Using Social Theory in Higher Education

Edited by
Remy Y.S. Low
Suzanne Egan
Amani Bell

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"This book is a beautiful demonstration of social theory coming down to earth. Through personal stories, vignettes, anecdotes, and skilful, critical analysis, the varied authors reinforce the legitimacy of social theory grounded in people's lived experiences. This is a timely contribution to our decolonial age, embracing social theory in the most inclusive way, while also acknowledging the challenges and conflicts we face. The book is a stunning statement about the democratisation of social theory in higher education."
  —Jan McArthur, *Senior Lecturer in Education and Social Justice, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University*

"This rich tapestry of deeply personal stories and insightful reflections highlights the usefulness of social theory in educational practice. By describing contexts and stories behind how an author applied social theory in their practice, this book helps readers gauge how they might use social theory in their own contexts. The writing is critical yet accessible, tackling challenging contemporary issues such as social justice, race, and Indigenous Sovereignty, while drawing upon diverse theories originating from around the globe."
  —Maha Bali, PhD, *Professor of Practice, Center for Learning and Teaching, The American University in Cairo*

"Books about social theory rarely commence with autobiographical moments but then *Using social theory in higher education* is no ordinary publication. From the opening page, when we are invited into Remy's lived experience of 'discovering' the self in theory, I was hooked. This book challenges us to rethink our relationship with theory, not simply as a 'tool' to apply but rather an opportunity for self-learning, or as the authors say, to 'act in the world differently'. Applying theory can be both messy and demanding, but by removing it from the abstract, the book allows theory to be considered in more embodied and nuanced ways, inextricably linked to our stories and life histories."
  —Professor Sarah O'Shea, *Higher Education Researcher, Curtin University*

"This volume offers a meticulous dissection of and reflection on choices of social theory in the study of higher education. This makes it valuable both to younger scholars starting their research and choosing their conceptual toolkits, and to established scholars reflecting on their own choice of theories. The contributors give attention to a range of emerging theories which challenge the established canons in higher education research."
  —Manja Klemenčič, *Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University*

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Contents

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Other People's Ideas: An Introduction to Using Social Theory in Higher Education

Remy Y. S. Low and Suzanne Egan

Remy's Story

Saturday mornings were our time. It was a few degrees cooler than the sweltering midday and less likely to rain than in the evenings. But there was never any reprieve from the humidity. So, chasing that ragged round ball in the field behind our housing estate meant that we would be soaked in sweat by the time we ran home in time for lunch. I would usually be greeted upon arrival by my annoyed grandmother, chasing me down with a wet rag, audibly muttering about how I had already ruined the clean clothing she had put on me earlier. Yet no amount of forced towelling or dressing down could rip me away from my neighbourhood football bash in those days. I had, after all, very quickly established myself as a fearsome goalkeeper (actually, they called me crazy goalkeeper). I was always ready to dive headlong to meet any fleet-footed opportunists looking for goal,

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1

which was usually the space between two bright enough pieces of trash we came across on our walk from our meeting point to the field.

Faisal was not crazy. He was skilful. I remember always trying to track his movements as he wove his way through obstructing legs, deftly traversing the lumpy terrain of grass and patches of bare, dark yellow earth. The tempo of my heartbeat would pick up a few notches every time he approached, by unpredictable trajectories, towards the goal that I defended. And, say, eight times out of ten, no matter how I threw my body and dirtied my clothes, nothing stood in the way of Faisal's left foot and the celebratory high fives and headlock-like hugs from whoever his teammates were that morning. Perhaps there was ambiguity for me about whether to be pleased or pissed off on those occasions because he was my dear friend, though we frequently found ourselves on opposite teams. Yet few could doubt his talent and my pride. I am not sure that many adults in the neighbourhood considered Faisal talented or me prideful for that matter. But they were irrelevant to us on that uneven and dusty field. Saturday mornings were *our* time.

One Friday evening, I was compelled to attend a gathering with my extended family and friends. It was some auntie's birthday—an auntie I did not know at all, which is not an unusual experience for Malaysian children. There was a terrific, constant din of chatter from adults sitting around on plastic seats that accompanied the white fluorescent lights filling the first floor of a large house. As the hours wore on, I grew tired and agitated, shuffling about in my seat between my grandmother and an uncle, who were having a chat with the auntie whose birthday it was, the one I did not know. Whatever it was they were discussing, it was about nothing a six-and-a-bit-year-old could latch onto. So, I whispered to my grandmother asking if we could go home soon. My grandmother nodded and signalled to the adults that we were leaving because I was getting tired and because I get up early on Saturday mornings to play with the other kids in the neighbourhood.

'Watch yourself', Auntie-who-I-did-not-know said in a stern tone. 'Or you might become like those Malay boys'.

I recall her looking at me as she spoke, her perm-stiffened hair framing her fleshy, pale, and red-tinged face. I had no idea what she meant by that. 'Why wouldn't I want to become like my friends?' I wondered to myself. 'And who wouldn't want to be awesome Faisal?!' Besides, my grandmother's main lingua was Malay. She had a Malay heritage that was—to my mind—visible to those around her, except in contexts where she had to

make herself inconspicuous. I have vivid memories of her out in the back lane of our street, sitting with the other aunties in the neighbourhood, all dressed in *sarong* tied up to their armpits, talking and laughing loudly as they washed and sliced vegetables. They all spoke Malay. I knew this because I spoke Malay (long before I was compelled to speak English).

Some 12 years after those Saturday mornings and thousands of kilometres away from that little grass patch behind our housing estate, I found myself sitting in a small, carpeted room with a dank smell. It was a hot mid-afternoon in March and in this little cupboard-like space with a poorly functioning ceiling fan at the end of the hallway in a 1960s brick building, it was hard not to feel like I'd been had by the image of the University of Sydney sold to me in the glossy prospectus. But I would walk out of that room at the end of that hour thinking neither of the weather nor of being jolly with a group of photogenic people while clutching books under faux-Oxbridge quadrangles. My mind would be abuzz with fuzzy images of those football mornings, my family, Faisal, and that comment by the aunty-I-did-not-know.

The class that day was on Asian economic history, and specifically Southeast Asian economic history, which may strike many as a rather boutique if unexciting topic to be sweating over on a late-summer's day. But led through key passages by my formidable teacher—Dr. Lily Rahim—I felt every sentence like an electric charge that pulsed into my chest from my cheaply bound course reader through the index finger that traced its pages. It's hard, even now, to describe the exhilaration of that moment when I first encountered the words of Syed Hussein Alatas (1977) on the nineteenth-century European imperial project and its racialised social system, where 'The Europeans formed the ruling class at the top of the hierarchy; next came those of mixed European blood and Christian in faith, then came the foreign Asian immigrant community, and finally the native population' (p. 18). Writing of Malaysia (or Malaya as it was back in the colonial days), Alatas (1977) lays out the precise ideological coordinates of such a system of subjugation, pointing to the origins of 'the myth of the lazy native' from the unwillingness of Malay peoples to become a tool in the colonial system of plantation production and the subsequent exploitation of indentured Chinese and Indian labourers on that basis. Citing an influential late-nineteenth-century British writer visiting the Malayan settlements—including Georgetown, where I was born—Alatas (1977) highlights the circulation of racialised myths by colonial administrators and settlers that buttressed this status system:

> From a labour point of view, there are practically three races, the Malays (including Javanese), the Chinese, and the Tamils (who are generally known as Klings). By nature, the Malay is an idler, the Chinaman is a thief, and the Kling is a drunkard, yet each, in his special class of work, is both cheap and efficient, when properly supervised. (p. 75)

It is difficult to express how haunting these words are for someone who grew up in Malaysia in the last decades of the twentieth century—haunting because like beings from another time that keep returning to rattle the iron cage of the present, these undead sentiments continue to be uttered, repeated, inscribed, embodied, and exploited by Malaysians in the postcolonial period (Gabriel, 2014, 2015; Hirschman, 1986; Kua, 2007). The oft-raised 'problem' of racial divisions in Malaysia—those categories of Malay/Indian/Chinese that crudely cut over family and community histories, that marked lines that didn't line up with bonds forged of intermarriage, kinship, and friendship, that tethered tongues to 'mother tongues' that were supposed to speak of one's race (and only one), and the hardening of boundaries between people—while not reducible in its entirety to European colonialism, certainly continues to bear its unmistakeable imprint. Through Alatas's meticulous historical research and Dr. Rahim's carefully considered pedagogy, the theory of race as a social system—that is, racism—gathered up the many inchoate fragments of experience and emotion that had been strewn around from my childhood in Malaysia.

That day changed how I thought about myself and the world I inhabited. And it altered the way I related to others in my family and community in Malaysia. It allowed me to offer a different story at family gatherings, meetings of activists and friends, and in casual conversations at street stalls—anywhere the ghastly tropes of colonial race ideology may be incanted. Via life's circuitous routes and after wandering down not a few professional side streets, I find myself here as a teacher educator in Australia, spending most of my days planning and facilitating lessons on the relationship between culture, power, and education. And I am still honing my skills in exorcism.

Suzanne's Story

I felt that I had found my home when I enrolled in women's and gender studies as an undergraduate. It was an immersion in wonderfully exciting ideas and theorists whose work somehow just seemed to 'make sense'.

Recently, interviewing sexual assault practitioners about the influence of feminism on their work, I had the strange experience in one interview of feeling like I was interviewing myself. This worker told me about how studying feminism at university had not *really* been about studying but was something she just seemed 'just naturally drawn to'. 'It wasn't laborious', she said, 'It wasn't like I was trying to read up on an academic framework'. Rather, it was something that 'just naturally fit' with her. It was, in her words: 'So exciting to me because it just fit with something that really was just a bit me. I don't know. It was really just, I loved it'.

'That's it!' I remember thinking at the time, getting caught up in her excitement despite myself, 'that's exactly what it is like'. The lens of gender helped me make sense of a whole host of experiences and observations that I had found equal parts perplexing and annoying. I loved the concept of 'sexed bodies', even if I did struggle with the often-convoluted language used to express such ideas. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), as has often been mentioned, was a classic case in point. But the ideas contained therein—that the same behaviour exhibited (e.g. movements, gestures, tone of voice, use of space) is often responded to differently depending on whether our bodies are seen and coded as male or female— just made such immediate sense to me. It checked out with my observations about how people did or did not 'fit' in particular contexts based on their outward alignment with certain gendered norms and the punishments and rewards that were meted out accordingly. It was as if theory disclosed my own experiences to me.

However, while I looked forward each week to the lively and animated classes, I barely spoke up in the first six weeks. Everyone else seemed so confident, so fluent in a language and concepts that left me perplexed half the time. It meant that my encounter with critical social theory was simultaneously exciting—revelatory of my own experiences even—as well as being a somewhat intimidating, if not alienating experience. At first (well, for quite a long time, actually), I thought it meant everyone else was much cleverer, much more intelligent than I was. I had left school when I was 15 and worked as cleaner, interspersed by periods of unemployment. Nobody in my family even finished high school, let alone set foot in a higher education institution. The university was not a place where it was easy for me to feel 'at home'; it was not my 'habitus', to use Bourdieu's (1990) concept. All around me was a way of speaking, behaving, and being that I found and continue to find difficult to understand. Eventually, though I came to wonder if this type of confidence exhibited by those around me—the

assured way of presenting oneself and one's ideas—was not at least as much about privilege as it was about intelligence. The sort of assuredness that can come, say, with a private or elite school education, from knowing that your trajectory will include a university education, from already having imbibed the language and practices of the educated upper-middle class where the academic caste in Australia is still largely drawn.

After those few weeks I did find my voice in those classes. In fact, I found myself throwing around those same sorts of sophisticated sounding phrases and words until one day, I listened to myself speaking and realised that I made no sense to myself. If anyone had challenged me and asked me to explain in plain English what I was talking about, I was sure I would have failed. And that was the second revelatory thing about theory for me: that it can be used to obscure as much as it can disclose. To my mind, critical social theory—what I will designate as 'Theory' with a big 'T'—can do so in a few ways. Firstly, with enough confidence and panache as in my own case, Theory can mask confusion and inattention. More perniciously, it can serve exclude others who do not trade in its linguistic currency while shoring up the privileged status of those who do. As such, it can serve to bolster egos, to mark the territory of individual or disciplinary expertise, to build careers, and/or to categorise other people outside of higher education institutions—often the 'disadvantaged' or 'marginalised'—in ways that, while perhaps well intended, do not always make much sense to those subject to such 'good intentions'.

Another way that Theory can be used for obfuscation is by allowing its user to adopt the 'high moral ground' in relation to others. Sometimes this is referred to as taking a 'normative stance', which is just another way of saying that the adherents of the Theory have a view about what (and who) they think is right or wrong. My first encounter with Theory used in this way came when I entered the professionally orientated phase of my degree programme and encountered 'empowerment'. I knew this notion was important just from gleaning the course outlines, which showed that most of that programme phase would be dedicated to one or another aspect of 'empowerment', not to mention its accompaniment by a required textbook of the same name. What did not dawn on me until well into the semester was that 'empowerment'—a word that seemed so intuitively right (I mean, who would honestly be against empowerment?!)—was itself a theoretically loaded concept. I still clearly remember the day I experienced this revelatory 'light bulb' moment: walking with my friend Michelle on campus, I asked her if she had also had this inkling that 'empowerment'

may not be a singular thing, that there were actually a number of different theories of empowerment. In retrospect, it probably seems a bit ridiculous to not have realised all along that empowerment was a theoretical concept.

Yet perhaps I was not so silly to have thought this. In retrospect, I believe what my fellow students and I were accommodating ourselves to was the *manner* in which this theory (of empowerment) was being taught. It had an aura of 'Truth' about it: for if the stated commitment to social justice was key value of my degree programme in social work, then empowerment was the means through which we would achieve this. There was little room for anything but the most tepid critique of anything or anyone who might question this; empowerment was the frame of reference against which other theories were discussed and critiqued in our discussions (not to mention how the final term paper was to be assessed). While this realisation was profoundly deflating, I suspect it was/is not entirely uncommon. Foucault, for example, often spoke of the stranglehold that Marxism held in French universities during the early years of his academic career (e.g. Foucault, 1980, pp. 78–108). Similarly, the rigid imposition of poststructuralism and deconstruction in English Literature departments during the 1990s has been recounted by many former students, and indeed some former advocates (e.g. Norris, 1996). My point is that the uptake, presence, or popularity of a 'Theory' is often about the unspoken exercise of power: whether this takes the form of setting the framework and assessment criteria by which utterances and writings will be evaluated within an educational setting, as in my example above; or the pressures felt by postgraduate students and early-career scholars to pay homage to certain names and ideas in order to gain entry into the world of publications; or simply in the subtle, hard-to-grasp ways in which some people are seen to be 'with it' and others not.

These are just some reasons why, when it comes to Theory, I have come to realise the importance of asking: Why is this theory or idea influential for this very place and time? This means reflecting on what is going on in society and culture, as well as within the institutional contexts that we find ourselves in (whether inside or outside the academy). In other words, it is about coming to terms with how we have come to decide on this or that Theory over others and to be honest about why.

Using (other people's) Ideas

Social theory, most broadly conceived, 'refers to ideas, arguments, hypotheses, thought-experiments and explanatory speculations about how and why human societies – or elements or structures of such societies – come to be formed, change, and develop over time or disappear' (Harrington, 2011). Jean Anyon (2009) offers a similar definition of couched in a helpful metaphor. Social theory, according to her, is 'an architecture of ideas – a coherent structure of interrelated concepts whose contemplation and application (1) help us to understand and explain discursive and social phenomena and (2) provides a model of the way that discourse and social systems work and can be worked upon' (Anyon, 2009, p. 3). As the above two stories illustrate, social theories have the capacity to name, clarify, obscure, reframe, orient, excite, soothe, agitate, inspire, and affect our senses of ourselves in the world. Consequently—to extend Anyon's architectural metaphor—they are also invitations to inhabit and act in the world differently to how we had hitherto. That social theories can enable different ways of knowing, being, and doing animate the stories that will be told by the various authors in this book, stories that situate themselves within that very particular province of the world called 'higher education' and the types of work that go on there—specifically, teaching and research. While differing from one another in the way they have come to use social theory, not to mention in their theoretical proclivities, all the accounts contained in this book orbit around the questions: What does social theory *enable* that would otherwise not be possible or at least not possible in the same way? Conversely, what are the limits of social theory? What, in other words, is the *use* of such an 'architecture of ideas'—other people's architectures, no less—in relation to the work of teaching and research that we do in higher education, day in, day out?

In this introductory chapter, we wish to offer three general ways of responding to these questions in the context of higher education. That is, when considering the work of teaching and research, we suggest that a case can be made for a social theory's usefulness for one or more of the following reasons:

1. It names observable phenomena
2. It has a practical consequence
3. It helps to resolve difficult situations

We will presently explore each of these reasons in turn and with passing reference to theories that have sought to address themselves to two themes prefigured in the stories told above: racism and sexism.

THEORIES ARE USEFUL IF THEY CAN BE LINKED TO OBSERVABLE PHENOMENA

Firstly, we might consider theories or theoretical concepts to be useful if they name certain actions and/or effects in the world that are *observable* and that can be *verified* by others. Barbara Kawulich (2012) makes a similar argument about the role that theories play in helping us to identify and organise the connections between various phenomena that may seem unrelated. According to her, a theoretical perspective helps to 'answer "why" questions and to explain various cases or units of analysis in certain situations', and from there to 'determine the relationship between concepts that are carefully defined, ways to measure those concepts and what influences them' (p. 37). By emphasising social theory's usefulness for making sense of what may produce a phenomenon by tagging concepts onto its different constituent elements, establishing the relationship of these elements to one another, then gauging which element/s produce particular effects, Kawulich develops a sentiment expressed by the American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce.

According to Peirce (1878/1997), we should be able to notice what an idea (and by extension, an architecture of ideas) names in the observable world: 'Our idea of anything *is* our idea of its sensible effects; and if we fancy that we have any other we deceive ourselves, and mistake a mere sensation accompanying the thought for a part of the thought itself' (p. 36). Once we have established that our ideas (or concepts) have an observable correlate, we can be left with 'a series of problems capable of investigation by the observational methods of the true sciences' (Peirce, 1905/1934, sec. 5.276). In other words, because useful ideas and theories are linked to 'sensible effects' in the world, they should be discoverable, testable, and/or refinable by others through investigation (Talisse & Aikin, 2008, p. 11). According to this view, if a theory names things in the world that cannot be verified by others somehow, then we should really question whether it is useful.

Consider, for example, the concept of 'sexism' as developed by feminist scholars. We can see that it names a variety of actions that perpetuate

inequalities by privileging certain types of men over other types of men and most women in observable, verifiable ways. As mentioned in Suzanne's story above, it 'checks out' with what we have also noticed about how people are treated based on how their gendered behaviours line-up (or don't). Of course, sexism has been discussed, debated, and developed significantly over time: the concept continues to be refined through investigations of its manifestations in different scales and places (e.g. how it appears in various social, cultural, institutional, societal, and national contexts); the uneven distributions of its effects (e.g. how different habits of action like racism and transphobia intersect with sexism to magnify its consequences for some people); and how best to reduce its occurrence (e.g. through education, legislation). Yet we would argue that this is precisely what makes sexism a useful theoretical concept—it sheds light on actions that have observable effects and that can be made clearer through ongoing inquiry (e.g. Haack, 1993; Trout, 2010).

THEORIES ARE USEFUL IF THEY CAN BE SHOWN TO HAVE A PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCE

While ideas are certainly useful for naming experiences and patterns of action that are observable and verifiable, they can also affect our habits of action by influencing what we believe, think, and feel—effects that are not immediately observable, but do have practical consequences. Sticking with our example, we can see that for many scholars who inquire into sexism, it is not only an idea that is useful for explaining patterns of behaviour. Holding to the theory of sexism—a well-founded move given its copious observable effects that have been documented—might also change what we believe about ourselves (e.g. as perpetrators and/or targets), how we think about ourselves in relation to others (e.g. our attitudes and perceptions), how we feel about ourselves and others (e.g. anger, compassion, desire for change), and how we subsequently act (e.g. to resist, to behave differently).

This is slightly different from the first reason above insofar as the emphasis is less on correlating the concepts of a theory to aspects of a phenomena that can be discovered, observed, measured, counted, and so on, and more on how those concepts may serve to bring together experiences or phenomena that would otherwise seem confusing or random. By bringing together experiences—for instance, being spoken to in a

condescending way often—under a theoretical concept (e.g. sexism), it allows us to make sense of situations and perhaps formulate a response to them. In short, social theory is useful because it can be shown to have practical consequences for living and acting in the world.

So, this second reason for using social theory can thus be summarised as follows: theories or theoretical concepts are useful if they enable us to *make sense* of our own and/or others' experiences and can be shown to make a *practical difference* in how we/others might act. This resonates with Lois Tyson's (2011) proposal for critical social theories, which, apart from enabling the user to 'think creatively and to reason logically' (Tyson, 2011, p. 1), also enables us to come to a better understanding of our own experiences and that of others. She argues that social theories, which are often developed as a way of making sense of complex experiences, enable us to:

> [T]o begin to understand one another by learning to see the world from diverse points of view, by learning what it might be like to 'walk a mile in another person's moccasins.' And though it might sound like a big claim, that is precisely what critical theory can help us learn because it teaches us to see the world from multiple perspectives. (Tyson, 2011, p. 2)

So in Remy's story mentioned above, for instance, the usefulness of the theory of racial ideology lay in its ability to make sense of his scattered experiences by bringing it under a set of theoretical concepts *and* in the way it went on to inform his subsequent actions and interactions with others. This type of argument for the practicality of social theory also finds a precedent in the work of William James, another American pragmatist and friend-cum-intellectual sparring partner of Peirce. In a well-known passage, the former asserts that the 'cash value' of an idea (or architecture of ideas) lies in demonstrating the difference it makes:

> Grant an idea or belief to be true… what concrete difference will its being true make in any one's actual life? What experiences [may] be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? How will the truth be realized? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms? (James, 1907, p. 142)

With regard to the theory of racial ideology, then, its usefulness can be shown to hold if it facilitates making sense of a series of experiences that

would otherwise appear disparate across contexts and times, but that can be gathered under the name 'racism'. It should also be clear that there are practical consequences for naming experiences and phenomena as racism—whether this takes the form of social revolt to break the system that manifests this ideology (e.g. Fanon, 1963), institutional interventions (e.g. Perez Huber et al., 2006), the attenuation of feelings of self-blame and self-doubt (e.g. Pyke, 2010), and/or the recognition of complicity in an unjust state of affairs (e.g. Applebaum, 2010). While there may be differences in opinion about the sorts of practical consequences that come with the recognition of racism, it is clear that the naming of this phenomenon in the work of social theorists is usually tied up with an exhortation to think and act differently in light of it.

IDEAS ARE USEFUL IF THEY HELP TO RESOLVE PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

Both the reasons for the usefulness of social theory mentioned so far presuppose but do not give emphasis to the specific contexts that may give rise to the need for them. The first reason focuses on how social theory can name complex phenomena that can then be verified and explained, while the second is concerned with how social theory can help make sense of experiences that are otherwise inexplicable, which makes a practical difference in people's lives and the world. To put it crudely, the first reason focuses on 'outer' phenomena, while the second is inclined towards 'inner' change, though one that can be demonstrated to have noticeable outward implications. The third reason for social theory's usefulness can be seen as sitting in-between the above two: it should address itself to a felt problem arising within a *specific situation*, suggest *alternative ways of approaching* the problem, and consider whether the problem can be *resolved*—in whole or in part—by the adoption of the perspective offered by the theory. We consider it to sit between the first two reasons offered above because its emphasis is neither on observable phenomena nor sense-making *alone*, but on the 'situation' defined as the interaction between people and their environment. A 'problematic situation', then, can be broadly defined as difficulties that arise from this interaction.

Jean Anyon (2009), in making the case for the importance of social theory in research, strikes a consonant chord with this perspective when she accentuates the potential of social theory to abet social change:

> We choose theories because, in the end, we think they will produce the most explanation parsimoniously, because their adoption may lead to new and interesting data and explanations, and – importantly – because they may provide some purchase on progressive strategies for social change. (p. 8)

We can see how this way of using social theory has been taken up by feminist and anti-racism scholars who are also activists for social change: by considering a given theory's adequacy for diagnosing a situation of persistent oppressive experiences; how its conception of sexism and/or racism may function as a tool for social change (or inhibit it); and whether changes made on the basis of its conception of the problematic situation have served to enable a more self-determining and flourishing life for people, and for which groups in particular (Collins, 1998; James, 2009). This approach to using social theory resonates with a third pragmatist—John Dewey.

According to him, all human thought and activity is inextricably bound to specific physical, social, and temporal contexts, which he also calls a 'situation' (Dewey, 1938a, p. 66). When we experience a general coherence between the habitual ways we interact with our physical and social contexts, we can be said to be in a 'determinate situation' (Dewey, 1938b). It is when this experience of stability or normality is disrupted or called into question for whatever reason that we find ourselves in an 'indeterminate situation'—what we have referred to above as a problematic situation. And it is this experience of being unsettled, of a lack of 'fit' between ourselves and our world, which spurs us to inquire into 'what's going on?' and generate ideas for how to act so that we can live in a more determinate situation: 'Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole' (Dewey, 1938b, p. 108). Knowledge and ideas, then, should not be taken to represent some transcendent or deeper truth; Dewey (1910/2007) considers this be a manifestation of an impulse to evade the frightening consequences of change: 'To idealize and rationalize the universe at large is after all a confession of inability to master the course of things that specially concerns us'. Rather, ideas are 'an instrument or organ of successful action' (Dewey, 2008, p. 180). In short, they should help to create a new situation, or a better one at least.

This approach to social theory is especially pronounced in the branch of social theory known as 'critical theory', which refers to 'a broad category

that includes a set of theories that generally critique larger social structures and explore social inequalities' (Winkle-Wagner et al. 2018, p. 3). More than an intellectual exercise in negation, however, as the terms 'critique' and 'explore' may imply, those who draw on such theories often consider their work to be contributing to the transformation of those unjust social structures they examine. As Winkle-Wagner et al. (2018) put it pointedly, 'critical theorists and those scholars who use these theories do not like oppression and they want their work to change it' (p. 3). In this way, critical theory exemplifies the type of social theory that seeks to inquire into unbearable situations of inequality and suffering with the goal of changing them.

Notes to the User

So, what is the point of all this unpacking of reasons for the use of social theory in higher education? From the above sketch of some reasons for its use, we submit that social theory can be seen as sets of conceptual tools (or an architecture of ideas, if you prefer) whose utility may be justified on the basis of one or more of the abovementioned reasons. It follows from this that when choosing between alternatives in social theory, it is important for the user to specify the reason, and make an argument if necessary, for preferring one over another based on its fit for purpose. In short, our preoccupations incline us to particular social theories. As Suzanne's story above suggests, much as we might like to think otherwise, there is no Archimedean point for our theoretical decisions. 'In arguing over the merits of rival theories', Roberto Mangabeira Unger (2007) points out, 'although we may fancy ourselves philosophers enjoying the view from the stars, we are in fact lawyers contending with irreducible ambiguity and foreclosing alternative solutions out of practical need' (p. 37). In the chapters that follow, the authors will offer accounts how they came to use particular social theories arising at a moment in time from some 'practical need' in higher education, specifically the two types of work that preoccupy most emerging academics: teaching and research.

It is also important to remember this when evaluating and debating the relative merits of different social theories—that they are conceptual tools that have been used by others for purposes and contexts that are likely to be different from our own. It is thus more helpful to think of them as more or less useful for our purposes and contexts, rather than as straightforwardly 'right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad'. As Hage (2016) counsels:

[W]henever possible say, I don't find this theory useful, rather than I don't agree, or, this is wrong… a theory offers a tool or a set of tools. It is neither a church you adhere to nor a football team you support. (p. 222)

This is not, of course, to suggest that discussions and debates should not be had about the different social theories on offer and why, from a specific location in time and place, given a set of circumstances, some should be deployed over others. Rather, it is to urge us all to be clearer (and more honest) about how the problems that vex us and the purposes that drive us coalesce to influence the theoretical perspectives we take up. This will be visible in the accounts of each of the authors that follow—how they came to judge the usefulness of a particular social theory within a given situation that they found themselves in.

How This Book Came to Be

This book itself is a product of a situation, a moment in time and space shared by the authors from 2017 to 2021 at the University of Sydney, Australia. Its gestation was a monthly reading group held in the small classrooms tucked away in the labyrinthine corridors of the university's Education Building in that period. On the last Friday morning of every month, the authors of this book would gather around a theoretical text nominated by a member of the group to discuss it—what we found interesting, confusing, insightful, frustrating, and range of other thoughts and affective tones that it may have brought up for us. Month after month we sat and read texts that we may never have encountered if left to our personal proclivities, which tend to stay close to those little provinces called our 'specialities'. After the first year of these gatherings, as we sat together on a balmy Sydney summer evening in late 2017 sharing what we considered to be most helpful about these meetings, and what kept us returning to it despite writing deadlines and marking piles, a few reasons seemed to resonate amongst us.

Firstly, to our slight surprise, most of the people who turned up regularly for these reading group gatherings were early-career academics, particularly postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and academics on fixed-term appointments, and those who were appointed as teaching-focused academics—in short, those for whom the pressures of time were most acutely felt. This seemed to be contrary to the assumption that social theory is the province of high-ranking professors who might have a bit too

much time on their hands, those who may be insulated from the vagaries of institutional life and work. The regulars of this reading group found mutual encouragement in the mutual sense that at their best, social theories might offer interesting insights into what we were otherwise busy doing. They were interesting to us *in light of*, not despite, the work we did.

From this, a second reason emerged as we chatted about why we persisted with the reading group: that unlike other social theory-based reading groups some of us had hitherto experienced, this one seemed to bring the largely abstract (and sometimes downright arcane) register of social theories 'down to earth' by raising the question of its usefulness in the types of work we were engaged in. Again and again, especially in its earlier days, someone in the reading group would ask about how and where a given social theory might be applied or not. Over time, we found ourselves articulating these possibilities and limits in our readings of the texts—a hermeneutics of practice that interpreted the social theories in relation to our work preoccupations and to read the social theories as offering us an opportunity to understand ourselves and our work differently.

Because of these reasons, the last but certainly not the least of reasons we returned to the reading group every month was its inviting atmosphere. Absent was the sort of posturing that sometimes accompanies discourse on theory, the sort that serves to exclude as described by Suzanne in her story above, which Hage (2016) characterises as 'the deployment of theory as a mark of sophistication and a form of cultural capital'. Rather, we found the reading group to be a time and place where we could acknowledge the difficulties we had with work and/or the texts we were reading and to offer one another our thoughts on how the social theories under consideration might be helpful or unhelpful with respect to our work situations. These gatherings were marked by an openness to differing perspectives because of an acceptance of the different institutional positions and preoccupations we had, which shaped the ways we understood the social theories discussed.

It is in the spirit of this reading group that we offer you, the reader, this book. We hope that it will be read less as a collection of authoritative commentaries on social theories and theorists and more as a series of accounts about how social theories can be useful for doing different types of work in higher education. In light of this, we asked each of the chapter authors to consider the following prompts, which were asked in our reading group

to those who nominated texts for discussion as a way of introducing them to the rest of us:

1. What was the situation/issue that you were interested in and why?
2. What was the theory you used?
3. How was the theory useful for helping you to understand or act on the situation/issue?
4. What lessons have you learnt about using theory from this experience?

To capture some of the spirit of our discussions, as well as our broader point in this chapter that we tend to incline towards ideas from social theory that speak to our preoccupations at a given time and place, chapters are followed by a response from other members of the reading group. Again, the emphasis in these responses is less on whether the theory in question (and the chapter author's interpretation) is 'right' or 'wrong', but rather on how the responder might read those ideas as more or less useful in relation to their own situation.

What This Book Contains

In the chapters that follow the authors engage with the work of a cosmopolitan cast of contemporary social theorists including Indigenous Australian scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, British sociologist Nikolas Rose and Lebanese history of medicine scholar Joelle M Abi-Rached, and the Australian sociological theorist Raewyn Connell. The theorists were chosen because of the utility of their work in both highlighting and addressing a number of key emerging social and political issues that we believe are central to critical higher education scholarship. The works of Indigenous scholars, for instance, are imperative to the challenges faced by institutions of higher education in working out how to engage with Indigenous knowledges (i.e. what it means to 'decolonise' higher education). While this work may still be nascent in some contexts, it is an issue that is in the process of gaining momentum. For example, as a result of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), some areas of Canadian higher education are mandated to include Indigenous knowledges and practices in their curricula (e.g. in medicine, law). This trend is echoed in Australia,

South Africa, and other settler-colonial states. Speaking to this theme in Chap. 2, Amani Bell and Gulwanyang Moran discuss the use of Indigenous theories and methodologies from the perspectives of an Indigenous researcher and a non-Indigenous researcher via the work of preeminent scholar of decolonising knowledge production (Smith, 2012. Lorraine Towers then adds reflections on her engagement with Smith's work in light of her personal experiences of working with Aboriginal student and community activists from the late 1980s (Chap. 3). In Chap. 4, Timothy Laurie also engages with Indigenous scholarship—in this instance, Moreton-Robinson's (2015) theory of white possession under settler-colonialism—to offer an unsettling perspective on student belonging and unbelonging in the classroom and in higher education. Gulwanyang Moran then offers a perspective to these questions of belonging and unbelonging vis-à-vis Indigenous sovereignty from her standpoint as an Indigenous scholar (Chap. 5).

Another example is the growing recourse to the neuro or 'brain sciences' in explanations of social problems including poverty, criminality, child abuse, and mental illness—the latter an emerging topic of discussion in higher education. Such explanations have now moved beyond 'clinical' research settings and are evident in social policies and practices in fields as diverse as education, juvenile justice, and child protection systems. In Chap. 6, Suzanne Egan thinks through the work of Rose and Abi-Rached (2013) on the brain sciences. She recalls engaging with Rose's work as a critical lens through which to critically explore and help make sense of the increasing dominance of the brain sciences—via the neuroscience of trauma—in Australian domestic violence and sexual assault policies, practices, and models of service provision. In response, Julian Wood also engages with Rose and Abi-Rached's work on the neuronal self as part of an effort to weigh up how to adequately engage with the neurosciences as a sociologically trained and inclined teacher educator (Chap. 7).

Other salient themes in contemporary higher education are also discussed in light of social theory in the chapters that follow. Remy Low, for example, grapples with the politics, power, and pliability of identity as it plays out in the tutorial classroom in Chap. 8. Adding to this in his response, José Fernando Serrano Amaya considers the risks and responsibilities incumbent upon educators who deploy agonistic identity politics by drawing on his experiences as a teacher and facilitator in post-conflict Colombia (Chap. 9). Turning from agonism to empathy in Chap. 10, Lauren Weber explores the utility of education scholar Megan Boler's

(1997) work on radical empathy to reconsider the rich possibilities that lie within the act of reading as a mechanism of social change. In turn, her responder Pat Norman alerts us to how neoliberalism has an insidious capacity to render something as inimical to its modus operandi as empathy into an empty moral concept (Chap. 11).

Turning to educational policy in Chap. 12, Ren-Hao Xu's chapter creatively deploys famed French social theorist Michel Foucault's (2008) concept of 'biopolitics', considering how the global push to raise higher education enrolment rates can be seen part of broader regimes of population management. Remy Low responds to this by suggesting that Foucault's concept of biopolitics also alerts us to classifications and lines drawn on populations based on race and nation, using as a glaring example Australia's treatment of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chap. 13). Also offering unique insights into educational policy through a theoretical lens—that of Slavoj Žižek (2012)—is Pat Norman in Chap. 14. He also helpfully elucidates how to retain a primary theorist's overarching ideas while selectively deploying other theorists' work to overcome limitations in the primary theorist's work. Christine Grice also demonstrates this in her response to Norman by bringing Žižek's ideas together with Ivan Illich's on education (Chap. 15).

A long-standing frustration for many scholars and practitioners is the apparent 'gap' between theory and practice—whether real or imagined or actively reproduced in the interests of maintaining monopolies on 'expertise' and professional hierarchies. This troubling gap is itself troubled by Fernando Serrano Amaya in Chap. 16, which draws on his experiences as a scholar positioned in the Global South (Latin America) to show else knowledge production can be conceived, with reference to Raewyn Connell's (2007) conception of 'Southern Theory'. Affirming this, Julian Wood's response also counsels scholars to look beyond the academy and the Global North, at the same time bringing our attention to the porosity of geographic metaphors like 'North/South' and 'East/West' when charting knowledge production (Chap. 17). Also seeking to trouble the theory/practice gap is Remy Low in Chap. 18, where he considers historiographer White's (2010) exhortation for historians to produce a 'practical past'. For teachers who have to deal with the limitations of time and space—as well as student interest and attention spans—any past deployed in the classroom is always already practical, he argues. Christine Grice then responds to this by highlighting how to do ethical educational leadership

requires a sense of history, and in turn to do ethical educational leadership is to do the type of history that White counsels in practice (Chap. 19).

As a fitting penultimate chapter to this collection, three emerging scholars—Meenakshi Krishnaraj, Ren-Hao Xu, and Pat Norman—grapple with Raewyn Connell's (2019) conception of 'the Good University' with reference to teaching, research, and professional services, respectively, in Chap. 20. Originally written amidst the upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic and while under strict lockdowns, they draw on their work and lives in India, Taiwan, and Australia to collectively ask: How else can the higher education be? Raewyn Connell then reflects on the background to her writing of her book on 'the Good University' and extends on her thoughts in her reply to Krishnaraj, Xu, and Norman (Chap. 21). In so doing, she exemplifies how social theorists form their ideas through lived struggles and concerns, as well as through dialogue.

At the end—as Amani Bell points out in her concluding chapter that draws the threads together (Chap. 22)—what we hope is that by sharing how we have put these selected theorists to work in our own projects, you as the reader will be encouraged to engage with social theorists as you do your work in higher education. This book is thus not meant to provide a 'how to' manual on using the work of these particular social theorists. Rather, it is a humble offering of our experiences of grappling with the ideas of others, on the one hand, and our own work in higher education on the other. What has emerged from that two-handed grappling are insights that have been useful to us, each in our own ways. We trust that you too will find grappling with social theory useful in the work you do in higher education.

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Sit Down, Be Humble: The Influence of the Work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith on Our Research

Amani Bell and Gulwanyang Moran

We explore the introductory chapter of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's influential text, which 'draw[s] attention to the thousands of ways in which Indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses' (2012, p. 21). Tuhiwai Smith argues that scholars need a 'more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices' (Smith, 2012), paying particular attention to understanding the impacts of imperialism and colonisation, and the past and continued damaging, unethical practices of non-Indigenous academics researching Indigenous peoples. This requires a reflection on power

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25

positioning, place and space. In this chapter we discuss our experiences of using Indigenous theories and methodologies as an Indigenous researcher (Gulwanyang) and a non-Indigenous researcher (Amani).

Amani and Gulwanyang: Diary Entries and Desire Lines

We have structured this chapter in the form of diary entries, inspired by Kelly's account of a day in higher education (Kelly, 2015). The entries are based on our notes, recollections, emails and conversations. The entries are not dated and are not necessarily sequential.

Alongside using a diary format, we have mainly cited scholars who are Indigenous and/or women, and/or from the global South, challenged by Sara Ahmed's act of not citing white men. She explains this citation practice as a way of paying tribute to feminists who have come before 'including work that has been too quickly (in my view) cast aside or left behind, work that lays out other paths, paths we can call desire lines, created by not following the official paths laid out by disciplines' (Ahmed, 2017, p. 15).

We have adopted this political act to showcase scholars who are other than the usual suspects, the superstars. There is a wealth of scholarship that is produced by women, Indigenous people and those from the global South. There are many ideas from these scholars to sit with, to learn from, to challenge and be challenged by, and yet they are sometimes relegated to the margins and neglected in favour of the big names.

Amani

I am not Indigenous. I am not attempting to speak for Indigenous researchers; I am speaking perhaps to others like me who are trying to navigate this tricky space. Although I have an ethnic and religious minority background, that does not mean I can relate to the experiences of Indigenous peoples. I am wary of drawing on my own experiences of 'otherness' too much.

Gulwanyang

I am a proud Indigenous Birrbay and Dhanggati woman and I do not attempt to speak on behalf of all Indigenous researchers; at the same time, I expect much of what I share in this reflective space resonates with other Indigenous researchers and highlights the importance of reflecting on power, place and space for non-Indigenous researchers working with Indigenous peoples and their epistemologies, axiology and ontologies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith reinforces the importance of this reflective practice within the context of research.

Amani

During one of Sydney's several lockdowns, which have all blurred together now, my world shrank to a five-kilometre radius in which we were allowed to exercise. A friend told me about an Aboriginal carving that is only a few hundred metres from my back gate. Encountering this carving—which is deliberately not signposted in order to protect it—is a humbling experience. Someone has encircled the carving with branches to encourage people to maintain a respectful distance. The lines are faded but it is clearly a male kangaroo or wallaby; on early morning bushwalks I have seen these wary animals bounding away from me. The carving was first recorded by colonisers in 1898 (Hiking the World, n.d.), though of course it is likely to be far older, even thousands of years old (National Museum of Australia, 2022). Walking to the carving is a reminder: this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. This is home to the world's oldest living culture. How does that shape my work in academia, my personal life?

Gulwanyang

I sit cross-legged on country in my final weeks of pregnancy. This is my fourth baby. I am in the bush on the sacred and shared country of Birrbay and Dhanggati peoples, my bloodline identities, and like thousands of women before me, I am here to birth my baby into country. Country to which my baby will be inherently tied for the rest of their life in both blood and spirit, their very first kinship relationship earthside. It is important that I am here in this space and place. Dawan (the pied butcherbird) comes to visit me here. Dawan is my childhood totem, an identity gifted to me at birth, and kin I have direct responsibilities for, responsibilities

that are reciprocated by Dawan: we are entered into a two-way relationship of responsibility, we call this kinship. The mullet have been running, it is starting to get colder and the wattle is getting ready to blossom. I know Dawan will be laying eggs soon and will be raising new babies as my baby comes. When Dawan rears its babies, I like to catch small insects and mice and gift them to Dawan for feeding. Dawan is very smart, territorial and good at looking after their families.

I feel I embody some of the traits of Dawan, maybe bar their amazing singing voices, although I do feel I go alright in the shower. I get bored easily if I am not doing more than one thing. I have always had a bit of an issue with mental stimulation, requiring more than what is offered just being in environments or any one project or in any one space. I have turned this into a strength. I like to do the doing and keep busy, putting my mind to work. There are some territories in which I best like to do this, the domains of cultural advisory, research and education. Like Dawan I care about my family and being present for them, whilst doing the doing in my nominated territories.

One of my favourite domains mentioned is research. Many Indigenous peoples globally tend to have historical trauma with the word research, having had knowledge systems, bodies and identities pilfered and rebranded, invalidated and exploited in the interests of 'science' or the academy (Smith, 2012). It has been a violent relationship here for the last 200 years, and colonialism continues to be a permeating force here in so-called Australia.

What the academy and those that subscribe to it often forget is that we are the world's oldest researchers and have been asking the questions of 'what if' with intention, of the natural environment and the way we behave in relationship with it, since the dawn of time. As researchers we mapped the movement of the stars, the sun and the moon, of all things in the environment. We intervened on the natural environment to yield mutually beneficial relationships and we developed sophisticated technologies that supported in creating symbiotic relationships with country (Pascoe, 2018). Our ways of knowing, doing and being we embody as Aboriginal peoples, that I embody as a Birrbay and Dhanggati woman, are drawn from the collective research of thousands of people before me. It is accumulated knowledge that can never be attributed to a single person.

Our education system is non-linear, and there is a constant circling back that occurs and is very deliberately practiced. Rather than a circle, however, it looks more like a spiral, where foundational knowledge is acquired

through a meaningful and situational transfer of knowledge that considers place and space. Learning never stops in our cultures, and we pride ourselves on good knowledge acquisition. I love learning. An opportunity presented itself to be engaged as a research assistant in the higher education research space; as I waited to birth baby, I thought why not, and applied. I was bored by maternity leave, and the opportunity meant odd hours of work interviewing students locally and abroad about their experiences of online placements amidst the COVID pandemic in 2020. This seemed a good opportunity to keep busy while rearing a sleepy newborn that would be keeping me up all hours anyway. I received an email back, and a date was set to meet with Amani Bell from Sydney University.

Amani

I first encountered Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work when I became involved in a Worldwide Universities Network about 'First in the Family' students succeeding at university, which was led by Ema Wolfgramm-Foliaki and Lorri Santamaria, both then at the University of Auckland. We had our first meeting in Sydney in March 2014, with researchers from Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, Australia and the USA, and at the time I reflected:

> A meeting like no other I've had before! We opened the meeting with singing… and then whakawhanaungatanga (establishing relationships) where people shared their background, vision and challenges. People shared their cultural backgrounds, spoke in different languages—it's clear that together we had a wealth of experience to bring to this new project. When it was my turn to introduce myself, I spoke a few words of Arabic and described a bit about what it was like growing up in predominantly white suburb of Sydney as a young mixed-race and (then) Muslim kid. A calm feeling pervaded the meeting and it felt like a safe space to share things.

