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Chapter 1

Gender and Settler Colonialism in the North American West and Australia

At the age of five, my idyllic childhood on the north shore of Oahu came to an abrupt end. My father, who had so wanted to live in Hawai'i after he retired from the army, contracted cancer and died, and my mother moved my brothers and me to Kansas City, where she had grown up, to share a small home with my grandmother. After a year of urban life, my mother moved us again, to a place she had always wanted to live: the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. We settled in a 1960s-style ranch home in a tiny town, Chipita Park, up Ute Pass and at the foot of Pikes Peak. In many ways, my childhood seemed a journey from one exquisite location to another. I traded the sands of Sunset Beach and the warm currents of the Pacific Ocean for the chilly waters of Fountain Creek and the imposing mountains of Rampart Range and Mount Esther that rose up on either side of our home.

Looking back from the vantage point of a historian of the American West and of indigenous peoples, however, I now see my childhood as a move from one colonized space to another; I lived in beautiful places from which indigenous peoples had been dispossessed. Unbeknown to me as a child, my family and I were unwitting participants in, but ultimately beneficiaries of, the ongoing colonization of indigenous peoples in Hawai'i and the American West. However, unlike other colonial histories that have been disrupted and exposed by nationalist movements for independence and eventual decolonization, the colonial histories of the places I inhabited were buried and obscured. Through hundreds of subtle lessons I learned as a child, the displacement of indigenous

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peoples from their lands and their replacement with people of European descent seemed an inevitable and natural process. Through television series and textbooks, museum exhibits and cultural festivals, I imbibed the idea that indigenous people were a part of the past. Their cultures and ways of life might have been interesting and even laudable, I was taught, but ultimately they had to give way to European settlement, “civilization,” and “progress.”

As a child, I had little exposure to the cultures and histories of the indigenous people European settlers had displaced. In Hawai’i, the extent of my contact with indigenous Hawaiians was to take *haole*-style hula lessons and attend the Kodak Hula Show on Waikiki Beach with our out-of-town visitors. In Colorado only the name of my small town—derived from a Ute Indian “princess” (or sometimes “queen”), the wife of Chief Ouray—signified that Indian people had ever lived in that mountain valley. (As punishment for the so-called Meeker Massacre of 1879, which occurred hundreds of miles to the west of Pikes Peak, the government confined all the Utes to reservations in southwestern Colorado and Utah.)¹ The town where I went to high school, Manitou Springs, appropriated an Algonquin word from tribes of the eastern United States. All that seemed to remain of the local indigenous cultures in these places, at least through the eyes of my protected childhood, was a fragmented figment, a quaint tribute.

Indigenous peoples have long known and told the histories that were hidden from my view, but only recently have historians within the academy (some of whom are indigenous themselves) begun to unearth these subterranean colonial histories. Scholars have given a name to this distinctive kind of imperialism: settler colonialism, a type of European expansion that resulted not in overseas empires but in “societies in which Europeans have settled, where their descendants have [become and] remained politically dominant over indigenous peoples, and where a heterogeneous society has developed in class, ethnic and racial terms.” As Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis explain it, “colonies of exploitation,” or extractive colonies, rested on the “appropriation of land, natu-



3. Ute Indians marking the old Ute trail. In 1912, seventy-five Ute Indians were invited back to the Colorado Springs area (from where they had been removed in the previous century) to perform for tourists at the Garden of the Gods and to mark the old Ute trail. The author grew up nearby. Image courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Horace Swartley Poley, P1272.

ral resources and labour” through “indirect control by colonial power through a small group of primarily male administrators, merchants, soldiers, and missionaries. In contrast, settler [colonies] were characterized by a much larger settler European population of both sexes for permanent settlement.” Settler colonies entailed “much more elaborate political and economic infrastructures” and eventually obtained either formal or informal independence from the metropole.² The distinction between extractive and settler colonies should not be seen as a strict dichotomy but as a continuum; many imperial enterprises have combined elements of resource extraction, forced labor, and the appropriation of land.

