives to pursue practical and transformative social projects; or, as Ian Hunter puts it disapprovingly, the theorist emerges 'in the form of a persona who can look down on the positive knowledges as vestiges of a lower kind of self' (Hunter, 2006, p. 94). Given the propensity of some theorists to construct elaborate conceptual systems separated from specific positive knowledges, education scholar Thomas (1997, p. 76) has characterised theory 'as a force for conservatism, for stabilising the status quo through the circumscription of thought within a hermetic set of rules, procedures and methods'. Thought must be open to difference—the radical, unexpected difference that might be overlooked by theorists too wrapped up in the preciousness of their prized new theory (see Feyerabend, 1993, p. 30).

I take both broad critiques of theory to be relevant in important ways. Theories are not simply hanging there, like ripe fruits on the tree of intellectual history, waiting to be plucked and digested into any discipline, any problem, or any conversation whatsoever. It matters which kinds of thinking we choose to call theory, and we must be wary of theory being used as authorisation to invalidate others' knowledges. But like all stories, the story of theory needs to be told in a particular time and place. Australian universities, like many others, have been transformed by sustained attacks on the humanities, including many English departments and philosophy departments, such that the space for theorising has become increasingly cramped. In a parallel development, the Eurocentric view that theory is a shorthand for a loose amalgam of European and Anglo-American philosophy is being slowly eroded in the academy. There are lively debates within culturally and linguistically diverse communities about the relative importance of institutionalised theories in supporting alternative forms of knowing, being, and doing (e.g. Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta, 2019). Theory may not be homogenous enough to serve only one group interest or purpose; conversely, it may be that dominant groups do not need theory to secure their dominance.

Against the backdrop of these critiques and the continuing ambivalence around theory in the academy, I want to read Aileen Moreton-Robinson's 'I Still Call Australia Home' as exemplifying the kind of abstraction that explains the 'essential characteristics' of the phenomenon of patriarchal settler colonialism. Along the way, Moreton-Robinson also prompts important questions around *what* theories can offer and *who* theories can serve. But this does not make the theory of white possession anti-abstract: my argument is rather that abstraction is a strength. For Mills (2005, p. 166), the political problem around theory for oppressed communities is not abstraction *per se,* but the tendency for theorists to 'abstract away' from some of the essential features of our current societies, which include oppression, historical injustice, the legacies of state violence and colonialism, and so on (2005, p. 170). Against the charge of abstraction, Mills suggests an alternative path for theory:

> The problem is that they are *deficient* abstractions of the ideal-as-idealized-model kind, not that they are abstractions *tout court.* What one wants are abstractions of the ideal-as-descriptive-model kind that capture the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites, not abstract away from them. Global concepts like *patriarchy* and *white supremacy* arguably fulfill this role[.] (2005, p. 173, emphasis in original)

The link between white possession and belonging in *The White Possessive* is a theoretical one in the sense given by Mills. It is an ideal-as-descriptive-model of the way the world is working, one that places in relation 'the essentials of the situation' without abstracting away from history. In fact, it is a theoretical model of the continuation of history into the present.

What does such a theory do in a classroom? It depends on which theory and which classroom, of course. But we can sketch out some answers for consideration. There are historical challenges to the ways that theories from previously excluded communities are introduced into the classroom; as Martin Nakata observes, 'it is not possible to bring in Indigenous knowledge and plonk it in the curriculum unproblematically as if it is another data set for Western knowledge to discipline and test' (Nakata, 2007, p. 8). A similar concern has been voiced more recently by Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2022, pp. 100–101), who note that, in relation to efforts to decolonise the curriculum, 'the simple addition of Indigenous knowledges offers little insight as to the complexities, contradictions and outright violations (e.g. intellectual property, cultural protocols) that may further misrepresent, disempower and oppress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities'. Rather than treating a text as a disembodied container of wisdom, Nakata invites teachers to 'understand what happens when Indigenous knowledge is documented in ways that disembodies it from the people who are its agents, when the "knowers" of that knowledge are separated out from what comes to be "the known", in ways that dislocates it from its locale, and separates it from the social institutions that uphold and reinforce its efficacy' (Nakata, 2007, p. 9). From this viewpoint, Charles Mills' approach to theory as a necessary abstraction would not seem to go far enough: one needs to consider *with whom* and *in what place* abstractions come to matter. To do this, we could begin by asking how to make classrooms more responsive to the social, cultural, and historical circumstances within which teaching takes place—with or without theoretical aids (see Page et al., 2016, p. 264).