The project team wanted to take a strengths-based approach to exploring the experiences of students who were first in their family to attend university across several countries, including those who were Māori and Pasifika (Aotearoa New Zealand), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Australia) and Black (South Africa). We also wanted to understand the experiences of students who were not first in family and how students' varied identities and life experiences intersected to influence their journeys into and through university.

We discussed the possible theoretical and methodological framings for our project. As a newcomer to this type of research, some of the other project team members recommended some essential reading for me: Smith (2012), Chilisa (2019), Mbembe (2016) and Airini et al. (2010) among others. We discussed and agreed that both the methodology and the way the project team worked together would involve whakawhanaungatanga (establishing relationships), respectful beginnings, relationship building, transparency, being strengths-based and being student focused, and later we wrote about how we enacted these principles (Bell et al., 2015). I left the two-day meeting excited to get started with reading and then preparing an ethics application.

Gulwanyang

My sense of Amani was a woman who was able to reflect critically about power within research. Amani was compassionate in how she presented herself and demonstrated this through her leadership on the project. The research role was to primarily act as a support and gather qualitative data through interviewing 'othered' peoples or, rather, equity cohorts. The research was titled *Exploring Benefits and Challenges of Online Work Integrated Learning for Equity Students* (Bell et al., 2021).

As Aboriginal peoples we are not exempt from reflecting on power, place and space. When conducting these interviews, I came from a position of privilege. I was a researcher getting paid; they were a participant from an 'othered' background getting a voucher. While the project and its approach focused on strategies of power reduction, I was still acutely aware of power imbalances. When interviewing I found ways to be able to break down perceived power even further and build rapport quickly with the students being interviewed.

Establishing effective relationships, being transparent and taking a power-conscious and strengths-based approach really is key in working effectively with others in research spaces. To be able to do this, it comes back to reflection of power, place and space. What real or perceived power do I hold within this space? How do I reduce that when navigating this space? How do I contribute to creating a safe space? This inevitably comes back to place. Am I best placed to be speaking on this? Am I best placed to be doing this, exploring this? How am I occupying this space? What is my place?

Amani

My next step was to read what the research team had recommended as essential reading, and one of these texts was Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Smith, 2012). Linda Tuhiwai Smith is a Māori scholar from Aotearoa New Zealand, and her book, first published in 1999 and now in its third edition, is well known and influential, with over 30,000 citations to date according to Google Scholar. Here I will focus on the introductory chapter, though I recommend reading the entire book. The chapter starts with the powerful statement: '"research" is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary' (2012, p. 1).

Smith describes the harm that research has caused to Indigenous peoples and its inextricable links with colonisation. She questions the taken-for-granted assumption that research is beneficial and shows us 'the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized' (Smith, 2012, p. 2). Smith goes on to state that the aim of the book is not simply to deconstruct Western scholarship but to explore 'spaces of resistance and hope' (Smith, 2012, p. 4) and that the book is 'addressed… to those researchers who work with, alongside and for communities who have chosen to identify themselves as Indigenous' (Smith, 2012, p. 5).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith explores the complexities that Indigenous researchers encounter in navigating between their own communities and Western research/education institutions and paradigms—the insider/outsider quandary—and says that 'If I have one consistent message for the students I teach and the researchers I train it is that Indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity' (Smith, 2012, p. 5). She then provides a series of critical questions that 'communities and Indigenous activists often ask':

Whose research is it?
Who owns it?
Whose interests does it serve?
Who will benefit from it?
Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
Who will carry it out?
Who will write it up?
How will its results be disseminated?
(Smith, 2012, p. 10, presented here in list form for emphasis)

Smith follows on to say that:

> What may surprise many people is that what may appear as the 'right', most desirable answer can still be judged incorrect. These questions are simply part of a larger set of judgements on criteria that a researcher cannot prepare for, such as: Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything? (Smith, 2012, p. 10)

As the chapter progresses Smith describes her early interactions with research as her father's helper in museums, her academic background in health and education, and that she found nothing in the literature that addressed 'particular issues I faced as an Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous research participants' (Smith, 2012, p. 12). Although she discusses some positive bicultural research/partnership initiatives, the chapter finishes with the reminder that 'the present work has grown out of a concern to develop Indigenous peoples as researchers. There is so little material that addresses the issues Indigenous researchers face. The book is written primarily to help ourselves' (Smith, 2012, p. 18).

Gulwanyang

Many non-Indigenous peoples seem to be oblivious of the concepts of place and space. There is often a sense of entitlement to take up space, I've seen this a lot with linguists working with languages revitalisation, granting themselves speaking rights, without asking themselves the question: am I the best placed to speak on this First Nations language, and on behalf of the First Nations people it relates to? This can be exampled at several Australian language conferences and forums where a lone non-Indigenous linguist presents on knowledge they acquired of a First Nations language from First Nations individuals and often not always within an ethical manner or partnership. Often this is taken out of the cultural context within which it should sit, and I wonder if the First Nations people know how much cultural meaning was lost on this linguist. I often sit in the audience wondering what remuneration they had received having given up so much of their cultural intellectual property. Do they know this non-Indigenous linguist is receiving so much social capital, so much clout, having had the privilege to work on their language? Yet should I ask the question that is often implied—should I just be grateful a linguist is interested in working with a 'dead' language?

Often I reflect on experiences within the academy as another day in the colony (Watego, 2021). I have faced many negative experiences as an Indigenous researcher. I have five degrees, and I can recall experiences of conflict with lecturers, tutors and so-called experts over how I wanted to show up as a proud Birrbay and Dhanggati woman wanting to make a difference to how my knowledge systems were treated and perceived in the academy. These lecturers, tutors and so-called experts forgot their place.

Only last month I was speaking to a non-Indigenous linguist who suggested that white linguists still need to lead in the space of language revitalisation in Australia because First Nations Peoples were lacking in the skills. I am often reminded in these moments of the important work of Dr Aileen Moreton-Robinson on talking up to the white woman (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). I was quick to respond that this was not the case and as a proud Birrbay and Dhanggati woman working in languages revitalisation, I was trained in aspects of applied linguistics through my languages education degree. Many universities are empowering us to work in hands-on ways with our languages in revitalisation and therefore this idea that we do not have the necessary skills or expertise is now being viewed as a reluctance to give up power to those that have never had it. Who else than the oldest living researchers on the planet? Who else than those that carry the memory of those languages in our veins, in our being, who connect with those languages every day when navigating our cultural landscapes, when practicing our cultures? Who else should be taking the lead on our own languages?

Luckily things are starting to shift in the academy, and our knowledge systems, our ways of being and doing are starting to move from being of little to no value to now a significant contribution of knowledge and praxis within many schools of thought and industry. Ethics groups are starting to hold researchers accountable on both place and space within any given research project, research that would have easily snuck through without this lens 20 odd years ago.

Amani

After my preliminary reading and discussions with the 'First in the Family' project team, I submitted an ethics application for the University of Sydney part of the research. The feedback I received from the ethics committee was helpful in pushing me along in being more explicit about my approach to the research. The committee requested further details about my

consultation with key Indigenous staff and students at the university and more thorough engagement with the literature. The committee also asked more about my intentions in employing an Indigenous research assistant:

> How will this research assistant be found and what will the selection criteria be? Their faculty area or their Indigenous background? …Will there be opportunities for the proposed Indigenous research assistant to work 'alongside' the researcher and there will be an opportunity for co-authorship of a paper? Are they a researcher or not?

At that point I was still in the process of appointing the research assistant. The questions that the ethics committee asked were ones that I had already thought through—yes, they would be a co-researcher and co-author—but I realised that I had not made these things clear in the application. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Support Coordinator at the university had sent out the position description and selection criteria to honours, Master's and HDR students. From this process, I received an expression of interest from Matt Benton, who was then a Master's student at the university. As a proud member of the Wiradjuri nation and first in his family to attend university, Matt was a welcome and essential addition to the project team.

The experience of preparing the ethics application and receiving and responding to feedback from the committee helped me realise the importance of ethics committees in challenging researchers to make sure that they have fully considered and explained their approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and in ensuring researchers follow the appropriate practices (e.g. AIATSIS, 2020; NHMRC, 2018).

Gulwanyang

Amani had obviously thought through my role on her research project. There was shared power in decision making and allowance of my own agency to determine how I structured and approached the tasks at hand. Being able to co-author the research and be acknowledged for my role in the research gave me much appreciation for her and how willing she was to share power. Amani listened to me thoughtfully and respectfully, even when I suggested we better consider power positioning within the language we were using in the write up of the research. This was something I had not experienced before to this degree when working so closely with

2 SIT DOWN, BE HUMBLE: THE INFLUENCE OF THE WORK OF LINDA… 35

someone attached to the academy. There was no push back, just genuine compassion and understanding of what it was I was articulating. I did not have to fight to be heard or respected. This is how it should be.

Amani

When it came time to conduct the focus groups—two with Indigenous students and two with non-Indigenous students—Matt and I discussed how these would run. We decided that Matt would run the focus groups with Indigenous students, with me in attendance, but sitting back and just listening and learning. One of the main things I noticed was the way Matt connected with the focus group participants by starting with connections to country (AIATSIS, n.d.). As a student himself, Matt could readily relate to the students' experiences and could understand the issues raised in ways that I as an outsider (in many ways—non-Indigenous, not a student, not young) could not. When we were writing up the findings (Bell & Benton, 2018), Matt was particularly attuned to issues of power, place and Indigenous student empowerment and resistance to the knowledge presented in academia.

Gulwanyang

What Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work can offer to the non-Indigenous researchers in higher education working with different groups of people is to think critically about power, place and space. In our cultures if you do not have a bloodline or law connection to countries, you don't get speaking rights for the lands, peoples or cultures. Often you will be afforded sitting rights if you have lived there for some time, but the final stop when it comes to governance sits with those that have the bloodline or law connection. This is despite how much you may have invested in that area, those peoples, that community or how entitled you feel to speak in the space. Much can be learnt from Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, and much of this relates back to being able to conduct critical enquiry within yourself and act with humility.

Amani

Today the critical theory reading group met to discuss Smith's introductory chapter (2012). We sat in a seminar room in the Education building,

the desks a bit awkwardly crammed together to make a rectangle. I always feel a bit awestruck by this group and how au fait they are with discussing theory. I still have so much to learn—the downside of having a background in science rather than the humanities! Below I present some fragments of our conversation, as a kind of poem:

Another epistemology is possible
Shut up and listen and learn
Feel the intense grief
of colonisation
The world before postcoloniality
A time when we talked in different ways
Remember that there have been other worlds before
and other worlds in parallel to this
Remember…
Like hearing echoes of many different conversations
Be careful
Be critical
Be aware of the way you think
A call, a reminder
An invitation
A manifesto

Amani

I emailed the abstract of this chapter to Remy and Suzanne, the co-editors of this book, for their feedback. Remy replied: 'I was just listening to this precise Kendrick Lamar song on the way to work today'. For those not familiar with the song HUMBLE, the chorus' repeated refrain is 'Be humble/Sit down' (Lamar et al., 2017). It is a catchy song, with a minimal yet insistent and dissonant keyboard riff. The song is not without issues (see, e.g. Rosewarne's, 2017, article about its 'false feminism'), but I chose to add the lyric to this chapter's title to express one of the ways that working with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's ideas makes me feel.

I have found cultural humility to be a useful concept. First arising in the health professions as a process in which 'individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners' (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 118), cultural humility has since been adopted within higher education (Nomikoudis & Starr, 2016),

though it has long been practiced by Indigenous peoples. Elder Roy Bear Chief (Blackfoot, Siksika Nation) explains that:

> We all need two-eyed seeing or we are stuck in our own perspective—this is beyond Indigenous/non-Indigenous ways—this is not about polarity, but rather about respect, humility, wisdom and responsibility… We need to respect the traditional lands where we are living, working and raising our families. How do we sit in humility with traditional knowledge holders to develop understanding? (Kennedy et al., 2022, p. 432)

I have also found it heartening to see the flourishing of Indigenous scholars—there is a wealth of knowledge and guidance now available on many topics, including how best to decolonise libraries (Sentance, 2018; University of Sydney, 2022), learn about Indigenous astronomy (Noon & De Napoli, 2022), find a 'third space' in architecture (Mossman, 2021) and make university spaces genuinely inclusive (Smith et al., 2021)—to name just a few. Non-Indigenous academics need to make time to read, engage with and cite these valuable resources; this is a lifelong journey of learning.

Amani

This year I have had the opportunity to work with Gulwanyang on a research project. Drawing on my earlier experiences of working with Matt, I knew it was so important to engage an Indigenous researcher on this new project, which was exploring the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds undertaking online placements (Bell et al., 2021). Gulwanyang brought such a depth of wisdom to the research. She was excellent at relating with the students she interviewed and at interpreting the findings. I have learned so much from Gulwanyang, from listening to her during our many Zoom meetings—of being on country, of her work in education, of her much deeper understanding of our state's flooding disasters. There is a profound connection to country, culture and language that I am in awe of—sit down, be humble.

OUR SUGGESTIONS

We conclude with a summary of our suggestions for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. For non-Indigenous researchers—engage with, cite, co-author, hire and mentor Indigenous scholars. It's not enough to leave the door open for Indigenous researchers to walk through: turn around, offer a hand back and lead from the side or behind. Think about the accessibility of your research and who it benefits. Think critically about your place, your proximity to the knowledges, to the topic that you are working with. Think critically about power positioning and how you can reduce this to create safe spaces. And most of all, sit down, be humble, listen and learn. Stay with the difficulty.

Indigenous researchers, show up in all your Blackness, all your glory, be unapologetic in the value you add to each and every space within the academy. Claim it as your space, demand your safety and lean on your fellow First Nations scholars. We have been researchers since the dawn of time, it is in our blood memory, it is who we are and we excel in it. We have the accumulated knowledge of thousands of ancestors that came before us and that is far less than what the academy currently has. For too long our voices have been left out, and they have some catching up to do. It is our time, and we have far too much to offer not to be here.

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The Decolonial Imperative—Text and Context: A Response to Amani Bell and Gulwanyang Moran

Lorraine Towers

Research is not innocent, Linda Tuhiwai Smith tells us (2021). As a critical form of knowledge production about Indigenous peoples, western derived academic research has been forged in the body of imperialism and is instrumental to the structured practice of colonialism. It has mis-represented, obscured and subjugated Indigenous diversity and experience. The cosmology of Indigenous knowledges has been devalued and relegated to a primitive past as European knowledges were reified as superior and universal. Indeed, she asserts, the very being and lived realities of Indigenous people inside and far beyond the academy have been objectified and dehumanised by research (Smith, 2021, p. 44).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith does not, however, directly address what were contemporaneous and now still persistent issues of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, although these are clearly a primary object of her agenda. Rather she deals in revealing the mechanics of systems of imperial and colonial power as antithetical to that agenda. This has instigated Linda

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41

Tuhiwai Smith's activist intellectual quest in resistance: to challenge the orthodoxies of 'truth' by dismantling the means of knowledge production in the academy. There is a need, she asserts, 'to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity' (Smith, 2021, p. 26). Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, in effect, beyond the violence of armed invasion and frontier wars (or indeed the police state) to articulate the cultural and psychic violence that research perpetuates—'the reach of imperialism into our heads' (Smith, 2021, p. 25).

My response to Gulwanyang and Amani's reviews and directly to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work pivots on this intersection of the institution, structure and process with lived experience, mind and body. As Gulwanyang and Amani draw on their own experience to engage with this work, it helps me bring into view that systemic partner of research, formal 'education'. There is less emphasis on this in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work although she does make clear that this institution is critical as a conduit of the products of research. Both Gulwanyang and Amani reveal some of the complex ways in which learning functions in this institutional site through the interplay between socio-political contexts, orthodox 'truths' and the embodied life experience of its participants, often with unintended consequences. It highlights for me too that Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work is obviously informed by the interplay of her Indigenous experience within the colony, both inside and outside the academy. However, the radical action being taken in the broader world for land rights, sovereignty and self-determination are not explicitly detailed. Nonetheless, these are implicitly present in the intellectual challenges she makes and indeed those of the oppositional academic works she cites, which will also circulate between thought, text and practice.

It is this complex learning experience that informs Gulwanyang and Amani's focus on 'power positioning, place and space' in their response to this work. This focus is central for me also but very importantly, it highlights that our starting points are quite different. The work itself demands, as they have done, that we reflect on our subject positioning, our place within this colonial space. Unlike Gulwanyang, I am not an Indigenous researcher. Like Amani, I am a non-Indigenous academic. However, unlike Amani, I was born in the imperial centre (although perhaps not wholly of it) that developed its discourse of 'truth' in the process of colonisation, and I migrated to the colony as a 'British' child. I didn't really know then what being 'British' was, but whether I like it or not, my relationship to the imperial 'truth'—not least of all the 'History' that Linda Tuhiwai Smith so

trenchantly dismantles—differs from Gulwanyang and Amani because of it. Being brought into this place now called Australia was facilitated (I would later learn) by an immigration scheme that cultivated and favoured British migrants. It was built on invasion, conquest and coloniality, not least of all the bizarre premises of racial ideology, and the privileges that this endowed and justified for the non-Indigenous. I became the 'settler Australian'; unseeing, unknown to myself in this context of Indigenous worlds.

In consequence, my journey of intellectual development and moral response demanded by this work must differ to theirs in principle. Although I am in this place, now called Australia, I am not of it in the way that Gulwanyang is. She illustrates this in her narrative of lived experience that speaks of the centrality and indivisibility of Country and First Nations Peoples. She is a part of the collective intellectual development and reflexive cycling of deep knowledge arising from being in place through generations of kinship and culture. Quite clearly this is not a static perspective of 'tradition' but one of intellectual, moral and emotional engagement and reflection.

For Amani, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work not only provides reflection on the canon of western research but incites reflection as decolonial practice. This is a highly personal endeavour for Amani, as for Gulwanyang, but from a different place. As a woman of colour, Amani has points of empathy with Indigenous experience, but she does not betray these by assuming sameness or the right to speak. She responds to the work's decolonial imperative in reviewing 'Indigenous research' as a 'humbling activity', an opportunity that has been afforded to her. This resonates with me.

But what I cannot deny is that this is not at all from the book alone, nor of many other useful academic works. It is from engagement with First Nations Peoples that in a sense knocked me at least a little sideways out of the state of the non-acknowledgement of the colony and my place in upholding it. The appearance of a young Pat O'Shane, a Kuku Yalandji woman, at my secondary school in the 1970s was stunning. This was a person who would achieve a series of 'firsts' (female Aboriginal teacher in Queensland; Aboriginal Magistrate in Australia; woman and Aboriginal person to be the head of a government department) (NNS, 2021). It would be a first for me, to hear an Aboriginal person speak with articulate rage on the violence of the colony. I may not have understood all but I wanted to know more.

Fifteen years or more ago now, late in the piece, I first encountered Linda Tuhiwai Smith's major work in an earlier edition. I was teaching

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainee secondary teachers, specialising in Aboriginal Studies, at the Koori Centre. This centre, (named for the regional identity of Aboriginal Peoples) at a major university, grew out of federal policy in the very late 1980s to develop enclaves of support for Aboriginal students (Cleverley & Mooney, 2010). The problem the centre posed was both symbolic and one material version of the power struggle over 'knowledge' and 'truth' that Linda Tuhiwai Smith elucidated.

This struggle and the significance it held for Indigenous knowledges and identities was played out in the lives of the students. There was little in the university system and its mainstream curriculum at the time that indicated an awareness or openness to alternative bodies of knowledge, moral systems or ways of being. Gulwanyang attests to the persistence of this in contemporary educational institutions when she questions the structures that continue to privilege non-Indigenous voices to speak over her.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Chap. 1—'Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory' (2021)—set as a required reading for these trainee teachers by my predecessor, was a potentially fundamental intellectual challenge to the system. The intent was more than a gesture, it seemed to me to have a practical aim: to both equip these students with the skills to critically evaluate the academic research and writing done to and about them and to challenge the right of others to arbitrarily conceptualise and tell their stories. They were being prepared to be active agents who would tell their own stories. Telling their stories inevitably would mean telling different stories, ones that countered the myths and silences of an 'Australian' history and society. This was critical to preparing for their roles as teachers and their everyday engagement with the secondary school system. In effect as teachers, as Aboriginal teachers, they were forced into contestation with a system that had barely begun to meaningfully acknowledge the concept or fact of Aboriginal histories or contemporaneous Aboriginal life. Given the coloniality of the institution that continued to ignore or denigrate, and to extirpate their Aboriginality, this reading was about the right to define themselves, their families and communities.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work articulated some of the emergent thinking on the ground, inside and out of the academy. It provided a clear basis on which to premise the further opening up of the formal educational space for Aboriginal voices and perhaps pierce the self-assurance of white curriculum and school communities, including the teachers. It would in principle

nurture an awareness and valuing of their Aboriginal selves, communities and knowledges in the colonial context as a basis for unity, to speak back. In doing this it might almost provide protection against the ravages of colonial psychic harms, permitting a regrouping to gain control of the means of historical production and so of the narrative of their lives, even of the nation. It was palpable that identity and history were intimately related; these were 'students', but this was their life; the academic was personal and political. In this respect, the text still seems like a manifesto, a call to intellectual arms.

But, for me, the book itself gained meaning and value from the pre-existing momentum of grassroots Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activism that was bringing changes to the school and university systems that I experienced from 1989, working in a university-based Aboriginal Teachers' Aide Training Program (Cleverley & Mooney, 2010). The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, formed in 1977, had made a tremendous impact, challenging the legacies of twentieth-century segregated schooling (Fletcher, 1989) and working for the enactment of the 1982 Aboriginal Education policy in NSW (the first state policy of its kind in Australia) (NSWAECG, n.d.). It also advocated for inclusion of aspects of Aboriginal cultures and perspectives—'knowledges' was a word less likely to be used—in schooling to create an environment that it was hoped would prove more inclusive for Aboriginal students and improve the woeful outcomes of formal state-mandated education.

Essentially, challenges were being made to the assimilatory trajectory of the schooling that posited Aboriginality as antithetical to success in education. These built on the momentum of challenge made to the Australian state and society by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands Peoples on various fronts—notably land rights, sovereignty and socio-political inequities—and was fuelled by their alienating experience of mainstream education. Formal schooling was an utterly fundamental issue underlying ongoing educational and social marginalisation, entrenching material disadvantage and poverty.

In the tertiary sector the challenge at the time was being made most decisively to the discipline of anthropology, particularly on the grounds of its historical relationship to government and the control of Indigenous people from colonial to times (masquerading as) postcolonial. Confrontation of the discipline of history, on which Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes so acutely, had remained stoically silent for much of the twentieth century; it was now

commencing but had failed to effect systemic change. The vehemence of the subsequent battles in the 'history wars' (Macintyre & Clark, 2013) in the mid-1990s as academic revisionist histories began to cut through to the quick of broader colonial sensibilities revealed the resistance of white society to 'knowing'. But the challenge in the polite spaces of the university to the discipline of anthropology at this time seemed visceral, precipitated perhaps by its self-proclaimed disciplinary remit to understand the totality and the intimacies of Indigenous life. As a novice in the academy, I recall less the reading of Linda Tuhiwai Smith than the blunt truths of Indigenous students and communities and the challenge of new radical leadership, political and academic, still marginalised, but making their assault on the academy, its exclusivity and privilege.

There was even some slight disappointment I confess in my reading of the work at the time—it whetted my appetite to know the truths that Smith's injunctions on methodology would reveal in practice; that is, I wished to hear Indigenous stories. Taken alone, the work seemed to homogenise, to universalise Indigenous experience. I craved a sense of the specific, the lives and the life-changing events, the revelatory truths of how things had been and the dynamism of the moment, the initiatives of challenge and possibilities: the struggle for power in practice. But I think too there was the arrogance of youth. I had been involved in a minor way in support of Aboriginal activism for land rights and still with a consciousness as an English migrant I saw myself as somewhat different, somehow removed from the colonial. It was only over time I began to realise my place in this context as a settler and the greater significance of the work for understanding and propelling the struggles that were emerging and had now become critical: the politics of Indigenous being and knowledge in the academy and the 'postcolonial' state, and the centrality of this for sovereignty.

As a worker in this field of knowledge production, initially mostly a teacher and progressively a researcher, I needed to grapple with the decolonial challenge being made ever more explicitly to my own subject position and the theories and methodologies of knowledge production. This is something I share with Amani, who elaborates in her own self-reflective engagement. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work makes us all, as non-Indigenous teachers and researchers in education, responsible. It is relentless in that it does not let us off the hook of having to account for ourselves and our practice. As teachers we rely on a body of academically produced knowledge that is complicit in relationships to power. As researchers how do we

account for our rationale and complicities in the process of production? How do we engage with, reframe and challenge this power and our relationship to it in order to be a conduit for Indigenous ways of knowing and being?

Martin Nakata in his delineation of the '*Cultural Interface*' (Nakata, 2007a, 2007b) asserted the dynamic intersections in the schooling encounter (2007a, p. 323) in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were not passive nor 'empty vessels' but those possessed of an agentic consciousness of self as inheritors of sophisticated knowledges and deep connections to Country and community. This revelation has been given a particular life for me not only in my engagement with students but in the reality of the growing numbers and influence of dynamic Indigenous academics with whom I have worked throughout my career. It gives pause for thought, contra the concerns about education in the creation of an Indigenous academic elite that Linda Tuhiwai Smith raises only briefly and perhaps more in illustration of the assimilatory intent of education. Her own story, her work, and Gulwanyang's response alone would speak otherwise to undermine education's capacity for effacement of the Indigenous.

This changing context has continued to prompt me into a questioning of the meaning and practice of the decolonial, especially with respect to Indigenisation: where exactly do I belong? As I commence a research project centred on the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students under Indigenous leadership, I reckon with the productive reflective questioning of both Gulwanyang and Amani. The work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith is not beginning nor ending in this but weaves in and out with the fabric of our lives of other learning and experience to remain remarkably salient.

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

Timothy Laurie

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

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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.

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:

> [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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In Belonging: A Response to Timothy Laurie

Gulwanyang Moran

We all need belonging. To thrive and contribute meaningfully, belonging is particularly emphasised in First Nations Cultures, and in these cultures, it supports the physiological needs of individuals through individual and collective responsibility. Before you are even dreamed up you belong.

In the colonial context here in what is now named Australia, the concept of belonging is underpinned by constructs that deter experiences of a deeper belonging and is often void of responsibility to the wider community, country and kin (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Dr. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes this sense of belonging as one conflated with possession and premised by the greatest lie told in the history of Australia (Terra Nullius 2015). This sense of belonging is in direct opposition with the belonging of First Nations peoples and continues to displace, dispossess and disenfranchise.

Belonging with country is continuous and the strongest point of reference of belonging that is on offer here to all in Australia. Country and its associated teachings centred around respect, humility and responsibility can act as an anchor point of belonging for all who now call Australia home. It can act as a constant in the lives of students if educational

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institutions can look beyond voyeurism and the consumption of ancient knowledge and better integrate First Nations epistemology and ontology into axiology-based practice. Having a relational epistemology supported by a relational ontology keeps us focused on interrelatedness and interdependence with each other and country (Thayer-Bacon, 2017). Relationality with self, each other and country forms the basis of belonging. Moreton-Robinson explains this relationality as 'one experiences the self as part of others and [those] others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory' (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 16).

In a learning context Laurie describes belonging as a 'profoundly embodied experience 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' (Laurie, 2023, p.x). This rings true and is the cornerstone of the approach taken by Aboriginal Cultures for knowledge transference. Identity, kinship and responsibility that form the basis of belonging act as anchor points for attaching and building knowledge.

Educational institutions and approaches today are attempting to foster and centre belonging through content and pedagogical theoretical frameworks and creating 'safe spaces' on campuses, however they miss opportunities to foster healthy relationships with country among its faculty and students. Housing Indigenous knowledge is superficial when it is not transferred in the environments in which it belongs. Methodologies used in higher educational instructions in research to collect our knowledges and inform their treatment have been exceptionally problematic. Housing it and being able to pick it up and honour it in the context by which it is meant are two very different things. It's attached to a values system that is intrinsic with country. When experienced and understood in its respective local context, Indigenous sovereignty can be a vehicle of a deep belonging for all who call Australia home.

This chapter responds to and reinforces the importance of the role of belonging and unbelonging in societal and educational contexts in Australia and builds on understanding Moreton-Robinson's work and reference to Indigenous sovereignty through a First Nations lens. It also poses the idea that epistemology and ontology without a consideration of practice maintain a superficial approach to education.

Belonging Through a Birrbay and Dhanggati Lens

Before I am birthed into country, my countries, Birrbay and Dhanggati countries, I am dreamed/sung up bilagabirang ngurrabaaguba, from the rivers of the dreaming, my spirit is called into being, this is also where it will return. As I grow in my mother's womb, I take on the information, I take on belonging of thousands of generations before me in my blood memory. Each ancestor, like me, was entered into relationship with country and kin and their belonging was reinforced through these identities, through relationality and responsibility.

When I was birthed into these countries, my little body was passed through smoke and my feet were placed into the soil and water of my countries, my body collected the microbial DNA from country that I will carry around inside of me for the rest of my life (Gonzalez et al., 2011). Not only am I spiritually connected to my countries through these ceremonies, but I am physically connected, country recognises and belongs to me just as much as I recognise and belong to my country. It is literally inside my body. This relationship is nurtured through ongoing practice and ceremony. When I was birthed, I was given a childhood totem, Dawan, which is the pied butchers bird: I am in kinship with this animal where I am responsible for it and it is responsible for me—we belong to each other. I also inherited through my bloodlines Guula, the koala, and Makurr, the bass. My namesake and women's totem is Gulwanyang, the black swan. Guyiwan, the grey nurse shark, Gurrigyn, the praying mantis, and Biluun, the stingray, are my nation and clan totems. I know where these kin belong on my country, I know their story as I also belong to these parts of country and their story is country's story. It is my story. They form part of my belonging.

The knowledge of these kin and my countries belongs to me in that I am responsible for imparting layers of it to others for purpose. I am a custodian of this knowledge. I am gifted this knowledge in layers—as I grow and acquire more knowledge, I am gifted another layer to make sense from. This sense making only comes with reflection and the practical application of this knowledge in the cultural context in which it is intended.

Indigenous sovereignty through my cultures is not only my country and kin but the governance, caretaking and justice systems associated with them as well as the practice of language and knowledge systems that are tied to them. Indigenous sovereignty incorporates environmental justice, anti-racism, social equity and justice, the Rights of Mother Earth,

opposition to the commodification and consumption of nature including the desecration of sacred sites and destruction and assaults on lands and waters, and protecting and nurturing tribal sovereignty (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2020). It is not just a spiritual notion that it has often been reduced to in recent political campaigns (Uluru Statement from the Heart, 2017), it is tangible and practical in every sense.

My belonging can never be taken from me when it is through nature I inherit this belonging through my ancestral lineage, but it is often interrupted in a nurture sense. Where Guula once thrived, there is significant housing development; where Guyiwan breeds on our country, we see their numbers dropping each year, and these kin of mine are now considered endangered. Accessing Guula's specific country for ceremony and practice like cultural burning practices, for example, is particularly tricky in developed areas. Accessing people's land to our Guyiwan site for ceremony to sing them up through their dreaming/creation/breeding cycles is impossible without attracting accusations of trespassing on our own countries, yet another example of Moreton-Robinson's white possessive (2015) and the ongoing denial of our sovereignty. Ongoing colonialism poses a significant risk to the loss of knowledge, loss of connection, loss of an ability to uphold responsibility, which translates as a loss of belonging.

I feel this deeply every day and it is tied to my wellbeing.

UNBELONGING

Unbelonging is just as important as belonging to reinforce connection and responsibility in our cultures. To be forced into a state of unbelonging from the collective is seen as one of the most severe punishments in customary law. Often, being outcast by your peoples from your country is viewed as more severe than death. There is also an unbelonging that is experienced when navigating other people's countries or parts of country we are not given permission to, for example, a men's rite site when being a woman, or parts of someone else's country that are sacred only to those that carry the bloodline of that country. Prickly goosebumps might form on the body, a sickly feeling in the gut, or a near miss with a deadly snake; a sixth sense is developed when navigating unfamiliar country. It has always been important for us to be welcomed, to knock on the door, so to speak, and wait to be met by neighbouring groups for a sharing of story, of a songline, to reinforce our relationality and receive detailed information on safe passage through their country. Unbelonging is also used in

the form of shame in a teaching and learning practice context. Read any dreaming story and you will find elements of fear or shame to communicate values and morals. Shame and fear are used as an important teaching and learning tool in many Indigenous cultures across the world. Once the learning has taken place, it is quickly followed up by love and a reinforcement of belonging.

Unbelonging in the colonial context is weaponised and legislated through genocidal practices like segregation, assimilation and formal policy like that of the White Australia policy (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). My peoples continue to be othered and severed from their belonging, however the modalities by which this occurs are now less overt, such as the taking, possessing and developing, and the locking out of our peoples, from lands and waters. This unbelonging will not be rectified through legislated recognition or assimilative practices of inclusion into existing colonial structures designed to keep us in a state of unbelonging (Uluru Statement from the Heart, 2017), but rather through land back and proper self-determination.

Unbelonging is also experienced at a high rate in Australia by the general community, reflected by high suicide rates, disengaged youth, high incarceration rates and generally poor mental health. The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index created to track wellbeing among Australians over the last 20 years identifies a decline of connection to community as one of the causal factors (Australian Unity, 2020). An Indigenous specific lens would likely argue it also reflects a lack of a healthy connection to self-identity and country (Queensland Health, 2021).

As more truth telling occurs about Australian history, unveiling the lack of stability underpinning a settler sense of belonging that Moreton-Robinson names as a 'feeling of attachment … to a racialized social status that confers certain privileges' (2015, p. 4), it gives rise to the thought that unsettling the settlers is not enough. Creating unbelonging is not enough alone. Until relationship is brought back into balance through the repatriation of land and genuine recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, then there is no postcolonialism, and space for fostering belonging among the general community anchored in Indigenous sovereignty may continue to be a pipe dream for First Nations peoples in Australia and their respective allies. Moreton-Robinson's (2015) concept of The White Possessive is not just a theory, but it is a practice reinforced in laws, actions, psyches of the Australian social, political and legal landscapes.

Walking the Talk: Moving from Theory to Practice

Laurie asserts that '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' (Laurie, 2023, p. x). It is my view after delivering Cultural Capability training to learners for over ten years that experiencing any unbelonging when interacting with ideas, feeling isolated from others or experiencing a lack of self-trust in educational institutions can significantly impact the wellness and willingness of the learner to take on new information, to move through cognitive dissonance. When posing new ideas or unpacking potentially contentious content, it is essential that practices factor in the importance of maintaining humility and respect in the learning environment.

Learners thrive in environments where they belong. In Aboriginal Cultures belonging is not only reinforced in the epistemology or ontology but also in practice. Strengths-based approaches to learning, an acceptance of others and common-ground approaches highlight the importance of the maintenance of humility and respect. The experience of unbelonging or rather shame is only used in strategic ways when needed to humble ego and is used only when a significant amount of unpacking and support is provided afterwards. Children are nurtured in their belonging, and adolescents are directed through rites of passage that reinforce their belonging at critical points of their development.

It has been asserted that Australian children no longer feel a sense of belonging. A report provided by the Australian Council for Educational Research shows a significant decline in a sense of belonging since 2003 (Allen et al., 2018). The research highlights the links between this decline and increased mental illness among children and adolescence.

> Belonging relates to higher levels of student emotional wellbeing and better academic performance and achievement. It also reduces the likelihood of mental health problems, promotes resilience when mental health difficulties are experienced and reduces suicidal thoughts and behaviour. (Allen et al., 2018)

Upon a person's first interaction with formal education system in Australia, there is an attempt to foster belonging through the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Department of Education and Training, 2019). Belonging, Being and Becoming scaffold the outcomes

of the framework, and there is mention of connection to community, people and country being important to outcomes:

> Children's connectedness and different ways of belonging with people, country and communities helps them to learn ways of being which reflect the values, traditions and practices of their families and communities. Over time this learning transforms the ways they interact with others. (Department of Education and Training, 2019, p. 28)

If facilitated well in the early years by Early Education providers in partnership with local custodians of country, a strong foundation of belonging can be fostered and nurtured, setting the littlest learners on the path to a healthy relationship with self, others and their environments. The appetite for this, however, would vary significantly among service settings.

Moving into primary and secondary education the idea of fostering belonging is often reduced to the inclusion of the word into vision and mission statements (Allen et al., 2018). Education systems continue to commission research reports on the importance of belonging, and articles facilitate hot tips on how to 'boost students' sense of belonging' (Allen, 2019), but the practical application of these statements and resources is yet to translate to outcomes (Allen et al., 2018).

Many attempts have been made to foster and centre the concept of belonging within an education context, whether it be the higher education approaches in the 1990s (Wilson et al., 2018) that informed strategies of diversity and inclusion in whole of institution approaches to belonging (Morieson et al., 2013) or the theoretical frameworks mentioned at the early years and schooling levels of education. These attempts often do not explore or capture the experience of belonging with country or kin and can sometimes reflect little respect for difference, social justice and inequality, power and privilege and risk inflicting racialized harm (Souto-Manning, 2021, p. 22).

Aboriginal Cultures are well positioned to enact this belonging as these respects already exist within the teachings of country. This reinforces the need for educational institutions first and foremost to belong with the country they are on. A mere slapping of an acknowledgement on a podium or building does not indicate a healthy relationship with country. Retrofitted 'embedding of Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum', a brief mention of eight ways pedagogy, or throwing a few Aboriginal slang

words into content design or delivery does not indicate a healthy relationship with these knowledge systems.

Besides a small bush tucker garden, how is the institution giving back to country the space that it has now taken? What spaces have been incorporated on these campuses that highlight the importance of country and caring for it? How is this institution treating and sharing knowledges of country and kin in non-voyeuristic, healthy ways within a local and culturally relevant context? How are they working with the custodians of that knowledge of country? How is knowing and being translated into practice? How do these institutions help support and facilitate belonging between students and the country they are on? This could be embedded throughout the institution and not othered as a belonging unit, space, or segregated to a garden area.

ALL OUR BELONGING

So, what about Indigenous sovereignty, rather than the Australian nation-state, as the ground of belonging? What if you were birthed into country as I was? What if as a non-Indigenous person in Australia you connected with the country in which you work and live in a meaningful way? What if country gave you identity, connection and responsibility? What if you learnt the language of country and how to be in relationship with it? What if no matter where you moved on that country you felt you belonged, and this sense of belonging was facilitated through ongoing practice with country and people who also belong to that country? Sure, your belonging with country would be a nurture-based rather than a nature-based relationship that has a bloodline, but this belonging is hard for another to take from you when it is authentic.

Maybe a relationship with Indigenous sovereignty locally will have you understanding the importance of Wakulda, meaning to be in oneness and take responsibility of yourself and to others, maybe you will learn of Ngukalil, the concept of I give, you give and reciprocity with all living things or maybe you will learn Maa-bularrbabu, the next seven, that we should always act with the next seven generations in mind. Maybe you will learn these at the right time when they are most relevant, on country in practical ways. Maybe deeper learning can happen around these and with it a deeper sense of belonging. Maybe you could gain this belonging through connecting with country and custodians as you grow, and it is reinforced in formal education systems.

Conclusion

There is no after belonging for me as I always belong when I think about my sense of belonging with people and country. I am acutely aware of the environments that are designed to reinforce my unbelonging in Australia as a Birrbay and Dhanggati woman. Wellness and belonging for each person who resides in Australia could be better strengthened through Indigenous sovereignty, through a facilitation of connection to country from birth. A staying always *in belonging* with a constant like country and its teachings even when engaging with temporary experiences of unbelonging keeps people grounded and connected. Educational institutions could play a significant role in helping to facilitate and reinforce this relationship by working with local custodians of country and walking the talk of moving beyond theoretical approaches and applying these into practice by actively contributing towards the strengthening and maintenance of Indigenous sovereignty.

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Deploying Rose and Abi-Rached to 'Make Sense' of the Rise of the 'Brain Sciences' in the Field of Violence Against Women

Suzanne Egan

The neuro- or brain sciences have been afforded increasing explanatory power in relation to a broad range of social issues and in fields as diverse as education, health, child protection, and criminal justice systems. Rose and Abi-Rached (2013) have termed the 2000s the decade of the 'brain sciences', the decade in which neuroscience escaped from the laboratory and entered key sites of social, cultural, and political discourse. This chapter engages with Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached's work to explore aspects of the uptake of a neurobiological approach to trauma in the field of violence against women. This is a field of practice, which with its origins in the second wave women's movement continues to be governed by an explicitly political social change agenda. Yet, in the Australian context, it has also been an 'early adopter' of the neuroscience of trauma. In this chapter, I use Rose and Abi-Rached's (2013) elucidation of the key economic, theoretical, and biopolitical developments that have enabled the diffusion of the 'brain sciences' to help make sense of what can appear a

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troublingly conservatising influence. This is important because, as I discuss, it enables me to engage in a critical though reparative dialogue (Sedgwick, 2003) with feminist scholars who have dismissed trauma discourse variously as pathologising, the result of 'professionalisation', and evidence of the 'cooption' of feminism by medicine and science. In what follows, I first provide a brief overview of my research and outline some of the issues I encountered when engaging with feminist scholarship on the uptake of trauma in feminist work against sexual violence. This provides the contextual background for the remainder of the chapter which is essentially a reflective account of the way I have come to understand or, perhaps more accurately am coming to understand, how to use Rose and Abi-Rached's work to progress my own.

Engaging with Feminist Work on Sexual Violence and Trauma

Neurobiological explanations of social issues have now entered sectors as diverse as health, child protection, mental health, and criminal justice (Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Rose, 2010, 2015; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014). My own research examines this phenomenon, focusing on neurobiological understandings of trauma and the impact of this thinking on policy development and practice in sexual assault service provision. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the uptake of the 'brain' or neurosciences in feminist work in the field of violence against women. This research programme began with my doctoral research, which used a Foucauldian methodological approach to investigate the trajectory of sexual assault as trauma (PTSD or complex trauma) into Australian feminist sexual assault services, and has continued into my current study, which extends to a broader consideration of the implementation of 'trauma informed care' policies and practices in the field of violence against women. I am interested in how the concept of trauma, a concept that particularly in its current form is very much associated with medicine, psychiatry, and increasingly neuroscience, has been used in applied feminist work against sexual violence.

At 'first glance' this appears somewhat incongruous, given that the work (intellectual and activist) of feminists agitating for and setting up rape crisis and sexual assault centres in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s was largely in response to the medicalisation, pathologisation, and disbelief of survivors' experiences by the medical and psychiatric professions. Indeed, when I worked as a sexual assault counsellor/advocate in the late 1990s

through to the mid-2000s, an anti-medicalisation stance remained discernibly explicit, evident in myriad ways, from the routine encounters with medical staff that occurred as part of our crisis work, in everyday workplace conversations, through to more formalised polices delineating and circumscribing the medical role in responding to the needs of survivors, and via work-based training workshops (Egan, 2020). Even at that time, however, the influence of neuroscience was evident in nascent form in the work of Judith Herman's highly influential trauma-and-recovery model (Herman, 2015), in the training programmes provided by the Education Centre Against Violence, and through the conferences and workshops by US trauma specialist Bessel van der Kolk.

My initial research project arose from these early observations and experiences and essentially evolved from curiosity: the wish to explore the place of feminism/s in contemporary Australian sexual assault services and the place of and relationship to trauma discourse through an empirical research project. In a nutshell, I wanted to explore and understand how it is that a feminist field of practice has taken up ideas that come from science, psychiatry, and neuroscience. In trying to understand this phenomenon, I engaged with a body of feminist scholarship on the uptake of trauma in feminist work on sexual violence, which I will outline briefly below. While this scholarship raises some important issues, I did not feel that it helped me 'make sense' of what I was 'seeing' in my research. I felt that what I needed was an alternative lens or framework, one that could ultimately help me engage in a dialogue with and perhaps contribute to it. This was my initial reasoning for turning to Rose and Abi-Rached's work.

Encountering Limits in Feminist Work on Sexual Violence—And Trauma

Internationally—at least within Anglo-American feminist scholarship—the uptake of what Marecek (1999) has referred to as 'trauma talk' in feminist work has been a source of concern and some fairly sustained critique (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011; Lafrance & McKenzie-Mohr, 2013; Stark, 2009; Whittier, 2009). Typically, there is an underlying concern, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, about the incursion of medicine and psychiatry that this is understood to represent. While there are some nuanced arguments and critiques, they tend to be grouped around the following concerns. Firstly, that trauma discourse individualises the issue of sexual violence, reducing a social and political problem to one of mental

health and individual adjustment (Lamb, 1999; Mardorossian, 2002; Marecek & Gavey, 2013). For example, Burstow amongst others argues that the adoption of diagnostic categories and symptomology pathologises survivors by treating the effects of sexual violence as deficits to be fixed (Burstow, 2003, 2005; Wilkin & Hillock, 2014). Secondly, and related to this point, the uptake of trauma (whether framed as diagnostic categories or a model stemming from those categories) in feminist counselling and within rape crisis and sexual services has typically been understood as symptomatic of a decline in feminism as social and political movement (Lamb, 1999; Mardorossian, 2002; O'Dell, 2003; Whittier, 2009)— indicative of the 'professionalisation' of sexual assault workers and organisations at the expense of a grassroots activism that characterised early rape crisis collectives.