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Until recently I had been reluctant to use the term *settler colonialism* to describe the ways people of European descent gained dominance in the North American West and Australia. The term seemed so innocuous; it conjured up an image of immigrants and emigrants peaceably spreading across continents, diligently clearing fields and erecting homes on empty land that was theirs for the taking. The concept seemed to reinforce the idea that these lands were not already settled by hundreds of thousands of indigenous people. Yet as scholars have delved deeper into the topic, they have made clear that settler colonialism was anything but benign, and may have been even more deadly to indigenous people than more classic types of extractive colonialism. The ultimate goal of settler colonialism—the acquisition of land—lends itself to violence. As Patrick Wolfe writes, the settler colony’s “aim is the replacement of native society. . . . Its governing logic is one of elimination” rather than incorporation of indigenous peoples.³ In other, primarily extractive colonies, the indigenous population served as laborers on plantations, in mines, on railroads, and in factories; by contrast, settler colonies rested on importing labor, often slaves or indentured workers.⁴ Indigenous people in settler colonies were not necessary or desired as laborers; to lay claim to their lands, the state sought instead to effect their disappearance. Therefore, policies of exclusion and segregation became central to the development and administration of settler colonies, at least in the first phase of colonization. As we shall see, indigenous child removal constituted another crucial way to eliminate indigenous people, both in a cultural and a biological sense.⁵

As I learned as a child, a curious feature of settler colonialism is that its founding and enduring narratives often obfuscate conquest and colonization and their attendant violence, instead portraying European settlers primarily as victims and resisters of another kind of tyranny. It is true that many early Anglo-Celtic settlers in both North America and Australia came from peasant families that had themselves been only recently dispossessed, forced off the land they cultivated by enclosure movements and the modernization of agriculture. Ironically, and tragi-

cally, in their search for new lands on which to settle and make a living, they displaced others. However, in the retelling of their histories it is this aspect of the story that is so often marginalized.⁶

The standard settler colonial narrative of U.S. history, embedded in our elementary school curriculum and popular culture, focuses on a persecuted European religious minority who founded a colony in the American wilderness. Popular accounts of early interactions between Europeans and Native Americans enshrine the first Thanksgiving, where allegedly peaceful Indians and grateful Pilgrims shared a meal together, as the iconic image of cultural contact. Virginia's origins are largely passed over in this account, except for the mythologized encounter in which Pocahontas allegedly saves John Smith from death at the hands of her "savage" relatives. The popular chronicle of early America culminates in the American Revolution, emphasizing how Britain wronged its American colonists and the oppressed Americans revolted against their British masters. As the historian Carole Shammas has written, "Having practically destroyed the aboriginal population and enslaved the Africans, the white inhabitants of English America began to conceive of themselves as the victims, not the agents, of Old World colonialism."⁷ In this enduring vision of American history, conflict with American Indians is represented as a pesky impediment to settlement, not as the central story of conquest and colonization.

Similarly, the conventional settler narrative of Australian history has depicted its early settlers as innocent victims of cruel British authorities who sent their poorest, most benighted people, charged with all manner of petty crimes, to a remote convict settlement in the antipodes. In this case, Australian nationalism "calls up a fraternal contract. . . . Its public persona is a brotherhood summed up as mateship, an ideological representation of rough egalitarianism and 'innocent male virtue.'"⁸ In this popular account, Aborigines appear (where they appear at all) as just another obstacle to settlement. (One official lamented in 1929, for example, "Our experience in New South Wales has been that the native population has been treacherous and blocked settlement in the early

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days.”⁹ In these versions of history, it is the settlers—fleeing persecution, being sent to the colonies against their will, and struggling against British oppression and the harsh land—who are the victims of violence and oppression and the heroes who triumph over tyranny. Against all odds, these accounts assert, these spirited settlers—“battlers,” in Australian parlance—built new nations.

The concept of the frontier in both countries has also contributed much to heroic narratives of settler triumph that all but erase the histories of violence and conflict with the indigenous inhabitants of each continent. Myths of valiant settlers on the frontier work to obscure colonial histories in both countries. Popular histories of westward expansion cast American settlers as brave individualists who were willing to endure great hardship to take up new opportunities and lands in the American West.¹⁰ Australian pioneer accounts echo American sagas; for example, one historian in 1924 characterized frontier life as “the struggle and the glamour, the *camaraderie* and the fights against uneven odds, the romance of overlanding and mustering, the dirt and droughts and disease.”¹¹ The “struggling bush worker for whom solidarity meant survival” correlates with the white pioneer of the American West.¹² By emphasizing the hardships pioneers endured, such narratives have authorized a sense of entitlement on the part of settlers. We settlers earned our place; we earned our right to the land, such accounts insist.