And yet, my interest here is in the practice of 'plonking' theory, as Nakata has described it. For better or worse, it matters which texts are labelled theory and the roles these texts are asked to play in a curriculum. Due to various pressures on teaching and learning efficiencies, universities may be inclined to select only those Indigenous resources perceived to be 'simple and accessible' for non-Indigenous students (see Whittaker, 2017,

p. 19) or to 'scramble to find one or two low-level people (who may or may not be Indigenous) to help a group of academics to insert some Indigenous content somewhere in their subject' (Page et al., 2016, p. 262). These risks become higher as teaching and learning becomes more outcomes-driven: Indigenous content becomes a paragraph to be added, a criterion to be met, a module to be completed. What is marked as progress from the viewpoint of course administration may have little connection to students' or teachers' thinking about the theoretical foundations or professional priorities for their chosen disciplines. Outlining approaches to decolonising curricula, Arlene Harvey and Russell-Mundine (2019) reflect on the challenges in navigating relationships across Indigenous and non-Indigenous resources:

> Indigenous and other non-Western knowledges are rarely assigned intrinsic value or respected on their own terms but acquire value only in relation to Western knowledge and priorities (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2011; Larkin 2013). In cases where 'alternative' knowledges are allowed into 'our' space, those doing the allowing – individuals comfortable with the status quo and uncritical of their own positions within the dominant culture – have a tendency to seek approval for their magnanimity. (p. 4)

Similar concerns have been voiced by Sami philosopher Rauna Kuokkanen, who noted that the inclusion of Indigenous resources within a primarily non-Indigenous curriculum environment could be irresponsible, if the focus was simply on cultural appreciation and a 'dissociated' relation to the perceived 'other' (2007, p. 109).[3]

A well-chosen theory might disrupt expectations about what theories themselves are for. Such disruptions necessarily involve rethinking the role of teachers in these classrooms (see McGloin, 2009, p. 39), but they also depend on the affordances of a theoretical text itself. Writing about her experience of law education, Gomeroi poet and legal researcher Alison Whittaker distinguishes between diversifying perspectives and reorienting ways of knowing altogether:

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[3] Sara Ahmed (2012) has raised similar concerns about the non-performative aspects of official equity and diversity statements in higher education. See also Bignall and Rigney (2018, pp. 168–169).

> Contrary to the patronising relegation of Aboriginality in scholarship to the ‘perspectives’ category, flipping epistemic approaches to Aboriginality identity law to view it from within gave rise to an analysis of previously unsurveyed legal terrain. This was not mere conjecture, nor mere perspective, but an entirely distinct view of the law that articulated new forms of precedent, and opened them to critical reflection as a self-determinative process or otherwise. (Whittaker, 2017, p. 20)

The choice of a theory matters. What can a theory ‘flip’ for a reader? What ‘distinct view’ can it provide that does not merely supplement existing views? And what does a theory demand of its reader?

The critique of belonging in Moreton-Robinson’s ‘I Still Call Australia Home’ asks something specific of its reader: it asks whether they belong, and doing so, asks how they know what they know about their belonging. The reader is neither positioned as a curator of world philosophies, nor an observer of other cultures, nor as an insider within Indigenous knowledge communities. The reader is placed on the edge of belonging itself: where does your belonging come from? What are its boundaries and limits? These are theoretical questions, because they involve some degree of abstraction to essential elements, but they can also be foundational questions for the classroom. Or rather, through the concept of unbelonging, it may be the gap between theory and the classroom can be closed—even if just a little.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has linked questions of belonging and unbelonging in educational settings to ‘belonging’ as a theoretical concept for classroom teaching. There has been an unfortunate tendency in many universities, one embedded in organisational divisions between roles and portfolios, to separate issues around student experience from issues about curriculum choices. If we wish to consider a more complex approach to belonging and unbelonging in education, this approach cannot simply be added to an otherwise untouched curriculum, like a special hot sauce added to a dull dish. To treat belonging seriously is to recognise that theories have the capacity to transform the ways we understand ourselves and others; conversely, to think through the limits of academic knowledge as a theoretical activity may require, as a foundational move, thinking through the tacit modes of belonging and unbelonging that make theorising possible.

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