I found this positioning of trauma as representing a decline or co-option of feminism unhelpful in trying to think through and understand what I could see in my research. As I have laid out elsewhere (Egan, 2016, 2019a), in Australian sexual assault services feminism continues to hold influence (Egan, 2019b). Indeed, feminist understandings of sexual violence have assumed a position of dominance in these services, no longer always needing to be explicitly identified as such, but rather embedded in the architecture of the services. Moreover, the research found that practitioners were actively incorporating trauma theory (PTSD, complex trauma) into their established repertoire of feminist practices, and it drew attention to their mobilisation of neuroscientific trauma research (e.g., Briere, 2002; Briere & Scott, 2014; van der Kolk, 2002, 2015). By the term the neuroscience of trauma I am referring to the ways in which psychological trauma is embedded in and effects the body, for example, the ways in which traumatic memory is often recalled and experienced in sensory (as feelings and images) rather than verbal form (Dombrowski et al., 2009; Van der Kolk, 2015).

I also found a level of reflexivity in the interviews I conducted with sexual assault workers, a knowing rather than an unknowing uptake of trauma discourse. In particular, those with lengthy working histories in the sector identified the increasing influence of trauma in the field of sexual assault service provision as one of the key changes over time and pointed to what could perhaps be seen as a certain irony in drawing on the work of male psychiatrists and psychologists such as Bessel van der Kolk and John Briere. Essentially, I was looking for a framework that would allow me to explore the nuances and to consider compatibilities—rather

than incompatibilities—between feminism and trauma discourse. I want to think through, to theorise, the ways in which the sexual assault workers who participated in my research study were able to use their understanding of trauma—and in particular the neurobiology of trauma—in ways that are enabling, rather than disabling or pathologising, and which they considered compatible with an integral part of their feminist practice.

On Developing a Relationship with a Theorist's Work: Sketching the Terrain

Nikolas Rose has an extensive body of work and has been instrumental in developing Foucault's theories and concepts—on governmentality, on biopolitics, and on the rise of the 'psy' experts. Some of this work I had engaged with as I wrestled with Foucault during my doctoral research. I appreciated Rose's ability to explain and apply Foucault's at times obtuse writings with clarity. I was also somewhat in awe of someone who (along with his selected co-authors) had such a breadth of understanding of Foucault, as well as a strong grasp of the effects of disciplinary and geographical context on the reception, translation, and transformation of Foucault's work.

During my doctoral studies I discovered Rose's research project the 'Brian, Self and Society in the 21st Century', which in part involved bringing together researchers from across the neurosciences, social sciences, and humanities via a series of symposiums and networks. Rose, who trained as a biologist before moving to the discipline of sociology, seemed uniquely positioned to facilitate this type of dialogue, together with co-author Joelle Abi-Rached, who, with qualifications in biology, medicine, and public health, was employed as a research officer on the Brain, Self and Society project. Abi-Rached has since completed a PhD in the History of Science from Harvard University, where she is now a lecturer. Their monograph *Neuro: The new brain sciences and the management of the mind* (2013) is essentially an outcome of this research project.

Initially, an attraction of the project for me was the accessible way the research team made their work readily available via series of working papers often authored by Abi-Rached as the project's Research Officer. This meant that I could access material much more quickly than via journal publications, which, given the required format and often very lengthy peer review process, can mean there is a considerable time lag before becoming publicly available. In time I was able to attend some presentations as well

as a master class Nikolas Rose gave while visiting Australia. I found him a captivating and considerate speaker. For example, I was impressed with the ease with which he seemed to be able to communicate with both general and academic audiences. And while I am not sure how 'legitimate' a reason this might be for inclining towards someone's work, I do think that this more personal encounter with Rose has been a factor in my continuing engagement and interest in it. If I am honest, my personal encounters with theorists do often play a role in how I engage with their work. Perhaps this is not so uncommon. For why would we travel (often great distances) to hear particular academics present their work 'in person' (as sponsored keynote speakers, for example)?

But I digress. Perhaps this is the point where I should be getting around to 'fessing up', as the saying goes, that Rose and Abi-Rached's (2013) work did not really feature in my final PhD dissertation. One of the more profoundly disappointing aspects of my doctoral journey was that I was unable to do a lot of the theoretical work that I wanted to do, particularly in terms of theorising (thinking through) the uptake of the neuroscience of trauma in sexual assault worker practices. At the time I thought that it was because I had run out of time, that I had somehow not worked hard enough or fast enough to do this. I now understand that it was not a deficit on my part, but that there is only so much that one can do in a single research project, that a PhD dissertation is actually a starting point rather than an endpoint, and that research does not always confirm to a linear temporal quality—the discrete project may have a finish date, but the thinking and development of that work often continues, for some people over the lifetime of their academic careers. These are things about the academic life that I did not quite understand at the time. Perhaps if I had, I would not have felt quite so profoundly disappointed in myself. So, with this 'strange' temporality in mind, I am going to move on to the question that has been preoccupying me on and off for some time, which is how to engage with Rose and Abi-Rached's work in a way that helps me to progress my own. And given that as Rose et al. (2009) have pointed out— again in relation to the reception of Foucault's theories across disciplines, time, and geography—that 'intellectual innovations do not fall out of a clear blue sky' (p. 13), I begin by drawing attention to the trajectory of Nikolas Rose's intellectual work.

Engaging with Rose and Abi-Rached: Or the Problem of Where to Focus One's Attention

What, ask Rose and Abi-Rached (2013), has enabled the neurosciences to leave the enclosed space of the laboratory and gain traction on the outside world, and to what extent is neuroscience 'configuring some of the ways in which individual and collective problems are made intelligible and amenable to intervention' (p. 227)? This work can be understood as an extension of Rose's work on the influence of the 'psy' disciplines (psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, and cognate disciplines) on social professional practices across the twentieth century. As Rose and Abi-Rached (2013) point out:

> The various psychological conceptions of the human being in the 20th century had a major impact on many practises: on understanding and treatment of distress; on conceptions of normality and abnormality; on techniques of regulation, normalisation, reformation, and correction; on child rearing and education; an advertising, marketing, and consumption technologies; and on the management of human behaviour in practises from the factory to the military. (pp. 7–8)

Indeed, across the twentieth century psychological training and language became dominant in training and domains from child guidance to social work and human resources, effectively reshaping our understandings of ourselves including ideas of identity, autonomy, and self-fulfilment in psychological terms (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013). Are the neurosciences, ask Rose and Abi-Rached (2013), assuming and perhaps overtaking the 'psy' disciplines in their social, political, and personal impact? For example, they point to the extent to which long-standing proponents of the importance of the early childhood years are increasingly reframing their arguments and attempting to influence social policy through recourse to the experiments and imaging techniques of the brain sciences. Indeed, they point to the extent to which the 'neuro-' prefix (e.g., neuro-psychiatry, neuro-economics, neuro-law) is coming to be used as an explanatory framework, in a manner similar to how in the first half of the twentieth century, the 'psy-' prefix became 'attached to many fields of investigation of human behaviour, seeming to link expertise and authority to a body of objective knowledge about human beings' (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013, p. 6).

Neuro: The new brain sciences and the management of the mind (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013) is something of a tour de force: a detailed, complex, and rigorous genealogical examination of the history and current influence of the brain sciences. The book is both conceptual and empirical. It draws on and closely examines the arguments made in scientific literature produced by neuroscientists and in policy literature referring to neurobiology. It details time spent with researchers in various laboratories, as well as informal dialogues enabled through interdisciplinary networks (e.g., conferences, workshops, symposiums) designed to bring together researchers, scientists, and scholars on the neurosciences.

Drawing on this 'data', they conduct a genealogical analysis of the emergence of the neurosciences as a distinct disciplinary formation, identifying the 1960s as the period when disciplines such as chemistry, neurology, and the behavioural sciences began to converge around the study of the brain. They describe and analyse a number of 'key mutations—conceptual, technological, economic and biopolitical—that have enabled neurosciences to leave the enclosed space of the laboratory and gain such traction in the world' (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013, p. 225). For example, they point to the way in which the human brain has come to be understood in terms of 'plasticity'; as both exquisitely vulnerable in the early years but as amenable to change (both structural and functional) across the life course (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013). With the brain now understood as open to environmental change (rather than determined by genetics and set at birth), there has been an increasing focus on the brain in everything from parenting in early childhood, the treatment of mental illness and understandings of criminality, through to popular understandings of the self (the imperative to manage and improve the self via the brain). With these few examples, I have barely skimmed the surface of their work. It is, as I have said, a dense, complicated, and complex piece of work.

One of the major preoccupations for me has been in deciding *how* to engage with Rose and Abi-Rached's work in a way that would be of most benefit to progressing my own. This may seem a rather obvious dilemma, but is probably worth exploring. How does someone with a perhaps more modest, and certainly more granular, research agenda take on board and use such broadly conceptual ideas? Eventually, after toing and froing, that circular process of reading and rereading, thinking and rethinking, I decided that what was most useful to my project was the spirit of 'critical friendship' with which they approach the neurosciences and which is

evident throughout the book. While concerns about the potential medicalisation and individualisation of social issues are acknowledged, from the outset the authors explicitly remove themselves from the overgeneralised and perhaps simplistic critique of the neurosciences more typically found in the social sciences. This is difficult to pin down as it infuses their entire book and is evident in the careful way with which they develop their key arguments. However, I am reminded here of a paper tracing the reception of Foucault's analytic of governmentality by Rose et al. (2009) where they dissuade the reader from slavishly trying to adhere to the theory or implement it in some sort of 'step by step' way. Rather:

> What is worth retaining above all from this approach is its creativity. We should not seek to extract a method from the multiple studies of governing, but rather to identify a certain ethos of investigation, a way of asking questions, a focus not upon why certain things happened, but how they happened and the difference that that made in relation to what had gone before. Above all, the aim of such studies is critical, but not critique—to identify and describe differences and hence to help make criticism possible. (Rose et al. 2009, p. 26)

This injunction served me well during a quite intensive doctoral period of working with Foucauldian theory and methodology. So it is with this spirit of creativity, of retaining a certain way of approaching an issue or problem, that I decided also to engage with Rose and Abi-Rached's theorisation of the rise of the neurosciences.

How Did This Theory/Theorist Affect the Way I Approach the Issue?

As discussed, the problem or issue I encountered in my research was wanting 'make sense' of how it is that a feminist field of practice (one which has typically been if anything hostile to medicine) has taken up ideas that come from science, psychiatry, and neuroscience. Moreover, I wanted to do this in a way that took as its starting point one of the key themes running through the practitioner interviews I conducted, which was that trauma was understood as not only compatible with, but also an integral part of feminist practice in sexual assault services.

Rose and Abi-Rached's work has had three key effects on my research. First, it has helped to give me the confidence to engage with my own

research findings in the manner that I wanted to: in a similar spirit of critical friendship, alert to the possibility of the medicalisation of sexual violence via the uptake of the neuroscience of trauma, while simultaneously open to the possibility that this does not have to be a forgone conclusion. Importantly, it has enabled me to engage respectfully with the knowledge, views, and experiences of feminists who are 'at the coal face', so to speak, and gave me space to 'take on board' what the data was telling me—that for these workers, trauma was neither oppositional to feminism nor evidence of a decline in feminist influence, but rather had become synonymous with feminist practice in the field of sexual assault service provision. Indeed, I think these practitioners demonstrate this ethos of 'critical friendship' on the ground, beyond the confines of the academy, and perhaps even in ways that could be instructive to the academy. Because what they demonstrated was a knowing rather than unknowing uptake of trauma discourse, mindful of the considerable harm medicine and psychiatry has caused to women, yet able to use its ideas on the neuroscience of trauma to enable them to work with survivors around with the embodied effects of sexual violence (e.g., hypervigilance, startle response, nightmares, recall of the abuse in images and sensations rather than verbal narrative).

Second, I have found Rose and Abi-Rached's work useful in terms of being able to position my own emerging research and scholarship within a body of scholarly work. It has helped me to build the all-important narrative about my research and research trajectory. I have come to understand my research as part of an emerging body of work that is interested in the translational process, in exploring how the concepts, languages, and practices associated with neuroscience are deployed, appropriated, and otherwise put to work in local contexts and in the messy context of real-world practice (e.g., sexual assault services). Third and related to the above point, it has inspired and helped me to frame two further research projects. One that is currently underway maps the neuroscience of trauma and its influence on Australian policy formation and responses to sexual assault. In this study I am particularly interested in examining how the concept of 'trauma informed practice' has become almost ubiquitous as 'best practice' in so many fields, including sexual assault, domestic violence, mental health, and child protection. The second, still in the preparatory phase (which essentially means I am looking for funding), involves undertaking a genealogy of the neuroscience of trauma in the Australian field of sexual assault service provision. This latter project will focus on key institutional

sites, such as the training organisations that typically provide work-based training to sexual assault practitioners, as well as particular sexual assault centres known to be influential in the uptake of trauma (e.g., so-called trauma specialist services and trauma counsellors).

Conclusion

So here we are, at the end of an unfinished story, one which like most will likely be subject to changes and 'revisions' over time. Will I recount this 'exact' same story of my encounter with *Neuro* (2013) once I have finished my next two projects? Maybe. Yet the narrative will change, and certainly it will expand and extend as I move along—and around and between—my own intellectual and research trajectory. Both Nikolas Rose and Joelle Abi-Rached have since moved along in their own separate ways through related fields of interest. Rose, for example, has for some time been exploring city living, the brain and mental health. This is interesting work, but perhaps not so directly useful to my own. Moreover, there is a burgeoning body of work in the now established field of critical neuroscience which provides multiple perspectives on possibilities for critical dialogue between the social sciences, humanities, and neuroscience (see, e.g., Choudhury & Slaby, 2016; Fitzgerald & Callard, 2015; Meloni et al., 2018; Slaby, 2015; Slaby & Choudhury, 2018; Tomasi, 2020). And feminist scholars are engaging with the neurosciences across some areas of feminist concern (see, e.g., Bentely, 2020; Duchesne & Kaiser Trujillo, 2021; Shattuck-Heidorn & Richardson, 2019; Roy, 2016; Walsh & Einstein, 2020).

In this chapter, I chose to focus on Rose and Abi-Rached's work. It can be helpful I think to take singular focus for a bit, to engage with just one theorist, one book, one essay. It can help, or at least it has helped me, in gaining a sense of mastery, or more precisely a sense of containment—a space where I block out all the other ideas and theories that compete for my attention, if only for a moment. Yes, there is always a chorus of exciting, interesting, and very complex ideas out there. But as I have been writing on Rose and Abi-Rached's *Neuro* (2013) for this chapter, considering the lessons it has taught me, they have been kept in the background. Now that I am finished here, they will have a critical friend's attention again.

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What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Neuro? A Response to Suzanne Egan

Julian Wood

At the planning stage for this book, we were involved in discussions about how to divide up and allocate the relevant chapters and responses. I saw early on that Suzanne Egan's work addressed, in a concrete and applied way, topics that I had been worrying about in a slightly unfocused way for some time. Both of us had been impressed by Rose and Abi-Rached's 2013 book *Neuro.* For me, this book related to a larger project to enter into a critical but friendly dialogue with neurological understandings of humans and their behaviours (Hansson & Lindh, 2018).

For Egan, the book represents a way to think through how the field of trauma studies and trauma-informed practical interventions had evolved in tandem with an incorporation of neurological discourses about the brain. Over and above that, it was also a demonstration of the arc of Nikolas Rose's body of work showing the usefulness of Foucauldian methods to analyse power/knowledge in the institutionalisation of discursive positions, bodies of expertise, and technologies of the self. Neuroscience applications could be seen as a paradigmatic case of the uses of science into social problems. As these processes consolidate, it becomes easier to see

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how this might relate to the management of people and potentially to the shaping of the social order.

In productive discussions with Egan, I gained insight from her account of travelling alongside an evolving theory/field whilst developing one's thinking. I could not claim such an organic sense of interweaving, but I do have some parallels in my own journey within my chosen sub-discipline of the sociology of education.

Before going on to discuss aspects of possible overlaps, I would like to say a few things about my formation as a teacher and the scope of sociology at least as I initially learned it. I began reading sociology seriously as an undergraduate in the UK in the 1970s. This was an era in which sociology, and the sub-discipline of sociology of education, was in an expansionist and confident moment. Some of the fuel for this was a newfound engagement with Marxism and reproduction theory (Apple, 1978; Young, 1972). This seemed to contain the promise of an increased relevance, particularly on issues such as the maintenance of social class trajectories and overcoming barriers to social justice. When we were not lost in reading Lacan and Althusser, we were inviting Bowles and Gintis (1976) to come and tell us how modern schooling was also (essentially?) the preparation of workers for Capitalism. Though this seems as passe as schools of thought like symbolic interactionism, its social justice legacy potentially remains relevant.

There are two further points that were evident even from my initial liking for sociological theorising. Firstly, there was the fact that, despite sociology's ever-expanding 'remit', not everything could be explained using only a sociological lens. A theory of the internal (more usually the realm of psychology) was necessary as well. Otherwise, one could end up with an 'oversocialised' model of humankind as author Dennis Wrong (1963, 1999 [1967]) argued decades ago in his much-quoted article.

The second limitation or correction was to do with striking a balance between materialism and idealism. This was particularly pertinent to Marxist theorising, after all, historical materialism was supposed to keep these two -isms in some dialectical relation. Even if one did not buy into debates about (economic) 'base' and (cultural) 'superstructure', it was important to think about how material conditions affect social developments and the prominence and promulgation of dominant ideas. Italian theorist Timpanaro (1975), writing somewhat polemically, was surely right also when he urged social theorists to recall that materiality matters. If you wait long enough, old fashions become new again. So-called New

Materialism (Barad, 2007. Coole & Frost, 2010) is somewhat in vogue, for example. It looks promising, although it is not without its own elements of mystification and poetic excesses (matter being seen as animate and so on). Coming right up to date, some of this vexed issue of mind and matter is recast in debates about the brain and the mind. A theory that considers ideas or motivations only in a free-floating sense is ill-equipped to have serious conversations about the functioning of the brain and its neurotransmitters. This is certainly part of the contested terrain that Rose and Abi-Rached's work relates to.

Even so I am reminded that the growth of understanding is not as linear as a retrospectively arranged narrative would make it appear. In terms of my formative engagement with research and theorising, there are two other developments that are worth recalling, though I will not have space to do them much justice. The first was feminism—the so-called second wave of which unleashed a huge amount of pent-up energy and accounts from often denied realities (Bland et al., 2013, [1978]). This not only produced new theorising but also sloughed off so much of the deadened or narrow previous paradigms. Its work of rewriting the canon is a continuing legacy. We sometimes forget how inventive and innovative feminist research was (and continues to be). It is dangerous to romanticise a bygone 'golden age', but there was an enormous energy released as many paradigms were adjusted or shaken up.

The other important development was being in on the formation of a cultural studies approach as that more eclectic framework branched off from mainstream sociology and media studies (for an interesting retrospective view of this largely in the British context, see Morley & Chen, 1996). Again, space prevents a fuller account of how that felt. Having worked with some of the key scholars in the UK at that time, my attachment to this development is tinged with the personal. There was great excitement in opening up new avenues of inquiry and addressing subjects that were now legitimate areas of investigation for this new, inherently multi-disciplinary theorising.

To come back to the main thread, the subject of this response is essentially about how a more 'neurological' view of people might affect the theorisation of people and their agency. This involves a complex nexus of possible relations and avenues of inquiry. It also relates, not entirely tangentially, to how 'necessary' it is to adopt some frameworks or theories in order to take positions on practical social issues. This relates to the idea of deciding what topics 'need' what kind of theory. I am tempted to adapt an

idea from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1975) when he talks about experience near (immediate relations) and experience far (more abstract categories or guiding principles). Maybe we can think of something like theory near and far. In teaching sociology of education, for example, I need a theory of why neoliberalism, and its marketisation of parental school choice, has affected the educational landscape and the distribution of life chances in Australia. This involves a range of theories or perspectives that I might need to have at hand a lot of the time when I research and teach. It is a set of theories that I trade in continuously. Then there are relations or problems that I would only come across very occasionally and for which I do not have a ready-made bank of explanations or readings in my head. These problems might be very interesting and important to read into when I do come to them, but they do not come up for me that frequently. The problem of how to theorise the place of neurological understandings of brain and personality and agency might be in that second category, but I am drawn to it nonetheless.

Again, in the light of the above, there are two ways that I am brought to neurological debates. The first is fuelled mostly by sheer curiosity. Most new developments are inherently interesting to social scientists. This is also an extension of my feeling that I need to think about motivation and agency in a holistic way. Minds are also (partly) brains and we cannot have one without the other (see comments below on dualism). Perhaps as Gregory Bateson (2000) argued some time back, we need to build steps to an 'ecological' view of minds which does not reduce to either crude materialism or untethered idealism.

My own practice as a sociologist and a teacher educator comes from a slightly different space. As implied, I do not have a clear and obvious way of arguing that the consolidation of 'neuro'-influenced practices affects my own work as an educator—although one could imagine this changing in the future. Yet I have been aware of neurobiological views out of the corner of my eye for some time and have collected readings around the topic in a bowerbird kind of way. I have been a sociologist for about three decades. Below I make a few remarks about proceeding/developing as a sociologist and the issue of trying to read into sub-disciplines that are 'next door'. I briefly address the dilemma of balancing sociology and other frameworks before considering further particular readings of 'neuro debates'.

Neuroscience and Progressive Agendas
for Educationalists

I would now like to turn to issues around the area of neuroscience and agency. There is great complexity here (to which I admit I cannot do justice). The link in my mind is to do with thinking through what really 'governs' our choices and beliefs. It also fits with some reading I had been doing on education and the agentic nature of the sovereign self. Of course, there is nothing that is new here. This had been a concern in philosophy (e.g., age-old disputes about free will and determinism) and it has its correlates in sociology (ideology and (false) consciousness). Neurological and other biological underpinnings are complexly related as well.

Once one has become sensitised to an area you notice more readily things that are possibly related to it (the theory of the lowering of the perception threshold). So, for example, I became aware some time back that some authors have sought to combine brain science and children's learning capacity in a multicultural context. The following example is brief and not intended to be more than illustrative. Zaretta Hammond (2014) gives us a well-intentioned example of this potential meld of neuroscience and progressive education in her *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*. The author tries to take on some quasi-neurological arguments about the ways in which American school children from non-English backgrounds learn. Without seeking to oversimplify the whole book, it does seem to rest on the idea that the brains of kids from certain 'backgrounds' (which codes for 'race' in this American context) have developed mentally in certain ways that needs to be taken into account. It appears to come close to saying that non-white kids are 'wired' differently because of their milieu/upbringing. It does seem as if this is a reinvention of a similar set of arguments. Although the book is clearly well-intentioned (even allied to the realm of compensatory education), it reminds us of problematic initiatives from previous American social sciences where the concept of 'race' was mapped to the so-called bell curve of IQ scores (Herrnstein & Murray, 2010). Hammond's book effectively talks about the project of NESB (CALD) kids in a remedial vein and sees its project as part of 'building their intellectual capacity'. Of course, because of the admixture of neuroplasticity, there is also the idea that we can help those under-connected brains to become more efficient. Hammond argues that we would do this by concerted effort and by teaching in a culturally responsive way. Culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy is a 'good thing' for

a whole series of reasons, but to ground all this in a perceived neurological differences surely needs further thought.

FROM BIO TO BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL AND THE HISTORICAL POLITICAL DIMENSION

Whether we like to admit it or not, we owe a debt to Rene Descartes' foundational thinking about mind and body. At the very least, it gives us a 'dualism' to push back against. We have learned from his 'error' (Damasio, 2006), and new paradigms try to address the topic of people (and bodies) and their thinking more syncretically and more holistically. As mentioned above, thinking about the brain as an organ could be another way of bringing materialism back in. So we can link this to 'new materialism' (Ellenzweig & Zammito, 2017; Sarah & John, 2017), a development that relates to these ongoing debates about an 'ecological' view of people and their material world (see Coole & Frost, 2010; Devellennes & Dillet, 2018). Authors in this paradigm argue that we are constituted materially in a 'material' world which is to be understood in the most epistemically fluid way (Barad, 2007). As also mentioned, a different version of a related argument about mind in an ecological context was made by Bateson some time back. These perspectives try to link, for example, ontology and agency to politics/sociology and to the natural world and science. It is dizzying stuff. In some way the paradigm makes up in inclusiveness what it lacks in coherence.

For those with long memories, some of this could be related back to earlier debates within Marxism/historical materialism. Matter matters, as it were. Italian theorist Timpanaro (1975) argued a while back, the Left has to take materiality (and science) seriously or simply be condemned to idealism. Nevertheless, the shadow of dualism is still there, just as it was for Gregory Bateson's intriguing attempts to build an ecology of mind (Bateson, 2000).

Neural imaging has given these debates a new twist, but the issue of our biological materiality and the old 'split' between brain and mind is not that easily relegated/erased. We know that mapping the brain (Carter, 1998) is not the same as mapping the mind, but the project to get more specific about brain regions and their functions is heralded as a new frontier. It is one that will continue to be explored, even though many

scientists are currently sceptical of some of the claims advanced by brain research[1] (Albright et al., 2000; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013).

Neuro—The Book and Its Intervention

The release of Rose and Abi-Rached's book was timely. Personally, it immediately caught my attention partly because I follow Rose's work (Rose, 1990, 1998). In a biographical sense, I was drawn to thinking harder about the limits of neurobiological explanations precisely because I did not have a science background. 'Of that which we cannot know, we must remain silent' is fine in a philosophical sense, but feels frustrating when developments that affect our sociological explanations are cut across by things we cannot engage with. When the book was written (nearly a decade ago now), the neurosciences had already entered an expansionist phase. As Egan said, they had 'escaped the lab'. New non-invasive brain imaging techniques were an accelerant to this. Watching bits of the brain 'lighting up' was suddenly seemingly standing in for us 'seeing thinking' (Illes, 2007).

As the authors also pointed out 'neuro-' had rapidly became attached to numerous disciplines and practices. In a very short time, the prefix gave us neuropsychology, neuropsychiatry, neuroaesthetics, neuromarketing, neurotherapies, and so on. The authors saw the need to think through the links to what we might call 'brain policy' (Blank, 1999), that is, the deployment of brain science technologies that take the experimental modelling of/about neurochemistry and insert it into the regulatory real. Having patiently interrogated psychology and governmentality, Rose saw how such discourses were relatable to biopolitics and the 'politics of life itself' (Rose, 2001). In a sense neuro- had replaced psy-, as their book puts it. The stakes could hardly be higher.

Neuro was mostly very well received (Clough, 2014; Gere, 2014; Gottschalk, 2015). Partly this was because the book and its project were seen as open-minded and prepared to engage seriously with neurobiological approaches in their own terms. This was not some sort of hatchet job. As Gere (2014) said, this even-handedness allowed the book to deliver some serious and cogent criticisms when necessary. The authors are also

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[1] Incidentally, this is to one side of Paul Feyerabend's still pertinent question about the status of scientific knowledge itself. As he argued a while back, science is not always as 'scientific' as it likes to think it is (Feyerabend, 1987, 1993).

aware that social scientists do not control every research agenda or funding priority. The brain sciences and those that want to use them proceed apace. They will not wait for sociologists to raise theoretical objections (although one could imagine that some ethical limits will have to be ongoingly negotiated, as the history of eugenics shows us). Important discussions around ethics in this new neurobiological research space continue to attract scrutiny. For a discussion of a cross-cultural examination of brain science and ethics, see Amadio et al. (2018). For me and other researchers, reaching some accommodation with the materiality of the brain and its decision-making (and thinking through what difference these models might make and in what circumstances) is of ongoing concern. As Illes and Bird (2006) say, 'advances in neuroscience increasingly challenge long-held views of the self and the individual's relationship to society' (p. 511).

As Rose and Abi-Rached are aware, there is a tendency with the new brain sciences to join up the dots too hastily. The positivistic lure of brain science is great, but do measurements of neurochemical mechanisms of the brain hold the 'real key' to human behaviour? Rose and Abi-Rached are at pains to suggest why this cannot be the case. A. C. Grayling (2022) recently made an allied point. Brain imaging and experimental investigations are not complete in themselves. This is frontier knowledge, but not necessarily sedimented fact. The cognitive functions that neuroscience explores are the ones most susceptible to our current means of investigation—that is sensory pathways. These it can trace/measure. As Grayling puts it, 'correlations are what neuroscience observes—not causes—and therefore not explanations (…) but correlations [that] are highly suggestive of explanations, so much so that in some cases clinical applications can be derived from them' (Grayling, 2022, p. 302).

In a similar vein we may need to get used to the idea (that we have known for a while really) that the brain makes decisions 'for us' behind the scenes and usually long before we think we have decided things with our conscious minds. It is part of its 'remit' to audit what resources are needed to do what is required to ensure our survival. Conscious thinking is too slow for the brain in this mode (Barrett, 2020). You have to be 'wired' to run from a snake independent of your knowledge of herpetology.

Coming back to trying to get a handle on the importance of neuro, it is not useful to set up neuroscience as a straw person. Defeating a caricature of brain science would be a pyrrhic victory (and, crucially, would ensure that we would not be taken seriously by the scientists themselves).

Arguably, this is the key strategic advantage in Rose collaborating with Abi-Rached. Medical research *is* organised knowledge (Sklair, 1974), and therefore any attempt to debate within and across it has to take cognisance of this. Nor would steering away from it altogether be satisfying. As indicated, to suppose that we could simply 'park' brain science while we proceed to talk only politically and philosophically about the behaviour patterns it relates to would be a weak position. Even if the brain is not fully 'in charge', it is implicated in agency/decision-making both rational and irrational.

Rose and Abi-Rached's book carefully picks its way through the technical arguments for us. However, it does not 'bow down' to science just because it is science. This aids its project of paying attention to internal debates and forms of critique that are politically progressive whilst being sceptical about overclaims. As implied, they are clear that brain science cannot be a sufficient or complete explanation of *all* aspects of lived behaviour. Nor do they necessarily concede to what they see as the neuroscientists' claim to be more 'objective' about motivations and agency. As one might expect from Rose, the book is sure-footed over this terrain of bio-politics and governmentality. As he points out (Hansson & Lindh, 2018), neuroscience is potentially intervening in a set of debates that psychology has already 'colonised', and governmentality is surely stitched into the fabric of such world views.

To put it another way, whatever findings neuroscience might come up with about how individuals' brains think/function would surely have to pass through the social, as it were (and the historico-legal, come to that). Regimes of truth depend upon a number of institutions and supporting practices and theories. As we 'other Foucauldians' would agree, the key fact about discourse is that it is *productive*. The doing of a praxis brings its object of study into being. Hence the importance of critiquing interventions into such inherently complex phenomena as domestic violence and policy, as Egan demonstrates. The real world is more complex than theory alone (as criticisms of 'lab rat' psychology said decades ago). When approaching neurological research, we cannot just 'cherry pick' (Amadio, 2018). We would have to think about the bases for selective uptake on a case-by-case basis. This is not to reject neuroscience *tout court*.

Questions remain of course about how we select its uses and who is selecting and for what purposes. Can we solve our problems by assuming we can pick good uses from bad ones and outlaw some neuroscience uses and encourage others? Who would make such a decision, and on what

basis? For example, could we conveniently separate 'good' uses (e.g., helping stroke victims recover by looking at how to re-wire their neurons) from 'bad' ones (e.g., assuming we could map or impute 'criminal tendencies' by wiring up young offenders' brains)? Would this be the equivalent of making docile brains in order to identify and control docile bodies?

Neuroplasticity and social learning add much further complexity. Some might say that, if the brain is 'social', then could we also admit it can be antisocial, but that both of these can be (re)trained. Once again, this leads us towards an ethical minefield. The authors clearly demonstrate that we cannot collapse the debates to being one of science versus the humanities—both are inscribed within a larger frame. History and power/knowledge always matter. The book is very careful not to reduce history and politics to purely technological frameworks. Debates about free will (and responsibility and motivations to change) are complex topics, as the short example about legal applications suggests. Responsibilisation has been criticised as a neoliberal control mechanism/agenda, but the idea of taking no responsibility for our actions and decisions would be unhelpful, as well as faintly absurd. 'My brain made me do it' is not a sufficient defence.

Rose and Abi-Rached are wary of falling off the high wire on one side or the other. As they say, socioreductionism has to be held against pure positivism. The concept of the self seems relatively simple, but that too is deceptive. The authors underscore the idea that the (Western idea of the) 'self' is neither un-influenced by externalities nor sovereign in the classic liberal sense. Nor is it a natural and self-explanatory category. Broadly, they argue that the self as a category is an artefact of history, culture meaning, and language (allied points were made some time back by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973)). However, that does not mean 'it' simply disappears when stretched across these categories. When picking our way between neuroscientific conceptions and sociological ones, it would be, as the authors say, 'prudent, therefore, to abstain from both celebration and critique' (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013, p. 203). Or, to put it another way, the jury is still out (Albright et al., 2000).

Conclusion

I do not really have a conclusion, at least if that is thought of an end point, far less a teleology. As a teacher/teacher educator, I have enjoyed reading my way into debates about neurobiology, but I am still not sure how 'essential' (or theory near) they are for me. One can teach sociology of

education without ever placing neurobiological views of personhood at the very centre. However, we do not want the neuro perspective to be an absent centre either. We do not want biology to be the bedrock that remains when all the sociological stuff has blown away. We surely have not reached the point where personhood is universally thought of as merely brainhood (Clough, 2014). Partly, this is matter of watching which way the debates go. After all, we have rubbed along with psychology of education and theories of developmentalism for years, and we can mostly agree to run in parallel. Lived realties have always been an important touchstone for sociological theorising. I am reminded of a remark made by an academic friend when there was a big conference in the UK on the 'discovery of the body' in sociology: *I am glad this has come about, I always knew I had a body*, she said. We have brains too, and minds and (possibly) genetic predispositions too.

The strong suggestion of books like *Neuro* is that we will never have a complete explanation of either brains or how neurobiology relates to governmentality and actual behaviours and predispositions, let alone what socio-politics and law and history do to these debates. Trying to put things together and become aware of parallel paradigms and developments in allied fields is part of the fun of being a thinking person. Even if it can be frustrating at times. Sometimes it feels as if we are condemned to oscillate wildly between the fantasy that we can know everything and the shrug that says whatever we find out will never be enough. What metaphor will suffice here? The jigsaw is likely to be incomplete for a long while (and there may be 'missing pieces' that we might never find, even down the back of the sofa), but, if we keep looking, and placing bits that *do* fit together, then at least a partial picture might emerge. Isn't there some satisfaction in that?

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The Power, Passions, and Perils of Identity: On Chantal Mouffe

Remy Y. S. Low

'Those Teachers'

'I don't think you know what it's like'.

She spoke those words clearly, audibly enough for everyone to hear, with a confident overtone, yet skirted by a slight tremble only perceptible to those who were sitting close by. The other students in the class sat quietly for nearly a minute, which had the effect of keeping her words suspended in the air of the small, poorly ventilated room where we spent those Monday afternoons together for 12 weeks.

'Sorry. I didn't mean to shut down the chat', she said, punctuating the muggy silence. 'I just wanted to share what it's like to have a shit teacher who puts you down for being poor'.

'Don't apologise. Thank you for being honest and sharing'. I moved instinctively to reassure her—or was it to reassure myself?—that this was precisely the sort of discourse we should be having in a sociology of education classroom. She had just told a story about the humiliations she had experienced at the hands of a teacher in high school for not having the

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right equipment (i.e., a laptop that was powerful enough to run a taxing design program), for not attending excursions (e.g., to ticketed art exhibitions), and for not blending the colours adequately in her studies leading up to her final visual art work (because she did not have the right range of markers that retailed for $12 each). Hers was the sort of experience that made real our discussion of the topic for that week: on the impacts of social class on education.

'Yeah, thanks for sharing', came a voice from the back corner of the classroom. 'I can't say I've had the same experience, but I know the sort of teacher you are talking about', he said.

There were a few nods around the classroom. It seemed as if the discomfort and awkwardness was dissipating a little.

'I had a teacher in primary school that told me that all the kids in my suburb grow up to do drugs, get pregnant in high school, and wait around for handouts from Centrelink'. Another student chimed in. I remember thinking that surely no one in their right mind, regardless of what suburb they are from, would but for utter desperation choose to spend their days subjected to the terrifying paperwork and notoriously long wait times that are the flaming swords guarding Australia's welfare coffers (Henman, 2017; Vincent, 2019). Given the ways in which the western suburbs of Sydney are commonly perceived, that student's primary school teacher was likely ventriloquising the ways that classed, raced, and gendered tropes interlock with geography in long-standing stereotypes of the region (Collins, 2000; Powell, 1993).

'What is wrong with them?!' A young woman sitting near the front of the class called out. Her exasperated and slightly dramatic question would induce its intended rhetorical effect. The tense mood that had held the room only a few moments ago was now palpably shifting towards indignation and disdain.

'What are those teachers even doing there? They are just jaded and hanging on for the pay or something'.

'They are traumatising and retraumatising their students'.

'I bet they are probably old teachers. Were they old?'

'I wonder if they were taught subjects like this when they were training to be teachers'.

'They should be sacked!'

I wanted to channel the class back to the discussion on social class and importantly, on what could be done both personally in our pedagogical practice to mitigate its impacts on student learning and institutionally to

reduce the barriers for students from less well-to-do homes. Surely, I figured, these soon-to-be teachers needed to think more about how their theoretical understandings of social justice can be operationalised in actual classrooms and schools—'they need to be able to imagine what that might look like and sound like', as Comber (2016, p. 413) urges.

'So now we understand a bit more about how social class impacts students' experiences of education, what would being a "good teacher" look like? And how could we change the ways schools do things to make them more inclusive?' I put to them. Not a small ask for a mid-afternoon on a Monday after lunch.

A hand was raised tentatively, soon accompanied by a voice that was surprisingly assertive. 'But can we change the ways schools are? I mean, if they are full of those jaded teachers who talk trash about their students… can we change their minds?'

'Can we?' I repeated, hopefully.

'As if they would listen to us'. She retorted. 'They are set in their ways'.

Chantal Mouffe and the Uses of Identity

The vignette offered above is composed from fragments of discussions that I have had in sociologically focused teacher education classrooms over the past few years. Sure, the topics under discussion—ranging from social class as illustrated above to religion and race to sex and gender—might vary week to week. And of course, the experiences that students bring to bear on the discussion of these topics are marked by the concatenation of innumerable conditions, relations, contingent life events, and personal proclivities that come together to make each of them unique. Yet the broad contours of many discussions do follow to the pattern I have narrated above: the courageous disclosure of a difficult personal experience of an issue, emboldening those who have similar experiences to chime in while uneasiness ripples amongst those who do not, then—based on a mixture of aggregation and abstraction—focalising on a type of person who might be responsible for the difficulties, and whom the class can then collectively agree is 'the problem' that needs to be resolved (or not uncommonly, just gotten rid of). Students often walk out after class continuing their chat in twos, threes, and fours, bonding with one another in ways that contrast starkly with the individuals who were silently scrolling on their phones or tapping on their laptops just before class. And I often get the sense that they are galvanised with purpose after these sessions—a

determination to be among the 'good teachers' and not the 'shit', 'old', 'jaded', 'undereducated' ones who traumatise their students and should be cast onto the scrapheap. Yet I am often left with a gnawing, subterranean current of discomfort after these classes.

When I am trying to make sense of social dynamics like this, I sometimes turn to social theorists. During my doctoral studies and in the years immediately after, I drew a lot of inspiration from the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe. She had helped me conceptualise how religious identities—diverse as they are within and between groups categorised as such—coalesce in complex and contingent ways around political issues (e.g., Low, 2013, 2016). So, having experienced her work as a raft to navigate the choppy waters of religion and politics, it was to her that I turned for help to make sense of the abovementioned social dynamics in my classrooms. Over several decades, Mouffe has theorised how the microcosmic forces that play out in small spaces like my classrooms can be seen more broadly in how diverse social movements operate to change society. While a complete account of her work is not the aim of this chapter, a brief outline of its key contours will show how it is germane to classrooms like the ones I am usually in.

Any society, according to Mouffe, is nothing but the institutionalisation of political outcomes achieved through struggle. What this means is that everything we take for granted about the society we live in—encapsulated in phrases like 'this is just how are' or 'this is how we do things here'—are nothing more than historical settlements established by those who have been successful in gaining power over others, especially by taking control of state and representative institutions. There are two immediate implications of this foundational, ontological premise. First, that there is no such thing as 'society' as such. Yes, this sounds eerily like Margaret Thatcher's notorious declaration made while pillorying those who make demands of the state and society: '[T]hey are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families' (Thatcher, 1987). I raise Thatcher's anti-welfare screed because I wish to use it as a foil to show that while on a superficial level Mouffe's claims about society chime with the former Conservative Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, they are radically divergent in how they understand this and the implications it bears. For Thatcher (1987), because there is 'no such thing as society', the onus is on hardworking and moral individuals to make life better. Beyond this, we can hope for no more. For Mouffe, the non-objective status of any

society—or what she prefers to call 'social order'—means that everything is up for grabs (i.e., contingent): the way we structure the economy and distribution of resources, the way we relate to one another, and what constitutes 'moral' or 'immoral' behaviour, even how we think about ourselves. Mouffe labels this 'up for grab-ness' of any social order the political dimension, the action of 'grabbing at' social and representative institutions she calls 'hegemonic practices', and 'hegemony' the state of having 'grabbed' those institutions successfully. So, in short, every society is the institutionalisation of a hegemony. In her words:

> To speak of hegemony means that every social order is a contingent articulation of power relations that lacks an ultimate rational ground. Society is always the product of a series of practices that attempt to create a certain order in a contingent context. These are the practices that we call 'hegemonic practices'. Things could always be otherwise. Every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. A particular order is always the expression of a particular configuration of power relations. It is in this sense that every order is political. A given order could not exist without the power relations that give it shape. (Mouffe, 2013a, 2013b, p. 131)

For those who have encountered the writings of Antonio Gramsci, this passage appears as an updated version of the Italian Marxist's own Machiavellian modification of Marx, which emphasised the revolutionary imperative of forging a 'collective will': 'winning over' people from different classes and social groups in civil society by proposing shared political objectives based on new beliefs and practices (Gramsci, 1971; also, Howarth, 2015). While Gramsci theorised to make sense of a failed revolution from a dank fascist prison cell from 1926 till his death from illness in 1937, for Mouffe it was to make sense of coming to maturity in the mid-1960s and 1970s when the post-war consensus on the welfare state in Europe was fraying and when the so-called new social movements like feminism, anti-racism, and environmentalism challenged the primacy of social class the main vector of political action (Martin, 2013, pp. 1–2). So, while for the former the main question can be crudely put as 'Why did the masses not join the working-class revolution?', for the latter it is 'How do all these disparate groups and causes come together to change society?' It is her attempts to work this question out that mark her development of Gramsci's thought and which leads us to the second implication of her foundational premise that society is nothing but the outcome of political struggle.

Consider how one might answer the question: Who are you? Of course, how we answer this question depends on who is asking and the context in which it is being asked. So, if it is in an educational institution, one might respond by saying 'I am a student' or 'I teach here' or 'I am in charge of making sure that all the classrooms are cleaned and tidy'. If it is at a wedding or funeral, we might declare that 'I am her son' or 'I am a family friend' or 'I am their secret lover'. If it is at a dreary professional conference, then 'I am a historian of eighteenth-century esoteric practices' or 'I am a cryptocurrency trader'. If at an interfaith event, we might profess to be Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, or secular (notwithstanding an undying faith, despite all empirical evidence, in a chronically underperforming football club). Note two things about all these responses and the many other possibilities about how we might respond depending on context: one, that we can be many identities simultaneously (e.g., a Hindu teacher who is a daughter and sister to two brothers in a family of diehard Manchester United fans); and two, that all these identities are given to us by social institutions sanctioned by the prevailing social order. As such, we are all bearers of multiple social identities none of which is necessarily our 'true selves' (i.e., we occupy different 'subject positions') and that all those identities are not stable or given but constructed at some point in history—they do not spontaneously arise from biology or from experience (i.e., there is no 'essence' that underwrites identity) (Mouffe, 1993a, 1993b, pp. 84–85). We *learn* to identify ourselves in one way or another in relation to others, and importantly, we identify what we are with reference to what we are *not*. This holds for individual identities and for collective identities:

> Once we have understood that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity (i.e. the perception of something 'other' than it which will constitute its 'exterior'), then we can begin to understand why such a relationship may always become a terrain for antagonism. Indeed, when it comes to the creation of a collective identity—basically the creation of an 'us' by the demarcation of a 'them'—then there will always be the possibility that this 'us/them' relationship will become one of 'friend and enemy', i.e. one of antagonism. This happens when the 'other', who up until now has been considered simply as different, starts to be perceived as someone who is rejecting 'my' identity and who is threatening 'my' existence. From that moment on, any form of us/them relationship—whether it be religious, ethnic, economic or other— becomes political. (Mouffe, 1994/2013, p. 148)

Beginning with the landmark work she co-authored with Ernesto Laclau—*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985)—and continuing into the present, a consistent argument advanced by Mouffe is that change to any social order requires this dimension of antagonism. That is, any change to society that seeks to replace an existing hegemony with a different way of doing things (i.e., a counter-hegemony) requires this 'political' dimension, the drawing of a 'political frontier' that unifies people with different identities and interests into an 'us' against a 'them': 'Political discourse attempts to create specific forms of unity among different interests by relating them to a common project and by establishing a frontier to define the forces to be opposed, the "enemy"' (Mouffe, 1993a, 1993b, p. 50).