Settler colonial narratives, where they do acknowledge conflicts with indigenous peoples, often present the demise of indigenous peoples as inevitable. Conflicts with American Indians are immensely popular in narratives of westward expansion, and their eventual capitulation is taken as an inescapable consequence of Americans’ superior technology, military prowess, and centralized state. For many, the spread of European American settlers over the North American continent is a sign of divine providence, or, in its secular form, manifest destiny. With a wistful sigh, popular accounts of westward expansion mourn the passing of the Indians as a (perhaps) tragic but unavoidable result of progress.¹³ In Australian settler narratives, a similar belief prevails. In 1929

an Australian administrator remarked, “We have the slowly advancing tide of resolute white settlers, and a receding tide of natives, sullen and naturally resentful. That position has been the same in Africa, America, Australia, and the Pacific. We have had massacres and ill-treatment, and there has been the same trouble, where aboriginals were concerned, all over the world. I say it quite frankly, these things end in the same way—in the domination by the whites.”¹⁴

Just as I also learned as a child, another common feature of settler colonialism involves the appropriation of indigenous symbols as emblems of the new nation at precisely the moment when indigenous people are characterized as nearly extinct. As the Australian historian Jan Pettman puts it, “Aboriginal people do now occupy a ritual place as the First Australians, although they are largely contained within the Past, or appropriated as magically spiritual, exotic and good for tourism” and “provide local colour at national celebrations.”¹⁵ (Even this jaded historian could not resist purchasing a number of cheap boomerangs to give as gifts to my children’s friends when we returned from living in Australia.) Certainly the same could be said for American uses of Indian symbols.¹⁶ (Much to my chagrin, the Hopi flute player, Kokopelli, adorns one of my oven mitts, and a New Age Indian dreamcatcher hangs in one of my sons’ bedroom windows.)

Intent on complicating popular narratives that obscure the central stories of colonization and dispossession, scholars have increasingly taken up writing the violent histories of colonialism within their nations. In Australia the anthropologist William Stanner issued a challenge to scholars in his 1968 Boyer lectures when he referred to “the great Australian silence,” “a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.” Over the next several decades, a number of scholars, including Charles Rowley and Henry Reynolds, sought to amplify these silent histories. This has led to great conflict, dubbed “the history wars” in Australia, over the meaning of the past. Former prime minister John Howard denounced what he calls “black armband history,” a portrayal of Australian history as “little more than a disgraceful story of imperial-

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ism, exploitation, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination.” He and other white Australians bemoan the loss of a historical narrative of heroic struggle.¹⁷ The historian Henry Reynolds has countered that Howard prefers “white blindfold” history.¹⁸

American historians have also challenged cherished settler colonial narratives, and as a result have unleashed a powerful backlash, primarily over national history standards and museum exhibits. To counter falling high school test scores, in 1992 the United States decided to develop new national standards of excellence in five subjects, including history. Several prominent professional historical organizations partnered with about thirty other organizations representing parents, school administrators, librarians, curriculum specialists, precollegiate history teachers, independent schools, and other educators. Through a long and laborious process of consensus building, these diverse organizations developed a set of voluntary history standards that integrated the newest historical scholarship—which has closely examined issues of race, class, and gender—into more conventional models. Yet even before the group unveiled their national standards, a well-organized campaign led by Lynne Cheney, the former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which had funded the efforts to draft the standards, attacked the standards as portraying a “grim and gloomy” version of American history. The conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh claimed that the standards represented the “bastardization of American history” and would indoctrinate students in the belief that “our country is inherently evil.” Due to this campaign, in early 1995, the U.S. Senate officially condemned the National History Standards.¹⁹

A museum exhibit in the 1990s also sparked enormous controversy over the interpretation and public presentation of history. In 1992 the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American Art presented an innovative show, *The West as America*, offering well-known paintings by celebrated western artists accompanied by text influenced by the burgeoning scholarship of “new western historians.” Curators “invited viewers to interrogate the paintings for evidence of romanticizing and mytholo-

gizing subtexts” and “pointed out elements of nationalism, racism, and imperialism that might be discerned in the painters’ representations of the frontier.” Conservative uproar over the exhibit, including charges that it was “perverse” and “destructive,” led the museum’s director to rewrite five of the exhibit’s labels and the show’s tour to other cities to be canceled.²⁰ Though clearly a politically fraught task, confronting settler narratives is a crucial responsibility in coming to terms with our entangled pasts and mediating multiple interests in the places we now share and each call home.

