

# Introduction    Dispossession in Focus

BETWEEN ANCESTRAL TIES AND SETTLER  
TERRITORIALITY

In May 2017 the Australian Referendum Council convened a meeting at Uluru in central Australia of over 250 Indigenous leaders to discuss constitutional reform to recognize and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. After four days of discussion the delegates resolved to call for the establishment of a “First Nations Voice” in the Australian Constitution and a “Makarrata Commission” to pursue reconciliation. These resolutions were expressed in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, a one-page declaration of First Nations history and sovereignty that demanded “substantive constitutional change.” Pivoting on notions of ownership and belonging, and insisting on the link between indigeneity, spirituality, and territory, the statement referred to the “ancestral tie” that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share with “the land, or ‘mother nature’” and maintained that those “peoples who were born therefrom” and “remain attached thereto” must “one day return thither to be united with our ancestors.” This sovereign link, argued the convention, “has never been ceded or extinguished, and coexists with the sovereignty of the Crown.” In a tradition well established in settler colonial politics, the calls of the convention were sadly, and predictably, rejected by the Australian government in October of 2017. In light of this betrayal, two

powerful questions within the *Uluru Statement* stand out: “How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?”<sup>1</sup>

These questions haunt the settler colonies of the Pacific Rim. In modern-day Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and North America, the relationships between First Nations and settler newcomers continue to be a foundational puzzle. Across North America, Indigenous groups have led anti-colonial resistance movements against extractive capitalism, exploitation, and dispossession, even as many continue to fight for formal tribal recognition, the repatriation of ancestral lands, and reparations for lives lost. In Aotearoa New Zealand, these same struggles play out at the Waitangi Tribunal, the permanent commission of inquiry into Māori sovereign claims that has been operating since 1975. However, they also spill into popular movements, occupations, and protests, as they have recently at Ihumātao, Auckland, a site of spiritual and archeological significance threatened by residential development.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of all these struggles are unanswered questions of place and sovereignty. Just as settlers work, according to the Australian historian and theorist Patrick Wolfe, to create a new “territoriality” for themselves, they defer and deny the same for, among many others, Aboriginal people, Māori, and Native Americans.<sup>3</sup> The fusion of settler colonist and Indigenous land may be the endgame of dispossession, but, as the declarations of the *Uluru Statement* remind us, settler colonialism proceeds from incomplete foundations. Settler control has involved constant maintenance and wary vigilance since the beginning. Over the previous two centuries the “ancestral ties” with land that the *Uluru Statement* describes and that the Indigenous people of the Pacific Rim largely share have been obscured by a seemingly proliferating series of mechanisms that run the spectrum from paternalism to displacement, denial, destruction, coercion, and genocide.<sup>4</sup> They have implicated politicians, scientists, lawyers, pastoralists, scholars, and, as this book will show, nature writers, artists, and landscape photographers.

In the white colonies of the Tasman World and the American West, settler photographers, in particular, perfected a kind of environmental image-making and storytelling that exuded territoriality. Between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, as settler expan-

sion drew new energy from resource frontiers in California and what is often enough called Australasia, new visions of nature became essential in knowing the natural world more fully, conserving it more effectively, and promoting its allure more widely.<sup>5</sup> This took place at a critical moment in what historians, following James Belich, now refer to as the settler revolution, which redefined and secured white control of a range of sites around the Pacific Rim over the course of a number of land rushes.<sup>6</sup> Among the most important of these sites were the British colonies that clustered around the Tasman Sea in the South Pacific: the Tasman World of New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land (renamed Tasmania in 1856), New Zealand, Victoria, and South Australia; and the settlements along the Pacific coast of the United States: California and the collection of western territories ceded to the United States after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Following land rushes across the greater American West and in locales around Sydney and Hobart, the discovery of gold in California in 1848 and in the Tasman World in 1851 consolidated settler footholds in these regions. On a global level the realignments of the settler revolution created a new Pacific Rim circulation of people, capital, and resources, securing an Anglo-American world system.<sup>7</sup> These monumental realignments, operating in opposite hemispheres, were ultimately defined by their intricate environmental foundations in the Tasman World and the American West.