Yet given the horrifying historical evidence of precisely such dynamics as exemplified in ethno-nationalism, religious extremism, and reactionary populism, is this not a dangerous political theory? Does arguing for the inescapability of antagonism in every society and the necessity of harnessing its dynamics for social change not amount to flirting with the worst excesses of collective life? The baseness of this is something that Mouffe does not shy away from. Indeed, against her liberal interlocutors who seek to forestall this conflictual dimension of social life—whether it is other theorists like John Rawls who appeals to what is 'reasonable' and Jurgen Habermas who calls for 'communicative rationality', or 'third way' social democratic political parties that seek to achieve a non-conflictual consensus between historical adversaries (e.g., employers and workers)—Mouffe (2005, p. 2) argues that: 'The aspiration to a world where the we/they discrimination would have been overcome is based on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics'. What is this 'real task'? It is to mobilise the dynamic of antagonism to create a collective 'we' that advances progressive social causes against a 'them' who stand in our way. In her more recent works, against the liberal bias against 'passion' as 'referring to affects of an irrational and undesirable nature', she has further argued that such passionate affects are a key component in this collective identity formation: 'A counter-hegemonic politics necessitates the creation of a different regime of desires and affects so as to bring about a collective will sustained by common affects able to challenge the existing order' (Mouffe, 2014, p. 155, 157).

And yet the pointy question that undergirds liberal objections to such an antagonistic politics fuelled by passion remains: Does this not open the

door to identity-based violence (e.g., Sen, 2007; Appiah, 2018)? Mouffe agrees that this is an ever-present possibility, so she suggests two strategies to tame it for the purposes of deepening democracy and pluralism. The first is to posit an 'us' identity that stands above and beyond particularistic associations like family, ethnicity, or religion and which can accommodate an ever-expanding number of people who are committed to progressive social causes. Her preferred identity category for accomplishing this is 'citizen' (e.g., Mouffe, 1992, 2006; 2013)—an identity that presumes upon the modern nation-state (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 90–118; also 2012). The second way to subdue the violent excesses of identity-based politics advanced by Mouffe is to reframe 'antagonism' as 'agonism', which means seeing 'they' who do not abide by 'our' political causes not as 'enemies' to be eliminated, but as 'adversaries' to be defeated within the bounds of democratic procedures: 'Democratic politics requires that the others be seen not as enemies to be destroyed but as adversaries whose ideas should be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas will never be questioned' (Mouffe, 2002/2013, p. 185). Here again, affects are to be encouraged:

> the prime task of democratic politics is neither to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere; it is, rather, to 'tame' these passions by mobilizing them for democratic ends and by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives. (Mouffe, 2002/2013, p. 186)

By this point, it might be apparent why Mouffe has been helpful to me for understanding the dynamics I experience in my teacher education classrooms that explore the different social dimensions that shape young people's experiences of educational institutions. Depending on the topic under consideration each week (e.g., social class, race, gender), students inevitably occupy different subject positions. During class discussions, antagonism is an ever-present possibility when it becomes evident that one's identity—and one's life experiences that are attributed to that identity—is constituted in relation to those who share it ('us'), those who sympathise with it ('allies'), and others who are seen as its opposition ('they'). It is only by sublimating these differences under a broader identity ('good teachers') so that those with different subject positions can come together, and the emotions accompanying each (e.g., anger, stupefaction, guilt, awkwardness) can be displaced into a generalised indignation, against

those others who stand in the way ('bad teachers'). The payoff from all this is the force it generates: the drive towards camaraderie and the political will to change educational institutions. There is something simplifying, invigorating, and seductive about it. Yet it is also this force that unnerves me. While I have previously also encouraged the unleashing of this force in educational contexts (Low, 2016), I now wonder whether Mouffe's theory of radical democratic politics, which relies on the 'taming' of passions and the domestication of antagonism (seeing others as enemies) into agonism (seeing others as adversaries), is as easy to accomplish as she suggests.

Oxytocin and the Janus Face of Social Bonds

What follows is not meant to be (pardon the pun) a killer argument against Mouffe's theory of radical democracy based on incontrovertible biological evidence. On the contrary, I draw on some of recent findings in social neuroscience both to support her philosophical intuitions about the power of identity to bring people together to achieve political goals and to confront the challenge of being agonistic rather than antagonistic.

There are many bodily processes involving multiple systems implicated in any human action in its context such that no single brain region or chemical can be said to cause it (Barrett, 2017). Bearing this in mind, I turn to research involving the hormone oxytocin—what has been (misleadingly) popularised as the 'love hormone' or the 'cuddle hormone' (Harvey & Pappas, 2021). Oxytocin is a neuropeptide (i.e., a huge class of signalling molecules in the nervous system of many groups of animals, including humans; see Larhammar, 2009) produced mainly in the hypothalamus and secreted through the posterior pituitary gland. It has played a key role throughout mammalian evolution in the regulation of complex social cognition and behaviours such as attachment, parental care, pairbonding, and social exploration and recognition (Kumsta & Heinrichs, 2013). In human groups more specifically, it has been linked to enhanced facial recognition (Guastella et al., 2008), emotional empathy (Bartz et al., 2010), generosity (Zak et al., 2007), and trust (Kosfeld et al., 2005)—even after betrayal (Baumgartner et al., 2008). Oxytocin works by inhibiting the central amygdala, suppressing fear and anxiety, and activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which produces a calm state and less cardiovascular startle responses (Sapolsky, 2017, p. 112). Unsurprisingly, then, it is often associated with the mitigation of stress and pain and hence the enhancement of wellbeing (IsHak et al., 2011). To

boot, it is one of the few hormones that operates on a positive feedback mechanism—that is, the release of oxytocin enhances positive social interactions and bonding, which in turn triggers the further release of oxytocin (Bethlehem et al., 2014).

What this detour through oxytocin suggests is that Mouffe's intuition about the importance of identity formation and its accompanying affects checks out at a biological level. In the face of marginalisation, discrimination, and stigmatisation—all of which trigger biological stress responses and tax the body's metabolic system (i.e., allostatic overload)—neurobiological processes like oxytocin release both enables and is enabled by group identity formation, which enhances social connectedness and support-seeking that lead to better wellbeing outcomes (Matheson et al., 2016). The oxytocin released during such group identity formation also lubricates cooperation within the group when social information and incentives are clear (Declerck et al., 2010).

Herein lies the rub: all these prosocial effects of oxytocin only hold for those within the group. For those regarded as the out-group—those 'others', enemies, or adversaries as Mouffe prefers—the oxytocin produced through group formation is increasingly shown to have the opposite effect. It is linked to in-group favouritism and out-group derogation (De Dreu et al., 2011), promoting in-group favouring dishonesty (Shalvi & De Dreu, 2014), escalating defensive aggression in intergroup conflict (De Dreu et al., 2010), increasing coordination of attacks on out-groups to exploit their vulnerabilities (Zhang et al., 2019), and heightening envy and pleasure derived from the suffering of out-group members (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009). Basically, oxytocin works in concert with an array of bodily process to accomplish many things, one of which is to bolster the 'us' against the 'them'.

CONCLUSION

What all of this suggests, as mentioned above, is that Mouffe's theory goes some way to explaining why identity formation around an 'us' versus 'them' can be so energising, comforting, galvanising, and strategic for effecting social change. And this is in no small part due to the affects and passions involved with such identity formation, as she also rightly indicates. However, what the research on oxytocin cautions is how once unleashed, it may not be so easy to tame the affects in order to

domesticate antagonism into a workable, non-violent agonism that sees 'others' as political adversaries and not threatening enemies to be eliminated (Triki et al., 2022). In addition, the favouritism it underwrites may well colour the acceptance of bounds established by democratic procedures, their fairness dependent on whether they are perceived to benefit 'us' (Radke & de Bruijn, 2012). Or, to bring it back to my classroom discussion, once 'we good teachers' take over from 'them bad teachers'—those 'shit', 'old', 'jaded', 'undereducated' ones—what further obligation do we owe them who are responsible for our suffering? What hope should we afford to them who are irretrievably 'set in their ways'? Maybe it is this teacher's naivete and lingering humanism to believe that everyone—even those we despise—can learn and change and that it is my job to help with that.

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Connections, Engagements, and Troubles: A Response to Remy Low

José Fernando Serrano-Amaya

In *The power, passions, and perils of identity: On Chantal Mouffe*, Remy Low offers an engaging and challenging critical thinking about his teaching and theoretical work on social (in)justice and the sociology of education. Low's chapter shows how social (in)justice is not just a topic to teach about, but a matter for reflecting on students' past and present positions in social structures and a way to draft different futures for them as teachers. The chapter is as much a theoretical contribution as an invitation to maintain the hope on change and social transformation.

The first section of the chapter presents an admirable work of (auto) ethnography combined with reflection on pedagogical practice for personal and professional purposes. The second section offers a good example of theory work and academic dialogue with the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe. The third section uses recent data from social neuroscience to support and expand Mouffe's philosophical intuitions. The three sections are interconnected by a discussion on the personal, the academic, and the political engagements with theory. Low has chosen Mouffe's work

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for its relevance to his field of interest and for the possibilities she offers to interact with concrete personal and professional issues. In his contribution, theory is not an abstract selection of a theoretical framework but a lived experience in permanent debate.

In reading the chapter I have three different reactions. The first section made me feel immediately connected with the topic, particularly with the discussion it opens on the implications of raising issues of social (in)justice in the classroom. Part of my teaching and research work is about political conflict and peacebuilding, and Low's chronicle of a classroom discussion seems like it could be describing several of my own experiences. The second section invited me to engage with the main argument of the chapter about the possibilities for and limitations to understanding politics in terms of agonism rather than antagonism. Since how to deal with protracted conflicts is a matter of ongoing discussion in my academic and activist work, I felt a call to enter in dialogue with that section. The third section troubles me. Due to my work on gender and sexual politics, biological arguments cause me suspicion and extreme caution on how and for which purposes such data are raised.

I introduce these three feelings to argue that as much as the engagement with theory implies the rational procedures of evaluation of evidence and arguments, it also requires the acknowledgement of the emotional reactions triggered. Reading, discussing, and using theory involve a messy combination of empathy, attraction, desire, rejection, repulsion, or rage, just to mention some of those feelings. How to deal with such messiness and the discomfort it causes is for me one of the constant challenges in academic work.

The idea that a certain amount of discomfort is needed for theoretical development and for pedagogical practice can be found in several arenas from philosophical argumentation to critical pedagogies, where unsettling common understandings are required for transformative and emancipatory purposes (Freire, 1972; Hooks, 2006; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007). Calls for 'pedagogies of discomfort' are raised in the teaching of social justice to facilitate the questioning of preconceptions and the positions of students in social structures (Boler, 1999); in decolonial perspectives on intercultural education to unsettle multiculturalist analyses of cultural conflict (Martínez Martínez, 2014); in the teaching of immigration issues in non-migrant contexts to discuss the complicity of whiteness with the status quo (Blum et al., 2021) or of racial inequalities in highly divided and racialised contexts (Leibowitz et al., 2010).

A pedagogy of discomfort can be even 'enacted' by those who are positioned as 'others' due to race, gender, or nationality to discuss the multiple and contradictory positioning in the pedagogical field (Lahiri-Roy et al., 2023). In all these examples, the ethical and political implications of using discomfort to raise some issues in the classroom are raised and dealt with the assumption that there is not a right or wrong way to do it, but the need for an ever-present discussion of and reflection on its implications.

I can see discomfort in Low's chapter in several parts. It appears at first when interrogating his own response to the student who raised her experience of class inequalities in the classroom. As he expressed, is our acknowledgment of others when they share painful experiences a way to express empathy with them or to give us an escape path for an unsettling moment that is difficult to manage? He openly shares with the readers his personal and professional strategies to deal with such discomforting feelings and reminds us how much of our intellectual work is also a bodily work.

It is in fact in connection with the need to live with discomfort that Low introduces his interest in the work of Mouffe. Theory can be a model to explain social issues and a way to exorcise the problematic feelings we are left with when those issues are overwhelming and difficult to manage. In our choosing of theories there is as much of an assessment of their explanatory potential as of their possibilities to manage our own anxieties. That is clear in Low's assessment of how helpful Mouffe's analysis of identity dynamics has been in understanding and processing how students bring the social outside to the inside of the classroom. The reference to encountering her during his doctoral studies should not be left on the side. Is not pursuing doctoral studies a moment in our academic careers in which discomfort helps us advance our theoretical development and at the same time an everyday experience we struggle with for our own survival?

I read in the concerns presented by Low's chapter a discussion on the ethical and political dilemmas of dealing with social (in)justice in pedagogical practices. As his initial vignette shows, those are not topics that show up suddenly when certain issues are included in a lesson or a module of the syllabus. They constitute the material and structural reality of the inside, the outside, and the in-between of formal and informal pedagogical spaces. Still, what are the effects and the implications of raising those topics in the classroom or in other pedagogical practices? If the 'unleashing' of those discussions can bring to the class an invigorating force as Low mentions, what is our responsibility in such an act? Once those forces are unleashed, what are we expecting to happen? Indeed, there are lots of

theoretical value in using very challenging perspectives, such as Mouffe's agonist approach to politics. But when we position them as a political possibility to deal with political conflict, is it just enough to name their place in certain theoretical debates as part of the lesson of the day? Those are core concerns in the pedagogies of discomfort that I would like to introduce in the conversation that I hope this response will open.

I entered in dialogue with the 'pedagogies of discomfort' in researching the politics and pedagogies of reconciliation in Colombia, Australia, and South Africa.[1] I was interested in discussing how reconciliation is presented to deal with past and present injustices, for whom and for which purposes. Reconciliation is indeed a very discomforting call, especially for those who have been suffering the effect of protracted conflicts and injustices. In exploring also if reconciliation can be taught and how, I encountered the work of education philosopher Michalinos Zembylas (2007, 2015, 2018). I was gripped by the side of his work that deals with issues of memory, history, and schooling in divided communities and the challenges of raising those topics in the classroom. In particular, I was confronted by his discussion about whether there is a certain kind of violence when creating discomfort for pedagogical purposes.

That idea resonates strongly with my own work. When I teach on gender, sexuality, and power or about sociopolitical violence in Colombia, I am often cautious about the examples I use, on the framing of the information I am presenting and on the purposes of doing it for the class objectives. I often explain that those topics may be not just data but the lived experience of some of the participants in the class, and therefore, we need to approach them with care, respect, and responsibility. Still, quite often such framing is not enough. Just recently, in class we were reading a chapter of the report of the Colombian Truth Commission (CEV, 2022). Some students were highly affected since what we were reading was very close to their own family stories. Sometimes, when discussing

gender-based violence, I have had students who talk about their experiences as a way to raise consciousness with their peers. In doing that, they challenge the implicit protocols that evade talking about some personal experiences in the classroom. Ethics protocols and disclaimers in the syllabus or the pedagogical strategies we use to make the classroom a safe space can be useful, but not enough and problematic. As Dutta et al. (2016) argue, classroom safety strategies tend to be individualistic and put too much emphasis on students' own management resources, rather than on collective critical and responsible engagement with difficult issues.

During 2021 and 2022 I have been leading with my research team three non-formal courses on politics and pedagogies of reconciliation for community leaders, public employees in charge of peacebuilding policies, international cooperation agents, and former guerrilla members participants in the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian Government and the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC.* We have opened conversations on the usefulness of an agonist perspective to conflict management with very contradictory results. As much as moving from antagonist towards agonist politics can be attractive for the call for reconciliation, participants often remind us that such movement happens in specific settings that give content to the call. Presenting a situation through a theoretical framework involves positions resulting from and constrained by the power relationships they intend to transform. Interestingly, the participants—that's the word I think is missing here—in the classes brought the need to overcome a model of contentious politics based on the dichotomies, wanting instead to focus more on the politics of solidarity and collective engagement to rebuild war-torn communities.

There is something implicit in Low's contribution that needs to be explicit and put on the table: as much as we need to take responsibility for unleashing forces that may lead to antagonism, or claim the need to move towards more agonist perspectives, it is also important to acknowledge the vulnerability it requires and causes. Low is right in interrogating his own fascination with Mouffe's call for acting in the political arena as adversaries (agonism) and not as enemies (antagonism), since it seems harder to apply than to explain in the classroom. We can make others vulnerable with our theoretical claims. Engaging with theory requires both the recognition of our vulnerabilities to transform our own perspectives and strategies to manage that unleashed force.

It is far from my reach in this response to engage with the work of Chantal Mouffe. There is extensive work for and against her ideas. Using the strategy of offering a different reading of the same author or theory would be an interesting way to enter in dialogue with Remy Low's chapter for testing the validity of his argument. I prefer to stay with his own reading to consider how, in the theoretical discussion of the utility of the dichotomy of antagonism/agonism and in the consideration of the ethical implications of the pedagogies of discomfort that we apply to teaching about social (in)justice, there is a common issue of interdependency and unequal power.

The classroom the Low describes at first is based on implicit and explicit agreements of interdependence that facilitate the sharing of and different ways of relating to experiences of injustice. As he describes, some students may share similar situations, some may feel in solidarity even if what is described is alien to them, and others may just sit browsing their mobiles and laptops. In leading discussions towards how to be 'good teachers' or good professionals in general, we can facilitate a movement towards a common ground and certain consensus. However, this can be based on representing others as the 'bad' ones and the 'ones we don't want to be': maybe not enemies or adversaries, but those 'we do not want to be like'. In Mouffe's perspective, those who can engage in antagonist or agonist contentious politics have some resources that allow them to locate themselves in one or another possibilities. That is interdependence to maintain power imbalances.

As much as I can see discomfort as a permanent element in Low's discussion as a lived experience that helps reflection, and as an analytical concept to expand the discussion and its ethics and politics, I need also to express my own discomfort with his last section. The pedagogies of discomfort are further invitations to deal with uneasy feelings, and using theory means using our feelings to advance and offer different perspectives on a similar issue. The last section of Low's contribution deserves consideration especially because today biological arguments are used once again: by anti-gender politics (Corrêa, 2018; David & Roman, 2018; Kuhar & Zobec, 2017) to reinforce dichotomic gender/sexual orders and by certain sectors of feminism to include and exclude some from the category of women.

There is a long history of suspicion about biological arguments in the study of gender and sexual politics and in their activisms. Biological arguments have been used to reinforce the idea of 'natural' gender and sexual orders, to cast some life experiences as 'unnatural', and to support the lack

of any consideration of a possible life. Sometimes biology can also be used in opposite ways, to claim the right to be who you want to be, since finally 'you were born this way'. In both cases, biological arguments have a power that overloads their own words and that gives any evidence coming from that field a charge of reality that speaks for itself. Low is honest and clear in claiming that his reference to neuroscience and research on the oxytocin hormone does not intend to be the 'killer argument' against or in favour of Mouffe's theoretical proposal.

The inclusion of such information, even if we as readers agree or disagree with it, opens another conversation on what we consider as evidence and how we present it in an argument. This is the shortest section of the chapter, yet it is the one with the most references to support the analysis, as if the nature of what is considered relevant 'evidence' was different from the previous sections of writing. Indeed, calling to the materiality of bodies as part of our need to understand the social and the political is a powerful call, that much more when discussing the ways in which we develop our affiliations and our senses of collectiveness, inclusion and exclusion—even more in contemporary politics, in which 'polarisation' has become a more common phenomenon and an explanatory category. Still, what are our intentions when dropping certain evidence or information that carries heavy weight amid a debate? Why might some readers, myself included, feel more connected with the personal initial narrative and more uncomfortable with the starkness of the scientific data?

Somehow, the same procedures involved in dealing with the passions that identity formation requires are present in our uses and support of one theory against other. Using theory is as much political as a political debate on the meanings of democracy. It also operates with similar procedures of passion, rationality, dispute, and tension. Theory work can create a sense of 'us' and 'them', just like identity politics. In the end, is not our relationship with theory and the way we use it a messy combination of antagonist and agonist politics?

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The Foggy Window: Passive Empathy and the Fight for Testimonial Reading in Neoliberal Higher Education

Lauren Weber

'Literature can be a window or a mirror', I tell my students. We are studying children's literature as part of their first year of training to be primary and special education teachers. My students and I have freshly emerged in the world from two years of lockdowns and online learning. They tell me about their struggles with making time to read. The majority of my students do not consider themselves to 'be' readers. In class discussion, an outspoken student asks, 'What's the point of reading fiction when I can look at reality?'. Even though my literature teacher reflex is to rebut this claim, I understand this student's frustration with stories in our dishonest world. I ask him what he thinks fiction is for—'entertainment?', he replies. I wonder what 'reality' my student looks at and whether or not most of this looking takes place on a screen. Another student responds, 'what about empathy?'. In my best teacher voice I ask, 'yes, what about it?'

The idea that literature can be a window or a mirror, particularly in relation to education, originates from the work of Rudine Sims Bishop in her

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influential article about children's literature, 'Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors' (1990). She argued that children need exposure to diverse texts so they can see themselves and others as they form their identities in relation to the stories they encounter at school. This practice of looking—looking at oneself, looking into something/somewhere new at others—is situated as a form of empathy. The reader is invited to look and then apply this new knowledge, gleaned from looking, to their understanding of the experience of themselves or others. In the popular imaginary, empathy and literature share a special bond (Zunshine 2006, 2022). Enabling this relationship in the classroom is seen to be a key component of education (see Nussbaum, 2010; Keen, 2007; Arnold, 2005).

Because of my professional purpose, I believe in this vision of literature. It is part of my cache of classroom catchphrases, and most of the time, I mean it. However, I know in practice that the complexity of empathy complicates this vision. The mirror may be smudged, producing an unclear reflection of the self, or the window may be too foggy to see through, obscuring the reality of what takes place inside. The blurring of our vision when we read literature for empathy is a risk. While I see this risk as worth taking, I want to think through the work of Megan Boler to support a complication of the window/mirror argument. Her 1999 book, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*, tackles the assumptions regarding the empathic power of literature, particularly in relation to education and the overwhelming perception that the value of literature in a classroom is its altruistic potential through empathy. Boler's theorising emerged partly in response to the work of Martha Nussbaum and her popular philosophical arguments involving the pro-social and empathic power of studying literature.

In the pages to follow, I explore the argument for and against an empathic approach to literature in the classroom. To begin, I situate the 'for' argument within the context of Nussbaum's work. In the middle of the chapter, I discuss Boler's position on empathy and work through her definitions of 'passive empathy' and 'testimonial reading' to help me think about the pitfalls and potential of empathy in the literary classroom. To conclude, I situate these arguments in the context of the contemporary neoliberal educational context and draw on Liam Semler's term, 'SysEd', which describes the current climate of education being shaped in the likeness of neoliberal systems. I argue that passive empathy is enabled by SysEd while the opportunity for testimonial reading is increasingly constrained. We need the time, space, and allowance for complex classroom

conversations involving the empathic power of literature and the way texts invite us to reflect on our understanding of ourselves and others. The outcome of testimonial reading is not easily measured by a standards authority, high-stakes external examination, or performance assessment. In the conclusion, I propose a vision for the mirror/window argument where testimonial reading and a reflective knowledge of passive empathy are features of our classroom discourse, particularly in the education of pre-service teachers at university.

THINKING WITH NUSSBAUM

The philosophy of Martha Nussbaum is perhaps the most influential when it comes to arguing a correlation between empathy, altruism, and literary reading. Her books, *Love's Knowledge* (1992), *Poetic Justice* (1995), *Upheavals of Thought* (2001) and *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), frame reading literature as crucial to the maintenance of civil democratic society where the interiority of individual life is imagined and appreciated as having worth and meaning. It is in the context of perspective taking that Nussbaum situates her definition of empathy 'which involves an imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the sufferer' (2001, p. 327).

Nussbaum forms her belief in the ethical value of literature alongside Wayne Booth (1989). Both argue that an approach to ethical criticism does not need to have specific motivations or means of influence. They suggest the relationship between text and reader is like a friendship and thus an important part of the reader's life which informs and instructs them, allowing room for movement and change along the way (1990, pp. 250–256). Perspective taking and the evaluation of situations and others from the perspective of fictional characters are central to this notion. Importantly, Nussbaum distinguishes empathy from compassion, and she does not see empathy as a constant reliable means for securing compassionate change in others (2001, pp. 328–329). However, she does link the two. It does not always lead to compassion but may achieve it by drawing attention to suffering others or understanding the other through comparing their experiences with one's own. For her, 'empathy is a mental ability highly relevant to compassion, although it is itself both fallible and morally neutral' (2001, p. 333). That being said, she does concede that a society of 'empathyless' individuals is worse than a society that regularly practices

empathy (2001, p. 334), a view widely accepted yet questionably applied in our world.

Nussbaum makes the case for the teaching of empathy and compassion through the reading of literary fiction at school (2001, p. 426). She argues that 'public education at every level should cultivate the ability to imagine the experiences of others and to participate in their sufferings', citing Dickens's *Hard Times* as an example of the way students can 'see the human meaning of facts that might otherwise have seemed remote' (2001, p. 426). Nussbaum argues for the humanities to occupy a 'large place in education from elementary school on up, as children master more and more of the appropriate judgments and become able to extend their empathy to more people and types of people' (2001, p. 426). She emphasises the value of the 'realist social novel' for promoting empathy in students, citing Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) as having the potential to 'inspire an empathy closely linked to reasonable judgments of seriousness and extended concern' (2001, p. 431). In her discussion of the value of the teaching and learning of literary texts, namely, social realist fiction, Nussbaum argues for the altruistic potential of empathy rather than her original conception of empathy as neutral.

In *Not For Profit* Nussbaum further explores claims from *Upheavals* regarding empathy and literature. She sees the increasing marketisation of the university and the financial strain on the humanities as threats to our society's ability to empathise and push back against the systematic oppression of others in an increasingly divided world. As previously discussed in *Upheavals*, a pedagogy of compassion can be achieved through the teaching and reading of literary texts in Nussbaum's model. At the heart of this pedagogy is the question of who students are most and least likely to empathise with (see Maxwell, 2006). For Nussbaum, texts must be assigned according to the student cohort in order to broaden their horizons and encourage them to empathise with others from diverse backgrounds (2001, pp. 429–431). Her proposal echoes the window/mirror argument that if students are exposed to diverse texts, then they will broaden their empathic horizons through exposure. However, the assumption that this model results in altruism is challenged by Megan Boler.

Thinking with Boler

While the definition of empathy is contested across a range of fields (see Keen, 2007; Cuff et al., 2016), Megan Boler identifies empathy by its belonging 'to a class of "altruistic emotions" that go by different names' like 'pity' and 'compassion' (1999, p. 157). Her definition responds to Nussbaum's coupling of empathy with altruism by way of 'fellow feeling', 'what I call empathy and Nussbaum calls compassion is probably best understood as our common-sense usage of sympathy' (1999, p. 158). However, Boler argues Nussbaum's argument for empathic reading is a naïve notion with potentially harmful effects. This is in part due to her argument that 'empathetic identification is more about me than you' in the way it requires an identification of the other in the self, as well as an approximation of experience and perspective taking (1999, pp. 158–159). She points out 'that the uninterrogated identification assumed by the faith in empathy is founded on a binary self/other that situates the self/reader unproblematically as judge' (1999, p. 159). This is problematic because it removes the complexity of power structures and social context from the empathetic equation and foregrounds assumptions about value. Empathy further requires our ability to know we are not the one who is actually having the experience. The window metaphor is problematised by Boler's reminder that as the readerly subject we are looking not experiencing:

> In popular and philosophical conceptions, empathy requires identification. I take your perspective and claim that I can know your experience through mine. By definition, empathy also recognises our difference—not profoundly, but enough to distinguish that I am not in fact the one suffering at this moment. (1999, p. 159)

For Boler, an awareness of one's difference is crucial in order to manage the risk of setting up a 'binary power relationship of self/other that threatens to consume and annihilate the very differences that permit empathy' (1999, p. 159). If the reader refrains from questioning their contextual relation to the empathic subject, a range of risks emerge. These risks relate to how the reader understands themselves in relation to the subject they are invited to empathise with. For example, a self/other binary may be validated by identifying with 'the oppressor or with more complicated protagonists' (1999, pp. 159–160).

Passive Empathy

A risk of literary education is something Boler terms 'passive empathy'. Passive empathy refers to:

> Those instances where our concern is directed to a fairly distant other, whom we cannot directly help. Some philosophers have it that in such cases the sufficient expression of concern is to wish the other well. I shall argue that passive empathy is not a sufficient educational practice. At stake is not only the ability to empathize with the very distant other, but to recognise oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront. (1999, p. 158)

Boler uses Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *MAUS* as a case study to discuss the problem of passive empathy and suggests a resolution to this problem. She cites written responses to *MAUS* from students detailing their enjoyment of reading the text without feeling anger about the horrors of the Holocaust and their belief in mastery over the subject matter following reading (1999, p. 161). In light of the students' commentary she asks 'What does it mean to experience a pleasurable read and be spared the emotions of rage, blame and guilt? In what ways is passive empathy related to the dehumanization strategies used to justify and represent war?' (1999, pp. 161–162). For Boler, the belief held by her students that they understand the experience of Holocaust survivors through reading supports her critique of Nussbaum. Boler locates the flaw in believing all students will have a reliably nuanced understanding and compassionate response to others as a result of reading about them. In summation, her argument regarding passive empathy is that it 'absolves the reader through the denial of power relations. The confessional relationship relies on suffering that is not referred beyond the individual to the social' (1999, p. 162).

Testimonial Reading

As an alternative to passive empathy Boler presents a pedagogical approach called 'testimonial reading' (1999). She argues the 'primary difference between passive empathy and testimonial reading is the responsibility borne by the reader' (1999, p. 162). For Boler, in order for students to move beyond the realm of passive empathy they must take on a 'collective educational responsibility' by evaluating and questioning their own

responses to reading the text (1999, p. 162). She describes this process as being akin to 'listening' rather than imagining the experience for one's own gain (1999, pp. 163–164). Boler describes the process of testimonial reading as something that 'requires a self-reflective participation: an awareness first of myself as reader, positioned by the mediating text. Second, I recognize that reading potentially involves a task' requiring actively challenging one's 'own assumptions and world views' (1999, p. 165). Building on the theory of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) regarding testimony and trauma Boler expands her theory of testimonial reading. Testimony acts as a challenge to the 'legal and historical claims to truth' as a process that evolves over time and place and 'has no self-transparency' (1999, pp. 165–166). The reader must also become an 'empathetic listener', an act where 'acute attention to the power relations guiding her response and judgements' while reading the text must be foregrounded (1999, p. 167). By acknowledging discomfort, irritation, anger, or rejection when reading, the reader becomes aware of her passive empathy and can navigate herself away from 'the annihilation of the text into an object of easy consumption' (1999, p. 168). There is also emphasis on embracing 'strangeness', 'ambiguity', and 'vulnerability' when reading and the acceptance of estrangement from the text while still empathising with characters through perspective taking. This is particularly important in relation to history where readers might feel like they 'know' a time and the plight of particular people because of reading. The complexity of how readers may come to 'know' a group through reading about them in a pedagogical setting is an issue I have problematised elsewhere, particularly in relation to texts that depict neurodiverse characters (Weber, 2020).

Boler argues history is strange and should feel unknowable, which makes way for her claim that, 'at minimum testimonial reading will call on us to analyse the historical genealogy of emotional consciousness as part of the structure that forms and accounts for the other's testimony' (1999, p. 168). The reader must close read their own feelings and thoughts to fully empathise with the text. Empathy is still important to the reading practice because it is 'necessary to the comprehension of trauma, and necessary to extend cognition to its limits through historical consciousness' (1999, p. 168). Boler describes the potential operations of the meta-reading practice she advocates to include identifying the 'history of a particular emotion' and unpacking the social, historical, and economic contexts that influence the reader's personal environment (1999, p. 169). For her, 'Testimonial reading pushes us to recognize that a novel or

biography reflects not merely a distant other, but analogous social relations in our own environment, in which our economic and social positions are implicated' (1999, p. 169). Reflecting on one's relationship to texts in this emotionally historical way methodologically offers a way forward for English pedagogy. Testimonial reading requires the teacher and the student to achieve awareness of one's own emotional relationship to textuality. This awareness may provide an opportunity to explore the real relation between empathy and altruism.

What becomes clear through Boler's provocations is that an *unquestioned* and *unreflective* belief in the empathic power of literature is limiting. It is limiting for the individual student, who may not have a window or a mirror to look into, and for harmful power relations to be perpetuated and established. The teacher is limited by being denied the opportunity for discussion, critical engagement, and questioning. If we accept Boler's problematisation of the empathic value of a literary education to be an expansion of the window/mirror argument, then we have learned that the goal is to aim for limitlessness through deep self-reflection and contextual awareness. This reflective work is something teachers encourage by virtue of being present in the classroom with students and allowing the time and space for them to question and reflect their contexts and associated assumptions. However, in the following section, I explore how testimonial reading faces constrains due to the pressures of systematised education.

SysEd and the Threat to Testimonial Reading

I know what context my students are entering. At the time of writing this, Australia, and much of the Global North, is experiencing a teacher shortage. My students are being offered jobs while they are still on their practicums to fill gaps, and teachers who have been in the profession are leaving or questioning their contributions due to system pressures. The reasons for these problems are complex, too complex for me to address in full here, but one way of describing the wicked nature of our contemporary education system is to say it has been overrun by 'SysEd'. SysEd is a term coined by Liam Semler to explain 'the increasingly systematized nature of the education sector and professional labour within it', which 'is a sector-wide symptom of the market-integrated and technology-driven transformation of all professional life in the developed world' (2017, p. 9). SysEd is a symptom of the larger impact of neoliberalism on the education sector which is focused on driving 'ever-increasing productivity, marketisation, competitiveness,

responsibilisation and acquisition of personal wealth' (2017, p. 9). SysEd threatens the potential for testimonial reading for a few reasons: (1) testimonial reading requires time required for students to accept the invitation to witness and to reflect on their contexts; (2) testimonial reading is not standardisable, it requires deep contextual understanding for every student and learning environment in relation to each unique work of literary art; (3) testimonial reading invites critique of neoliberalism by way of witness to its failings. Testimonial reading is an act of questioning—of the context in which we are an agent, of ourselves as individuals within this context, and of the work of literature we are faced with. This process is antithetical to SysEd because of the requirement of nuance, time, and respect of the educator to manage and mediate this process.

Conclusion: Where to from Here?

I have argued that SysEd threatens education and the potential for real empathic altruism to result from reading literature in classrooms. While I believe this argument to be strong, I am hopeful for the future. I am hopeful that the teacher shortage crisis will bring change, and with change will come a rebuke of SysEd because it clearly isn't working. I am hopeful that teachers' voices will be heard and the testimonial reading practices they currently employ will be given time and space to flourish. I am hopeful that my students will remember our discussions and take the time in their future classrooms to investigate their own positioning of the window/mirror theory and invite their students into the act of testimonial reading. While the perceived divide between theory and practice undoubtedly prevails (just look at recent comments by politicians around the globe regarding initial teacher education), I hope that this chapter has shown the value of theory. Passive empathy, while often accidental, does not speak to the potential of literary studies. While testimonial reading may not be a foolproof approach to altruism through empathy, it offers *potential*, a sign that there is hope on the horizon.

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Performing Empathy with Neoliberalism, or Kendall Jenner on the Streets, Thomas Gradgrind in the Sheets: A Response to Lauren Weber

Pat Norman

INTRODUCTION

How can we carve out space for the imagination—moral or otherwise—when we are so busy playing the games of neoliberalism? Lauren Weber has argued that we play the neoliberal game when we suggest that 'studying literature' can build empathy and empathic capability. English can't teach empathy in a way that can be measured to the satisfaction of neoliberalism. Or, as Lauren said in conversation with me, 'reading Anna Karenina can't make you a good person'. My own research explores the way professional ethics and identity are constituted, so I find the implications of the literary imagination—and the ethical consequences of such a notion for the development of personal ethics—really fascinating.

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Weber traces the lines of agreement and distinction between Martha Nussbaum and Megan Boler, before turning to the matter of neoliberalism and the classroom. How does empathy or critique work in that environment? I want to take that concept of empathy out of the classroom and consider the public pedagogy of neoliberalism: specifically, how it contends with and activates the idea of empathy and critique. These ideas are incompatible with the neoliberal project: as scholars such as Clarke (2012) and Durán Del Fierro (2022) have argued, neoliberalism seeks to standardise and depoliticise, technicising and removing the political from the social sphere. So how exactly *does* neoliberalism assimilate explicitly political notions?

To answer this question, I want to argue that neoliberalism posits an alternative 'reading' of the world. This neoliberal imagination appropriates ideas like empathy and social movements that seek to address injustice, turning them into commodified, thinned out shadows of themselves. This happens in the social sphere through processes of governmentality and suggestion, the prime conduit for which is consumerism. Advertising is the most visible and explicit way that neoliberalism enacts this public pedagogy, and I will discuss the way the appropriation of moral practices like protest can be seen in the 'Live for Now' Pepsi campaign. Finally, I make the argument that affective, empathic, and uncanny pedagogical practices—such as those advocated by Boler and Nussbaum—can create intellectual space for 'thinking differently' to the dominant neoliberal imaginary.

The Public Pedagogy of Neoliberalism: Don't Be Political!

Boler and Nussbaum articulate competing, though not antagonistic, approaches to the social good. Nussbaum's conception of empathy draws on the Aristotelian sense of *pity*, though she uses the word *compassion* to set aside the negative connotations implied by pity (Nussbaum, 1996). Nussbaum argues from a Rawlsian perspective that self-interest ultimately leads to a growing care for the other: 'there but for the grace of God go I', from which follows the idea that compassion is a necessary but insufficient condition for justice (Nussbaum, 1996). However, where she differs from Boler is in her belief that compassion—and the empathy involved in the literary imagination—can lead to a more expansive sense of social and moral justice. In *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum (1990) posits that 'practical reasoning unaccompanied by emotion is not sufficient for practical

wisdom' (p. 40). Emotions and imagination have a rationality that leavens pure reason—a truth of which Thomas Gradgrind, the utilitarian Superintendent in Dickens' *Hard Times*, eventually becomes aware.

Nussbaum builds a case—by discussing the figure of Gradgrind—for forms of character and virtue that are sympathetic to others and that enrich life with meaning and substance. This character is counter to the instrumental logic of neoliberalism which 'reaches into the social' (Brown, 2005), seeking to reduce our social position to that of consumer and worker. This is too thin for the kind of virtuous character Nussbaum advocates: she supports a certain cosmopolitanism, an orientation towards wider humanity.

As Weber has noted, Boler (1997b) makes her case for testimonial reading by challenging the 'passive empathy' of Nussbaum in *Poetic Justice* (Nussbaum, 1995). Boler situates her critique at sites of injustice—like the holocaust—or in spaces where *affective* pedagogies might help students to position themselves in relation to these traumatic events. MacDonald and Kidman (2021) describe a similar strategy of 'uncanny pedagogies' that take place at sites of colonial violence. These uncanny moments create a felt, embodied experience of historical trauma. This kind of 'reading', like testimonial reading, calls attention to complicity and inspires a sense of action towards justice.

Boler (1997a) has expressed concern that the role of schools under the liberal model advocated by Nussbaum fails to 'alter social inequities' and instead seeks to 'adapt the individuals to the existing system' (p. 211). Testimonial reading is anchored in a view of the world that places less stock in the individual than does liberalism. The sense that an empathic faculty can lead to an active concern for the wellbeing of others is unconvincing to Boler. Rather than being 'concerned with emotions as a site of social control', Boler (1997a) argues that the disciplining of emotion is a technique deployed within capitalism to attenuate the gap between unfulfilled needs and desires the system produces in the self.

Neoliberalism is a project which operates smoothest when it appears apolitical. In part this strategy happens through a process of 'depoliticisation', where policies are put in place that seek to standardise and conform human processes for consistency's sake. Durán Del Fierro (2022) has noted the way this operates in higher education, where principles of institutional diversity and autonomy are subtly circumscribed to keep conflict out of the equation:

the market needs to impose seemingly objective and neutral regulations in order to prevent political disagreements that might give rise to new normative principles and policy frameworks. (p. 3)

Standards and frameworks like these are familiar to many who work in education: Weber notes the way Systematised Education voraciously 'eats up data'. Consumption is the default condition of neoliberalism, and it achieves this through its depoliticised, commoditised, and quantified logics: a Gradgrind of the socio-economic imagination. The 'Gradgrind Mind', argues Nussbaum (1995), is one bent on calculation and utility, and *Hard Times* opens with the philosophy of the Gradgrind school: 'in this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!' (Dickens, 1961). Nussbaum (1995) suggests that the economist's way of thinking cannot do justice to the 'inner moral life' of the human being (p. 24).

So, what does that inner moral life look like under neoliberalism? The formation of a virtuous character associated with Aristotelian empathy might be broadly compatible with neoliberalism if we forget the full sweep of Nussbaum's work. The capabilities approach, for example, describes forms of human functioning the development of which, she argues, ought to be the ethical goal of a society (Nussbaum, 2011a, 2011b). These capabilities cannot be produced by individuals alone: they are a product of community. This renders them incompatible with the most extreme versions of neoliberalism which collapse rich identity positions into the singular role of consumer.

Nussbaum thus argues for a sophisticated and ethical mode of subjectivity which might resist the demands of neoliberalism. Boler's argument for testimonial reading—extending empathy to 'the limits of historical consciousness'—stems from the notion of collective responsibility for injustices of the past (Boler, 1997b). Testimonial reading produces a personal sense of the 'unimaginability' of trauma and a proactive duty to engage with and rectify injustice. But that alone is insufficient for the formation of character and a rich human identity. The two approaches complement each other: Aristotelian empathy serves as a moral foundation that extends virtuous character to concerns outside of the self, and testimonial reading situates that self within the specific contexts and histories that constitute sites of trauma, injustice, and inequality.

Nussbaum and Boler's complementary approaches to reading and to the narrative imagination are shattered under neoliberalism: cosmopolitanism is replaced with the economic logic of globalisation; social justice is

co-opted by brands as another expression of consumer identity. What neoliberalism cannot assimilate, despite its efforts, are 'thick' concepts like virtue and justice: doing so would undermine the pro-corporate assumptions that underpin neoliberal ideology. The gap between our desires and their fulfilment, the sense of injustice that emerges from our moral imagination, each produces perverse effects under neoliberalism. I want to turn now to one such effect.

Empathy and Politics Under Neoliberalism

Thomas Gradgrind would be a good neoliberal: he is a Malthusian character, existing a century before the rise of massified consumer culture which defined the twentieth century. His philosophy is utilitarian, oriented towards facts and economic productivity. I think this highlights a social tension that exists in education today and one that Nussbaum calls attention to in *Cultivating Humanity* (Nussbaum, 1997). The impulse towards utilitarianism occurs in a context where everything is counted—reduced to a *telos* of consumption or productivity. Neoliberalism doesn't only demand productivity from us. Where capitalism collapses our social and productive identity into the position of worker, or 'human capital', neoliberalism emphasises social relations slightly differently: recognising the *consumer* first, with other forms of identity functioning as commodified subordinates. Neoliberalism is tolerant of a wide spectrum of liberal human rights positions because it co-opts them into this consumerist logic.

Consider the example of the Pepsi's 'Live for Now' advertisement, featuring Kendall Jenner.[1] Released in 2017 and capitalising on the Black Lives Matter movement, the ad features a large group of protestors marching down a street with ambiguous signs pleading for others to 'join the conversation' (Victor, 2017). Kendall Jenner—a member of the famous-for-being-famous Kardashian family—is modelling nearby and feels compelled to join. She offers a Pepsi to the stern policemen surveilling this 'protest', leading to a Pepsi-fuelled street party.

The ad itself is profoundly banal, but it reveals much about the way neoliberalism understands social justice movements. There is no rage, not even a trace of anger, in the crowd that is mobilised on the street. When the police officer accepts the offer of a Pepsi from the fantastically wealthy

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[1] Pepsi has removed the ad, however users have uploaded it to YouTube for viewing: https://youtu.be/tJCcnkqnjqU

Jenner, the crowd bursts out into cheers of joy and applause. In reality, Black Lives Matter protests in the United States were violently policed cries for racial justice—they were not joyous occasions. The neoliberal interpretation of these protests is that they express some desire to 'be together', to 'join the conversation', to submit to a hedonic social impulse. It misses the point entirely. The way Pepsi responded to the backlash is also instructive. In a public statement, the company explained:

> Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding. Clearly, we missed the mark and apologize. We did not intend to make light of any serious issue. We are pulling the content and halting any further rollout. (Victor, 2017)

This marketing guff is the kind of empathy that Boler (1997b) critiques: it is a call to recognise the 'other' but hollowed out of even the most basic empathic content. It is worse than performative. This kind of participation carries a similar risk to that of passive empathy which Boler (1997b) describes: 'the annihilation of the text into an object of easy consumption' (p. 266). This consumption safely depoliticises conflict, stripping it of its intensity and historical situatedness, rendering it neither 'strange' nor 'uncanny' (Boler, 1997b, p. 266). In a similar collapse of conflict and context, Boler and Zembylas (2003) describe a number of 'reductive conceptions of difference' that are expressed as part of American liberal individualism: the idea that 'everyone is different so we should respect and honour everyone's difference equally', that 'we are all the same underneath the skin, so let's not pay so much attention to difference', and that 'some fears of difference are innate and therefore natural' (pp. 109–110). The thinness of Pepsi's ethical position is obvious in its call for a message of 'unity, peace and understanding'—empty moral concepts with no substantial concept of justice. A counter to this moral emptiness are rich pedagogies that engage the emotions, which can be used to introduce politics back into our narrative imagination.