Additionally, if we are to fully comprehend settler histories, the central role that gender played in settler colonies must be addressed. In any society, gender—the meanings we attach to maleness and femaleness and the practices that ensue from these meanings—constitutes one of the most fundamental organizing principles. Gender systems, especially the sexual division of labor, often underpin the economy of a group; they also provide fundamental mechanisms for the reproduction of the group and assertions of identity.

Up until the 1970s the popular mythologized narratives of settler colonies focused primarily on men, marginalized *all* women, and neglected questions of gender. In early women’s history projects to recover and reclaim women’s experiences, white women’s role as pioneers in American westward expansion and as the “goodfella missus” in Australia took center stage.²¹ These works spread far beyond the academic realm. As a child growing up in the 1970s (and an aficionado of Laura Ingalls Wilder books and the TV show based on them), I spent many a day playing “pioneer girl” down by the creek that ran behind our house in Colorado. Many Australian and American women recall dressing up as Annie Oakley and playing cowgirl in the 1960s.²² These inclusions of white women in the popular and academic settler narratives of the American West and Australia have reinforced, not challenged, settler colonial narratives. Focus on the hardships and travails of white women “on the frontier” and “in the outback” have further confirmed a sense of ownership on the part of white settlers to the lands of North America

and Australia. Moreover, feminist appropriation of colonial metaphors to apply to the experience of white women in the two countries has deflected attention away from actual colonial relations and white women's role in them.²³

New generations of scholars have worked diligently to enlarge our view of women and gender in the American West and Australia. Now considerations of indigenous women and immigrant women, as well as discussions of masculinity, sexuality, and gender, populate the historical scholarship in both countries.²⁴ Still, the older narratives that celebrate and elevate white pioneer women have maintained their powerful hold on American and Australian imaginations. Nearly every day when I pedal my bicycle to work I pass a statue of a valiant (white) pioneer woman looking stoically toward the horizon. And whenever I travel to national parks and monuments in the American West and browse through their gift shops, there is always a shelf devoted to western women, but it almost invariably includes only white pioneer women (or, occasionally, white prostitutes).

To do justice to and fully understand the settler colonial histories of the United States and Australia, we must move beyond merely adding (white) women to a simple narrative of heroic triumph over adversity. The anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler's concept of the "intimacies of empire" is helpful, indeed indispensable, to understand and reconceptualize the intersections between colonialism and gender.²⁵ It was not only in the halls of governance or on fields of battle, but also in the most intimate spaces of homes, schools, and missions where colonialism's power and hierarchies were constituted and reproduced. Gender and the intimate figured in the workings of colonialism in several ways. First, to bring indigenous people into the new economic order or the Christian fold, colonizers struck at the most intimate aspect of indigenous societies: their understandings of gender and the sexual division of labor. Second, sexual intimacies between men of the colonizing group and indigenous women helped to facilitate trade and colonial enterprises in extractive colonies. Third, the protection of white women by white men often

became a primary justification for violence against indigenous peoples. Fourth, to reproduce European notions of the home and advance the spread of European settlements, colonizers depended on enlisting white women. Finally, through their associations with the intimate domain of the home and with child rearing, white women claimed a role in transforming indigenous homes and bodies.

These intimacies of empire were all apparent in the development of settler colonies in North America and Australia. In the rest of this chapter I piece together the bare bones of settler colonial encounters on these continents up to the late nineteenth century. Such an approach necessarily neglects the unique features that make such encounters much messier in detail than in crude outline. This basic anatomy, however, provides the context for my more fleshed-out examination of indigenous child removal in subsequent chapters.

At first glance it might seem inappropriate to compare the history of the European settlement of Australia with that of the United States. Thousands of miles separate one continent from the other, and Europeans colonized Australia nearly two centuries after they first established settlements in what became the United States. Different motivations and historical contingencies guided the European settlement of each. Yet it would be a mistake to fall under the spell of nationalist narratives of exceptionalism that ignore a common set of relationships that developed in each place between incoming settlers, many of them of Anglo-Celtic origin, and indigenous peoples. While each place developed its own unique form and personality, a similar skeletal frame supported and gave shape to the unique histories that played out in each location.

Interestingly, the founding of the new American nation in the late eighteenth century and its century-long drive to colonize the rest of the American continent coincided roughly with Britain's establishment of its Australian colonies and its own century-long enterprise to take over the Australian continent. The American West, then, understood as both an ever-moving frontier at the outer limits of American colonization efforts