These foundations were environmental because of the way that an appetite for territory underwrote the activities of settlers. Perhaps most noticeable, in the antipodean colonies clustered in the southeast corner of the Australian landmass the issue of how to take and hold Indigenous land occupied white settlers across and around the Pacific Rim.<sup>8</sup> In the colonies of the Tasman World and the American West, the problem of separating First Nations from their land was primarily achieved through a range of legal instruments. Settlers developed regimes throughout the nineteenth century that rejected Indigenous law and property rights, subjecting Indigenous people in the Australian colonies and in California to increasingly coercive systems of confinement and surveillance.<sup>9</sup> In New Zealand, Māori property rights were formally acknowledged in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, but the dynamics of land purchase favored colonists. By the end of the nineteenth century large-scale land sales had transferred

most territory in these islands to British settlers.<sup>10</sup> The spatial outcome of all these policies was to separate First Nations from their lands and create lasting white settlements in their stead. The point of staking this out is to stress that, in settler colonial contexts, environmental histories are never just about the natural world. Equally, histories of Indigenous dispossession and marginalization have their environmental dimensions too, and while contests over sovereignty have had important legal and logistical dimensions, the core issue of possession is inescapably spatial, and possibly even *landed*. Settlers claimed sovereignty by transforming the land through their own labor, thereby investing something of themselves into the soil, to summarize John Locke's famous theory of property rights. Yet, while this logic supported the expansion of settlement in many places around the Pacific Rim, it did have its limits. Small but highly symbolic acts, such as the cultivation of a garden and the erection of a dwelling on Kulin land in 1835, could establish the extensive property rights that John Batman sought for the Port Phillip Association. More pertinently for our photographers and their audiences, maker's rights worked fine for early pastoralists and agriculturalists, but they did little for later waves of settlers, many of whom had much less contact with the soil.<sup>11</sup> To take one step further than strict conceptions of property, then, is to acknowledge that settler occupation was enacted and reenacted in the transformation and imagination of places visually, rather than simply through the movement of people from one site to another, the admixture of labor and earth, and the transfer of deeds. Visions of nature allowed for a different kind of investment in the colonial earth that paid off in feelings of belonging even for those who never turned a sod.

Spatially, settlements were sustained through the cultivation of new cultures of territorial affinity. These cultures bear the unmistakable marks of difficult and protracted adjustments to new ecologies and foreign places. In the Australian colonies, it was ancient geography, botanical oddity, and Aboriginal survival that made distinct impressions.<sup>12</sup> In New Zealand, harsh environments and the unyielding Māori left a salient imprint. The migrants who spread into the American West were also harbingers of change, who confronted and disrupted a range of communities and ecologies.<sup>13</sup> Everywhere they went settlers disturbed existing patterns and practices and forged new ones based on the territorial imperatives of

colonial control. Meanwhile, the accretion of environmental and cultural adaptations in settler cultures became an important instrument that newcomers used to assume a mantle of indigeneity. By the late nineteenth century a mythology of nativity opened up a wealth of possibilities for settler colonies, which became strongly associated with the natural resources that “providence” had delivered. On a global scale, these resources were simply grist for the mill of a vast imperial system shifting from one mode of growth to another, but in places like California and Victoria they took on specific local meanings. As newcomers came to think of these places as home, the resources that drove the settler revolution and, eventually, the natural world itself, became objects of pride and celebration.

This book centers on the local cultures that enshrined visions of nature as ultimate symbols of settler belonging. Reviving a long tradition of comparative work within environmental history, I place the development of settler attachments to particular places into dialogue with global histories of the settler revolution in order to understand how these resource-producing appendages to Anglo-American empire developed such close relationships to the physical world.<sup>14</sup> These relationships relied on the very concept of “nature,” which was at the center of a spatial politics that enabled settlers to create and sustain affinities with place—territoriality—in new lands. In the Tasman World and in the American state of California, remarkably similar visions of nature emerged during the late nineteenth century that helped settlers defuse the problem of Indigenous sovereignty. For the most part, they also developed without the kind of transnational circulation and exchange that defined imperial and then settler political and legal cultures.<sup>15</sup> Instead, settler photographers practiced a kind of unknowing transnationalism that made otherwise unconnected images hauntingly familiar. Across the settler colonies landscape photography was deployed to make physical space into an asset. Settlers turned to wilderness for inspiration, sought out depictions of land and its resources for commercial purposes and inscribed all kinds of landmarks with their own forms of knowledge in order to create natural archives of their own. Landscape photographers capitalized on the natural world at every step. *Visions of Nature* approaches their photography not just as an expression of environmental attachment, enterprise, or scientific thinking, but as a declaration of settler territoriality.