Pedagogies That Add the Human Back into Humanity

The tradition of pedagogy drawing on empathy and affect is rich and varied. Zembylas (2007, 2013, 2020), who has written with Boler, has discussed ways to incorporate affective practice and use emotions in the

classroom—particularly when dealing with the political. In a recent paper, MacDonald and Kidman (2021) describe pedagogies of uncanniness, where sites of trauma can be used to educate through feelings of unease and tension. In the context of teaching students about the New Zealand Wars and violent episodes in that country's colonial history, MacDonald and Kidman (2021) describe 'uncanny pedagogies': an affective practice that draws on embodied, emotional, and uncomfortable learning experiences to stimulate and inspire thinking around history:

> A deep sense of respect emanates from the crowd. The objects give presence to the dead and the uncanny is quietly activated through a personal connection to historic figures. (MacDonald & Kidman, 2021, p. 6)

This is the kind of connection and historical situatedness which Boler (1997b) advocates as a consequence of testimonial reading. The trauma and excess of these experiences is precisely the point, since it 'raises the question: what are the forces that brought about this crisis of truth?' (Boler, 1997b, p. 264). That excess achieves an inner transformation—a sense of the unimaginable—which has powerful pedagogical implications:

> The challenge for educators who work with uncanny pedagogies at sites of colonial violence is to sustain the embodied, intellectual and affective transformations outside the crypt, so that the disturbed feelings and the trouble that ghosts represent do not go away. (MacDonald & Kidman, 2021, p. 11)

The literary imagination, therefore, reveals the very limit of neoliberalism: an excessive social dimension—an 'inner life'—that can resist the subjectifying neoliberal gaze.

I find it significant that Nussbaum's humanism and reverence for empathy is grounded in an Aristotelian ethic. The cosmopolitan ideal—of an expansive circle of concern gifted through narrative imagination—is one way to build practical wisdom and personal virtue. Boler builds on these foundational capabilities to invite us not only to expand our moral imaginations, but to do so in a way that demands action which might correct injustice. Testimonial reading is a political act, it reintroduces critique and conflict to the narrative imagination. Nussbaum herself is attuned to the inadequacy of the literary imagination to which Boler and Weber refer. In *Poetic Justice* she explains:

> People cannot learn everything they need to learn as citizens simply by reading works set in a distant place and time, no matter how universally applicable those insights may be. Reading Dickens shows us many things about compassion; it does not show us the very particular ways in which our society inhibits our compassion for people of different race, gender, or sexuality. (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 11)

Nussbaum refers to novel-reading as a 'bridge' to a vision of justice and the capacity to enact that vision, but not something sufficient for a notion of social justice. That bridge can be made sturdier through testimonial reading, uncanny pedagogies, and other such rich approaches that embody notions of restorative justice and normative moral deliberation.

However we choose to teach matters relating to social justice, we usually wind up taking a stand against the public pedagogy of neoliberalism. Such approaches challenge neoliberalism by re-embedding the political. They require that we weigh up questions of value, ethics, and sociality in a manner that is incompatible with neoliberal standardisation. In so doing we *repoliticise*, introducing 'conflictivity' in the way Durán Del Fierro (2022) suggests: 'contestation, opposition, disagreement, division, debate, dispute and dissent', and the 'active critique and refusal of power relations derived from a given regime of truth' (p. 9).

Even for higher education, facts are not all that there is: we should not be Gradgrinds. Weber argues that empathic reading requires time and cannot be reduced to a tick box under regimes of neoliberal accountability. There is also a significant political role that emotion can play in learning and research. Whether that emotion is foundational like empathy or complex and embodied like uncanniness, these forms of pedagogy lift our moral horizons, add texture to our inner worlds, and lend substance to a self that is embedded in the social world of others.

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Understanding Higher Education Enrolment Through Michel Foucault's Biopolitics

Ren-Hao Xu

Since the 1980s, the idea that 'we live in a knowledge economy' has become ubiquitous in both public and private spheres at all scales (Robertson, 2005, p. 152). The idea of a knowledge-based economy holds that the university system can play a key part in economic transitions: a university can generate innovative knowledge and upskill younger generations, in turn contributing to new economic activities fuelled by knowledge (Bell, 1973). Since the 1980s, this master narrative has dominated policy talk. Governments around the world have increased the number of university places, with the goal of gaining more 'knowledgeable' workers to enhance their national competitiveness (Lauder et al., 2012).

This political rhetoric remains powerful in the current terrain of higher education. On a global scale, international organisations have consistently highlighted the importance of higher education enrolment for the development of a knowledge-based economy. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its annual report *Education at a Glance*, has not merely stressed the benefit of a widened university system but, more importantly, has ranked the member

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countries by cohorts with degree-level education to indicate how educational attainment has led to economic growth (OECD, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). These OECD reports, with their idea of expanded higher education systems as economic growth engines, have influenced higher education policies in many countries. One such example is Australia's Demand-Driven Funding System, commenced in 2012 after having been recommended by the Bradley Review of 2008. At that time, the Australian government claimed:

> The Australian Government's goal is for this country to be amongst the most highly educated and skilled on earth, and in the top group of OECD nations for university research and knowledge diffusion. (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relationships, 2009, p. 7)

> Funding that meets student demand… is the only way Australia can meet the knowledge and skills challenges it faces. Thus the government is proposing a phased 10-year reform agenda for higher education and research to boost national productivity and performance as a knowledge-based economy. (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relationships, 2009, p. 5)

With the Demand-Driven Funding System, Australian universities were free to enrol as many undergraduate students as they wished. This billion-dollar scheme was cancelled in 2017 after growth in higher education enrolment met the goal that 40% of the Australian population have at least a bachelor's degree. Australia is not unique in believing that increased higher education enrolment could boost economic growth and make for a stronger country. Today many governments, including but not limited to France (Carpentier, 2018), Germany (Ertl, 2005), Hong Kong (Wan, 2011), Japan (Reiko, 2001), Taiwan (Wang, 2003), and Türkiye (Özoğlua et al., 2016), have achieved greater—or more specific—student participation, thereby making their populations as a whole, and especially those historically underrepresented in higher education, more productive in a globally knowledge-based economy. Enhancing national competitiveness by means of widened student participation in higher education systems has seemingly become an idea expressed across the world.

I have interrogated this phenomenon in my doctoral project since 2018. The reason why I chose it as my research focus was because I felt its connection to my experience: I was born at a time when the higher

education system was rapidly expanding in Taiwan. I was the first person in my family to attend university. My parents and my older brother had little experience of this world to share with me. Despite this, from a young age I knew that one day I would graduate from my high school and step into a university lecture hall. The idea stayed in my mind for years, probably from my school days when our teachers often reminded us to think about our university major as early as possible. The idea could have also stemmed from my community, where I saw some of my neighbours moving to other cities to pursue their studies. Over time, as I reflected on my education background and thought about the global phenomenon of higher education expansion, I became increasingly interested in the 'individual-national-global nexus' that not only drove governments like Australia and international organisations like the OECD to invest a billion dollars in providing more university places, but also led individuals like me to dream of walking into a tutorial room to receive knowledge I had not yet learnt, knowledge no one in my family had ever accessed.

Bringing this individual-national-global nexus into my project, I began to review the literature. Numerous studies have clearly investigated the effectiveness of varied higher education policies that aimed to suffice the demand of a knowledge-based economy in different countries. In addition, other studies have thoroughly discussed how expanded higher education systems have supported national competitiveness in a global economy (Lauder et al., 2012; Marginson, 1997; Mok et al., 2013). Apart from the macro-level perspective, research has also considered how the competencies of an individual could be changed after receiving a university qualification, exploring the correlation of such a qualification with individual employability in the job market. Yet scarcely any attention has been paid to the assumption that higher education should be expanded to support economic development in local and global contexts; namely, how the individual-national-global nexus is built. At this point, I realised I needed a theory to allow me to specifically unpack this pre-existing policy assumption, so that I could understand how university degrees are shaped as *a dual obligation*, to both widen university provision to respond to growing student demand and to enhance their competitiveness, for the OECD, the Australian government, and beyond.

With these highlighted research interests in mind, I now turn my focus to how I sought a theory to probe the global phenomenon of higher education expansion. I encountered Michel Foucault's concept of *biopolitics* during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, one week after I

finished my fieldwork in Taiwan and flew back to Sydney in preparation for interview sessions as part of my Australian fieldwork, the Australian government closed its international borders due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Since then, many cities of Australia have intermittently experienced lockdowns. During the pandemic, my colleagues and I were heavily affected by the restrictions, so we planned to do something together to distract our attention away from the uncertainty of the situation. It did not take much time to get everyone on the same page reading Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics*, which was recommended by my colleague, Remy Low, who is also the responder to this chapter. I was fascinated by Foucault's outline on the first day of the 1979 biopolitics seminar. He said:

> This year, I would like to… retrace the history of what could be called the art of government. You recall the strict sense in which I understood 'art of government' since in using the word 'to govern' I left out the thousand and one different modalities and possible ways that exist for guiding men, directing their conduct, constraining their actions and reactions, and so on. (2008, pp. 1–2)

The term 'to govern' opened up a perfect entry point for engaging with my question of how an individual like me has been shaped to believe that a university education is something necessary to pursue and how populations in many societies like Australia were guided to aspire to higher education, eventually resulting in a massification of student enrolment. That was how I encountered Foucault's work on biopolitics, leading me to approach the individual-national-global nexus in the domain of the higher education system. Before continuing to explain how I found the concept of biopolitics useful in my studies of higher education enrolment, I first overview its theoretical foundation.

Derived from his lectures *Society Must Be Defended*, *Security* (2003), *Territory, Population* (2007), *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008) at the Collège de France, and one of his most influential publications, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (1978), Foucault's concept of biopolitics addresses an historical phenomenon and a contemporary problem: how population is governed by the political forms of rationality. Put straightforwardly, the term biopolitics refers to how the legitimacy of sovereignty can be secured while managing a population in a territory. So, what do 'an historical phenomenon' and 'a contemporary problem' mean in Foucault's concept of biopolitics? First, Foucault's conception of population in the

political domain (2007) did not exist prior to the sixteenth century. At that time, individuals had to subordinate themselves to the divine, and they were told what was permitted and forbidden through a matrix of coercion, control, and direction. Yet, when a town grew, new populations arose. This demographic increase fundamentally changed ideas of how to govern. Sovereignty by directly ordering and restricting hundreds of people was no longer feasible (Foucault, 2007). The growth in population and attendant pressures related to food, criminality, public health, and education also challenged the legitimacy of sovereignty (Foucault, 2007). Second, the principles of state became immanent in the state itself, which now needed not merely to prevent invasion from other countries, but also to secure its legitimacy through effectively managing the population. In this fashion, the strength of the state was reformulated: the idea that the survival of a state relies heavily on its military and diplomatic power has been redefined since the seventeenth century by the added notion of the productivity of the population. With this in mind, the governing ends of state turned to maximising the amount in the treasury by enhancing the productivity of each and all (Foucault, 2020).

Foucault's concept of biopolitics is not well defined, but it remains a helpful approach to understanding the co-evolution of modern statehood and the subjectivities of a population. It concerns how the emergence of the modern nation-state corresponds with the need to shape the subjectivity of those that inhabit its territory (Foucault, 1991; Gordon, 1991; Simons, 2006). Following this argument, population is understood as the centre of political concerns; specifically, the enhancement of productivity on both individual and societal scales. As Foucault (2008, p. 317) elaborates, 'rationalised problems posed to governmental actions that are based on the demographic characteristics, such as health, hygiene, race, and education' represent population management that in its depths and details aims to secure the *raison d'être* of statehood: to sustain productivity for the survival of state.

What Foucault tries to stress here is that exercised sovereign power must cohere with biological existence (Lemke, 2011), reflecting two main principles in the concept of biopolitics: population and governing knowledge. For Foucault, population is not simply understood as a sum of subjects who inhabit a territory, but rather a combination of variables dependent on different factors (e.g., gender, income, and age) and things (i.e., resources, means of subsistence, and the territory with its specific qualities) (Foucault, 2007). It shapes the idea of government as disposing

and arranging things with the aim of addressing emerging problems regarding the lives of people. Population management, for Foucault (2008), relies on a specific type of knowledge to address emerging problems. Foucault argues that the historical evolution of population management in Western European countries is entangled in an idea of household administration requiring individuals within a family to direct their goods and wealth towards the pursuit of fortune and power (Foucault, 2008). In this framework it is not possible to govern a population through listing allowed or prohibited actions. As such, effective population management now refers to the introduction of the economy into the political domain (Danaher et al., 2000; Foucault, 2008). That is to say, the modern state now aims to ensure its survival by using a form of biological-economic knowledge to effectively govern its population by both enhancing collective productivity and preventing risk from emerging problems. In sum, Foucault uses the concept of biopolitics to mark the historical transformation of the exercise of power: away from divinely appointed sovereignty towards a focus on the conduct of subjects' behaviour with the knowledge of political economy. The notion of policy in this vein refers to the specific set of practices by which a government in the framework of the state is able to govern so that individuals can be productive citizens (Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2020).

Now I return to the individual-national-global nexus to probe the alternative understanding of higher education enrolment. As noted above, the policies of many governments as well as the OECD have tied the social meaning of higher education enrolment at the national-global level to manifestations of national competitiveness, widely promoting messages that university education upskills individuals and makes them more productive, and that at the societal level, an increase in the degree-holding population amounts to an augmented capacity for collective productivity. When I read this economic-oriented narrative, I noticed how it was often based upon a differentiation between age groups. Here I give an example from the OECD's report:

> [I]n almost all countries, 25 to 34-year-olds having higher HE attainment levels than the generation about to leave the labour market (55 to 64-year-olds)… over time provide a complementary picture of the progress of human capital available to the economy and society… the trends in education attainment in the adult population (25 to 64-year-olds)… offer good

overall assessment of the skill distribution and how this distribution has evolved over time. (OECD, 2009, pp. 29–31)

Here, the OECD refers to those aged 25–64 and 55–64 as, respectively, the 'skilled adult' and 'nearly-retired' cohorts in the labour market, arguably implying that 25- to 34-year-olds were a newly joined division of human capital in the workforce. In other words, the classification of 25- to 34-year-olds presents a type of political-economic basis for institutions like the OECD to 'know' the 'latest human capital' of a country through the index of education attainment and reflects 'the necessity of understanding the characteristics, structures and trends of [a] population in order to manage them or to compensate for what they could not control' (Taylor, 2014, p. 46). To date, the 25- to 34-year-old population having at least a bachelor's degree has been one of the most common indicators for measuring the change in higher education attainment between different generations or countries. As Foucault (2003) argues, the age of the population was the main concern of modern state because it allows state to foresee a sapping of the populations strength, a shortening of the working week, wasted energy, and monetary costs (pp. 244). This creation of demographic groups and populational characteristics, as Popkewitz and Lindblad (2020) note, is a way to think about and plan to rectify 'harmful' social and economic conditions. Using Foucault's concept of biopolitics, we can see how a population can be managed according to different vectors based on these characteristics—demographic classification based on economic knowledge of human capital is not only used for optimising collective productivity, but also to foresee the change in the strength of the state through the index of education attainment in the name of a knowledge-based economy.

This age classification also represents a power/knowledge regime in which individuals attach themselves to a specific *ethos* in order to become self-governing and productive citizens capable of acting with freedom (Rose, 1999). The term biopolitics, for Foucault (1980), is about regulation and discipline, with 'two types of power linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations' (p. 139). As Lemke (2011) explains, it is a 'distinctive art of government that historically emerges with liberal forms of social regulation and individual self-governance' (p. 34). In other words, biopolitics is concerned with how to achieve an equilibrium between population and sovereign power and between individual and self (Foucault, 2003). As such, in this case, the classification constituted by the

concept of human capital is about both demographic division by age group and the categorisation of a population into workforce and non-workforce. Individuals, through recognising and attaching themselves to a category, shape their own conduct in particular ways through subjectification, where behaviours are *moralised* into the permitted and forbidden. This understanding of the relations between self and others does not suggest that an authority controls the mindset of individuals. It rather highlights how social structures and relationships underpinned by a power/knowledge regime create what Foucault (2003, p. 242) calls 'human-being-as-species'. That is, subjects are not only regulated by the sovereign power, but are also situated within power networks in which individuals govern their own social bodies. With this conceptualisation of power relations in mind, the categorisations of workforce/non-workforce and university-educated/non-university-educated produce a set of norms that limits what it is possible to think, write, and speak in a society. For instance, both the OECD (2009) and Australia's Demand-Driven Funding System (2009) specified that individuals should aspire to university education because a bachelor's degree could increase their employability in the job market. This understanding of the relations between individuals, population, and nation involves how lives and worlds are governed by specific kinds of classification.

Two lines of relations come to intersect here. Higher education enrolment represents, on the one hand, a specific domain in which population and state have been entangled in the name of a knowledge-based economy. On the other hand, individuals have been divided on the basis of various backgrounds depending on economic-biological knowledge (e.g., age and labour condition) and further shaped into different subjects (e.g., upskilled and highly productive groups). Rather than testing whether higher educational attainment made labour more productive or increased national competitiveness, it is important to understand how a governing modality of population was formed based on the configuration of biological, economic, and political knowledges. With the biopolitical perspective, higher education enrolment is not only about an individual student's pursuit of better employability in the job market, but also a guarantee of social order and prosperity at the level of the population, illustrating how the life of individuals and the population comes to be correlated with the legitimacy of sovereignty.

However, the cases of the OECD reports and Australia's Demand-Driven Funding System do not imply that higher education enrolment can

only be perceived according to one approach, like the conception of knowledge-based economy, nor do they suggest that biopolitics means an economisation of the higher education system. Instead, Foucault's work on biopolitics raises the question of 'how to govern' in the sense of biological existence, arguing that governing knowledge is not fixed but evolves over time. Here, I want to draw upon historical higher education enrolment policies in Australia as another case to demonstrate the changing relations between individuals, population, and state. One of the most influential higher education polies in Australia was the Murray Report published by the Menzies Liberal-Country government (1949–66) in 1957. At that time, university was described as 'a preparation for a vigorous life in a free society' (Committee on Australian Universities, 1957, p. 9), with the aim being to 'educate a liberal spirit' (p. 7). The Murray Report further explained:

> It should be said that what the university gives in this way should 'not' be regarded in purely technical terms; The technical and specialist requirements are without doubt in themselves no less than a matter of life and death to the nation; but they are not the end of the affair. It is the function of the university to offer not merely a technical or specialist training but a full and true education, befitting a free man and the citizen of a free country. (p. 8)

The idea of university education in 1957 encompassed not only skill advancement, but also non-material betterment (which is less mentioned in more recent higher education policy documents of the OECD and Australia). The Martin Report (1964), another impactful higher education document also published by the Menzies government, stated that:

> Education is as important for the community as for the individual in non-material as well as material aspects. The modern state requires a well-educated population capable of making reasoned judgments against a background of change... [P]rovide talented young people with opportunities to develop their innate abilities to the maximum. (Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia, 1964, p. 6)

In the 1950s and 1960s, the aim of higher education in Australia was notably not framed as 'job preparation'. Rather, higher education was construed as part of a social welfare system that ensured particular sections of the population (mainly young men but also some affluent women) were

sufficiently educated for industry and commerce, while also providing individuals with opportunities to develop their abilities. The meaning of university education in Australia during the Cold War era centred on the cultivation of freedom and democracy for the society (Forsyth, 2017). In this modality, which classified the population in terms of a 'liberal spirit', and, by extension, a non-liberal spirit, the government sought to legitimise its sovereignty by increasing a 'well-educated population capable of making reasoned judgements'. What can be seen here is that the university was given meaning as the cornerstone of a democracy and civil society. This is very different from the current narrative of a knowledge-based economy, in which the university is merely a site for producing well-skilled labour. By showing these two historical enrolment policies, I want to highlight how variance in the meanings of university education creates different relations between individuals, population, and the state and, more importantly, that the everyday life of individuals is shaped by the way relations are formed in the domain of the higher education system.

My viewpoint is that biopolitics offers a critical lens to (re)examine the social phenomenon of higher education expansion, thereby allowing an exploration of the ways in which individuals, population, and the state have been interlinked in a specific temporal-spatial condition. When a society encourages an individual to take part in a higher education system—because an increased proportion of a population having a bachelor's degree is assumed to enhance national competitiveness—it engages that individual in a classification that produces biopolitical effect. The construction of, for instance, a 25- to 34-year-old cohort involves the entanglement of biology (i.e., age), economy (i.e., human capital and knowledge-based economy), and demography (birth rate), exemplifying how the notion of higher education enrolment can be thought of in the sense of population management.

It is important not to forget 'historical roots' when drawing on the concept of biopolitics. Nowadays, a growing number of studies of the changing landscape of school and higher education systems, specifically inspired by Foucault's biopolitics, argue that economisation emerges at all societal scales (Peters, 2007; Simons, 2006). Indeed, when Foucault elaborates upon the evolving relationships between individual subjectivity and statehood, he highlights how principles of governance have shifted from coercion and force towards the economic management of government and population. Nevertheless, biopolitics, for Foucault, is a perspective that focusses on how problems concerning population and the legitimacy

of sovereignty can be addressed. As such, it is not just about dealing with economic issues, but also with how the political life is formed; namely, how people in a given territory can live with a sense of wellbeing so that the governing regime of state can be sustained. Although economic discourses built around concepts such as human capital and a knowledge-based economy indeed hold hegemonic power in our public sphere today, the Murray and Martin reports provide historical examples of how other governing knowledges have shaped the everyday life of individuals in the domain of higher education.

Building on these arguments, how can we understand higher education enrolment through biopolitics? To date, the worldwide gross enrolment ratio has reached 40%, with more than 370 million students enrolled at various types of universities (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2022). A growing proportion of the global population is involved in the higher education system, where their everyday life is being shaped by a specific type of knowledge regime. Populational categories give direction to what constitutes the problems, causes, and solutions regarding social issues (e.g., a shortfall of highly skilled workers) (Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2020). For me, the use of biopolitics in the field of higher education has provided fertile terrain to carve out the complex relations between population and state policies and has enabled me to ask critical questions about education politics and historical-contemporary contexts. Although biopolitics is not as well defined as many other theories or theoretical perspectives, it is one that can benefit research on higher education with critical interrogation of student participation across different backgrounds, academic recruitment, and campus and facility design. As higher education is increasingly interlinked with our life, biopolitics also helps to open up a space for reimagining the emerging challenges in the higher education system.

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Students, Biopolitics, and State Racism: A Response to Ren-Hao Xu

Remy Y. S. Low

Ren-Hao Xu has offered us a carefully considered chapter on Michel Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics' and its usefulness for understanding the OECD and the Australian Government's push for raising enrolments in higher education. The urgency of this push domestically has been driven by the political narrative of preparing citizens to be competitive and productive in the globalised 'knowledge economy', which, as Xu deftly demonstrates, is intimately tied up with the competitiveness and productiveness of the nation. I use the word 'intimately' because as Xu has also pointed out, the concept of biopolitics alerts us to how we have come to relate to our very selves—body and mind—in a unique way at the nexus of economics and biology: 'optimised' citizens who do our productive part for the national economy because of our educational attainment. If biopolitics can be summed up by the series 'population-biological processes-regulatory mechanisms-State' (Foucault, 2003, p. 250), then what Xu has done is show how something like the way national higher education enrolment policies are engineered (e.g., targeting particular age groups,

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163

identifying productive and unproductive labour) can be interestingly interpreted as a part of that series.

What I offer here is less a response per se than a brief addendum to Xu's chapter. And I will do this by joining together two seemingly unrelated points he raised: the first is personal, where he mentions reading Foucault on biopolitics in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of Australia's international borders, and the second is his key argument that higher education enrolment can be linked not only to individual employability, but also to the larger purpose of underwriting the social order and prosperity at the level of the population, thus legitimating sovereignty. For me as a teacher in higher education, I am a part of that biopolitical machinery. A question that arises for me as I reflect on my work is this: Who is this 'population' that is to be educated, whose productivity is accounted for within the calculus of national competitiveness, whose life is to be fostered for the sake of securing the nation's future, and who is *not* a part of this?

Raising this question brings us to another aspect of Foucault's conceptualisation of biopolitics: the operation of 'racism' as a principle for determining the dividing line between those who are part of the population that the state intervenes in biologically and economically to 'make live' (e.g., through health programmes, widening participation in higher education) and those who are not part of that population that it can just 'let die':

> What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die. The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls. It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population. It is, in short, a way of establishing a biological type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain. (Foucault, 2003, pp. 254–255)

What does all this scary sounding business of 'what must live and what must die' and the drawing of biological lines between races have to do with students enrolling in higher education? Here is where COVID-19 offers a telling case. For through it, we can see how not all enrolments

were regarded as equally tied up with the biopolitical calculus of national health and wealth and hence how within the student population 'a break into the domain of life that is under power's control' was established.

In early 2020, as COVID-19 was in its early stages of gaining a foothold in Australia, the Australian Government launched a series of unprecedented fiscal measures to buttress the health system and economy from the fallout of the pandemic, which would total $343 billion within a year (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022). These measures included a supplement to unemployment benefits known as 'Jobseeker' by $550 per fortnight (a survival rate long argued for by welfare advocates; see Davidson, 2022), a $1500 per fortnight wage subsidy paid through employers known as 'Jobkeeper' (Frydenberg & Morrison, 2020)—and a $1.1 billion expansion of health services such as pathology testing, respiratory clinics, and telehealth (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020), plus an additional $48.1 million for mental health services (Hunt, 2020). There was a notable exception to all these public support measures: international students.

About a fortnight after Australian borders were closed to non-residents, and within days of announcing many of the abovementioned support packages, the then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison was asked about whether any of it extended to the international students who had collectively injected $37.4 billion to the Australian economy in the year prior (Ferguson & Spinks, 2021). He told the press conference: 'They're obviously not held here compulsorily… If they're not in a position to support themselves, then there is the alternative for them to return to their home countries' (cited in Ross, 2020). He went on to advise that while it was 'lovely to have visitors to Australia in good times', international students should 'make your way home' to 'ensure that you can receive the supports that are available… in your home countries' (cited in Ross, 2020). What was the rationale behind his curt advice? 'At this time, Australia must focus on its citizens. Our focus and our priority is on supporting Australians and Australian residents with the economic supports that are available' (cited in Ross, 2020).

In one exchange with the media at a critical moment in history, the former Australian Prime Minister illustrated just what Foucault means when he says that biopolitics always involves some distinction to be made between those in the population for whom the state intervenes 'in order to improve life by eliminating accidents, the random element, and deficiencies' (Foucault, 2003, p. 248) and those it chooses to 'let die'. And racism is the principle of this distinction in modern nation-states,

according to him. To be sure, when referring to the state 'letting die' or even 'killing' certain people, Foucault is aware that this might sound so dramatically malevolent that it can be dismissed as being only relevant to extreme cases (e.g., Nazism). So, he qualifies this:

> When I say 'killing,' I obviously do not mean simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on. (Foucault, 2003, p. 256)

With this qualification, Foucault attunes us to the 'grey zone' of how state racism operates through biopolitics. This grey zone can be understood spatially and temporally. In the first instance, biopolitics can be seen to create a spectrum—or more precisely, a hierarchy—within a given population that runs from access to all that 'makes live' (e.g., enrolment in the best schools and universities, insured with the highest quality health care) to all that 'makes die' (e.g., lack of access to family support and adequate nutrition, under resourced schooling and hospitals, confinement to living in areas of neglect and over policing). 'Biopolitics is always a politics of differential vulnerability', as Lorenzini (2021, pp. 43–44) points out:

> Far from being a politics that erases social and racial inequalities by reminding us of our common belonging to the same biological species, it is a politics that structurally relies on the establishment of hierarchies in the value of lives, producing and multiplying vulnerability as a means of governing people. (Lorenzini, 2021, pp. 43–44)

For the international students who remained in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic—not being able to take the then-Prime Minister's advice for financial, relationship, and/or material reasons (Doherty, 2020)—it became very apparent that their enrolment status factored little in the political calculations for the nation's future. As one international university student put it with acuity:

> In this current pandemic the Australian government has made it more clear that they don't really care about the [international] students. I don't know why is that. It's pretty much heartbreaking considering the input of them in the Australian economy. (cited in Morris et al., 2020)

Just as the grey zone of biopolitics can be seen as producing a spatial effect because it creates a spectrum and hierarchy of value, determining who is 'in' the population whose lives matter for the prosperity of the nation and who is 'out', so it also produces a temporal effect insofar as this making of inclusion/exclusion, valuation/devaluation, and life/death is ongoing. 'The specificity of modern racism, or what gives it its specificity, is not bound up with mentalities, ideologies, or the lies of power. It is bound up with the technique of power, with the technology of power', Foucault (2003, p. 258) argues. By this he means that racism is better seen not simply as 'bad ideas' about certain groups of people. Rather, through technologies of power like border security and immigration controls that protect the passage of some and condemns others to detention (Perera & Pugliese, 2020), pandemic control measures like differential policing (Ryan et al., 2022), systemic disparities in exposure to health risks (Karácsonyi et al., 2021), and so on, racism is part and parcel of how modern nation-states operate. As such, it involves an ongoing process of enacting 'dividing practices' within a population (Foucault, 2000, p. 327). As Lemke et al. (2011, pp. 43–44) summarise:

> According to Foucault, racism is an expression of a schism within society that is provoked by the biopolitical idea of an ongoing and always incomplete cleansing of the social body. Racism is not defined by individual action. Rather, it structures social fields of action, guides political practices, and is realized through state apparatuses.

To bring it back to international students in higher education, they have for now been welcomed back to Australia. This is not on account of their future productive potential as part of the population, but because they 'are worth some $40 billion to our economy' (Frydenberg, cited in Henderson & Stayner, 2021) and can help to plug 'current workforce shortages' (Hawke & Frydenberg, 2022). Historically, their welcome has always been conditional and subject to rounds of suspicion about their status in the student body. Consider, for instance, that whether it is about 'contract cheating' in universities (Shepherd, 2022) or the lowering of academic standards to let 'seriously failing' students pass (Baker, 2022), there are the twin dynamics of biopolitics at play in these recurrent bouts of public alarm: one, the important educational function of universities to secure the future of the economy and nation, as Xu points out in his chapter; and two, the racialising logics that frame some students as threats to

their integrity and purpose (Saltmarsh, 2005). For us as teachers in higher education, these are what Foucault's concept of biopolitics should at minimum attune us to.

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Wrestling with Monsters: Critique, Climate Change, and Comets

Pat Norman

INTRODUCTION

It's a cliché to begin a chapter with 'as I write this paragraph', but at the tail-end (supposedly) of the COVID-19 pandemic, with tensions rising between China and the United States over Taiwan, with the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, with Australia having had its wettest year on record due to a record third La Niña event, and even with Sriracha production under threat due to extended drought in the Western United States… this selection of unprecedented things suggest that I am writing this paragraph in interesting times. That observation is significant for me because Slavoj Žižek tells of a supposed Chinese proverb, explaining that "if you really hate someone, the curse you address them with is 'may you live in interesting times!'" (Žižek, 2012). I don't believe that I have been cursed, but these material crises—these monsters that stalk our times—present challenges for thinking theoretically. Žižek is one thinker much suited to 'interesting times'.

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I first encountered Slavoj Žižek at Sydney's *Festival of Dangerous Ideas* when he gave a talk titled "Let us be realists and demand the impossible: communism".[1] Over the course of an hour, Žižek roamed the theoretical landscape, tracing the way ideology structures our lives, drawing on everyday matters from Kinder Surprise to Starbucks. Žižek is entertaining. He is as comfortable ruminating on his philosophical inspirations—Hegelian dialectical materialism and Lacanian psychoanalysis—as he is criticising pop culture. Žižek argues that pop culture reveals much about the ideology that underpins contemporary capitalist society, which is why he spends so much time exploring it. Pop culture, like a binge on *Netflix*, is a mask that obscures and mystifies cultural-political tensions. But Žižek suggests that the masks *themselves* reveal more than they obscure: the form and content of these masks, the pleasure we take in them, speak to an unconscious social texture. How do we access this deeper layer of understanding? By taking the time to *think* and to challenge our taken-for-granted logics.

In an interview, Žižek noted that the Chinese proverb about interesting times is likely to be a Western projection: everyone he has spoken to in China says that they have only ever heard it attributed to them by Europeans (Žižek, 2013, p. 16). Žižek's work is compelling because of the way he challenges us to think about problems differently. He invites us to include into our understanding of a structure—such as capitalism—the contradictions and resistances that we see as outside of it. In doing so, Žižek proposes that we shift our understanding of contradiction 'from the distortion of a notion to a distortion *constitutive* of a notion…to see distortions as integral parts of a system' (Žižek, 2011b). Such thinking can help break through conceptual walls because it reveals the habits, assumptions, and ideologies that govern the way we discuss political issues in our world. This chapter seeks to use Žižek's theorising as a lens for exploring two cultural moments in the climate change debate. After first introducing elements of Žižek's theoretical approach, this chapter takes the Netflix film *Don't Look Up* as an instance of a consumerist 'response' to climate change. It then turns to the school strike movement—an activist project undertaken by students around the world demanding action on climate change. This chapter poses the question: what are the social logics crystallised in this moment? And perhaps more importantly, how can we use Žižek to re-articulate these problems? Working with Žižek's theory in this way leads us to a hopeful conclusion: that there are other possibilities for dealing with the troubles of our 'interesting' times.

[1] A re-posting of this talk can be found on youtube: https://youtu.be/QARALafdWUI

Fantasies, Masks, and Hegemony

Before I turn to the case of climate change, it is necessary to trace some of the core concepts that underpin Žižek's work. Fantasy plays a central role in the theoretical thinking of Žižek. Rooted in the work of Jacques Lacan, Žižek's notion of fantasy refers to a structuring logic that helps us to organise our worlds and to accommodate for a 'lack' (Žižek, 2008). Žižek draws on Lacan's triad of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real: three registers of existence that structure our subjectivity and identity. The *imaginary* refers to an early sense of identification: a kind of fictional wholeness where we identify with parental figures before we are inducted into the culture of language. The *symbolic* refers to the order of language itself: a pre-existing 'big Other' of meaning that structures the way we come to understand the world. In our move into the symbolic order, our imaginary identifications are lost, giving rise to the sense of 'lack' which is the root cause of desire. Filling in the void of this lack, we construct complex stories to make the world cohere, which is understood in Lacanian terms as *fantasy*. The order of the *Real* refers to the material substrate of reality over which the fantasy of the symbolic order is laid. However, because language is always an approximation of the Real—it can never fully describe, it is always a representation—a kernel of unrepresentable *excess* exists, around which desire circulates. This excess is known as the *objet petit a* (the small object a), something that speaks to 'the in-eliminable gap between discourse and the social reality is purports to capture' (Clarke, 2012). In the discourse of the political, fantasy takes the form of *hegemony*: the dominant ideological form that orders our social world. In the world today, the dominant ideology is neoliberal capitalism: the form of capitalism that sees the logic of the market reach into social relations (Brown, 2005), positioning us all as consumers.

In order for these hegemonic ideologies to operate effectively, power must mask itself—to 'depoliticise' the political (Clarke, 2012). The example Žižek often gives is the demand made by capitalism—consume and obey—despite our perceived freedom. Consider the way we are repositioned as consumers, subjectified as such: on public transport in New South Wales, we are no longer 'passengers' but 'customers'. Welfare services run by Australian governments now refer to 'customers' not 'clients' or 'citizens'. And yet, as my housemate recently noted to me, holders of American Express cards are referred to as 'members'. The ideological power of neoliberal capitalism rests in the way it transforms social

relations: it must be *disguised* so that in places where it most obviously exists—the credit economy, for example—it is masked as membership in a club, and places where its logic might be challenged—public services provided by government—are rearticulated through consumerist language.

If this language sounds inflammatory and anti-capitalist, it is because Žižek's project is explicitly couched in such terms. The challenge with supposedly 'inflammatory' critical theoretical language is that those of us who engage in critique seem either utopian or curmudgeonly, and it is difficult to move beyond this 'negative' frame. Critical theories should not be content just to describe the world as it is, but ought to outline the way that it should be, a project Zembylas (2020) calls 'affirmative critique'. The reach of the capitalist imaginary, and its fortified contemporary model of neoliberalism, is necessarily a focus of much critical work today. Žižek is concerned with the way the logic of the market, of competition, of 'economy' is "progressively imposing itself as a hegemonic ideology" (Žižek, 2012, p. 34). We should also be aware of the way the domain of education is being reshaped to suit the neoliberal agenda. Žižek references the Bologna Process in the European Union, which sought to repurpose higher education for increased economic productivity—a trend that has echoes in Australian education policy over recent decades:

> The reduction of higher education to the task of producing socially useful knowledge is the paradigmatic form of the 'private use of reason' in today's global capitalism. (Žižek, 2012, p. 33)

'Practical' university research and schooling that prepares students for the workforce in and of themselves are not bad things, of course. It is sensible that universities turn their attention to the problems of society and that students are given the opportunity and skills necessary for life in a capitalist society. However, there is a social cost associated with this kind of instrumental, utilitarian approach: the logic that this economic fantasy sustains undermines other, democratic purposes for education (Clarke, 2012). Žižek's point is salient: "what disappears here is the true task of thinking: not only to offer solutions to problems posed by 'society' (state and capital), but to reflect on the very form of these 'problems', to reformulate them, to discern a problem in the very way we perceive a problem" (Žižek, 2012, p. 33). If the basic idea that we can take from Žižek—or any critical theorist, really—is that the way we see the problem is part of the problem, then perhaps the best thing is to try and articulate these

problems in a different way. Theories give us lenses through which we can look at the world, and in doing so they help us to see our problems differently. But they also give us training in imagining differently. For Žižek, the 'mask' is often only hiding the truth that there is more truth in the mask itself than in the thing that it is masking. The *form* the mask takes, following from Freud's interpretation of dreams, is indicative of a repressed or hidden 'truth'. Applied to a structuring fantasy like neoliberalism, such a perspective allows us to *re-articulate* the components that comprise ideological hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In the spirit of re-articulation, let us turn to the significant long-term problem of our time: climate change.

Climate Change and School Strikes

In the 2021 Netflix film *Don't Look Up*, Jennifer Lawrence plays a PhD student who has discovered a comet heading towards the earth. As she and her doctoral supervisor, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, warn the world of impending doom, she becomes frustrated by the lack of concern shown by those in power—notably Cate Blanchett's sunny breakfast show host and Meryl Streep's president, who cares only about re-election and good relations with powerful industrialists. The film is an allegory about climate change: the title 'don't look up' references people choosing to look *away* from the comet, even when it is right in their faces.

But what about those groups who *are* looking up, who are fully aware of the approaching comet and are shouting wildly about it? Lawrence and DiCaprio's exasperated scientists spend much of the film fighting so the public understands the threat of the comet, yet they are continually trapped within the circuit of consumerism. DiCaprio becomes a celebrity 'good-looking scientist', appearing on breakfast television and eventually having an affair with Blanchett's host. Most of the supporting characters in the film refuse to change their lifestyles—everyone is seeking fame or money. An interesting running gag punctuates the movie, capturing this hyper-neoliberal society. Early in the film, while Lawrence and DiCaprio wait to meet the President, a three-star general asks if anybody would like some snacks. He returns with a bag of chips and a bottle of water for Lawrence, telling her that they cost $10. Later, Lawrence walks into the kitchen from which the snacks came and discovers that they were free, setting off a spiral throughout the film as she questions what could have motivated the General to charge her for these snacks. Did the General just want some extra cash? Lawrence muses: "He knew eventually I'd find out the snacks were free, so it was just, like, a power play?"

While *Don't Look Up* is an obvious allegory (ironically hosted on a consumerist platform like Netflix), the symbolic function of this general charging for the snacks is twofold. First, and most obviously, he represents a degraded society where even those in positions of great responsibility are compelled to hustle on the side. But a second, paradoxical reading of this general—an authority figure who ought to know better—reveals something about our own response to climate change: aren't our leaders acting as though the snacks *are* free? That there can be a relatively painless transition to a zero-carbon economy or that we can continue with minimal changes to our rapacious consumption of energy? The notion that the global order as it currently exists can be sustained without disruptive change is an example of *fantasy*, a product of the symbolic order meant to mask the unsettling truth. In fact, Žižek would argue that this fantasy exists *precisely* to mask the intrusion of the traumatic Real of climate change: a physical process that is a product of the very system it now threatens. This is why passionate young activists, to whom this chapter now turns, are probably musing like Lawrence's character: "they know eventually we'll find out the snacks *are not free*, so why aren't they acting to stop climate change? Is it just a power play?"

Climate change looms as humanity's most significant long-term challenge. Naomi Klein has argued that the economic transformation required is of a scale not seen since the abolition of slavery in the southern states of America (Klein, 2014). Governments are under pressure to enact targets and policies designed to constrain carbon emissions and cap rising temperatures. Even with these targets, we seem to be headed towards irreversible change, and the question now is the degree of change with which we are comfortable. Of course, it is not 'we', a generation of adults with the power to vote and make decisions, who need to be comfortable—except in a moral sense—because 'we' will not have to live with the consequences. And this is the basis of this school strike movement in Australia, known as *Fridays for Future* in Europe. Sparked in 2018 by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, the movement involves students absenting themselves from school—going on strike—to protest the lack of significant action from governments. The school strike movement built pace globally, and throughout 2019, until schools were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, many strikes took place around Australia.

Australian media representations of the strikes were mixed, with Mayes and Hartup (2021) noting four dominant characterisations of participants:

ignorant zealots, anxious pawns, rebellious truants, and extraordinary heroes. Students were criticised by then Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, for being out of class (Ward, 2019). In my research, I spoke with teachers who expressed their frustration at being unable to join their students on the strikes. They saw these activist practices as 'teachable moments' and as deeply connected with their own ethical understanding of teacher professionalism. But they were prohibited from attending the strikes by government policy, reflecting a bureaucratic concern about media representations associated with teachers' presence at a political rally. Paradoxically, many of their counterparts in private schools, often attended by conservative-voting families, were allowed to join their students at the strikes, ensuring that students were safe, and the experience was an educative one. Despite the varying media narratives generated around the school strikes, students themselves were clear about their purpose. Student Varsha Yajman explained to the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "there's no point having a good education without a good future to use it in" (Ward, 2019).

Why is this a problem worthy of re-articulation? These students are showing collective action—a form of social life that we see less of today. The school strikes represent a generation of students who seek to politicise the terrain of the commons. They recognise a problem that demands not just individual action, but one which requires the full resources of the global community. There are examples of new forms of participatory and collaborative action that have arisen from the school strikes. For example, White et al. (2022) write about their group collaboration: two student school strikers and two environmental education academics engaging in 'research *for* education'. In that paper, they bring students into the research and publishing process as equal partners, re-articulating the research enterprise from one that seeks to understand or explain, to one that gives agency, power, and leadership to students. They call for a 're-imagining of education' by 'daring to think differently' (White et al., 2022, p. 36). That call to think differently is significant, because it is exactly this process that allows us to re-articulate those social problems. It calls to attention the fundamental contradictions in the neoliberal fantasy sustained by the symbolic order—the fantasy which masks the *Real*: the problem of climate change. To put it in Žižek's terms, it is necessary to discern how the way we understand and frame these problems—the questions we ask and the solutions we propose—might be a part of the problem itself.

RE-ARTICULATING THE PROBLEM: WHICH CLIMATE IS IN CRISIS?

The challenge is not simply that we are burning fossil fuels. The challenge is also that the very form of our social life depends on unsustainable consumption: we are atomised individuals, we want our nice things but cannot conceive of the cost. Wendy Brown (2005) notes the way neoliberalism—in its various guises—comes to focus its attention on the individual as a consumer. This is the way people come to be 'governed' under neoliberalism. We are constituted as neoliberal subjects, an ideological fantasy that is rendered into reality by this dominant discourse (Foucault, 1982). Žižek can help us to think through an inherent contradiction in this state of affairs: how can it be that vast problems of the commons might be solved through acts of *individual* responsibility? When we are invited to consider our personal carbon footprint, to buy an offset when we take a flight, to eat less meat, or god forbid to buy a Tesla, we are still operating within the domain of consumption that fuels unsustainable production. Even when we watch *Don't Look Up* on Netflix, we are still acting in the role of consumer! Perhaps more significantly, even if we *are* to change our consumer habits, these small practices won't compensate for the emissions generated by vast heavy industry around the world. The problem cannot be solved by individuals. As Žižek argues, "the only way to break out of this deadlock is to propose and fight for a positive universal project shared by all participants" (Žižek, 2012, p. 39). Universalism is a recurring theme for Žižek, particularly when writing about these social struggles. And universalism is a central message that emerges from the school strike movement: these students are advocating to preserve a good future for *all* of humanity. Žižek argues:

> The key to actual freedom rather resides in the 'apolitical' network of social relations, from the market to the family, in which the change needed if we want an actual improvement is not a political reform but a change in the 'apolitical' social relations of production – *which means* revolutionary class struggle, not democratic elections or other political measures in the narrow sense of the term. (Žižek, 2012, p. 37)

Perhaps I put more faith in democracy than Žižek does, but it is not my view that *revolutionary class struggle* is the only escape from political deadlock. There are particular class struggles that inflect the debate, such as

state capture by companies that make their money from fossil fuels, but the economic and social tide is turning on those organisations. Similarly, the issue here is not one of extending democracy further or by ensuring one side of politics (progressive left) emerges as dominant over the other (conservative/reactionary right). Rather it is to ensure the universal problem of climate change is recognised by *all* sides as a struggle. The problem—today refracted through the lens of 'ideology' despite not being ideological—is a *common* one and should be elevated beyond the plane of democratic antagonism.

