

Preface

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Belonging and transgression: the intuition at the core of this volume that these two concepts in some sense belong together seems particularly opportune today. The current moment of historical change at which the Western world – and Europe in particular – finds itself is driven not only by external challenges to its borders and structures (migratory movements, globalisation, etc.) but also from ‘within’ by a crisis of belonging developing largely, though not uniquely, in response to these. What it means to belong is manifestly very much a live issue, at a number of different levels. First, ‘belongings’ in the sense of possessions raises the question of property and ownership, and thus of rights. When something that used to belong to us is felt no longer to do so, or when someone felt not to belong crosses a boundary (the standard dictionary definition of ‘transgression’), the shift in the border between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, between ‘ours’ and ‘yours’, is often experienced not just as a loss but as a theft, the infringement of a right. Second, an uncertainty about what we belong *to* is arguably even more destabilising than one concerning what belongs *to us*. It would be hard to exaggerate the importance played by ‘belonging’, in the meaning of feeling part of a greater whole, a shared togetherness, in the constitution of one’s sense of identity.

Nonetheless, as we know, all identity depends on a sense of difference. Indeed, the etymology of the word ‘belonging’ is instructive in this respect. Unlike its Romance language equivalents (French *appartenir*, Italian *appartenere*, Spanish *pertenecer*) whose Latin etymon (*appertinere*, from *per-* (‘through’) + *teneo* (‘hold’), hence holding or stretching through) suggests a continuity or oneness, the English term (deriving from the Old English *be-* (intensive prefix) + *longen*, ‘to go along with/alongside’) signals a relation to the other irreducibly at the heart of the concept. Similarly, the German *gehören* literally means to hear or ‘listen to’, which also suggests an original doubleness, or duplicity. Belonging is never single. Or indeed simple. The key insight explored by this collection, it seems to me, is that belonging and transgression go hand in hand. This is perfectly exemplified in the case of the traitor: a traitor is someone who – for whatever reason: conviction, ideology, financial gain – transgresses by placing the interests of the other or outsider above the claims of those to whom s/he belongs. As such, betrayal may initially appear to be the opposite of belonging. Yet the difference between a traitor and a simple ‘enemy’ is that a traitor is one of your own. There can be no betrayal without a prior belonging: belonging is in fact the condition of possibility of betrayal. Conversely, moreover, belonging depends on the possibility of betrayal. ‘Belonging’ to a community is performative to the extent that belonging involves performing or enacting an adherence that one can always choose no longer to maintain. One only ‘belongs’ to something that one *could* betray.

Belonging and transgression, going alongside and crossing over, are not just different relations to the limit, then; each to some extent involves the possibility of the other. The different contributions that make up this number vary in their focus and their priorities but even before we read any further, the volume already deserves our admiration for drawing to our attention how these two concepts themselves both accompany and are implicated in each other.

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