In the Tasman World and American West, mythologies of settler belonging began to crystallize during the middle of the nineteenth century. This was the precise moment that photography was emerging as a reliable and practical technology of visual reproduction. While settler visions of nature had previously been made and remade in landscape painting, survey drawing, and lithography, photography offered unique opportunities to speed up the production, reproduction, and distribution of imagery.<sup>16</sup> In 1849 the British mathematician and physicist David Brewster developed a lens-based innovation of the mirror and box stereoscope that drastically reduced the size of the instrument while maintaining its capacity to display three-dimensional scenes. The breakthrough was compounded by the development of the collodion wet-plate process in the 1850s, which enabled the reproduction of inexpensive paper copy versions of negatives.<sup>17</sup> This had major implications for the depiction of landscapes and imagery focusing on outdoor views that proliferated from the 1860s onwards. Throughout this period photography articulated neatly with the developing narration of landscape in writing, reporting, and poetry, seamlessly with the cartographic techniques of colonial land surveys and productively with the existing visual modes of romantic painting. Settler landscapes came to be produced through an exchange between image, text, impression, memory, and experience. Indeed, in few other contemporary sources is it so abundantly clear that nature is a profoundly human artifact, to borrow from environmental historian William Cronon.<sup>18</sup> Nature, for settler photographers and their audiences was not only beautiful, ancient, and empty, but an object that disguised the realities of Indigenous presence and reinforced colonial fantasies of environmental abundance.

Reading the cultural productions of settlers interested in landscape in this way reveals that not only is nature a human construction, but also that it did essential work for settler colonists. In the Tasman World and in California, settlers wielded their visions of nature in influential ways and constructed monumental natural spaces. Like many other aspects of settler society in the white settlements around the Pacific Rim, this vision of nature was defined by the exclusion of various racial others, beginning with the essential marginalization of Indigenous inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> Yet, while landscape photography may have been periodically successful in framing various kinds of settler control over the natural world, Indigenous people

in the Tasman World and in California tended to reappear in surprising ways at unexpected times. The representatives of the Australian Indigenous community who met in central Australia in May 2017 were no doubt aware that forms of settler exclusion have often been temporary or imperfect. The *Uluru Statement* closed with recognition of Indigenous resilience, citing the landmark 1967 referendum victory that finally made Aboriginal affairs national business in Australia: “In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard.” *Visions of Nature* shares a critical stance with the *Uluru Statement*, examining the intricate ways that Indigenous presence influenced how nature itself was construed in the white settler colonies of the Pacific Rim.

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In settler colonies nature is a cultural formation that depends on the relationships between newly arrived people and the physical spaces they come to inhabit. And while, as the British historian Simon Schama insists, echoing Cronon, that landscapes are ultimately created through human perception, the material forces of the natural world nevertheless exert an agency of their own. Rather than just a scene, stage, or setting, nature was an active element in the lives of settlers and Indigenous people alike.<sup>20</sup> This was especially noticeable from the middle of the nineteenth century, when the ecological and hydrological systems of California, Victoria, Otago, and many other places were permanently disrupted in the wake of the Gold Rushes. To various extents, these places were already sites of so-called “ecological imperialism.” They were temperate zones in which exchange had remarkably successful effects for settler colonizers and reciprocally deleterious ones for existing ecosystems and Indigenous peoples.<sup>21</sup> These environmental factors alone account for the inclusion of the colonies of the Tasman World and California within a comparative frame, but it is also clear that the specific physical conditions that settlers encountered were never completely natural anyway. In all cases they were initially the product of Indigenous land management strategies, and later they were remade during imperial rule or earlier stages of the settler revolution.<sup>22</sup> White settlers everywhere had to come to terms with these differences and with the stunning environmental effects of settler colonialism.

The American photographer Carleton Watkins, born in 1829 in New York State, established a career in the wake of these environmental effects, putting together an unmatched catalog of photographs of California and the American West between the mid-1850s and 1900. After traveling west with the future railroad magnate Collis Huntington in 1849, Watkins quickly established himself as one of the most productive and consequential artists in nineteenth-century American photography.<sup>23</sup> He helped define conventional views of the Yosemite Valley, the northern Pacific coast, and the mountainous Sierra Nevada. He specialized in the depiction of remote highland landscapes of sublime beauty and of the expanding influence of settlement across California. Settlers across the United States came to know the western landscape through the imagery of Watkins and those like him. In this period, landscape photography, which projected control over space, helped settlers position themselves within new environments.<sup>24</sup> When deployed in the right circumstances, photographs reinforced possession over distant and isolated sites by creating an illusion of access. Watkins's work, in particular, was exemplary of a settler geographical imagination that reflected expectations and anxieties about the possession of territory and the conversion of wastelands.