But there is also a tension here: our pedagogical structures do not lend themselves to this form of resistance. The act of teaching—in an industrial model, as Ken Robinson might have said—is also bound up in the logic of a system that gave rise to the crisis. Rather than simply turning the school strikes into a 'teachable moment' for students, perhaps the real opportunity is for the school strikes to become a teachable moment for ourselves. The strikes are effective in bringing this conversation into public focus, but are they effective at encouraging leaders to act? Leaders argue that the transition to net zero emissions must be gradual so as not to cause great economic harm. But what greater harm is there than the degradation of the climate? How do we break the climate deadlock of scientists and 'progressives' advocating for change that will involve a cost borne more aggressively by the working class? Here again we can learn from the students: by recognising that the issues cut across generational and class divides, that the changes required are not just matters of physics and engineering, but also involve social and economic adjustment. Finkel (2021) has argued that—for Australia—a shift to electrification for as many industries and modes of transport as possible, with solar, wind, and—in the interim—coal and gas simply requires public investment and patience. Achieving political consensus for such vast changes requires the emergence of what Žižek calls a new 'we': the universal subject of the human species (Žižek, 2011a, p. 332). However, argues Žižek, the struggle here is not only to resolve the problem facing the Earth's ecology, but first to resolve the deadlock of ever-expanding economic growth as a dominant hegemonic paradigm.

Transforming the political relations surrounding climate change may also go some way to addressing the 'impossibility' of significant reform. As Žižek explains:

Today, impossible and possible are distributed in a strange way, both simultaneously exploding into an excess. On the one hand, in the domains of personal freedoms and scientific technology, the impossible is more and more possible (or so we are told)…on the other hand, [our era has] accepted the constraints of reality (read: the capitalist socioeconomic reality) with all its impossibilities. *You cannot* engage in large collective acts…Political decisions are as a rule presented as matters of pure economic necessity. (Žižek, 2012, p. 35)

Returning to the example of *Don't Look Up*, Meryl Streep's US President explains that deflecting the comet just is not possible while there is still the opportunity to make money by mining it. She genuflects to the burlesqued caricature of an industrialist—a kind of hybrid Elon Musk-Jeff Bezos figure—who explains how much value, in the form of jobs and energy, can be created if we simply allow the comet to get dangerously close to the Earth. However, earlier in the film, the President exclaims that it is impossible to say with 100% certainty that the comet will hit the Earth (the public will be too alarmed, let's just say 70%) and that electoral realities prevent her from taking early and swift action to protect the planet.

This allegory rings true because we have seen these arguments rehearsed by political leaders time and again. The risks of economic damage, of energy insecurity, and of course, losing elections, mean that taking bold action is *impossible*. And yet when COVID-19 threatened the global economy, hundreds of billions of dollars was invested by governments to develop an effective vaccine in under two years. Clearly, we have the technical capability and the capital to solve global problems, but these solutions are 'impossible' until they prevent an immediate threat to the ongoing capitalist system. The radical intervention by governments in response to COVID-19 shows that another world is possible, even if we did not take that particular crisis as an opportunity to 'walk through the portal' to that world 'without our baggage' (Roy, 2020). We know that we can offer new possibilities, argues Žižek: "something is wrong with the world where it is possible to become immortal but impossible to spend a little bit more for education" (Žižek, 2012, p. 35).

Conclusion

Tracing the contours of political struggles today, Žižek quotes Gramsci: "the old world is dying, and the new world struggles to come forth. Now is the time of monsters" (p. 43). The time of monsters is a liminal political

zone, caught between one world and the next. This gives rise to difficult spectres, for instance, that we might not be able to transition from coal-fired energy to renewables without a transitional fuel like gas (Finkel, 2021). The industrial needs of our advanced global economy are complex, and as such give rise to contradictions, unexpected paradoxes, and difficult compromises. But amidst these spectres, there are also possibilities for hope: the notion of 'learning from young people' (Verlie & Flynn, 2022), for example, and learning to reappraise the baggage and habits of the old world. While the immediate problem of carbon dioxide pollution heating the atmosphere is one—perhaps *the*—brutal monster of our time, the school strike movement it inspired suggests another: the problem of our common social life. Thinking like Žižek and *re-articulating* the phenomenon, we recognise that there is something revealed in the 'mask' of the climate change debate:

> Communism is today not the name of a solution, but the name of a *problem*: the problem of commons in all its dimensions.…Whatever the solution, it will have to solve *this* problem. (Žižek, 2012, p. 44)

Our social life itself has been undermined by neoliberalism. We are atomised, and our creative capacity to respond to problems suffers for it. The transformation demanded by climate change is not just one of economy and energy, it is also *social*.

I think the most basic and the most powerful theoretical insight I have taken from Žižek is precisely that the way we perceive a problem is often part of the problem. He argues that we need to slow down, to recognise the value of intellectual work that—at first—may seem to have 'no practical use' (Žižek, 2012, p. 33). Sometimes we must resist the temptation to rush to action, even if the problems we face are urgent. The case may be that those problems are misrepresentations of the *real* problems, the problems of commons, the universal struggles in education and society that would allow us to properly imagine a better world. Fighting monsters is never easy, and in some instances—as in great narratives—perhaps the monster is not what we thought it was: perhaps the monsters are way-points to the new world, creatures that sharpen our theoretical tools as we plunge onwards into the uncertainty of the new. Crucially, this demands that we who do 'knowledge work' or who are animated by the task of critique press back on the instrumentalization of education—what Žižek calls 'the private use of reason' (Žižek, 2013). Education—in schools, in

universities, at school strikes—should be a process that brings forth new possibilities for hope. We should therefore heed Žižek's call to do theory: don't just act, think!

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Still Wrestling with Monsters: A Response to Pat Norman

Christine Grice

'Interesting' is a word replete with connotations, used by the polite to indicate a pretence of agreement alongside hidden respectful disagreement. Something can taste 'interesting', which does not mean delicious, look 'interesting', which does not mean attractive, or sound 'interesting', which does not mean tuneful. Žižek (2012) connects 'interesting' with crisis, where our 'interesting' irrational, fast, and often contradictory solutions are, as Norman notes, potentially destroying the planet. Is the role of curriculum to envisage the Anthropocene as the end? How can educators grapple with truth and crisis and reclaim genuinely interesting and creative solutions to global problems, as Norman suggests, with hope and possibility in a world of inequity and degradation?

We teach and lead education and pedagogy in interesting times. Most recently, interesting times in education might be considered as contradictory, such as opening up physical classroom walls alongside the boundarying and boxing of online learning or providing the necessary focus on wellbeing following COVID isolation, but narrowing being well to

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185

bandaid solutions that increase workload for educators and thus risk their wellbeing. Žižek (2012) invites us to slow down from all of this exhaustion. The crises of wellbeing, education, and the planet invite us to carefully consider philosophical solutions in practice, by reconsidering the civic purpose of education beyond citizenship. The role of education as an act of citizenship is important for stretching beyond the human endeavour of ourselves and our own academic performance, but citizenship curriculum could be a historic alternative to a contemporary problem. As global citizens, we have a civil responsibility to humanity—beyond our civic responsibility to our nation and other people groups and their biases that divide—towards each other. What this means as we wrestle with pedagogy is paramount.

Education is ultimately about conscience and that comes from our assumptions. It is important that I declare mine. I am an educator who has taught in Australia and overseas in government and non-government schools in the wealthiest and poorest of contexts. Throughout my career I have held leadership positions in curriculum, pastoral, and school management. I now research in the field of educational leadership, which often involves system-level leadership research. My pedagogy and research stem from dialogic theories that come from my views that we learn by thinking, talking, and listening made from our experiences, practices, and beliefs. Assumptions form our perspectives about self and society and cannot be separated, or we lose our own narratives, which form the paradoxes Žižek invites us to critique. Systems and ecologies are social logics we use for dealing with problems in interesting times, as Žižek writes, and these are understood through our assumptions and experiences. Systems are after all made up of individuals, and individuals are replete with paradoxes.

At best, educational leaders solve problems of practice that transform understanding and possibilities for education, but as Moller (2022) suggests, leaders today are often doing 'the splits' as they navigate compliance while attempting to imagine new possibilities for their students. This is an 'interesting' predicament that calls into question whether principals are leaders at all. They do not write curriculum or policy and lead with others by navigating choices about its enactment. In terms of curriculum, former Australian Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson lamented that in Australia today "education only covers what we did wrong" (2022). As 'The Apology' by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2008) indicates, Australia has whitewashed education for a long time. The purpose of

education is to uncover uncomfortable truths as it both celebrates success and humbles us in failure, and these truths should lead to action.

As we wrestle with the monsters of capitalism and neoliberalism, of wellbeing, vanity, and of ourselves we also wrestle with conscience and the other. The juxtaposition of individualism and universalism is an interesting conundrum for school leaders as they encourage individuals to be their best, alongside civic and civil responsibilities. Civic society is the realm of the state, and civil society is the realm of the citizen. Both are about the individual and the collective, but civil society supports and creates the conditions for the realisation of human rights. Ivan Illich led a civil-minded life following his study of history, crystallography, theology, and philosophy in Europe. In 1950 he came to New York and worked as a parish priest. In 1960 Illich moved to Mexico and learned that financial freedom and freedom of choice are less accessible to the poor. Illich began to understand that the citizen was more important than the state in building community and social equity. Žižek understands that democracy holds both promise and contradiction as it struggles with individualism and universalism concurrently where *power-over* is an inevitable part of structure and social relationships even as citizens. Illich (1971) argues that power relations pervade schooling and impose institutionalisation, limiting genuine relationships:

> School prepares for the alienating institutionalisation of life, by teaching the need to be taught. Once this lesson is learned, people lose their incentive to grow in independence, they no longer find relatedness attractive, and close themselves off to the surprises which life offers when it is not predetermined by institutional definition. (p. 22)

Illich's radical image of societal learning from civil freedom through *interwebs*—where the village is the place of learning, open with community—is a creative solution beyond the current limitations of school structures and systems that intend to build community, but concurrently limit its possibilities.

Žižek (2012) invites us to think, and Arendt (1985) agrees that thinking brings hope. Where Žižek (2012) is about refining our thinking, Arendt is about nascent action, for action is where hope exists. We have to think in order to know how to act, and this involves challenging taken-for-granted logics. Norman suggests student voice as a solution to climate change, where we can find teachable moments and act. However, voice is

not enough. At the heart of education is pedagogy: How we think determines what we think. We need to get better at open-minded debate and grow through alternate perspectives. Rather than declaring victory, we need more inquiry, discovery, and shared understanding. Good pedagogy should discombobulate us and provide us with more questions than answers. Arendt, who famously wrote about totalitarianism given she survived the Holocaust, chose to dine with those she disagreed with, and of course with those with whom she loved, so that she could understand herself. This in itself is a pedagogical act. Arendt lamented that she was too busy being with students to waste time on coursework design. Pedagogy is relational and involves two-way dialogue, as Norman agrees. The question that lingers today is whether education helps us to think, and pedagogy provides us with answers. The loss of thinking time is a legitimate concern. The increased self-service labour of tertiary work affords less time for philosophy. It's hard to do philosophy when you spend more time on administrative tasks than on the core purpose of your work, as Shahjahan (2014) also writes. Our philosophy group helped us to carve out the necessary time to grow and think. Not all of our work has a price tag, and yet neither can we hide from the contradictory fact that we work for an institution of privilege. Bono, lead singer of U2 (2022), in his autobiography, like Žižek, grapples with paradox and asks if it is the role of the artist to uncover paradox and wonders whether to resolve every contradiction is too much to ask of any human.

What do we do with such educational privilege as we work in the academy? Bono acknowledges his rock star privilege and the opportunities he has taken from fame to be a modern philosopher and activist. Unable to provide a solution to *rebooting capitalism* (p. 478), whilst acutely aware of his earning capacity alongside a lifetime of global charity work and awareness raising of global inequity, Bono concludes that the answers to changing the world do rest in what we seek to change through our work, through action and advocacy that he refers to as '*actualism*' (p. 482), where pragmatism and idealism connect. Bono knows this is the outworking of something spiritual. Changing the world starts with surrendering our ego to the Big Other, an idea that stretches beyond the super ego of Freud (1978) or Lacan's *Big Other* of language and ego as object whilst knowing the paradoxical limitations, even of self-work. Lacan (1955) sees the mirror as an object that alienates us from how we see ourselves, towards how others perceive us, helping us to develop own alter-ego of empathy, a nod to Žižek's *other*: the mirror. Bono's Big Other is his own encounter with God.

As we look into the mirror, Žižek invites us to ask what masks we wear and to consider our own integrity as Norman also suggests. Civil society invites relational authenticity where civic society invites masks wrought by structure and titles. In my first week as an academic I interviewed a school Deputy Head and Principal. Prior to the interview recording, the Deputy Head asked me about my background in education. I explained that I had started my career as a primary teacher, and then had moved into school leadership, and as a PhD candidate had worked in the tertiary sector alongside a school middle leadership role. He quickly quipped that primary teachers are all about the children, secondary teachers are all about the curriculum, and academics are all about themselves. We laughed, and my role in establishing a warm interview rapport was achieved. But those words never left me. What is my academic identity? Was I to be entering the academy to be all about myself? Does the intellectual work of the academy have any practical use? Our inaction is the opposite of praxis, of morally formed action. And yet rearticulating problems to transform understandings and possibilities is essential to moral formation. Thinking and action are connected. Whilst we navigate these interesting contradictions as academics, we wear masks. Our social media and published identities cultivate and collate what we choose to share of ourselves. Masks reveal more than they obscure about our desires as Žižek (2012) claims.

How do we use our educational privilege for the benefit of others? We assume that we will promote social equity. Illich smashed this assumption decades ago arguing that worshipping universal education makes false promises to the poor. Illich (1971) argues that our attempts to do schooling are futile in their current state, unless we recreate education through community:

> Universal education through schooling is not feasible. It would be no more feasible if it were attempted by means of alternative institutions built on the style of present schools. The current search for new educational *funnels* must be reversed into the search for their institutional inverse: educational *webs* which heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring. We hope to contribute concepts needed by those who conduct such counterfoil research on education and also to those who seek alternatives. (p. 2)

Illich captures the tensions between democracy, capitalism, and social equity that Žižek (2012) is questioning. Norman invites relational,

dialogical, and emancipatory solutions that White et al. (2022) invite us to reimagine. The answers are in relationships, as Žižek and Illich concur. "The key to actual freedom rather resides in the 'apolitical' network of social relations" (Žižek, 2012, p. 37). Žižek invites us to imagine a new universal 'we' of the human species (Žižek, 2011, p. 332) in order to get beyond ourselves. Norman grapples with this by acknowledging that unsustainable consumption actually consumes us. It divides us as social beings. He proposes that we recognise climate change as a universal struggle that transcends ideological lines. Žižek suggests this vast problem is a collective responsibility, a "universal project shared by all" (Žižek, 2012, p. 39) beyond the individual. The importance of collective responsibility has been shown during COVID through mandated mask wearing to protect others, and the loss of collective responsibility when governments no longer mandated masks as they were forced to decide whether zero cases of COVID and fewer deaths were more or less important than mental health and wellbeing. These political decisions were seen as economic necessity as Žižek reminds us, and yet the heart of the problem was our loss of relationship, and this was particularly felt by educators because pedagogy *is* relationship.

There is increased global dissatisfaction and mistrust in government that is impacting government education, which is in turn disrupting community. O'Neill (2002), a British philosopher and a crossbench member of the House of Lords, writes in the BBC Reith lectures about how loss of trust and increased suspicion comes from deception. Parents understand the capitalist machine and are asserting their control through school choice, even in the poorest of countries. What should our expectations of government be for education? Does government regulation of education bring equity or mere curriculum compliance? With increased numbers of home schooling, further exacerbated by COVID, what is the role of parent and community in education? If democracy is about independent choice and freedom, does this come at the cost of equity? These are interesting times where civil and civic society have crossed lines in education. If "School is the advertising agency which makes you believe that you need the society as it is" (Illich, 1971), it is no longer working for us and the ways we imagine education need to change, both from within and from outside. Illich chose to live frugally and, despite feeling crippled by overthinking, opened his doors to collaborators and drop-ins with generosity, running non-stop educational learning which was celebratory, spiritual, open-ended, and egalitarian. This is hope in action that comes from

choosing relationships and humanity first for a higher purpose, choosing pedagogy as embodied diplomacy (Sarson et al., 2019). We too have a choice between settling for good manners in interesting times in our schools and classrooms or to think more carefully about the value of diplomacy as "the art of restraining power" as Kissinger (1995) advised and redistributing it. Language matters.

At its heart, education is the hope of regeneration. Pedagogy enables that power through shared voice, dialogue, listening, wisdom, and deep respect for humanity through relationship. Only when we are humble enough to suspect that we can be wrong can we accept that embodied diplomacy learned through pedagogy can invite peace. Žižek invites us to reimagine, and the academy invites us to disrupt, and this is our privilege, enabled through our global networks that we must harness wisely to unearth possibilities for new relationships and discover unheard voices that create new art and new songs.

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CHAPTER 16

Dialogues Between Activist Knowledge and Southern Theory

José Fernando Serrano-Amaya

INTRODUCTION

While academia is usually represented in public culture as the most common place for knowledge production, activism is seen more as direct action and less as a source of knowledge in its own right. In this chapter, I would like to trouble those separations and hierarchies, using examples from theory and drawing upon my own personal experience and

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positionality. I am writing from Colombia, a country in the Latin American Global South where there are not the neat separations between academia and activism that are present in the Global North. As a result of personal political commitments to struggles for gender, sexuality and other rights, I have navigated between academic and non-academic environments. This navigation has taken place within contexts that many experience today— job precarities, the de-regularisation of labour and the fragility of work industries in neoliberal economies—that require adapting permanently to changes in employment opportunities.

Frequently, when news reports require expert knowledge, a university researcher is called. Often the person called is a male professor, despite the long-term and increasing presence of women in academic environments.[1] When thinking about knowledge creation, a single individual in a class-room or experimenting with test tubes in a laboratory may come to our minds. Think about characters in *The Big Bang Theory*, Doc Brown in *Back to Future* or Erik Selvig in *the Avengers*. On the other hand, when thinking about activism we may think of raised arms, megaphones and collective organisation in the streets. I invite the reader to do an online search of images of activism. You may find more images of women, public spaces and of collective action.

Academia and activism are often represented as if they are separate worlds, rarely connected. Some could claim the need of such separation since academia and activism serve different purposes. In fact, there have been long-term calls for connecting academia and activism, for example, by putting into practice what is produced in academia or by supporting those struggling for social change. Action research, since its origin in early 1950s (Lewin, 1946), has been a perspective that connects knowledge production with the answer to social problems and demands for social justice. The call for connections between academia and activism has resulted in ideas such as activist scholarship (Lempert, 2001; Sudbury & Okazawa-Rey, 2015) and engaged scholarship (Lynette & Tania, 2013), among others.

In linking these separate spheres, the approach tends to go in one direction: from academia, as the space for knowledge production, to activism, as the space for action and application. When the interest is in the other

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[1] A recent study in Finland found that, in spite of the fact that women and men are evenly distributed among academic institutions, 71% of academics interviewed as experts are men (Niemi & Pitkänen, 2017). Another study in the United Kingdom shows that 77% of those called by media as expert sources are men (Ramsay, 2018).

direction, the knowledge produced in activism is framed as practical in nature (Maddison & Scalmer, 2006), with a different status than academic knowledge. Such renderings of activist and academic knowledge as different run the risk of creating hierarchies and divisions.

Many areas of struggles for social justice and social change have troubled those separations and hierarchical linkages. Feminisms, critical race studies, postcolonial and subaltern studies, gay and lesbian studies, queer studies and transgender studies, together with all their different political developments, commonly interrelate activism and academic scholarship. They show that knowledge production is action. Still, not all those connections are based on the same political agendas, nor have they all had the same resources for making their contributions to social change recognised.

Several areas of intellectual work in Latin America have developed at the intersections between teaching, research, social activism and government consulting, such as Edgar Valero (2017), an example of sociological thinking, Marcos Roitman (2008) on the theories and practice of development and Esther Wiesenfeld (2014) on community social psychology. The work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921–1997) and Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda (1991) on popular education and critical pedagogies intrinsically connected political activism and knowledge production. *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales*, created in 1957, is a further demonstration of such commitments (Correa Delgado, 2008).

The disciplines of gender, feminist and women's studies have a long history in Colombian universities of fostering strong connections between academia and activism. Those connections are in conflictive and creative relationships, as can be read in the account of the *Escuela de Estudios de Género* at *Universidad Nacional de Colombia,* by Luz Gabriela Arango (Arango, 2018). Latin American approaches to men and masculinity studies (Keijzer, 2011; Madrid et al., 2020) have developed in close connection with feminist, women's and gender studies, with research centres for activism and policy making. We have rich knowledge on gay, lesbian and transgender topics, not necessarily developed as silos or autonomous areas of study, but inside broader academic projects (Serrano-Amaya, 2010). In these overlapping areas of expertise, some of us have been educated as social scientists to produce knowledge that leads to social impact and the advancement of social change.

On This Contribution

I will use as an example the story of producing a report on the violence faced by people living with HIV in relation to socio-political conflict (Serrano Amaya et al., 2021) to discuss ways in which theory can be used to connect academic and activist knowledges. This example is part of the increasing scholarship on the victimisation of LGBTQI+ individuals and collectives and on their contribution to peacebuilding during Colombian socio-political armed conflict. This is a collective knowledge produced for activist, theoretical and policy purposes mostly either outside of academic settings or at the intersections between social organisations, state institutions and interested scholars. It has been pivotal for the implementation of transitional justice instruments, for the reparation of victims and for making perpetrators accountable for their crimes. It is knowledge and expertise that is making Colombia the focus of increasing international attention for policy making and as a fieldwork site for visiting academics and graduate students. Hopefully, this piece will invite them to reflect on their own practices for knowledge production.

It would be possible to define this knowledge as grey literature. It is a term used to describe information that does not circulate in traditional distribution channels and that is often produced by organisations or institutions with limited resources to make their knowledge known. Grey literature includes formats such as pamphlets, reports, dissertations and working papers. Publications of these types have an important role in social mobilisations and activism. Danusia Malina and Diane Nutt (2000) argue that grey literature is at the core of feminism for communicating women's knowledge and promoting activism. The same can be seen in the activism of other subordinated social groups, such as that related to gender orientation and sexual identities. Still, grey literature is a broad category that risks reproducing what it criticises, homogenising under one banner knowledges produced by disparate regimes.

I prefer to define this knowledge as activist knowledge since it is produced mostly by and for activist purposes. In doing so, however, a certain hierarchy may be implied between activist and non-activist knowledges. Instead of making a separate typology of knowledge, I will consider it as a "knowledge project", following Raewyn Connell's (Connell, 2007, p. 228) invitation to rethink social science not as a unified system of theories, methods and results, but rather as an "(…) interconnected set of intellectual projects that proceed from varied starting social points into an

unpredictable future". I also follow Patricia Hill Collins' (2021) discussion of how those within systems of oppression create and disseminate a knowledge that helps them survive, recover and resist. The knowledge projects I refer to provide understandings of past and present injustices and strategies for imagining possible dignifying futures.

The chapter starts with a discussion on the possibilities that Southern Theory opens for reflecting on the role of activist knowledge in social struggles and in theory development. Then, to describe the particularities of knowledge projects coming from activism, I will explore three of their dimensions: (i) interpellation of the politics of not-knowing, (ii) contribution to producing a knowledge that is useful and brings justice to social struggles; (iii) articulating power. In the conclusion, I will discuss and expand the call made by Connell in *Southern Theory* to promote new dialogues between the Global North and Global South.

On Southern Theory, Social Justice and Activism

Southern Theory is a concept coined by Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (2007) to continue and expand discussions on power relations in knowledge production on a global scale. The use of "Southern" is a call to examine periphery-centre relations, to recognise that theory does emerge from so-called peripheral positions and to remember that social thinking and intellectual work occur in specific settings rather than in abstract or invisible locations (Connell, 2007, p. ix). It is a critique of universality, of implicit centrality in knowledge production and of the erasure of the knowledge produced by those in subordinated positions.

Connell engages in dialogue with feminist scholarship (Haraway, 1988), subaltern studies (Das, 2008; Guha, 1997), decolonial thinking (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007; Domingues, 2009; Mignolo, 2007) and other perspectives that have responded critically to universalised knowledge based on a metropolitan, male and colonial way of thinking. Since Connell's work comes mainly from the social sciences and sociology of knowledge, it adds a particular angle to other perspectives based on humanities, literature or cultural studies. Amid those interconnected discussions, Southern Theory invites scholars to explore the geographies and cartographies of knowledge production as an industrial formation (and corresponding labour force) distributed across specific historical, political and social settings.

This invitation by Connell has been applied to diverse areas of academic inquiry, showing the potential of exploring how those in Southern positions—and not only residing in the Global South—contest power imbalances in the production of knowledge and claim agency as knowledge creators. There are applications of Southern Theory perspectives to a variety of fields, including information and computing technologies (Kreps & Bass, 2019), childhood studies (Abebe et al., 2022), and gender and education (Epstein & Morrell, 2012). In literary criticism, Southern Theory has helped to challenge the standard canon imposed by Euro-American literary studies, looking at works from countries like China (Yan & Connell, 2019). In urban studies, it has invited scholars to consider what kinds of lessons can be learnt from cities in the Global South for planning in the Global North (Narayanan, 2021). Southern Theory has extended reflection on the history and application of criminology scholarship, uncovering the discipline's fixed production of hierarchies and its colonial legacy, expressed, for example, in the over-representation of Indigenous people in the judicial system of settler societies such as Australia (Carrington et al., 2016). Epstein and Morrell (2012) are correct in considering Southern Theory as a work in progress, but it is a work with clear and direct impact in offering possibilities for new perspectives on knowledge production.

As expected for a project with rapid uses and appropriations, there have also been critiques. These criticisms include claims that Southern Theory homogenises representations of both North and South, that it paradoxically centres attention on the North when intending to talk about the South and that it overlooks educated elites in the South. Discussions were presented few years after Connell's pivotal work in a special issue of the journal *Political Power and Social Theory* (2013). This dialogue gave Connell the opportunity to update some of the components of Southern Theory, emphasising that the North and the South are ways to discuss power imbalances and stressing the fact that the periphery does produce knowledge that extends the democratic purposes of education and research.

Knowledge coming from social justice struggles is at the core of Southern Theory. Responding to a critique by Patricia Hill Collins (2013), Connell emphasised that Southern Theory was developed from the reading of the work of intellectuals committed to social justice and activism (2013, p. 176). This reading highlights a method and a purpose of Southern Theory. Robert Morrell uses this strategy in his analysis of

gender research in South Africa to show how the apartheid regime and struggles against that repressive regime framed and defined research decisions and agendas (Morrell, 2016). Still, the reflections made by Connell or Morrell are mainly focused on individual intellectuals whose work benefitted from resources allowing it to be published, circulated, recognised and consumed as legitimate knowledge. What about those who do not get access to such resources? What happens to those who do not obtain individual recognition as intellectuals or to academics whose work is part of collective projects in which individual recognition is less relevant?

The North and the South are strategies to identify knowledge inequalities that happen in the separation between academia, as the space for knowledge production, and activism, as the place for practice and application. As I will illustrate later, inequalities due to the exclusion of knowledge from collective activism and sites outside "proper" academic circuits can also occur in Southern positions. Knowledge from activism is at the South of Southern knowledge and even more when such knowledge is written and published in languages and in publication circuits less available, legitimated or attractive for academic markets. At present, I am writing this piece in English even if most of its thinking and supportive experience comes from Spanish and Latin America.

This contribution shares with Southern Theory its call to democratise the social sciences on a global scale and to promote more dialogic knowledge production. However, resources to access more dialogic interactions are unevenly distributed, and the benefits obtained from those dialogues may not be the same for those in the North and those in the South. Southern Theory offers us a useful strategy for ongoing vigilance in recognising where, how and by whom power imbalances are produced, reproduced or challenged.

On Knowing but Not-Knowing

In the late 1990s, Álvaro Miguel Rivera, a Colombian environmental engineer, was doing HIV activism in the department of Meta, an area expanding from the central Andean region in Colombia towards the border with Venezuela. This area was at core of struggles between the former *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*—FARC guerrilla, paramilitary groups, the state army and drug dealing industries. If getting access to HIV treatment was already difficult in capital cities due to complex bureaucratic procedures and lack of integral assistance schemes, it was

even more difficult in rural areas and areas affected by armed conflict. Activism and organisational networks were pivotal to establishing a space between the violence committed by armed actors and the violence committed by institutions.

Such movements were risky. Álvaro travelled in the region and to capital cities, ascertaining the limited HIV treatments available to distribute to those who were affected. Due to the permanent control of the region by armed actors, carrying HIV medicines would put someone at risk of being stigmatised and subject to violence. On one occasion, Álvaro and other activists appeared in the main square of a town with their hair dyed blond as a way of resisting the gendered dress codes imposed by *paramilitares* on young men and women. When in 2002, Álvaro denounced guerrilla groups that were forcing inhabitants of small towns to undergo HIV tests and other human rights violations, he was threatened and forced into exile.

These events did not go unnoticed. Local, national and even international media (Hodgson, 2001; Reforma, 2001) documented the forced testing, the complicity of some local authorities, how results were made public and how those who tested positive were persecuted. Informal networks of activists made public what was happening, and early researchers on violence against LGBT people in relation to armed conflict collected the voices of victims, including Álvaro's (Payne, 2007). Information about these human rights violations was available but still ignored by state institutions. This explicit ignorance has been theorised as a politics of not-knowing (Nordstrom, 1999)—the explicit and intentional denial of some events as a result of power relations that allow the continuation of violence.

Álvaro Miguel was murdered in 2009. His killing was under-investigated, and no one has been prosecuted yet (Colombia-Diversa, 2012). Nevertheless, Álvaro's work and the events that surrounded it stayed in the memories of activists for years.

Useful Knowledge

On October 18, 2012, the Colombian government announced the beginning of peace dialogues with the FARC guerrilla, marking a new moment in the efforts for non-violent conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Civil society organisations played a key role in pushing for the need to stop violence and protect negotiations (Valencia-Agudelo & Villarreal-Miranda, 2020). LGBT organisations and activists have had a long-term commitment to peacebuilding and were relevant actors for peace throughout the

negotiations (Bueno-Hansen, 2021). They produced manifestos and documents that were discussed at the peace negotiation table and participated in social pedagogies for peace all around the country.[2] The signing of a first version of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the former guerrilla of FARC on September 26, 2016, was both a moment of expectations and tensions.

Peace negotiations occurred at a time during which anti-gender movements in Latin America were gaining momentum. The inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace agreement was the result of mobilisation by feminist and LGBT organisations that utilised gender—as a perspective, a strategy for social analysis and an agenda for change—to raise awareness around the differentiated impact of the conflict on women and men. Gender was therefore central to the implementation of peace strategies. Yet gender was also at the core of opposition to the peace agreement. Those against the peace process used gender to stoke fear, denouncing the peace agreement as promoting a "gender ideology" that would undermine the family and existing social values. The defeat of the first version of the agreement in the plebiscite held on October 2, 2016, resulted in the signing of a new one on November 24, 2016. The negotiation of the new agreement included a conservative redefinition of the gender perspective that erased references to gender and sexual diversity, excluded the role of LGBT activism in peacebuilding and emphasised gender binarism, presenting women mostly as victims.

Opposition to gender and to the needs and proposals of LGBT organisations did not prevent the inclusion of transitional justice mechanisms in the peace deal. The peace agreement created three mechanisms for transitional justice: the Truth Commission, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Unit for the Search of Disappeared Persons. These mechanisms required specialised knowledge on issues of gender, sexualities and victimisation, as well as the inclusion of the agendas for peace created by LGBT organisations. Activists mobilised to provide the knowledge required not only data documenting the victimisation faced by LGBT individuals and collectives, but also technical support to translate concepts and categories

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[2] To expand on the documents and reports produced by those organisations, I suggest exploring the websites of organisations such as Caribe Afirmativo https://caribeafirmativo. lgbt/paz/biblioteca-de-paz/; Colombia Diversa https://colombiadiversa.org/publicaciones/; and Plataforma LGBTI por la Paz https://lgbtiporlapaz.org/

of analysis into guidelines and instructions useful for the collection of data, the development of questionnaires and the preparation of reports.

In this negotiation and peacebuilding, LGBT organisations and activists drew upon accumulated knowledge from the LGBT movement's earlier work in lobbying for rights. This knowledge had been produced according to the politics of collective action, identity building and dignity struggles (Planeta-Paz, 2002; Proyecto-Agenda, 2001). Contributions to the peace process also came from state institutions in charge of historic research and memory work (CNMH, 2015), as well as from academic research (Serrano Amaya, 2014) and local publications. This was a heterogeneous body of knowledge, circulating mostly outside of academic publications in meetings, assemblies and documents that supported legal struggles. Because it was published in Spanish, this knowledge received little attention from academics in the Global North.

Cultural studies scholar Elizabeth Walsh (2003) argues that the politics of knowledge encompasses practices that allow certain kinds of knowledge to be considered proper, while other kinds are put aside or marginalised. As mentioned earlier, this phenomenon results, in part, from hierarchies and power relations between the metropole and the periphery. It is also due to differences in political purposes. The politics of knowledge that gave rise to the information mentioned just above have a relation to the "memory work" (Haug, 1987) done by activists and organisations, a kind of work intended to connect theory with experience through collective processes. In this memory work, documenting is not just a technical endeavour to collect narratives from witnesses and victims, but is also a mechanism to enable the emergence of testimonies that challenge the plain description of events common in official recounts. Furthermore, memory work can produce knowledge that acts against the previous politics of not-knowing (Nordstrom, 1999) that for decades explicitly ignored certain individual and collective struggles. Disputes over the recognition of LGBT activism in peacebuilding and the subsequent denial and forestalling of LGBT actors' participation in formal initiatives for peace can serve as instructive examples of such politics.

Articulating Knowledge

The Colombian Truth Commission worked from April 5, 2017, until June 28, 2022. Building on the previous experience of other commissions such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which

gender was included from the beginning of the process, the Colombian Truth Commission mainstreamed a gender perspective in its design and composition, and in the structuring of its final report. Considering previous opposition to LGBT topics during the peace agreement discussions in Colombia, the inclusion of gender identity, sexual orientation and the work of LGBT organisations was all the more innovative. This mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the work of the Commission resulted in the writing of a full volume on gender, with a chapter on women and another on "LGBTIQ+ persons"[3] (Comisión-de-la-Verdad, 2022). It was the long history of activism and knowledge produced by women and LGBT organisations that made such inclusion in the structure of the Commission and in its final report possible.

Civil society organisations were key participants in the making of the volume on gender, as described in the documentation of the research and writing process. Women and LGBT organisations participated in the collection of information, in drafting technical documents, in educational campaigns on the work of the Commission, in the legal representation of victims, in their counselling and psychosocial support when giving testimonies and in the writing of reports. Just in relation to the chapter on LGBTIQ+ issues, LGBT collectives and allies submitted 22 reports to the Commission from September 2019 to March 2022, describing and explaining the heterogeneous but systematic violence faced by LGBTIQ+ collectives due to the armed conflict in Colombia (Cuello Santana et al., 2022). Caribe Afirmativo, one of the leading organisations working to protect the rights of LGBT people, submitted 13 of those reports, detailing among other issues violence against LGBT children and youth, Afro Colombians and Indigenous communities.

Organisations and activists worked for more than two years to produce the information required to prove that violence against LGBTIQ+ persons and their collectives was fundamental to the dynamics of armed conflict in Colombia, that it occurred in many areas of the country and that it was committed by all armed parties involved in the conflict. They produced diverse explanations to show how gendered and sexualised violence was not a side effect or an isolated case committed by deviant persons, but a

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[3] LGBTIQ+ was the acronym used in the work of the Commission. In this chapter I have used LGBT as being the most common in the discussions I am dealing with. The acronym is a matter of constant debate and permanently evolving. I am not assuming it as a descriptive term but as a political construct.

structural and integral aspect of Colombian socio-political violence. All these reports were prepared during the COVID-19 pandemic and with limited economic and logistical resources, making the researching and writing more complex.

These processes can be described using the concept of articulation developed in cultural studies (Clarke, 2015; Grossberg, 1986). Articulation describes a connection between elements that may belong to different orders and for which unity is not permanent but specific to certain conjunctures; in this way, the concept of articulation makes intelligible a historical situation in ways that cannot be reduced to a single structural factor. This is relevant for the inquiries discussed above for three reasons: (i) it challenges the idea that the knowledge projects under discussion can be explained as response to some kind of communality linked to a single and exclusive social identity; (ii) it allows for the existence of disparate alliances that under other circumstances may not occur; (iii) it emphasises the temporality of the political projects that mobilise knowledge projects.

In 2018, small groups of activists and academics organised to write a report on the violence against people with HIV in the Colombian armed conflict. Some of us were working in an HIV organisation, others in an LGBT collective and others in academia. The interest was based in previous personal, political and academic experiences. Some of us were colleagues and peers of Álvaro Miguel, and paying respect to his memory was also motivating our involvement in the project. While some have had a long-term commitment to HIV activism and community work, others have come through academic pathways. The intention in producing the report was less about adding a document to the work of the Truth Commission or making visible a topic that was not considered before in other commissions. Writing was a form to deal with silences, with the lack of voice in state institutions and in official memory accounts and with the process of healing wounds from long-term violence. It was a way to exist not as casualties or as epidemiological statistics, but as victims of political conflict and agents in its transformation. It also provided the opportunity to pay respect to Álvaro Miguel's memory and to engage his legacy in current efforts for justice and memory work.

The writing of the report faced economic, methodological and theoretical challenges. We were not able to obtain funding for the project, so we had to work in the usual form of community and grassroots activism: each one drawing upon their own human and economic resources, donating time from other regular paid work and contributing labour across

weekends and off-work hours. Theory work happens in concrete material situations and those situations are often not ideal, especially when located in the Global South.

In terms of methodology, there were two main challenges: access to information and the protection of participants' identities. Information was dispersed, uneven and hard to access. We worked using a meta-analysis methodology in which we combined information coming from newspapers and previous reports with interviews to identify acts of violence against people living with HIV committed by armed actors or in circumstances associated with armed conflict. Protection to participants was fundamental, since some of them were still living in areas of conflict and could be talking about their own experiences of victimisation or violence against others close to them. Information provided could expose some participants to great risk.

In theoretical terms, the main challenge was finding an explanatory theoretical frame that could support the analysis of data and contribute to the report. Victimisation of persons living with HIV in the context of armed conflict has been mostly understood from an epidemiological perspective and with a focus on public health securitisation. There is extensive literature on the varying effects of armed conflict on patterns of HIV infections; in some cases conflict has caused an expansion of infections, in other cases it has brought about a reduction (Bennett et al., 2015; Elbe, 2002; McInnes, 2009). Most of this research has been developed in African countries. There is little about Colombia and even less that centres the perspective of people living with HIV. Since our report was conceived as a contribution to memory work and to reparation, such previous focuses on epidemiological perspectives were limited. The report also limited the concept of "stigma" commonly used in previous research (Chaw-Kant et al., 2010; Colombia-Diversa, 2017; Herek, 1998) due to its focus on the violence associated with stereotyping, shaming and prejudice and its neglect of other issues relevant to our findings, such as armed forces' use of violence to secure economic and territorial control.

Instead of using a well-established academic theory to discuss these issues, we decided to use another approach that would locate our report in dialogue with international law and with theoretical discussions closer to transitional justice and the reparation of victims. Our team included lawyers and social scientists, and we sought to develop a concept suited to both data analysis and political action. After intense discussions, we decide to frame our findings in connection with the concept of "crime against

humanity of persecution" found in Article 7(1)(h) of the Statute of Rome. Our data was consistent with such an explanatory frame. Violence was committed against people living with HIV as constitutive of a particular group defined by gender, sexual and social orders. Such perception and constitution as a particular group put them in a situation of vulnerability. Events were systematic and generalised. Our report was less intended to prove a theory than to make an issue visible to the state and to those implementing a transitional justice instrument such as the Truth Commission.

We gave the report to the Truth Commission during a semi-public encounter on September 28, 2021. It was a very emotional event. Present were some of the participants, who offered testimonies and knowledge that had made the report possible. Some of us had not been able to be together for years, and it was a moment to reunite. There were laughs and tears. There were memories and recollections of those who were lost due to armed conflict and due to the pandemic. Having the report on paper and handing it to the representatives of the Truth Commission gave our writing and research a new sense of tangible, material existence. Writing theory is also an embodied, physical and collective experience.

Conclusion

Theory can be used in several ways. I was educated in a positivist tradition in which theory was often presented as a frame announced at the start of writing in terms of big statements taken from a leading figure of the canon. This canon was often masculine and from the Global North. It was assumed that with such framing of one's ideas, the reader would understand where one is located in a tradition, how one's perspectives can be distinguished from other perspectives and how one's work exists in relation to defined intellectual frontiers. The frame had to be applied carefully and rigorously if one expected to be considered an adequate subscriber to the intellectual tradition behind the frame.

The use of Southern Theory, described above, is different. Instead of making borders by using a frame, Southern Theory is more an invitation to enter into permanent and open conversations. As in any invitation, there are basic rules of respect for those who open their houses, their stories and their histories before any questions are asked or interventions made. In this piece, Southern Theory has helped me to represent and explore an experience in which I have been both actor and observer. There

are some long conversations far from my understanding that come to me as echoes and others that sound clear and loud. Southern Theory has enabled me to tell a story of power relations in knowledge production and to locate my own work and contribution. I used Southern Theory to claim a space for the knowledge produced by and for activists as valid and relevant. It is the knowledge that one may not find in the expensive databases to which universities in the Global North subscribe, or through simple online searches, which often contain algorithms that deprioritise research and reports from the Global South.

These conversations also helped me to identify how a particular knowledge project emerged from the work of activists and organisations that are not only documenting their suffering and acting to transform it into political agency, but are also active producers of expert knowledge. I do not intend to produce a romanticised view of knowledge, although a little romanticism can be useful in times when hope for change seem less evident. There are intense inner tensions and hierarchies within activist knowledge production that need to be recognised and discussed. If activist knowledge is in a Southern position in relation to academic knowledge, inside activist communities there are some researchers with more resources than others. Activism requires literacy as well as social and political capital. There are voices there that do not speak the language of laws, of rights or of the state and are therefore heard as "noise". Hierarchies between Southern positions risk reproducing some of the power relationships they intend to challenge.

Connell calls for the use of Southern Theory as a vehicle for more dialogue between North and South. But this is not just any kind of dialogue. Dialogues between academia and activism, or between theory and practice, can still perpetuate separations and hierarchies. Connell's call requires considering the heterogeneity and diversity of those involved. Otherwise, the dialogue may end up assuming homogeneity, blending what is intrinsically different. We can often see these problems in international conferences in the Global North that feature the South as an exception or a case study, but not in organisational and decision-making positions. Similar issues can be identified in calls for cooperation between North and South that still bring the knowledge to the Global North for processing, publication and consumption.

I would endorse instead those dialogues that create spaces for interaction between different collective knowledge projects. These interactions cannot be simple exchanges or cooperations, since those in an unequal

relationship are not exchanging the same things nor are they under the same political and institutional constraints. Even more, those interactions are embodied in concrete persons and groups that challenge the usual individualist style imposed by academic promotion. The promotion of dialogues that are located in power relations while at the same time challenging them enables possibilities for the cross-pollination and mutual imbrication of theories and practices.

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Approximate Geographies: A Response to José Fernando Serrano Amaya

Julian Wood

Can we have social theory that does not claim universality for a metropolitan point of view, does not read from only one direction, does not exclude the experience and social thought of most of humanity, and is not constructed on terra nullius? (Connell, 2020b [2007], p. 47)

As a young postgraduate student of Anglo-Irish descent, I wangled a reader's ticket to the British Museum Reading Room in my native city of London. The room was a beautiful space and, yes, it was steeped in imperial/colonial history (famously it was where Karl Marx wrote most of Capital). It had the kind of settled almost unassailable history which takes its grandeur for granted and has convenient amnesia about its privileges and its contested claims. To get access to the room then you had to walk through the museum itself. The BM, as it is known, holds some astonishingly beautiful objects from many eras and civilisations. It has been obvious for some time that it is also a house of plunder, and the debates about its booty are hotting up. The process of giving back some of its stolen

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213

treasure has already begun. Recently other UK museum collections have decided to return some of their artefacts to the countries from which they were stolen.

