

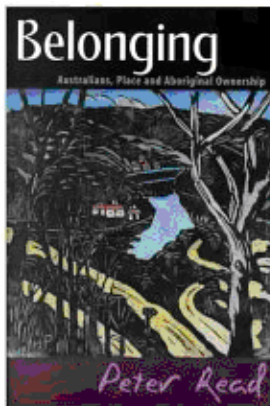
BOOK REVIEW

Read, Peter. *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Peter Read explores the feelings of non-Aboriginal ('native born') Australians as they articulate their sense of belonging to the land of Australia. The question of who properly belongs to and in this country has become a highly provocative and contested national issue.

One part of this debate focuses specifically on the competing claims of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Here the train of reasoning seems to have reached a conceptual impasse. The contest is clear, but what is less clear is what is being contested. If belonging is constituted by an attachment to place, what sort of place and what sort of attachment? How can we understand the concept of belonging; not only who has it, but more fundamentally, what it is and how is it constituted?

Read's thesis is that 'native born' Australians, either through their long association with the Australian land or through the sense of deep immersion in it, can claim a bonding or belonging to the land similar to that of Aboriginal Australians. Read gives voice to many Australian poets, musicians, writers and artists in his exploration of this thesis:



I feel I want to belong here while respecting Aboriginality, neither appropriating it or being absorbed by it.

I belong but I do not belong; I seek a solemn union with my country and my land but not through Aboriginality.

Let's intuit our own attachments to country independently of Aboriginals.

We can belong in the landscape, on the landscape.

Read does not write out of any specific religious tradition, but as a scholar in Aboriginal history and Australian place studies. He promises to bring both the notion of belonging and the possibility of a belonging 'shared' between Aboriginal and settler Australians into sharper relief.

While this work does advance the understanding of the disparate ways in which native born Australians articulate their belonging, it does not provide a coherent account of what makes one belong, or why. Nevertheless, it is well worth reading, for the quest to find a shared belonging that is both meaningful and legitimate is not exclusive to Peter Read.