These expectations and anxieties were profoundly shaped by the environmental histories of settlement—their success, failure, or stagnation—in any given location. In this way the surfaces of settler landscapes were historicized but their temporal depths held interest too. Settler surveyors, geologists, and writers found revelation within mountain passes and glacial valleys and encountered rupture in shakier geologies. Eadweard Muybridge, a polymath who is remembered for his locomotion studies of Leland Stanford's horse *Occident*, engaged with both revelation and rupture in his forays into landscape photography between 1867 and 1878.<sup>25</sup> In this short career, Muybridge managed to develop an aesthetically significant album of Yosemite pictures, a documentation of the Modoc War in Northern California, and a triumphal panorama of San Francisco. His pictures are artifacts of a broader inscription of time in space; one that was a result of global revolutions in natural history. Settlers took these innovations in thinking about time and the earth and applied them to mediate local experience and contextualize new geological information.<sup>26</sup> So while pictorial evidence of the glacial formation of the Yosemite Valley

might have been of interest to European savants, different scientific inscriptions of time in place functioned equally well for settlers looking to understand and explain. Here, landscape photography reveals the local contexts of European science and the assembly of deep geological time, which were put to work in the colonies to encourage settler belonging.

Despite the enthusiastic approach that settlers took to deepening their connection to place, the problem of Indigenous endurance haunted late nineteenth-century visions of nature. The New Zealand photographer Alfred Burton confronted this problem in 1885 when he ventured into the highlands of the King Country to photograph the nature and the inhabitants of what many settlers considered as the colony's last frontier. Burton took to landscape work from about 1868 and traveled extensively throughout the South Pacific until his retirement from commercial photography in 1898. Burton's work on the edges of settlement exemplified many of the strategies that helped settlers manage continued Indigenous presence on what they thought of as sovereign colonial ground.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, a kind of ethno-photography depicted Indigenous presence according to themes of savagery and primitivism.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, landscape photography relied on absence, and settler colonial wilderness imagery regularly overwrote spaces of Indigenous history, autonomy, and survival.<sup>29</sup> Depictions of Indigenous presence and absence in settler photography frequently operated in concert, managing continued Indigenous presence in colonial environments by creating inverse visual traditions.

Visions of nature, then, were shaped by a range of factors relating to the topographies, geologies, and spatial fantasies that settlers came to rely on in the late nineteenth century. For settlers in the Tasman World and in California, nature predominantly meant the remote areas that exemplify the paradox at the heart of the very idea of wilderness. The propagation of these mythologies through photography, nature writing, and other media have had lasting impacts on the way that settlers imagine the natural world and their place in it. Wilderness, though, was never simply just a figment of settler imaginations but the result of various campaigns of Indigenous removal and exclusion. As the American environmental historian Mark Spence has argued, "uninhabited wilderness had to be created before it could be preserved."<sup>30</sup> It bears stressing at the outset that part of this creation was a complex envisioning that worked to reinforce settler fantasies of

an untouched natural world. Outside the wilderness parks of the American West, this idea also took hold in the settler colonies clustered around the Tasman Sea. By 1894, Australia, New Zealand, and California had all inaugurated national parks for settler leisure and science, creating long-lasting divisions between Indigenous interests in land rights and environmental protection.<sup>31</sup> At each turn in this story photographers played crucial roles. They assembled and maintained the spatial fantasy that enticed visitors into national parks and wilderness areas. On pilgrimages to these somewhat contrived sites, settlers communed with the natural world by breathing in its wonder and studying newly insulate ecologies.

For instance, by the end of the nineteenth century, wilderness was supporting a settler revival of Romanticism that naturalized a transcendent, intuitive, and sentimental experience of the physical world. These experiences were prepared and promoted by landscape photographers like the Tasmanian settler John Beattie, who rendered the central highlands of the island, and visions of its past more generally, as a space of sublime antiquity. Between his arrival on the island in 1878 and his death in 1930, Beattie became a prominent figure in Tasmanian artistic and civic life. His most successful years as a landscape photographer were the 1890s, a decade in which depictions of wilderness in Australian Romantic painting went into terminal decline and were replaced by photographic visions of nature.<sup>32</sup> Romanticism had ideological as well as visual elements, and in the same way that writers such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge helped reform England as an imperial power, photographers forged their own ideology of encounter in the settler colonial world. Well after it helped Wordsworth and Coleridge imagine themselves and their society anew, Romanticism came to influence how settler colonial environments were envisioned as picturesque or sublime, how histories of dispossession were remembered, and how Indigenous absence was articulated rhetorically and aesthetically.<sup>33</sup> These ways of thinking about the self, the past, and the natural world became reliable touchstones for settler photographers in the late nineteenth century, just as they continue to provide a foundation for environmental affinity today.