What cannot be so straightforwardly handed back, however, is the knowledges and social development which accompanied and propelled Britain's imperial rise in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is what Connell (2020b [2007]) rightly terms its colonial dividend, and it forms part of a larger argument about the pattern of distribution of both material and immaterial resources historically and globally.

I want to say a few things about other debates (such a post/colonialism and global knowledge flows), but I start with southern theory as an idea and as a book. *Southern Theory* (2007) could appear overambitious. After all, no one book could single handedly re-map the whole world of theory or re-present all the traditions ignored by the west. It is also important to see the book as part of a larger project in which Connell (and others) strive to de-centre the world map of knowledge production and valorisation. As Connell is very well aware, theorists from non-northern countries and regions had been producing sophisticated theoretical accounts for decades.

Before proceeding to the rest of this chapter, I also need to enter a small caveat. I should declare upfront my connections to Professor Connell. She has helped me over the years, acting as a sometime unofficial mentor and as an academic collaborator. She is also a personal friend. Naturally I worried that this might colour my judgement or affect my ability to comment neutrally on her work. However, given that Raewyn has collaborated for so long with so many scholars I obviously would not be alone in navigating such a consideration.

One could argue that there are two important aspects for the project of southern theory (for reasons outlined in this piece, the term may not be fully stable, but let us go with it in a pragmatic sense). Firstly, there is the problematisation—but not full dismantling of—'classical' or northern social theory (Connell, 2006). This means taking on the hegemony of the metropole both at the level of theory and in terms of who is expected to theorise about whom. In an analysis of empires and imperial rule the metropole was the centre or 'home country' from which ideas and forms of rule were spread to dependent states. The analogy here is that the Northern hemisphere nations (American but also Britain and parts of Northern Europe) act as an assumed centre which makes nations of the south part of the periphery.

The second aspect relates to the attempt to (re)construct a more inclusive, multi-centred, and even-handed and democratic model of intellectual labour and globalised knowledge production.

This is a set of arguments that Connell had been building up to for some years (Connell, 1997). The discussion of the emergence of sociology/social theory considered as a 'concrete historical question' (2020b [2007], p. 7) sets the scene in the early chapters of *Southern Theory*. It is a very broad target but not a fast moving one. The (western) sociological canon is relatively enduing, if not entirely static. That said, Connell scores several direct hits in terms of conventional sociology's content and method and the geopolitics of our times. Part of the symbolic violence here is in the flight to abstraction. The reliance on a presumption of the ahistorical universalism of a social science terminology (actors, agents, social structures as many a sociology course would have it). These terms are presumed to be 'cross applicable', but they leave out, or sidestep, a lot of concrete detail about how different societies frame their issues.

The whole western tradition is only able to appear universal by downplaying or ignoring what Wiredu (1996) called the questionable cultural universals and particulars. The view from the north assumes a panoptic confidence and 'arranges' other knowledges as being peripheral. Further, we have learned from postcolonial studies that the idea of the west as a monolithic and homogenised entity is itself a biased story. As suggested it vitiates its analysis by ignoring or downplaying contributions from the periphery. As Carrington (2008) says, Connell is right that a lot of northern theorists do not feel the need to even read contributions from the south. They can get by without reading them. Again, Connell is aware of the imbalances here and, as a theorist currently residing in the south (see also below), her feeling that the complacency needs to be disrupted provides some of the force of the book.

As implied above, northern theorists can get published in the west and talk to other theorists in the metropole without even referencing the fact that they too are 'local'. The west sees itself as central/universal, while the south is often shouting from the wings. Things are changing on this front, but there is a long way to go. There are perhaps three stages or stances. One is to not be aware of non-metropolitan sources/theories. The second is to be aware but not really care. And the third is to actively strive to incorporate other views and/or to collaborate. Southern theorists by comparison often have to be twice as smart or to shoulder a double load to join the conversation. They need to know all the 'northern' theories first and

then they have to educate audiences in the metropole about the way things are understood or theorised in their country or region (the relationship between these debates and postcolonial studies is discussed below).

The Problem of the North

The *Southern Theory* book was not intended merely as a polemic, although it has a polemical edge. It was certainly a provocation. Fundamentally, it is an attempt to get 'us' to turn our heads towards other resources and modes of thinking. There is throughout a sense of exasperation with northern theory, especially when it is unaware (as it often is) of things that have been already well addressed and theorised in situ in countries outside the metropole. However, the book is not some quixotic attempt aimed simply as unseating the likes of Bourdieu or Giddens or Coleman. In stylistic terms, these are often cumbersome writers, but their reputations and place in the canon are safe enough. It would be overstepping to argue that northern theory is bad just because it is northern. We can pick and choose. To ignore the insightful elements in writers like Bourdieu would be an act of mere inversion. Bourdieu is not a fluent writer (and one could read him as being conservative in his implications), but there is nonetheless some useful theorising in his oeuvre. Concepts such as habitus and field and forms of capital have inspired some good research.

Connell tackles the classics as part of the story, but her scope and ambition has always been wider. She knows 'classical' sociology (Connell, 1997) in great detail, but she wants to replenish it and upgrade it. One of the aspects of the project is to point out the elisions and forgotten debates with the northern discourse itself. For example, she is adept in using earlier iterations of theory that have fallen into disuse or out of fashion, and she often advocates for those sociologists who had something useful to say (e.g., Karl Mannheim, Georg Lukacs).

Even in this part of the project we run into issues of what is the centre and what is the periphery. Lots of regions (which are not really southern) feel they had to struggle to get noticed in mainstream academic debates. For example, there is the question of whether theorists from Eastern Europe can be counted as 'southern' (perhaps on the basis that they are/were 'excluded' from the northern hemisphere mainstream (Boatcă, 2010, Boatcă & Costa, 2016, Rosa, 2014)).

As implied above, there are several overlapping problematics (to use an old term). One is related to the fact that the world has always been

interconnected, by global capital flows (Appadurai, 1996), or through conquest and colonisation, or via long-term intercultural exchange and hybridisation. Edward Said argued this very specifically some decades back (see also discussion of his work below). The western concept of globalisation, for example, that prompted a rush of publications in the 1990s and 2000s suffered from the illusion that it was a phenomenon that was completely new. Hirst and Thompson (1996) pointed out early on that this was a somewhat ahistorical periodisation. The world has always been global in a sense. The Catholic Church was a global organisation in its way many centuries ago.

Connell continue to promote a series of ongoing interdisciplinary studies using data and theories from different countries. However, Southern Theory Studies is not quite yet a unified field in its own right, but in its formation it overlaps with other emergent traditions Social science has long had globalised elements. Sometimes these resurface as different subdisciplines and have their own growth spurts (Connell, 2011a, 2011b; Connell, 2013). Similarly, postcolonial studies has developed into a large field of scholarship over several decades. For example, there have been periodic attempts to institute postcolonial sociology as a subdiscipline (Go, 2016). Comparative studies also runs in parallel and is therefore an approach that could be aligned with southern theory (see, for instance, Takayama et al., 2017). The main point is that scholars from different or parallel disciplines saw in southern theory a chance to hybridise and productively combine their approaches.

We Were Never Southern—Australia and Where It Is

The question of who narrates the nation (Bhabha, 2013) often gives rise to a contestation. Sociologists nowadays usually describe Australia as a settler-colonial society (thereby overwriting the existing civilisation of course). Alongside that we might ask, can Australia with its still largely Anglophone culture and its strong western (though not monocultural) identity convincingly describe itself as 'southern'? From another perspective, it might as well be characterised as an Asian country as it is in an 'Asian' part of the world. The very idea of Asia is of course quite unstable as a term, and it lumps together very different nation-states. There are the conditions for an identity crisis here. As Connell (2018) points out,

Australian identity, at least as seen in the works of its literary intellectuals, has often had elements of displacement and geographic ambivalence. Patrick White—the only Australian author so far to win the Nobel Prize—is both uniquely Australian and quite Anglo/colonial.

Connell herself embodies some of the historic-geographic multifacet-edness and nomadic intellectual formation. She was educated initially in the western (northern) tradition. She has also taught in, and had exchanges with, significant sites of teaching and theory production in the metropole as well as reaching out to collaborators in the global south. Although she has not yet written an autobiography or memoir, she is aware of the speci-ficities of her location and formation. That long history and wide engage-ment with scholars around the globe is of course what partly informed the launching-off point of southern theory. Can people be both 'southern' and 'northern'? Is it a matter of when one is writing or with whom one is collaborating? Is a book or article produced by writers from both hemi-spheres, northern or southern?

Code Switching—Writing from the North and the South

Following on from the above, there are some further complexities about who is producing what and when. In some cases, it is not a matter of where theorists work, but when in their journey they formed/wrote their ideas. This dilemma had been examined, for example, by leading African intellectuals (Hountondji, 2002). Colonisation affected many southern intellectuals deeply. It can take a psychological toll (Fanon, 1970), and the colonising process gets 'inside' the head of the theorist such that the colo-nising power becomes an intimate enemy in Nandy's (1989) resonant phrase. Then there is the difficulty of occupying a liminal space, being strung between two worlds and perhaps not fully at home in either of them. Many intellectuals from other regions of the world wrote initially in the country of their birth and then ended up teaching in the institutions and universities of the north. Many have written about feeling both an existential uprootedness and the felt need to fit in or integrate. Some fur-ther lamented that shouldering the burden of being charged with some-how resolving these contradictions off their own bat. The role of the diasporic intellectual is not always an easy one, as Said's (2012) eloquent and plangent biographical reflection testified.

In terms of the north-south axis, this does not invalidate the souther-ness of their theorising, but it also requires us to recall that to be heard in the west they have had to meet northern theory more than halfway. How could it really be otherwise? Many such intellectuals have to engage in a kind of code switching in order to theorise the south and be heard in the north. The problems of projection and misunderstanding abound. Does the west (or the north) really hear the non-northern theorists as they intended to be heard? Given the current hegemony too, there is the prob-lem of northern intellectuals appropriating the work of southern theorists. This could produce the patronising assumption that the north can situate southern accounts and re-present them and even 'correct' their ideas (shall we coin the term 'northsplaining'?).

British scholar Benedict Anderson (2006) made a useful contribution to studies of the origin and spread of nationalism. His contention that all nation-states rely, to some extent, upon realising themselves as imagined communities is an idea with legs. There were of course already some southern theory elements in that well-known book. Anderson tells us that he is primarily a scholar of South East Asia and he makes light of the would-be global pretensions in expanding the historical arguments. However, the book is more useful and convincing precisely because it does not start from an unexamined and uncontested westo-centric perspective. Other scholars have used his ideas as a launching-off point. It is important not to start with the assumption that non-western countries are a blank slate with no prior theories of their own. However, we are also aware that the invention of tradition is always predicated on the eclipse, if not the 'abolition', of what has gone before (Dussel, 1995).

UP, DOWN, AND ACROSS—GEOGRAPHIC METAPHORS AND ANALYSES

There have been other attempt to 'geographise' the world of thought and culture and they often excite mis/readings and debate. For example, there are some interesting comparisons that could be made between *Southern Theory* and Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*. Both books were widely read and have been quite influential in their fields. Both could be described as agenda-setting (or resetting). Both are theoretically heterogenous and written largely in non-technical language. Said's book might adorn more shelves, but that is partly because as a work of literary studies/cultural

studies it is more likely to connect more with general readers. That of course is making the (perhaps snobbish) assumption that educated readers, even if they have not studied social science, will have already had a grounding in literature and 'the classics'. Titles do matter, especially if can be said to express a whole new idea as a sort of gestalt. *Orientalism*, like *Southern Theory*, gives us an idea, and a useful linguistic coinage, that encapsulates its central thesis in a metonymic way.

However, there is something else we could say about their projects that relates to both the times in which they were written and some tropes within the global imaginary. The whole concept of the 'West', as Said shows, requires some self-defining energy to keep it current. Moreover, it cannot survive without its 'other' (the Orient), an entity that it (re)produces discursively partly as a repository of its own repressed desires. But where Said's analysis divides the world vertically as it were, Connell divides it horizontally. As already implied, borders create the potential for border disputes. Both authors find some heuristic value in their shorthands, but they are also both aware that the entities they sketch in exist only in a cultural and historico-political way. Both 'north' and 'south' are in their way imagined geographies.

They are not literal or strictly geographic. Still, people need to understand the central idea and not just nit-pick at the edges. Said (in his 1995 Afterword) spends a considerable number of words fending off what he sees as misconstructions of his arguments (see also Said, 2013). Connell could do very much the same with *Southern Theory*, but she has taken a different tack. In fact, a lot of the thinking that comes indirectly out of pondering reactions to her original starting point can be found in the Good University (2019) (see Chaps. 3 and 4) (see also Bhambra et al., 2020).

What both of these 'spatial metaphors' share is a sense that knowledge production and circulation is not naturally occurring and is never value-neutral. It is complexly indexed to relations of history power and hegemony. The politics of knowledge is an ongoing one. Both books, in their gentle and insistent way, take the west to task and suggest that growth lies in further self-criticism and in opening up to non-western views and arguments.

Reading or Applying—Actually Using Southern Theory

In relation to its legacy, we could predict that southern theory might evoke different reactions in different world regions. For the north, one could say there was partly a feeling of being both admonished and corrected. In the south, the reaction was more likely to be one of critical approval and even a sense of 'about time' (Arjomand, 2008). Of course, even a timely book can only do so much. It would be unfair to hold the book to account solely on the basis of whether or not it has made a dint in northern theory. Rather, we should acknowledge as did many supportive reviews (Boatcă, 2010; Lundström, 2009; Muller, 2009) that the book needs to be seen as *part of a project* of mobilising attention to what has been excluded or downplayed. One of the hopes for the *Southern Theory* book is that it would inspire further work in that vein (and not just be skimmed and placed on a shelf). Southern theory was a mapping exercise, but people need to actually *use* that map to explore new terrains.

Here I would like to make two quick points, both of which grow out of an engagement with the larger southern theory project. They relate to the ideas of collectivism and activism. Connell has been critical of the over-attention to 'star' intellectuals because that can mask the efforts of those less noticed or less heralded (often, not so incidentally, women). For example, as feminist scholars have shown, the history of science is littered with women co-workers who did not get the recognition for their part in collaborative research (one thinks of Rosalind Franklin whose work on DNA sequencing is much less well known than that of her Nobel-prize-winning colleagues Watson and Crick).

Further, focussing on great individual thinkers can mislead us into idealist model of how really useful knowledge grows and how we can employ it to make things better. Knowledge is not 'produced' just inside theorists' heads, but through actual intellectual labour and long-term collaborations. Similarly, we need to think about knowledge production in a globalised world in a globalised way (Connell & Crawford, 2007; Connell 2019). Importantly, there is a global intellectual workforce which underpins individual careers. This is an aspect that is often overlooked, but it has been central to Connell's project for many years (Connell et al., 2005). Great thinkers are useful (and fun to read), but they are the prow of the ship and not the whole vessel. In that sense the attachment to solo intellectual knowledge production is a distraction. Real advances are always

made through *collective* efforts. This has always been true of science, and we should recall that when we attempt to think about social theorising.

Secondly, there is the grounded theory that comes out of knowledge-informed activism. In this sense Connell was 'walking the walk' for some years on either side of the publication of the book. For example, her research in areas such as HIV prevention (Connell, 2012; Connell et al., 2013), gendered violence initiatives, and global peace studies (Connell, 2017) involved collaborations with other individuals or organisations, often in the global south. Connell has also considered how fields such as the sociology of gender would look if due consideration was given to southern contributions (Connell 2014a, 2014b, 2020a; Connell & Pearse 2015).

This is also theory valorised through activism which is joined to progressive social action and participatory campaigns. It is not just a matter of raiding the south for 'examples' of social life to take back and theorise at home. In this connected world we can trade ideas and insights without ever getting on a plane. It also utilises contemporary technological developments such as the de-territorialising elements of online global communications.

Crucially, collaborations are better when they flow both ways. Scholars such as Morrell (Connell et al., 2016; Morrell, 2016) have taken the southern theory framework (creatively combining it with Connell's gender theory work) and have made advances by applying it concretely in a Southern African context. This work has potential global significance. It is also very much in the spirit of the book to use the southern theory framework as a spur to activism around gender justice and human rights, which is why Serrano Amaya's account of the dialogue between theory and activism is so relevant and welcome.

If we want to make theory in a world worth living in, we have to look beyond both the ivory tower and the blinkers of western assumptions.

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The Historian as Pedagogue: On Hayden White's Practical Past

Remy Y. S. Low

I have serious anxieties about identifying myself as a 'historian of education'. Yes, by the most cursory indicators, I have done some work that explores complicated issues like race and religion in education by recourse to the past (e.g., Low, 2014a, 2014b, 2019). But surely to have so turned to the past to help understand the present is not sufficient to qualify one as a historian, is it? If not, then what qualifies one to be? And does one have to be a historian to write history?

It is because questions like these haunt me and taunt my attempts to construct a professional academic identity that I have found comfort in thinkers that challenge what it means to be a historian and do history. For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche's essay 'The uses and disadvantages of history for life', published in 1874 as the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, has long been the underlying floor plan for how I have organised my thinking, research, and teaching of the historical dimensions of education. In this essay, Nietzsche straightforwardly asserts that 'we need history' insofar as it 'serves living'; historical knowledge 'atrophies and degenerates' when it is used for 'a comfortable turning away from life and action

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or merely for glossing over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act'. The latter is abetted by teachers who traffic the idea that to be 'educated' is to accumulate knowledge, and especially historical knowledge, such that the student's 'head is filled up with a monstrous number of ideas derived from extremely indirect knowledge of past times and peoples, not from the immediate contemplation of living'. To avoid this, Nietzsche (1874) suggests that history's proper role is to link greatness from the past to the present in order to build a great future: 'The task of history is to be a mediator between them [i.e., exemplary greats] and thus to provide an opportunity and the energies for the development of greatness. No, the goal of humanity cannot finally be anywhere but in its greatest examples'. What he is proposing is history as exhortation to action, as motivating myth, even as therapy and spirituality.

In his time and perhaps in ours too, this approach to history puts Nietzsche at some distance from what most professional historians might think of as their proper task. But on his side, we can find the American historian Hayden White—'a groundbreaking critic of conventional historiography'—who challenged professional historians' disavowal of narrative, aesthetics, and imagination in the way they select and arrange evidence (Ball & Domańska, 2019). While the focus of this chapter is on White's call for a 'practical past'—the title of an essay under which he would gather his final works—it is helpful to note that it had been a long-standing concern of his. As early as 1966, White had put it to his colleagues that: 'The contemporary historian has to establish the value of the study of the past, not "as an end in itself," but as a way of providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our own time' (White, 1966, p. 125). In his final writings on the practical past he returns to this imperative via literature, in particular modernist novels that are able to:

> extend the literary (or poetic) imagination to the examination of the present social world and to view it *sub specie historiae*, to view it as a drama of human beings trying to come to grips with the changes historical in kind that seemed to wash over them, beset them at every turn in 'modernity.' (White, 2010, p. 15)

Self-consciously standing in the lineage of Nietzsche, then, White is making the case that not all information about the past is useful, pitting himself against those he calls 'professional historians' with their insistence

'that the past be studied, as it was said, "for itself alone" or as "a thing in itself", without any ulterior motive other than a desire for the truth (of fact, to be sure, rather than doctrine) about the past' (White, 2010, p. 14). What they produce is a 'historical past' that teaches 'no lessons of any interest to the present, a version of the past as an object of strictly impersonal, neutral, and in the best cases, objective interest' (White, 2010, p. 16). A practical past, by contrast, is self-consciously elaborated in the service of the present and is related to this present in a practical way, especially because from it:

> [W]e can draw lessons and apply them to the present, to anticipate the future (or at least the proximate future) and provide reasons, if not justification, for actions to be taken in the present on behalf of a future better than the current dispensation. (White, 2010, p. 17)

As such, for the sake of serving life in the present, White suggests historical researchers (as opposed to 'professional historians') avail themselves of the rhetorical tools that make for compelling narratives, those more commonly associated with 'creative' and 'poetic' writing (White, 2010, p. 14). So while professional historians may turn their noses at such renditions of the past, preferring to represent the past 'in the genres of writing which, by convention, are called "histories" and are recognized to be such by the professional scholars licensed to decide what is "properly" historical and what is not', purveyors of practical pasts, while still drawing on the real past as their ultimate referent, are 'amenable to a literary – which is to say, an artistic or poetic – treatment that is anything but "fictional" in the sense of being purely imaginary or fantastic in kind' (White, 2014, pp. xiii, xiv). And while White refers to the conservative political philosopher Michael Oakeshott in making his distinction between the historical versus practical past, the rambunctious ghost of Nietzsche (1874) is unmistakeably present: 'only when history takes it upon itself to turn itself into an artwork and thus to become a purely artistic picture can it perhaps maintain the instincts or even arouse them'.

I have neither space here to tease out the tenability of White's distinction between the historical versus practical pasts, nor am I inclined to tell professional historians how to do their jobs. In what remains of this chapter, I want to show how teaching in higher education is a context where practical pasts are regularly conjured. For a less noticed thread that runs through both Nietzsche's and White's exhortations about history is its

pedagogical purchase. Writing his untimely meditation on history between October 1873 and January 1874 while holding down a teaching job at the University of Basel (Large, 2012, p. 93), the former spends a sizeable part of it lambasting conventional historians of his time for sapping the youth of their vitality by overwhelming them with superfluous detail. He had prefigured some of these themes in a searing set of lectures on the topic at the Basel city museum in 1872 (Nietzsche, 2016). In his lecture from 6 February 1872, for instance, he complained about how the 'scholarly historical approach' to the teaching of German culture and language made it seem dead, thus showing those teachers to have 'no sense of obligation toward its present and its future'. 'But education', he professes,

> begins precisely when we understand that a living thing is alive; the task of the educator is precisely to suppress the 'historical interest' that presses in on all sides, especially where it is a question of proper action, not merely understanding something.

Nietzsche's firm line on history's educative purpose—that 'the understanding of the past is desired at all times to serve the future and the present' (Nietzsche, 1874)—also chimes with White. For the latter, it is instructiveness that serves as a pivot between the two types of history. We can note this by his repeated use of the phrases 'draw lessons' and 'teach lessons' in association with the practical past (White, 2010, pp. 12, 14; 2014, pp. 6, 9, 10, 82, 90) versus the historical past that 'taught no lessons of any interest to the present' (White, 2010, p. 16) and, as such, has limited itself to 'establishing what really happened in discrete domains of the past and resisting any impulse to draw lessons for the present or, God forbid, daring to predict what lies in store for us in the future' (White, 2014, p. 20).

So, in what follows, I offer a brief account how teaching obliges us to treat the past in a practical manner. I specifically reflect on my experiences preparing a guest lecture for students enrolled in an educational leadership programme that my colleague (and responder to this chapter) Christine Grice capably helms.

At the end of 2021, Grice and I were finally able to meet together to share points of commonality in our respective areas of teaching and research. While we had for some years floated the idea of me teaching in the educational leadership programme, the COVID-19 pandemic had caused some pandemonium in our university (and lives, for that matter).

So having regrouped in 2022, Grice graciously invited me to deliver two very important lectures to her students: one on how ethical leadership in education can be conceived and another on international perspectives on ethical leadership in education. While the first allowed me to introduce my approach to ethical leadership in education inspired by Michel Foucault's (1985, 1986) retrieval of ethics as 'care of the self', the second posed a more considerable challenge. For apart from the sheer geographical scale of 'international'—which I understood to be anything outside of Australia—I was also confronted with the amount of possible material that I could use. In almost every locale and tradition across the globe, there are complex philosophies and practices for the cultivation of ethical leaders (Khalifa et al., 2019). Indeed, so-called modern western education is unique in its lack of emphasis on the community-based ethical person-hood of the educational leader beyond policy strictures and institutional codes of conduct, perhaps with some vague moral injunctions for 'social justice' included (Marshall & Ward, 2004).

As a historically inclined researcher, I was always going to reach into the past to demonstrate how ethical self-cultivation was core to leadership in education. But where and who and how? 'International' and 'history' hardly qualify as precise parameters for a lifelong research project, let alone a 50-minute lecture to a diverse class of students, many of whom would be listening after a long day at the chalkface. When I boiled it down, the challenge facing me was this: in under an hour, how do I best impress upon 30 unique and tired students the importance of ethical self-cultivation for them as emerging educational leaders?

This was my attempt.

I began with a brief refresher on the theoretical framework I brought to the question of ethical leadership in education, drawing on Niesche and Haase's (2012) profiling of two school leaders in Australia using Foucault's framework for ethics. The beauty of this article by Niesche and Haase, in the spirit of this book, is their ability to show how useful Foucault's theorisations are to understanding the work that educators have to do on themselves in order to become socially just leaders who are responsive to the communities they serve. In other words, to be an ethical leader requires engaging in *askēsis*—'self-forming activity or ethical work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself into an ethical subject' (Davidson, 1994, p. 118). Having established the theoretical apparatus, I then broadened the geographical scope by focusing on two historical figures who, despite the weighty forces they lived under and the currents of

their times, were able to exemplify educational leadership in ways that made them singularly unique, if not strange for their times. Yet we consider them worthy of admiration and emulation today precisely because of their strangeness—their unique *ethos* or ethical style—as manifested through their attitudes, behaviours, and deportment cultivated through work on themselves as a practice of freedom (Foucault, 1987).

My first exemplar was Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (1854–1964)—the philosopher, African American community activist, and educator. I offered a very brief summary of her remarkable 105 years of life, beginning with her birth into slavery in Raleigh, North Carolina, on 10 August 1858, through her stellar educational career at St. Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute (1868–1877), then at Oberlin College where she earned her BA in Mathematics (1884) and then her MA in Mathematics (1887), to her appointment as a mathematics and science teacher at the only high school for African Americans in Washington, DC—the highly regarded Washington (Colored) Preparatory High School, known customarily as the 'M Street High School' and later renamed Dunbar High School (Moody-Turner, 2017). What I focussed on was her refusal, after being elevated to principal of M Street in 1901, to relent to the pressure to pivot the school away from the liberal arts curriculum—which had seen graduates gain admissions to Harvard, Yale, Brown and Oberlin, amongst other prestigious higher education institutions—to an industrial training curriculum (Giles, 2006). At a time when the intellectual capacities of Black students were a matter of public debate (e.g., Mathews, 1889; Crummell, 1898), and where the influence of Booker T Washington's 'Tuskegee Machine' within the Black community combined with the power of White bureaucrats to push the vocational curricular agenda (Keller, 1999), Cooper's insistence on her vision of Black education 'as being naturally on par with the full range of educational opportunities offered to white students' led to a drawn out battle that saw highly publicised attacks on her reputation (both professional and personal) (May, 2012, p. 25). Her radical resolve for educational options for her students, that 'Enlightened industrialism does not mean that the body who plows cotton must study nothing but cotton and that he who would drive a mule successfully should have contact only with mules' (Cooper, in Bailey, 2004, p. 61), saw her dismissed as principal in 1906. Five years later, she would be reappointed as a Latin teacher at M Street, where she remained until her retirement in 1930.

How did Cooper maintain her poise amidst all this? Through her conviction in the inherent worth of all human beings and, notably in the context of the early-twentieth-century US, Black humanity (Bonnick, 2007). This conviction drew deeply from the wellsprings of her Christian faith 'that God has not made us for naught and He has not ordained to wipe us out from the face of the earth' (in Bonnick, 2007, p. 193), which was in turn sustained by spiritual exercises (i.e., *askēsis*). One notable way that she regularly undertook such work on herself was through a unique style of self-writing across different genres—philosophical writings, letters, and poetry—that opened up 'a new space between the first-person confessional of the slave narrative or spiritual autobiography and the third-person imperative of political essays' (Alexander, 1997, p. 62) and through which 'she crafts a critically engaged, witty, and socially aware black feminist self' (May, 2009, p. 17).

From the racialised educational debates of north-eastern US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the north-eastern face of the British-ruled Indian subcontinent, over 13,000 kilometres away, I turned to my second exemplar: Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Already a well-established and prolific poet in Bengali, in 1901 he unexpectedly established an eponymously named school in a rural West Bengal town called Santiniketan, about 150 kilometres from Kolkata (van Bijlert & Bangha, 2019). Yes, as with Cooper, I did also offer a brief biographical sketch of Tagore, who in contrast to his US counterpart, did not find much success in his schooling. Given his career trajectory and his own alienating experiences of schooling, why then did Tagore open a school? 'I suppose this poet's answer would be that… [I] started to write a poem in a medium not of words' (Tagore, in Dutta & Robinson, 2002, p. 199). And it was the shape of this 'poem', his school, carved between the dam wall of British imperialism and the rising waters of anticolonial nationalism in India, that is remarkable. By design, it threaded a non-exclusionary path between what Nandy (1994, p. 1) calls the 'three basic sets of contradictions or oppositions' faced by Afro-Asian decolonial reformers: 'that between the East and the West; that between tradition and modernity; and that between the past and the present'. At Santiniketan, Tagore promoted a curriculum of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' that emphasised 'the role of living in harmony with the universe and the natural world around, rather than controlling the external environment and trying to create walls around', as well as 'hospitality and dialogue between cultures' (Mukherjee, 2020, p. 55).

How did Tagore stay steady on his path despite the pulls of aggressive nationalism and reactionary traditionalism, even in the face of political pressure and widespread mockery at the time? His view of the unity of all peoples with one another and with the natural world was nourished, like Cooper's, by a deep spiritual conviction. While for Cooper it was her Christian faith that supplied a 'higher law' about the value of peoples devalued by the racialised human laws of the nineteenth century US (Lloyd, 2016 pp. 32–57), for Tagore his sensibility that 'in [each] individual spirit [is] a union with a Spirit that is everywhere' was forged from a complex mix of influences from the Upanishads, the theistic-humanistic tradition as represented by the Vaishnava poets and the Bauls of Bengal, Sufi saints like Kabir Das and Dadu Dayal, Mahayana Buddhism, and Western romanticism and Christianity (Sharma, 1998, pp. 89, 96). And like Cooper, he was also sustained in this by persistent self-writing as *askēsis*: 'His oeuvre is epochal. While he was a poet, lyricist and composer, he was also a novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist, a prodigious letter writer, a sermon writer and an artist' (Fraser, 2016, p. ix). Through these various forms, Tagore enacts an 'alternative postcolonial self-fashioning' to the nationalist and nativist self-fashioning that was ascendant in his milieu (Dasthakur, 2020, p. 260).

As any reader who knows a thing or two about Cooper and Tagore may have noticed, in what I covered in my lecture, I neglected to direct attention to what may be considered to be the highlights of their lives: I dwelt neither on Cooper's immense philosophical prowess as demonstrated in *A voice from the south* (1892/1988) and her PhD awarded by the Sorbonne in 1925 when she was 66 nor on Tagore's poetic heights as crystallised in *Gītāñjali* (1910/1997), for which he became the first non-White, non-European recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. By these omissions, I may even risk being seen as flirting with egregious Eurocentric intellectual habits, like reducing a formidable Black women thinkers to their biography (May, 2012, pp. 37–43), or treating sophisticated Asian thinkers as 'mystical sage[s] of the East' (van Bijlert & Bangha, 2019). Yet this was a 50-minute lecture to students of educational leadership, and pedagogical decisions had to be made. I cannot think of a more pressing context for articulating practical pasts than in lectures where time, titillation, tedium, and the need for meaningful takeaways are all key considerations.

Did I succeed in encouraging the students in that lecture to undertake the work of crafting an ethos so that they too can be educational leaders

in the lineage of Cooper and Tagore, to become beacons in our own tempestuous times? In other words, did the past I presented become practical? That is for the students to decide, and for future historian-pedagogues to determine.

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What Stories to Tell: A Response to Remy Low

Christine Grice

According to White (2010), history is teacher. Those who write and speak of people and events in the past to teach others do so selectively based upon their emotions and assumptions and purposes. It is inevitable that humans see the present through the lenses of their emotions and experiences, which form the building blocks for accruing knowledge, which in turn shape the assumptions people build over time. If education is about challenging and disrupting assumptions, what does this mean for designing a post graduate university course for future educational leaders? What are the essential knowledges and skills, philosophy, and research that educational leaders should access and consider? What is most important? Current rhetoric suggests that we should equip our educational leaders to understand evidence-informed practice directly from our research. Is that all we should do? Is it practical to consider shaping a course around a history of the field of educational leadership? What even is this field? How does the course align with the social justice agenda of our school and faculty? What do these challenges mean for the role of educational leaders in leading change in education?

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The role of the educator is to be a pedagogue. Being a pedagogue is achieved through understanding content and history, and through action, by practising pedagogy through classroom relationships. One cannot be adequately performed without the other. I would like to reflect on the pedagogical decisions Low (Chap. 18) made about teaching ethical leadership and how students responded to them and how these both resonated with me and inspired me in course design, and more broadly about the purpose of the field of educational leadership.

Leadership: international perspectives is a one-semester unit that invites students to see educational leadership framed in alternate ways, drawing upon international perspectives of educational leadership theory and practice, perspectives about learning and educational leadership, ethical perspectives, and issues of identity. Rather than gathering information, each framing of educational leadership invites inquiry and choice about theories and perspectives. In this way the course reflects White's view of the contemporary historian who "has to establish the value of the study of the past, not 'as an end in itself,' but as a way of providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our own time" (White, 1966, p. 125). Low's chosen topic was ethical leadership. Drawing upon the life histories and educational leadership experiences of two philosophers and educational leaders, Low sought to understand ethical worlds and decisions from their contrasting backgrounds, and for leaders to be inspired by their actions, driven by their ethical purposes.

Ethical leadership is as necessary for our time as it ever was. However, student responses from our international classroom demonstrated that ethical leadership means different things to different people. As Low writes, "White is making the case that not all information about the past is useful because it is not all truthful or representative" (Chap. 18). The challenge was to make the coursework representative for an international cohort, in a way that enables them to reimagine the useful and practical in their contexts, rather than have theories "wash over them" (White, 2010, p. 15). This is particularly important, as Low suggests, when educational leadership is about inner and outer change. White challenges us not to paint over truths, with his example of converting a place of atrocity to a zoo and that we cannot predict the future. However, he argues that we can use narrative aesthetics and imagination to draw understanding. Drawing understanding is the starting point for learning. Hope is where understanding leads to action. Hope can fill the gaps through conscious

acknowledgement of past atrocities and intentional actions for change. As Arendt (1985) writes, hope is nascent. Hope is an action.

The course draws extensively upon practice theory as a way of understanding what educational leaders actually do, say, and how they relate and the arrangements that surround their practices (Kemmis et al., 2014). Practice theories relate well to British philosopher Michael Oakeshott's understanding of "the practical past" and what we can learn from yesterday's practices in our schools. These are our "versions of the past that most of us carry around within our minds and draw on in the performing of our daily tasks where we are compelled to judge situations, solve problems, make decisions and, more importantly, perhaps respond to the consequences of decisions made both by us and for us by those institutions of which we are more or less conscious members" (White, 2014). These are the daily practices of an educational leader. In this way, doing the present is doing history through practice theory.

A key question for the educational leadership field is whether we choose to ignore the history of educational leadership in our coursework today (Eacott, 2021). Many courses draw upon critical theory and poststructuralism as an alternative, and our course also presents these perspectives. Words and experiences and the representations of both through theory are always limited. Myths are the lived theories of our understandings. Their creativity helps us conceptualise solidarity, solutions, and possibilities for our limited human minds, like children playing make-believe or like the animals we view almost voyeuristically at play in a zoo. And yet, do multiple shared perspectives in our classroom add to increased understanding? White warns against the detachment rhetoric where our souls might be starved from the truth that only the creative and poetic can represent or distort. Nietzsche (1874) himself turns history itself into an artwork, as Low writes: "What he is proposing is history as exhortation to action, as motivating myth, even as therapy and spirituality" (Chap. 18). The contemporary education context invites educational leaders to consider myth, metaphor, spirituality, and wellbeing as a necessary part of their daily work.

On what basis do we become like a zoo of confusion and distortion, or liberation and release? How do breakout rooms and shared narratives help future educational leaders to gather and consider these truths? What pedagogy enables and constrains these practices, and how do language barriers, assessment structures, and lack of time play a part in the growth of these understandings?

What do we leave in and remove? Hayden White's discordant imagery of a concentration camp reconstructed into a zoo reminded me of the importance of exposing and interrogating our own subjective assumptions and representations within educational leadership research. Myth enables us to understand the complexity of human interaction. In a similar way to the zoo, we utilise myths and metaphors through theory and philosophy as palatable mediums for exploring confronting truths, which cause us to ask what is history? What is fiction? What is an international perspective in educational leadership? Remy provides answers as he invites future leaders to understand history by "doing the work on ourselves" by examining the life work of Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (1854–1964)—the philosopher, African American community activist, and educator and Black feminist—and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)—who opened a school in India as he explored the dialect between colonial and his own culture as "hospitality and dialogue between cultures" and their spiritual convictions. Through the lens of Foucault (1987), Low openly declared what he chose to share and omit, as we do when we teach and when we lead.

Our tribute to the late philosophical historian, Hayden White, is to question the truths of theory and practice we create as researchers, and in the classroom. Collectively, we co-create records of interactions with students, teachers, and leaders as we inquire into the practical past of participants and utilise philosophy to map perceptions of what is valid, in order to make meaning from their understanding of known realities.

What horrifies us the most drives us to research and write, and so it should if our desire is to create ethical educational leaders seeking to improve schooling. The horrendous alternative is to create leaders driven by improvement without questioning what, or who, is to be improved and at what cost. We carry around our history, our assumptions, our insecurities, and our experiences into our teaching and leadership agendas. Our writing, our teaching, and our actions become the poetry of those navigations, melding the theoretical and the mythical with the practical, capturing perspectives grounded in the perceived reality of words or figures. White (2010) explores how our creativity helps us conceptualise solidarity, solutions, and possibilities for our limited human minds.

There are unrepresented voices within our coursework. My greatest fear being in the academy is that I will become a conformist academic caged in captivity within my educational institution, disconnected with the daily reality of schooling and with international perspectives and global philosophers. We perform our work as institutionalised beings in both schools and universities. To what extent can we connect with reality any

more than the animals in captivity? Who is in the cage? Freedom comes from demonstrating compassion, representing broader philosophies, interrogating our assumptions, and thinking as 'outsiders within' (Wilkinson & Eacott, 2013) our institutions, as our critical theory group from which this writing project originated has inspired us to do.

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The Good University? Colourful Histories, Ongoing Troubles, and Changing Contexts

Meenakshi Krishnaraj, Ren-Hao Xu, and Pat Norman

Throughout the period of strict COVID restrictions in 2020, the 'Critical Theory, Education and Social Work Reading Group' based at the University of Sydney continued to meet monthly via Zoom to discuss Raewyn Connell's *The good university: What universities actually do and why it's time for radical change* (2019). In a very palpable sense, the crisis faced by higher education institutions in this time—set against broader social and political crises triggered by the pandemic—was the backdrop for monthly discussions. In the book, Connell challenges us to rethink the fundamentals of what universities do. Drawing on the examples offered by pioneering universities and educational reformers around the world, Connell outlines a practical vision for how our universities can become both more engaging and more productive places, driven by social good rather than profit, and helping to build fairer societies.

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Reading Connell's book in the context of 2020 generated a rich stream of reflections on and responses to her text each month, especially from postgraduate students who are in a liminal space in the global higher education industry. They are often both students and precariously employed staff; both visible as sources of income for universities and invisible as its workers; both already within the university system and uncertain if they will remain.

In this chapter, three postgraduate members of the reading group—Meenakshi Krishnaraj, Ren-Hao Leo Xu, and Pat Norman—engage with Connell on university teaching, research, and professional work, respectively. Each in their own ways, and drawing from the experiences of different times and places, raises the question: How can we reimagine the 'good university'?

The Guru in the Good University (Meenakshi Krishnaraj)

Raewyn Connell, in her book *The good university* (2019), argues that the logic underlying teaching needs to be changed. On engaging with Connell's work on teaching in the 'good university', I began reflecting on its implications for the role of the teacher in the Indian context. Particularly, the positioning of the *guru*, the portrayal of the *guru* in Western literature, and the transitions from the role of the traditional *guru* to the modern teacher in India. Most university teaching is designed based on defining the student as lacking in knowledge and positioning teachers as being filled with knowledge.

Connell (2019, p. 49) argues that this design of the 'empty-vessel pedagogy' and lecture being the predominant method of teaching at universities is a cause for concern. Connell argues that the classic university technique of treating the lecture as the primary method rarely yields sustained learning and that it offers few opportunities for students to challenge the social limits embedded in the hegemonic curriculum. Connell suggests that the role of the teacher should change to help students take their next step once they have identified their direction.

I found this to be interesting as it resonated both in the contexts of India and Australia. However, within the Indian context, it aligned closely with the modern universities introduced through colonialism. Simultaneously it differed from the assumptions of traditional knowledge systems within India, which were more closely aligned with Connell's arguments for a how a teacher should be in a 'good university'.

Connell emphasises the need for a democratic approach to teaching where the teacher no longer stands over the students as the machinery

from the republic of knowledge, which is fundamental in the Indian context. A change in the role of the teacher may support not only democratisation but also the decolonisation of education in the context of India. There exists a contrast between higher education institutions and traditional knowledge systems. By exploring the differences in the role of the teacher in the *guru* (teacher)-*sishya* (student) *parampara* (tradition) in India, on the one hand, and the role of the teacher in higher education, on the other, we may be able to come to a new understanding of teaching—one that emerges from within a local cultural context.

Connell argues that while democratising the role of the teacher might appear to make it less dignified, in essence it is a demanding, skilled, and rewarding role. However, the potential implication of this change in the status of the teacher may play out differently in India. While the *guru* continues to enjoy a high status even today, the profession of teaching is of low status. This can be understood historically: as universities emerged in India under the colonial rule in the nineteenth century, a need emerged for 'formally-trained' teachers. While the modern university brought many advantages, the institution, Rao (2014) argues, was grafted into local cultures without any regard for the host culture. This pattern of staffing formal educational institutions persisted through the period of national independence in the mid-twentieth century into the present. Along with the increasing demand for teachers, the structural adjustment programmes adopted by the Indian government in 1990 under the influence of the world bank and International Monetary Fund resulted in the decrease of state funding and increase in privatisation of education. This resulted in the hiring of teachers, who were both underqualified and lacked opportunities, to further engage in training (Jayaram, 2003; Varghese, 2015). Teachers were positioned as 'meek dictators' whose objective was not even the passive transfer of knowledge; rather, it was to simply ensure that university students passed their assessments (Kumar, 2015). Priority was given to credentialing that enabled students to seek employment (Sheikh, 2017). Rote memorisation and teaching for the test became predominant patterns that underpinned the learning and teaching process.

By contrast, the historical tradition of the *guru-sishya parampara* is predominantly based on the oral culture. The *Upanishads* were possibly the first documentation of this pedagogy, which noted that learning was seen as a result of the student's capacity to question and the teacher's capacity to answer. However, the colonial translation of the *guru-sishya parampara* cast the teacher as an authoritative esoteric with an

unquestionable fountain of knowledge (Kaktikar, 2020). This positioning led to the negating of traditional oral culture and a transformation in the positioning of the teacher. In the *guru-sishya parampara*, individuals who were seen as knowledgeable and capable of enabling others to gain knowledge and skill were raised to the status of a teacher—as opposed to enforced authority due to their employment as a teacher.

Today the *guru* exists only in a few circumscribed fields: namely, that of spirituality, and associated traditional art forms like dance, music, instrumental knowledge, astrology, yoga, and the martial arts. Traditional knowledge systems of language such as Sanskrit, spirituality, and these aforementioned art forms were quarantined from the university space governed by Western philosophical norms (Mohanty, 2001). The emphasis in Indian universities today on disciplinary boundaries, textual knowledge production, and technical expertise indicates a greater need for the democratisation of the university space as Connell suggests. This would also be of a piece with the decolonisation of education. While the National Education Policy of India (Government of India, 2020) aims to decolonise higher education and reintegrate elements of traditional knowledge systems, how this will be implemented is yet to be seen.

A different conception of the teacher can be seen in Indian history at ancient institutions of learning equivalent to modern-day universities. Established in the fifth century, Nalanda is considered to be one of the first sites of institutional higher education. Nalanda was an ancient Buddhist institution in the kingdom of Magadha. Teaching at Nalanda followed the oral culture of recitation and exegesis of texts, combined with discussion and interrogation. Such discussions at Nalanda would occur every day in over 100 pulpits, where students and teachers would assemble to test and advance knowledge, as well as challenge what was known (Beal, 2001).

Teaching in present-day Indian higher education is fixated on enabling students to obtain credentials that enable them to compete in a capitalist society (Sheikh, 2017; Varghese, 2015). This reflects Connell's depiction of teaching in universities across the world. The teachers at Nalanda and the *gurus* aforementioned had greater control and agency over what was taught, and they were not governed by state or market imperatives (although power and material support were certainly in the mix; see Chandra, 2007). Yet today, the Western-style system of credentialing has also crept into how the *guru* is conceived, with demands for formal credentials supplanting the *sishya* of a particular *guru* that sufficed to secure their stature only decades ago (Kaktikar, 2020).

There is thus an emerging need to transform the role of the teacher in both traditional knowledge systems and current universities and to establish a relationship between the two. This is possible only by treating the university as a democratic workspace, for all its workers as argued by Connell, and by decolonising the curriculum to consider knowledge systems beyond what is currently recognised as legitimate in universities. Perhaps a sharp historical point of difference such as the one drawn above may offer a place from which the democratisation of teaching in India can emerge.

The distinction made by students of traditional artforms in positioning the *guru* as the source of teaching, on the one hand, and the university as the source for validating that knowledge through credentials, on the other hand, was evident in three narrative interviews that I have conducted in my doctoral research. My research focuses on the role of flexible education in supporting the narratives of self-fulfilment for women in Chennai, India. The three women who spoke to me had been learning particular art forms from their respective *gurus* for more than a decade. Yet they felt compelled to seek a university degree through distance education in the same art form to gain the credential needed to attain social status and employment.

One of the participants in the study had been learning music with her *guru* for over a decade. She chose not to enrol in a traditional university course as she wanted to spend more time with her *guru* learning the art form. She believed that the teaching of her *guru* enabled her to question, examine, and explore the art sufficiently. However, with the support of her *guru*, she enrolled in a distance education programme to get both her Bachelor and Master of Art in Music. When asked about her decision, she indicated that society would view her as a failure without a university degree. Pedagogically, while she considered that her guru's teaching provided her with the knowledge and practice necessary to become a professional musician, she also believed that the university course added value by exposing her to allied disciplines such as language and history. The focus of the university course at the time of enrolment was the credentials. It was the prior knowledge from her *guru* that enabled her to navigate the university course. While exposure to knowledge and information was made accessible by the university degree, the actual understanding and learning was facilitated by her interactions with her *guru*.

The *guru* in this case took the position that Connell discusses, being both the provider of knowledge in terms of the actual art form and also

the one working on the side of the student in supporting her journey of learning. However, the dependence of the *guru-sishya parampara* on the knowledge of a singular *guru* needs to be considered. The university context by contrast provided exposure to other disciplines and to academic systems of knowledge, which were important to the student's ability to explore diverse perspectives and meanings.

In order to redefine the logic of teaching in the Indian context, it is essential to consider historical systems of knowledge that are relevant to the community while at the same time adapting those pedagogies for the present. And this is so for both the *guru* and the university teacher. Specific cultural norms, such as the respect afforded to the *guru*, are important to reckon with. So, while Connell puts forward a compelling argument that the logics governing university teachers at present need to change, adapting it to suit local cultural sensibilities become crucial in the democratisation process and the process of decolonising education. To change the logics governing the university teacher in the Indian context may serve not only as the foundation for creating good universities, but also potentially contribute to the decolonising and democratisation of education in India more broadly.

Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Agenda? The Story of University Research in Taiwan (Ren-Hao Xu)

Research aims to produce knowledge. Rather than individual sparks of genius or theorising in a vacuum, it occurs as a social process. This process is termed 'research-based knowledge formation' by Raewyn Connell (2019, p. 12). In this domain, it can be seen that temporality and locale play key roles in research-based activity. Research-based knowledge formation and universities developed together (Connell, 2019). Universities as organisations provide the facilities, funding, and environment where scholars and students are able to conduct research and then produce knowledge. The university also operates as a social process. Its development is deeply integrated in group work. For instance, innovations in cutting-edge technology in universities are derived from the demands for problem-solving: the need for groups of different backgrounds to engage in teamwork in order to explore, for example, how specific technological devices can be utilised. Such knowledge production in turn has a need for administrative supports to keep the project operating smoothly. Through

this single case, we can see how collective work is ubiquitous across various disciplines in university research.

Social processes are based on the complex dynamics of interaction between different entities; they are not a static status. Therefore, the way universities produce knowledge through research activity varies in different contexts. For instance, in the 1960s, the Australian government invested a vast amount of money in universities to meet its national priorities: bracing itself in the Cold War by energising research in the areas of nuclear and engineering sciences (Forsyth, 2014). Five decades later, research formation in Australia is largely driven by the neoliberal agenda. On the one hand, public sector funding for research has been increasingly replaced by market-oriented private sector funding (Connell, 2013). On the other hand, any disciplines that are significantly linked to 'job readiness' and economic returns find it relatively easier to receive government funding (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021). This is not limited to the case of Australia; this radical transition is occurring worldwide (Marginson, 2021). This broad pattern notwithstanding, a subtle exploration of the processes of knowledge formation in a given society is required, rather than a generalising across a range of different contexts. As mentioned earlier, knowledge production in the university is a social process. Thus, its spatial and temporal specifics matter. By elaborating on the case of Taiwan, this article aims to show how university research emerges in situ and how it changes under different political regimes. Most importantly, the case of Taiwan enables us to reimagine how university research and social change coexist and co-evolve together.

The history of Taiwan demonstrates how social process influence knowledge formation in universities and vice versa. In the pre-democratic era, research in Taiwanese universities was largely controlled by the colonial and authoritarian regimes, respectively. With the termination of martial law in 1987, research-based knowledge formation in the Taiwanese universities gradually freed itself from such direct political interventions. To exemplify the change in knowledge production as part of broader social dynamics, this article focusses on the Department of History at Taihoku Imperial University and its successor, National Taiwan University.

In 1928, the establishment of Taihoku Imperial University was approved by the Japanese parliament to service its national interests. Under this circumstance, the research conducted in the Department of History aimed to enhance the understanding of Southeast Asia from the perspectives of economics, anthropology, and linguistics (Chou, 2018).

The university intentionally recruited academics whose research focus was about Southeast Asia or Asian history. The academics and students were supported materially to study any topic in relation to the Southeast Asian countries or regions. The knowledge subsequently produced was then placed in service of Japanese imperial expansion into Southeast Asia (Chou, 2018).

In 1945, the Kuomintang (KMT) founded its authoritarian political regime in Taiwan. The KMT saw to the structural rearrangement of the Department of History at the renamed National Taiwan University (NTU). During the following 43 consecutive years of the KMT's White-Terror policies, the KMT's priorities regarding Taiwan were the dismantling of Japanese influence and the legitimation of itself as the true representatives of China. In this epoch, researchers whose expertise was Southeast Asia were replaced by those who specialised in Chinese history (Chou, 2016). Furthermore, any historical studies had to be politically correct by the KMT's standards. In other words, knowledge production was immersed in a different political process from the previous stage— research findings now had to cater to the 'national narrative of Chinese legitimacy' (Chen, 2018, p. 229; Chou, 2016).

However, social processes involve a vast amount of interactions with multiple entities and components. This means that permanent and total control is unworkable. Since the 1980s, research in Taiwanese universities gradually challenged the dictatorship. The local knowledge and novel understandings they produced also circulated into the civil society. Eventually, they became increasingly interwoven with the political push for democratisation in Taiwan. The 410 Civic Education Movement marked the historic turning point in 1994. It successfully mobilised different stakeholders to push the KMT regime into launching comprehensive education reform (Law, 2002). The legalisation of academic freedom came into place in the late 1990s. Under this new circumstance of political liberalisation, historical studies at NTU gradually became more plural. Government-funded research projects in the Department of History began to delve into such diverse topics as the cultural transformation of Taipei city under Japanese colonisation, the written contract in the sixteenth century, the history of First Nations Peoples during the Dutch occupation of Taiwan in the seventeenth century, and so on.

Along with the global neoliberal education reform movement, research-based knowledge formation in Taiwanese universities was plunged into the market-driven system in the 2000s. Undoubtedly, as outlined above,

this change is yet another that has shaped the landscape of research-based knowledge formation in universities. Political interventions in research activities have been gradually replaced by the economisation of knowledge production. One of significant example of this is the 'Aim for the Top University Project', which was launched in 2005. It was designed to target funding to boost the performance of selected Taiwanese universities in the global ranking system (Ministry of Education, 2005). NTU was one of them. In this circumstance, performance-based policy tools and market mechanisms played a role in reshaping NTU, and more broadly, the Taiwanese higher education system. To gain the external funding, NTU tended to favour fast-moving and cost-efficient projects. This higher education master project remained for ten consecutive years. And during this period, research funding had largely shifted to the science-oriented projects. NTU even standardised the allocation of its internal research funding allocations according to 'scientific criteria'. These factors led to knowledge production in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences drying up, including the Department of History.

Nevertheless, research-based knowledge formation in Taiwan has remained resilient in pushing back against the neoliberal reform agenda. Social processes and research-based knowledge formation in universities co-evolve together; it is not a simple single-direction relationship of political and policy cause, knowledge production effect. The creation of hierarchies and mechanisms of competition was opposed by the universities and the research it produced. The universities showed the government that the neoliberal agenda might lead our higher education to a better place in the global ranking systems. However, it would also erase our local knowledge. With the neoliberal mentality of cost-efficiency, valuable local knowledge would not have a chance to be funded as it takes time to develop. And universities did not work alone to convince the government to modify its research priorities. They cooperated with unions, associations, and politicians and formed a movement. Eventually, this coalition changed governmental priorities. In 2016, the government announced a new ranking-driven research funding scheme called the 'Higher Education Sprout Project', which would succeed the 'Aim for the Top University Project' (Ministry of Education, 2017). In this newer policy statement, it points out in circumspect language that 'whilst we encouraged our universities to pursue higher performance in global ranking systems, the nature of university was also abandoned by us' (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2). Under the influence of New Public Management, the 'Aim for the Top University'

project had presided over the reduction of public funding to Taiwanese universities, polarised the sector through its distribution of research funding, and deteriorated public support of many disciplines. To rectify this, the government made the statement that 'the allocation of research funding in universities should not be based on the short-sighted interests' (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 9). This latest funding project is now designed to enhance the 'public good' and 'research in different disciplines' through secured budget funding to the higher education sector (Ministry of Education, 2017). It partly explains why 'Sprout' was utilised for the title: it symbolises that higher education should be deeply rooted in order to grow. With the implementation of this latest project, the uneven allocation of research funding was slowly corrected, which enabled studies across different disciplines to be supported by the universities.

The story of Taiwan highlights how university research is a key ingredient for making social change happen. As Connell (2019) argues, research is a circuit that traverses archival work, encountering materials, patterning, critique, and broadcasting. She highlights how research-based knowledge formation co-exists with its broader socio-political climates. Yet this does not mean university research is passively shaped by the 'social' or 'political', as demonstrated in my outline of Taiwanese higher education history, but that research is always already social and political. On the one hand, research operates through the norms, regulations, and habitus of universities and society, rather than in a vacuum. On the other hand, university research is capable of putting social processes onto a different course. And it is knowledge that makes this possible. The case of Taiwan offers evidence of this. Universities are powerful players for producing alternative visions of 'reality' through plural research agendas, especially from those starting from the standpoint of low socio-economic classes, racial and gender minorities, and the Global South. These may yet produce alternatives for universities and societies to turn over new chapters beyond the free market agenda. Change is possible as long as collective action happens.

Professional Staff and the Neoliberal University (Pat Norman)

Raewyn Connell's *The good university* (2019) is important, particularly in this moment, because of its powerful message about the value these institutions bring to our communities and the way that value can be

compromised by the thin market agenda. Connell reminds us that the academic enterprise is not a solitary one, but rather an interconnected network of people. A central idea underpinning the 'good university' is the notion of 'the collective intellectual': that the individual work done at a university is imbricated with the efforts of many, many, others. My own experience in universities has spanned many of these different positions: student, casualised academic, and member of the professional staff.

Connell refers to professional staff as 'operations workers', the staff who keep the university machine functioning. Connell notes the 'constant, active interweaving, which makes up the daily life of the university workforce' (p. 59) and which depends on 'situational knowledge' in order to function. This characterisation of professional work is accurate: the contemporary university is a complex and dynamic organisation with many thousands of employees working in its various departments and functions. Without the highly contextual knowledge associated with experience and institutional memory, it would be impossible for a single staff member to navigate smoothly in line with the demands of the academic year.

At the same time, these staff are engaged as 'third space professionals' (p. 56) who occupy roles that involve teaching, research, and other support functions. Interestingly, Connell draws on research by Whitchurch (2008) noting that these professionals are taking on roles that cannot be neatly classified, engaging in para-academic work, administration, management, and teaching. Being one of these 'third space' professionals can be enriching: I am simultaneously a librarian, a teacher, a research assistant, a publishing adviser, a research metrics data analyst, a networker, and so many other roles. I have been a counsellor to international students who are crying from the fear of losing their visas, because the university cannot fully resource writing support. I have helped academics with emergency re-writes of reference lists as they rush a publication to deadline. I cannot calculate how many weeks of time I have spent conducting systematic review searches across a range of faculties and projects. On weekends when I meet new people and they ask, 'what do you do?', I reply, 'I'm a librarian' and we have a nice conversation about how beautiful libraries are and the lovely, serendipitous feeling of finding a book in the stacks. In my career as a librarian, I have not shelved a single book.

As the number of professional staff in the university declines, the amount of work pushed back onto academics increases. Computer systems automate some processes. However, this requires that academics enter information and learn these processes themselves. That leaves less time for

writing, reading, even thinking, which really is the 'core business' of a university.

Professional work more generally has been reshaped by what Connell has elsewhere called 'the neoliberal cascade' (Connell, 2013). One manifestation of this for educational institutions is the rise of audit culture, a situation in which both institutions and individuals are required 'to make themselves auditable' (Connell, 2009). In considering the structure of the operations workers in universities today, Connell (2019) notes a familiar pattern: a highly feminised workforce, with a large proportion of middle-class men in management positions.

Connell also notes the entry of corporate speak—the kind of convoluted managerial language Don Watson (2018) criticises as 'death sentences'. And, of course, there is the primacy of 'evidence-based practice'. My own research interests include the way the logic of 'evidence-based practice' and 'what works' in schools constructs a privileged model of professionalism, one that emphasises decontextualised, generalisable knowledge. Approaches such as these have no truck with the practical wisdom that is built by professionals over many years of experience and practice. Instead, our diminished workforce is encouraged to focus on that which 'can be measured and reported' to the provost, rather than that which might address the greatest need or have a profound, if less easily measured, impact. The episteme of 'evidence-based practice' aligns neatly with the neoliberal instinct for accountability and individual responsibility, and yet it negates practical wisdom by emphasising the decontextualised and quantifiable. Which is an ironic place to be, since the original Academy and Lyceum were founded by Plato and Aristotle, both of whom were intensely interested in the idea of practical wisdom. What a difference 2400 years can make!

Managerialism, neo-Taylorism, workforce stripping, and deprofessionalisation are just some of the neoliberal practices seen in universities today, but these are set alongside a perverse and growing administrative workload. Graeber (2018) famously referred to much of this work as 'bullshit jobs', but I think his more useful observation is that this work is associated with the 'utopia of rules' (Graeber, 2015): the sweep of policies, procedures, forms, and systems generated by contemporary audit cultures. To be fair to the administrators who develop these policies, they are often trying to make the byzantine networks of contacts associated with the 'active interweaving' of the workforce more navigable for employees of the university. Shared inboxes, centralised service units and hubs, and

single contact points from which problems may be triaged are designed to improve accessibility to services. And there is merit to that, yet removing the personal contact also has the effect of diminishing situational knowledge and the credibility needed by 'third space' professionals in order to properly help.

We have seen this happen at many universities across many branches of the institution through processes of centralisation, automation, and outsourcing, a problem Connell references in the book. Whereas in the past academic staff had a person with whom to build a relationship, now they must contact role-based email accounts, hoping their query does not fall through the cracks, not knowing how they can chase it up. Similarly, models of customisation and care in third-space teaching are generalised so that they can be fit to the largest possible group. Learning experiences are 'delivered', like a flavourless mass-produced pizza arriving safely inside students' heads. How can this model be better than the care and customisation associated with situational knowledge and active interweaving? The answer is that it cannot: it is the product of an institution which is undervalued and underfunded, forced to economise because governments do not recognise the expense involved in truly good teaching and research.

As professional staff numbers are reduced, replaced by automated systems where possible or sometimes outsourced, there is a flight of institutional memory but, perhaps more worryingly, a degraded institutional imagination. Autonomy and experience are necessary for the development of practical wisdom—and practical wisdom creates opportunities for creativity and innovation in the university. Connell (2019) argues in the book that the fragmented work of the university is 'held together informally from below, by the organizational know-how of the operations staff, and their ability to improvise and innovate' (p. 60). This improvisation and innovation depends on the kind of deep knowledge of the institution, its culture and context, which is diminished by automation and outsourcing.

My first reaction—informed as it often is by political pragmatism and cynicism associated with membership in the contemporary Australian Labor Party—was to read *The good university* as utopian and unrealistic. However, Connell's work has been a touchstone for me throughout my studies, and the reason that is so is because it benefits from re-reading. It is subtle. What I perceived initially as the utopianism of *The good university* actually speaks to a very practical reality: another university is possible. We have seen it in the past in the research and teaching academies Connell

258 M. KRISHNARAJ ET AL.

references earlier in the book. We see it today in a sense of mission and an ethic in which even the jaded still believe in what Connell refers to as the 'vocational' dimension to this kind of work. When staff negotiate a new enterprise agreement, I have friends—at the university and elsewhere—who say 'you guys don't know how good you've got it'. Actually, we do: that's precisely the point. If universities cannot show the rest of society a different, better way of being, then where can? And why would we want to create conditions that worsen the experience for everyone? That, for me, is the biggest threat posed to the sector by the neoliberal instinct. It would be a tragedy for these institutions of wisdom, of the collective intellectual, that have given so much and have so much to give, to be reduced to something as transactional as credentialling factories.

Neoliberalism diminishes us all, professional and academic staff alike, but also students. The implications of Connell's argument in *The good university* run deeper, though, for institutions. Universities have always pressed societies past the boundaries of what is, and instead showed what is possible. That is true of both the natural sciences and the social sciences. Universities have brought us Higgs bosons and human rights, neuroscience, and necropolitics. As a professional staff member, and a student, and a casual academic, and an advocate for the transformative, inspiring, character-building mission of universities, I think *The good university* reminds us that good universities help to build good societies: how could it be any other way?

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The Good University Examined: A Response to Meenakshi Krishnaraj, Ren-Hao Xu, and Pat Norman

Raewyn Connell

It is a pleasure to be a part of this discussion with Meenakshi Krishnaraj, Ren-Hao Xu, and Pat Norman (Chap. 20). University work today is normally pressured and demanding—far from the imagined leisure of the Ivory Tower. To take time, to slow down and focus careful thought on one text, to think out its implications is an exercise that is all too rare. More than a pleasure, it is also a privilege for me, as the author of the text in question. I am very grateful to the authors of these thoughtful commentaries.

The commentaries have, I think, captured key themes of *The good university* (Connell, 2019). They recognise the central argument for the collective character of intellectual work, which remains the basis of university research and teaching—despite the reigning ideology of individualism and the toxic apparatus of output norms, rankings, and league tables. They recognise the interactive character of university teaching, the basis of the real cognitive work done in higher education—despite the traditional

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261

dominance of the lecture format and the new pattern of online instruction. And they understand the importance of the political environment of university work, from the budgetary policies of current governments to the worldwide impact of colonial power.

Where did *The good university* come from? I have written a number of books, but none like this before. I wrote it in the years after retiring from my job, looking back with joy and anger after a long academic career, and drawing from several streams of research and action that flowed through those years. One stream of research, starting early, was about the sociology of education, notably educational inequalities (e.g., Connell et al., 1982). A more recent stream concerned 'neoliberalism' as ideology and policy framework, including privatisation and managerial prerogative (e.g., Connell, 2013). I have also done research about intellectual workers, both in Australia and overseas, and became interested in the labour process in intellectual work (e.g., Connell & Wood, 2002). I was increasingly concerned with the global economy of knowledge, research that crystallised in the book *Southern Theory* (Connell, 2007).

As well as this research background, I had practical experience in universities in several countries and many troubled conversations with university workers. I had been involved in setting up new programmes, trying to democratise university teaching, and trying to create new research agendas. And—still in vivid memory—I was in a group, mainly fellow-students, who set up an experimental Free University in Sydney back in the 1960s.

That was the general background to *The good university* (2019). There was also a specific impetus. As I explain in the book's Introduction, in 2013 there was a long industrial dispute at the University of Sydney. I was a union member all my working life, but I could not remember such a ham-fisted series of aggressions and delaying tactics by management, so much anger among the university workforce, or so much distrust of the way the university was being run. I was on the picket line during the strike action and shared in the cultural struggle that the union and its supporters waged. That included a workshop to re-think the nature of the university. I guess the discussions in that group, and across the campaign as a whole, were really the beginnings of the book. I hope I have done them justice.

Pat Norman's commentary foregrounds one of the main agendas of *The good university* (2019). This is the idea of the collective intellectual, based on the fact that universities actually function not by command from above by managers, but by coordination from below, guided by what Norman nicely calls the 'practical wisdom' of the workforce. Norman

recognises the enormous importance of the university operations work-ers—a good half of our workforce—variously called the professional staff, support staff, general or non-academic staff, or, in the United States, just 'staff'. Almost all the critical literature about universities is written by aca-demics, and unfortunately some are only concerned with academics. I do not want to point fingers, but I find it embarrassing, even offensive, when academic colleagues write as if the fellow-workers on whose helpfulness, intelligence, and skill they depend every day, either do not exist or do not count.

Norman recognises their importance and understands how their jobs change. Sometimes they expand into the 'third space' between academic and professional roles. I love his description of being simultaneously 'a librarian, a teacher, a research assistant, a publishing adviser, a research metrics data analyst, a networker' and more. Sometimes these jobs are impacted or even abolished by automation, and sometimes—not recog-nised enough in the critical literature—they are outsourced to companies external to the university itself. Norman understands the intimate politics of the 're-structuring' that is so important a tool of managerialism and can be so disruptive to the institution and distressing to the workers who get re-structured. He offers a subtle analysis of the cultural change that is set in motion by the models of 'evidence-based practice', 'best practice', or—to put it more bluntly—the constant importation of managerial techniques from the profit-driven corporate world. Gross consequences of those prac-tices are the casualisation and outsourcing of jobs, the rise of insecurity in university work for the majority, and the outrageous amount of money funnelled to a small cadre of top-level managers. At a much finer level, we see the consequence that Norman points to: the changed definition of professionalism that follows from an emphasis on de-contextualised knowledge, abstracted measures, and so-called accountability.

As Norman argues, this trend de-values the practical wisdom we might otherwise be recognising and celebrating as a basis of university life. He diagnoses, I think correctly, a dangerous result. The de-contextualisation, outsourcing, and re-structuring, endlessly repeated—since none of these changes is ever regarded as final—not only obliterate institutional mem-ory, the everyday know-how that makes the institution run. They also degrade the institutional imagination, the capacity to go beyond the given, and 'show the rest of society another, better way of being'.

So finally, Norman comes to the very basic question, what are universi-ties for? Just churning out credentials? That is pretty much the vision of

current conservative parties around the Anglosphere. He proposes, and I think most of us would agree, that it can and should be something more. 'Universities have always pressed societies past the boundaries of what is, and instead showed what is possible'. Amen to that!

Krishnaraj's commentary addresses an existing alternative, a tradition of advanced education created in India, and still present, though under pressure. She describes the *Guru-Sishya* relationship, a specific teacher-student pattern that I suspect is widely misunderstood outside India, since 'guru' has become a loan-word in English. The loan-word is commonly taken to mean an authoritative, even authoritarian, teacher, whose rigid doctrine is supposed to be blindly followed by the disciples.

Krishnaraj describes a significantly different relationship, one that is much more interesting educationally. The *guru* is indeed a respected authority, a noted practitioner of a body of knowledge, an art, or skill, who gains a reputation for enabling others to acquire it. It is a relationship in which the *sishya* is active, not passive: posing questions, practising the art, and seeking advice. It is a relationship that arises from an oral culture, and Krishnaraj suggests it has a very long history in India. But it is now under pressure from a much more formalised model of teaching in the schools and universities.

India currently has one of the three largest university systems in the world—alongside China and the United States—descended from the largest of all colonial university systems. Colonising powers faced the task of legitimating their rule and sustaining it through time, and formal elite education was one of the tools the British used. The idea was to train the professional or semi-professional workforce needed to make the Empire function, so there was a top-down pedagogy and a mainly European-derived curriculum. This model was strongly criticised by the great writer Rabindranath Tagore, who just a hundred years ago launched the alternative Visva-Bharati college as a 'meeting-place of civilizations'—I tell this remarkable story in *The good university* (2019). After partition and independence, India's public university system was expanded in a nation-building effort (Australia's public universities were expanded at the same time, for the same reason). And then the free-market ideology took over, assisted, as Krishnaraj notes, by the World Bank and IMF. In the last 30 years, hundreds of fee-funded private colleges and universities have been set up. They now account for about half of all Indian higher education enrolments.

Krishnaraj describes the pathology of this system: a strong preoccupation with credentialling—basically, access to jobs—which focussed on the passing of assessments rather than the quality of learning. The emphasis on credentials has even invaded the spheres where the *guru-sishya* pattern of teaching and learning survived, areas of Indian culture that include spirituality, dance and music, and yoga.

So, are we looking at the extinction of a rich Indigenous educational tradition under the pressure of colonialism, modernisation, and global capitalism? Krishnaraj gives us a brief but highly interesting case study that suggests another possibility. The student discussed, a musician, has studied with her *guru* for many years. She now feels the need to gain formal credentials, both from social expectation and in order to broaden her fields of study, but not as a sharp alternative. Rather, she enrolled in distance education with her *guru*'s support and uses the skills and knowledge she has acquired with her *guru* to navigate the formal university offerings. It seems there is not a necessary antagonism between the two models of teaching and learning. They can be made to work together. That might give us hope for the strong agenda of change that Krishnaraj requires when she argues that in India, to democratise university teaching and learning requires the decolonisation of education. There is a growing international discussion of this idea, especially in Africa—there is a notable essay on the subject by the philosopher Achille Mbembe, for instance (Mbembe, 2016). In far too many cases, the idea of decolonising remains a vague aspiration. Krishnaraj has given us some specific meanings and practices, as well as the broad perspective, and I think that combination is a great help.

Ren-Hao Xu takes us to another part of the post-colonial world, Taiwan. No other society had quite the same experience of colonisation: a long-established Indigenous culture with many regional and oceanic connections; informal migration from China over several centuries; contact from the Portuguese empire, trade, and settlement by the Spanish and Dutch empires; partial imperial control from China; conquest and direct colonial rule from Japan; re-occupation from China. That was rapidly followed by the violence of the cold-war dictatorship under the Kuomintang (KMT) regime, which had just lost the civil war on the mainland and escaped to Taiwan, while still claiming to be the legitimate government of China. The process of democratisation in the 1990s was not strictly a decolonisation—Indigenous communities remain a small and marginalised minority—but must have had a similar feeling.

The focus of Xu's discussion is university research rather than teaching. The turbulence of Taiwan's modern history has plainly had important consequences for university research. Xu outlines the general trajectory and also gives us a case study of one unit, the Department of History at the institution that is now Taiwan National University. It was set up by the Japanese colonial regime, which wanted knowledge relevant to the Japanese empire's expansion in south-east Asia—so the historians studied that. Under the KMT, attention was switched to mainland China, under ideological controls supporting the KMT's narrative of legitimacy. Only after the process of democratisation was well under way, at the end of the dictatorship, was there freedom to diversify historical research and challenge official interpretations of history.

In Australia we should be able to recognise the politics of historiography. We have had our 'History Wars' about the British conquest of Australia, its violence, and its legacy of racism. We have had historians' struggles over the meaning of the attack on the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915, supposed by many to be 'Australia's coming of age' as a nation, but capable of very different interpretations. It is not surprising that the cover of *The Anzac Book* (1916)—the famous memories-of-the-front-line volume that was a best-seller in Australia during World War I—showed a wounded soldier standing grimly in front of a shot-torn flag. The surprise is which flag: not the Australian or the New Zealand flag, but the empire's Union Jack.

(While I am on the subject, the soldier is shown with a bandaged head, holding a rifle, standing up in full view, and facing away from an infantry fight that is going on in the background—which is about the last thing that any real soldier in Gallipoli *with a head wound* would have been doing! But it is a heroic pose, and I guess the cover artist had sensibly remained a long way from Gallipoli.)

Coming back to Xu's account, I think it provides a good corrective for my picture of research work in Chapter 1 of *The good university* (2019). My picture is too schematic, it does not have much space for censorship, terror, or other political effects. I think it is correct to say that the local situation of the researcher and institution do matter. Xu notes a gain in academic freedom in the time of Taiwanese democratisation, but also notes that the advent of a neoliberal, pro-business policy regime then also affected research. It did so in several ways: tightened public-sector finance, heightened competition between universities, and funding being shifted away from humanities and social sciences.

That too is familiar in Australia, from the Dawkins era, which reintroduced fees and started a chaotic competition between universities, to the Morrison government and its dumbing-down 'Job-ready Graduates' package. What we have not yet seen in Australia (this is written in late 2022) is anything like the 'Higher Education Sprout Project' that Xu describes in Taiwan. This involves a turn away from the short-term approach to more concern with good teaching, with social justice in access to higher education, and with research in the public interest—though I notice that the Sprout agenda still tries to identify and resource 'top universities'. For me the most hopeful part of this story is that the policy turn was achieved by pressure from the universities, but not from universities alone. They found allies in a movement or coalition of groups that eventually changed the policies.

So, there is hope for further change. That hope surely comes through in the commentary offered by Krishnaraj, Norman, and Xu. There are resources for change in the rich capacities of the university workforce, in the multiple possibilities of coalition-building, in the many traditions and approaches to higher education that exist in the wider world, and within Australia too. The task now is to put those resources to better use than the current system does.

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How We Use Social Theory: Common Threads and Concluding Thoughts

Amani Bell

I have a background in science rather than the humanities, and so learning how to work with theory has been daunting at times. As each chapter of this book came in to Remy, Suzanne, and I as co-editors, I felt a growing sense of excitement. Seeing the ways in which each author worked with theory made me wish I'd had a book like this when I was starting out in higher education research. The insights offered into the ways colleagues grapple with theory shows that it's a skill that can be developed and honed.

Common Threads

At first glance it may seem that this book covers very disparate topics, ranging from educating the next generation of teachers (Chaps. 4, 8, 10, 18, 19) to research on the violence faced by people living with HIV in relation to socio-political conflict (Chap. 16). The book covers a number of countries, contexts, experiences, and views and is written by PhD students, early and mid-career academics, and a Professor Emerita. Each contributor writes in their own distinct style, and you'll notice a variety of

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269

ways in which the response authors approached their task of conversing with their assigned chapter.

Despite these differences, there are also several common threads. Although the contributors to this book are working with theory in different ways, we are all using it to make sense of aspects of our work in higher education. Here are four common threads I noticed: (1) Theory is personal and contextual; (2) What theory does; (3) Grappling; and (4) The collective individual. I elaborate on each of these in turn below, followed by a brief discussion of topics you may wish to explore beyond the book and some final reflections.

Before this though, I wanted to note that the pandemic looms large throughout the book. COVID makes an appearance in most chapters, which is not surprising given its world-altering impacts. Certainly the in-person reading group of 2017–2018 that sparked this book seems a distant memory of the before times. Post-apocalyptic books and TV shows like *Station 11* and *The Last of Us* now have a personal resonance, where we are simultaneously repelled and fascinated by the depictions of societal collapse and also heartened by the emphasis on the importance of humour, art, and love.

These are indeed the 'interesting times' referred to by Norman (on Žižek; Chap. 14), who goes on to also discuss the crisis of climate change. And there are certainly links between the twin tragedies of COVID and climate change, as discussed in the book *Inflamed* (Marya & Patel, 2021). So in our book you may sense a regrouping, a refiguring of who we are now, and what state the world is in, after so much loss and change, so much personal and collective grief.

Theory Is Personal and Contextual

All contributors were invited to bring a personal lens into their writing and we hope that these examples bring working with theory to life. The idea that theory is personal is particularly vivid in Moran's writing about the ways in which she is connected to and belongs to Country:

> When I was birthed into these countries, my little body was passed through smoke and my feet were placed into the soil and water of my countries, my body collected the microbial DNA from country that I will carry around inside of me for the rest of my life. (Moran; Chap. 5)

That the personal is political was a central tenet of second wave feminism; theory can also help us both understand and see beyond the personal. For example, Xu reflects on his personal experiences of moving into and through higher education as the first in his family to do so, and how Foucault's concept of biopolitics helped him understand the global massification of higher education (Chap. 12). Theory can help us take a wider perspective and question prevailing norms, taking us from individual experiences to understanding of systemic issues.

Some authors have taken some time to situate their chosen theorist. Once we understand a theorist's context, we are then better able to understand how that theorist's work might apply to our own contexts. As emphasised by Egan in the introductory chapter, we need to ask ourselves 'Why is this theory or idea influential for this very place and time?' (Chap. 1). We need to understand the theorist's context, what came before, the antecedents of and influences on their ideas.

Sometimes we don't really grasp a theorist's key ideas until we learn about their lives and the events that shaped them. For example, Egan commented to me that

> I only really started to grasp some of Foucault's key ideas when I read about his life and how particular events, such as the French student protests in 1968, revealed to him the limitations of Marxism. However Foucault does not explicitly refer to these influences in any of the key texts I was grappling with at the time (i.e. History of Sexuality Volume 1, Discipline and Punish, the Archaeology of Knowledge). So even when it's not made explicit by the theorist, they, as an individual with a particular set of experiences, are always in their theory. (S. Egan, personal communication, February 21, 2023)

In Connell's case (noting how honoured we are to have one of the theorists discussed by our reading group generously take the time to contribute a response), we gain a first-hand glimpse into how theory is created:

> Where did The Good University come from? I have written a number of books, but none like this before. I wrote it in the years after retiring from my job, looking back with joy and anger after a long academic career, and drawing from several streams of research and action that flowed through those years. (Connell; Chap. 21)

Connell goes on to explain that the book also had a 'specific impetus… a long industrial dispute at the University of Sydney'. We gain further

insights into Connell's context in Wood's response to Serrano Amaya (Chap. 17). Wood as a contemporary and friend of Connell traces the development of Southern theory and shows how it expands on earlier work, is part of a larger collective project, and builds up an argument over time. For me these glimpses into theory creation indicate that place and life events continually shape and re-shape our theorisation and scholarship.

The importance of the personal and of context is also emphasised by Serrano Amaya:

> I am writing from Colombia, a country in the Latin American Global South where there are no neat separations between academia and activism as presented in the Global North. I have been navigating between academic and non-academic environments as result of personal political commitments with struggles for rights, mostly the rights of those collectives discriminated by gender and sexuality matters. That navigation comes by effects of the job precarities, de-regularisation of labour and the fragility of work industries that some of us experience nowadays in neoliberal economies and that require adapting permanently to changes in employment opportunities. (Serrano Amaya; Chap. 16)

Connell responding to Xu affirms that 'the local situation of the researcher and institution do matter' (Chap. 21). Another example of the importance of one's own context is seen in Krishnaraj's use of Connell's theorising in *The Good University* to explore the *Guru* (teacher)–*Sishya* (student) *parampara* (tradition) in India (Chap. 20).

WHAT THEORY DOES

At a time when some types of theory are under attack it's important to understand what theory does. I'm thinking particularly of critical race theory in the USA, where its opponents have deliberately misled others as to what it is and academics in some states are now not able to teach it (e.g., Golden, 2023; Kendi, 2021). Critical race theory, first conceptualised by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a way of understanding how racism is structural and is reproduced via laws and culture, with the ultimate aim of addressing racial inequalities (Fortin, 2021). Conservative politicians, commentators, and religious leaders have instead told the public that critical race theory vilifies white people and in particular that its teaching harms white children (Kendi, 2021). Several states in the USA have since introduced

restrictions on the teaching of critical race theory, leading to some professors cancelling planned courses (Golden, 2023). While this is perhaps an extreme example of theory being misconstrued and co-opted for political means, it highlights the importance of understanding that theory can be used (and mis-used) for many purposes.

In this book, we can see several ways that theory is being put to work and several metaphors to describe what it does:

- 'A call to arms' (Wood; Chap. 17)
- A 'map to explore new terrains' (Wood; Chap. 17)
- 'To make sense of social dynamics' (Low; Chap. 8)
- Searching for the possible (Norman; Chap. 20)
- To 'name, clarify, obscure, reframe, orient, excite, soothe, agitate, inspire, and affect our senses of ourselves in the world' (Low and Egan; Chap. 1)

Theory can help us understand social phenomena:

In teaching sociology of education for example, I need a theory of why neoliberalism, and its marketisation of parental school choice, has affected the educational landscape and the distribution of life chances in Australia. (Wood; Chap. 7)

Theory can be used to achieve something very meaningful, see, for example, Serrano Amaya's evocative example of working with Southern theory to:

deal with silences, with the lack of voice in state institutions and in official memory accounts, and with the process of healing wounds from long-term violence. (Serrano Amaya; Chap. 16)

I particularly enjoyed Serrano Amaya's description of theory as:

an invitation to enter into permanent and open conversations. As in any invitation, there are basic rules of respect for those who open their houses, their stories, and their histories before any questions are asked or interventions made. (Serrano Amaya; Chap. 16)

My musing after reading the book is that theory can be used as a lens to bring something into focus, to frame, to zoom in or out, to crystallise, even to distort or diffract. Overall though, my main lingering impression is that the authors are working with theory in hopeful ways, ways in which they are hoping the status quo will change or longing something will come to be. Just one example is provided by Connell:

> there is hope for further change. That hope surely comes through in the commentary offered by Krishnaraj, Norman, and Xu. There are resources for change in the rich capacities of the university workforce, in the multiple possibilities of coalition-building, in the many traditions and approaches to higher education that exist in the wider world, and within Australia too. The task now is to put those resources to better use than the current system does. (Connell, Chap. 21)

Here Connell is commenting on the hope evident in the ways Krishnaraj, Norman, and Xu have applied the concepts of *The Good University* to their academic work (Chap. 20). In particular Norman uses Connell's theorising to understand and work through the many, sometimes heart-breaking, challenges of working in the academy in neoliberal times. Any theory that offers hope in the 'cruel optimism' of our times (Berlant, 2011) is worth clinging to.

GRAPPLING

Sometimes theory just clicks into place, as Egan describes in Chap. 1. And sometimes working with theory feels like trying to grasp something that is just out of reach or holding onto a slippery fish. This can be due to the way theory is presented. Egan initially struggled with 'the often-convoluted language used to express such ideas' and how the ways people speak and write about theory can be alienating and unwelcoming, particularly for first-generation scholars. bell hooks wrote that such ways of writing about theory are deliberate:

> It is evident that one of the many uses of theory in academic locations is in the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read. (hooks, 1991, p. 4)

Many of the chapters describe the emotions that the authors encounter when working with theory—'Unnerves me' (Low; Chap. 8), 'serious anxieties', 'haunt me' (Low; Chap. 18). Working with theory can challenge our work, our beliefs, and our identities as scholars and, as discussed by Bell and Moran in Chap. 2, it demands humility.

The Collective Individual

The final common thread I noticed is that journeys with theory don't need to be solitary. This book grew from a reading group. Something that our reading group provided was the time to read, to focus, to discuss. As described in the introductory chapter we were (and are) all time pressured but also craving the time to slow down and engage deeply. Boulous Walker calls for slow reading—a political act against the pressures of today's higher education environment. Slow reading, depending on the context, may involve re-reading; or 'sinking slowly and carefully into the atmosphere, mood…that the work creates (Boulous Walker, 2016, p. 178); or 'a fine-tuned attention to detail and nuance'. Some of the metaphors Boulous Walker uses to depict these practices include 'meandering', 'patience', 'intimacy', 'wondrous appreciation', even meditation and love (ibid). I see resonances here with Moran's depiction of Indigenous ways of learning as 'non-linear…a constant circling back' (Bell & Moran; Chap. 2). In our reading group we were able to engage in slow reading and discussion together. It's important to create and protect these spaces and practices however we can.

In some of the chapter and response pairings too, we can see glimpses of the discussions that occurred, particularly in Wood's response to Egan (Chap. 7). Other forms of collaboration can be seen in chapters that depict researching 'with' rather than 'on', for example, Norman's exploration of White's co-research with students (Norman; Chap. 14), Bell and Moran's collaboration (Chap. 2), and Serrano Amaya's activist work (Chap. 16).

The theorists themselves worked in collective ways:

> focussing on great individual thinkers can mislead us into an idealist model of how really useful knowledge grows and how we can employ it to make things better. Knowledge is not 'produced' just inside theorists' heads but through actual intellectual labour and long term collaborations. (Wood; Chap. 17)

The collective individual is in the present and also in the past and future. Moran, in her discussion of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, introduces us to the concept of '*Maa-bularrbabu*, the next seven, that we should always act with the next seven generations in mind' (Moran; Chap. 5). For all of us working in universities shaped by neoliberalism there can be a constant push to come up with quick fixes and simplistic solutions, and to work beyond reasonable hours, often at the expense of our wellbeing and that of the planet. If we consider that one generation is around 25 years, then *Maa-bularrbabu* prompts us to consider the impact of our actions 175 years into the future. Against that expansive timeframe, the typical university strategic plan timeframe of four years seems almost comically short-sighted, and Moran's reminder to think far into the future is welcome.

Beyond This Book

As discussed in Chap. 1, while we have covered a range of theorists, the book is not intended as a primer on all the potential theorists that can be put to work to aid higher education teaching, research, and work life. Another thing this book does not do, and nor was it intended to, is to examine how theory is used by those positioned outside higher education. Social theories are often produced within universities and therefore don't always fit well with the realities of social and community work. It would be interesting to explore how teachers in schools, people working in non-government and other organisations, and researchers located outside of higher education put theory to work.

In addition, while the reading group selected a range of scholars from different parts of the world, and women as well as men, as several of the authors point out, we need to continue to seek out the work of scholars from the global south and from diverse gender and other backgrounds. Connell (among others) has long emphasised the importance of attending to theorists from 'the periphery'. Related to this point, we acknowledge that publishing this book only in English limits its audience. Serrano Amaya acknowledges that:

> Knowledge from activism is at the South of Southern knowledge, and even more when such knowledge is written and published in languages and in publication circuits less available, legitimated or attractive for academic markets. At present, I am writing this piece in English even if most of its thinking and supportive experience comes from Spanish and Latin America. (Serrano Amaya; Chap. 16)

Moran too discusses the importance of language and, in particular, Indigenous language revitalisation (Bell and Moran; Chap. 2). Just yesterday I was at a university ceremony where our health and medicine precincts were being named with Indigenous names. Several of the Indigenous speakers expressed that language is an important aspect of healing and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples. I encourage you to consider how language impacts on your selection and use of theory.

Closing Reflections

I recently retired a blog I used to write, as I wasn't finding time to add to it. I had one post about theory, titled 'Working with theory – go hard or go home' that I wrote in 2015. While I cringe a bit to read it now, it shows a novice perspective that perhaps may be relatable and reassuring to some readers:

> This moment has been coming for a while. My background is in science, and I'm now working in academic development. So in the past when people have talked about theorists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Derrida and the gang, I've struggled to understand. When I saw that Dr Remy Low was giving a talk called 'How to do things with theory', I was so there!
>
> Remy took us on an exciting romp through phenomenology, critical theory and post-structuralism, enlivened by poetry, memes and music videos. Obviously there was only so much he could cover in two hours, but it was a great introduction. His talk has made me more aware of the theory-lite nature of my own research to date. And I'm not the only one. The lack of theory in higher education research has been pointed out several times e.g. Ashwin (2012), Hutchings (2007). A whole issue of one of the top higher education research journals was devoted to the topic 'Questioning theory-method relations in higher education research'. (Ashwin & Case, 2012)
>
> My own research is crying out for it. So I now need to leap in and start reading. My plan is to start with theorists who write about education or higher education. My ideas so far include Raewyn Connell, Sue Clegg and Catherine Manathunga. Other suggestions for reading are very welcome. I know that some of the writing might be difficult to understand, but as a colleague pointed out, statistics is difficult and off-putting for those who don't have a statistics background. So here goes. See you on the other side!

I don't think I'm alone in that initial trepidation; many guides on higher education research discuss 'theory anxiety' (Mewburn, 2012) and 'theory fright' (Thomson, 2018). Reporting now from 'the other side' several years later I am by no means an expert but, just as one small example, I did find myself nodding along while reading Jan McArthur's (2019), book about assessment for social justice: 'ah yes, the third-generation critical theorist Axel Honneth'. Learning to work with theory is a slow but sure process; to quote an Australian shampoo TV ad from the 1990s which seems to be stuck in the memories of many who saw it: 'it won't happen overnight but it will happen'. My grappling with theory—reading it, discussing it, thinking about it, using it, writing it about—is ongoing, and I'm not sure it will ever be easy. But it is worthwhile.

I encourage you to reflect back on your past interactions with theory and keep a note of how that changes over time, and no doubt will continue to evolve and change. We hope that this book provides a way in to working with theory in higher education and inspires you to read and grapple with these or other theorists and to make theory. We wish you all the very best as you work with theory in your own teaching and research.

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Index[1]

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.