However influential, the Romantic nature that photographers worked so hard to frame and market was only one aspect of a more comprehensive settler spatial politics. Images of pristine environments and pastoral uto-

pias certainly featured in many of the international exhibitions where struggles over imperial, national, and colonial identities were played out in the five decades after the Great Exhibition in 1851, but they accompanied more prosaic representations of the bounties of the colonial earth too. Settler colonies were among the most enthusiastic exhibitors and avid inheritors of the exhibitionary tradition, but they developed unique habits of display that focused on raw products of settler expansion like new scientific information, valuable minerals, huge volumes of agricultural produce, and even open space itself.<sup>34</sup> As we would expect, photographers were regular exhibitors and keen attendees at these exhibitions. Daniel Mundy, who had a peripatetic career as a photographer in the Tasman World between the 1860s and his death in Victoria in 1881, attended at least two of these events: the first New Zealand Exhibition in Dunedin in 1865 and the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879, which was the first major show to be held in the southern hemisphere.<sup>35</sup> In the exhibition courts in Dunedin and in Sydney's Garden Palace, Mundy witnessed both the best examples of his own art as well as imposing displays of gold, coal, timber, wheat, and wool. Within the exhibitionary starburst of the late nineteenth century, landscape photography appears to have offered a slightly different view of the settler colonies than many of the other displays. Open space and wild nature may have still been commodified by the photographer, but they stood out among the bales of wool and bushels of wheat that otherwise signified settler civilization.

By the end of the nineteenth century, white settlers on the Pacific Rim were well versed in identifying with local natures. Settler territoriality included both the pride in resources displayed in international exhibitions and an older, more sentimental affinity with natural environments. The Victorian photographer Nicholas Caire negotiated this situation adroitly in his promotion of rural escape and communion with nature. After immigrating to Australia with his parents around 1860 and serving an apprenticeship as a photographer under Townsend Duryea, Caire cut his teeth in the Gippsland, the Strzelecki Ranges, and the goldfields.<sup>36</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Caire's photographs were appearing in a number of guidebooks that promoted recuperative retreat in the natural spaces on the fringes of Melbourne, an exemplary settler city and center of political life in the Australian colonies. Intensifying investments in settler nativism, culminating

in the opening of Australia's parliament in 1901, were matched by similar moods in California and New Zealand. By 1910 these movements were ascendant, and the centripetal gravity of national integration had prevailed after a period of remarkable and environmentally powerful transpacific exchange.<sup>37</sup> But while exchange may have slowed as Californians took a continental turn away from the Pacific and as both Australia and New Zealand remade their ties with Britain as dominions, investments in whiteness remained paramount in all three places. Territoriality weathered national integration and became the foundation upon which separate twentieth-century settler societies could rest.

Landscape photography supplied settlers with a kind of landed imaginary that helped them come to terms with colonialism. Settlers manufactured these territorial affinities in a range of domains from about the middle of the nineteenth century as a way to, borrowing from the geographer Kathryn Yusoff, inscribe their own "lineage" in new lands. Settler territoriality also proceeded, necessarily, from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the exploitation of the earth. In this way the deep attachments to place that inflected Romanticism in the Tasman World and the United States were also an intuitive and sentimental inhabitation of stolen land—a mimicry of Native connection to territory.<sup>38</sup> Territoriality added meaning to the resources that settlers hewed from the earth and to the material cultures they put on display. It provided a basis for the nativist politics that developed reliably throughout the late nineteenth century. In these ways, visions of nature were mobilized into a coherent spatial politics that has had an enduring influence on settler identity and history. What appeared to be a prolonged coming-to-terms with the colonial environment was simultaneously a reckoning with the spatial meanings of Indigenous dispossession. These settler cultures had dual foundations.

During the Tasman and Californian settler revolutions, settlers produced a landscape photography that made and remade the natural world. The work of the six photographers just introduced—Watkins, Muybridge, Burton, Beattie, Mundy, and Caire—therefore provides a guide to the excavation of a settler colonial vision of nature and the power relations that sustained it.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps only through settler colonial landscape photography is it possible to trace the full implications of the cultures of territoriality that emerged in these places. Some landscape photographers