

Introduction

Settler Racial Hegemonies

THE TENSE CROSSINGS OF SETTLEMENT,
EMPIRE, AND RACE

In 1969

XXXX Coloradoans were killed in Vietnam

In 1978

XXXX Coloradoans were killed on the highways

In 1864

There were no Indians killed.

*Remember My Lai*¹

In his 1981 poetry collection, *from Sand Creek*, Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz draws connections between the Sand Creek massacre of Cheyenne and Arapahoe people in their traditional homelands within the colonial borders of Colorado (1864) and the massacre of Vietnamese people over a hundred years later in My Lai, Vietnam (1968). Through this poetic alignment, Ortiz connects the brutal manifestations of U.S. settlement in the Américas to its imperial actions across the Pacific in Asia. In the chapter-opening quotation, the speaker highlights the elisions of these histories in popular memory, where the deaths of Vietnamese, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe peoples—most of whom were women and children—were erased by emphasis on U.S. deaths during the Vietnam War or, in the case of the 1864 Sand Creek massacre, wholly masked by lies. By emphasizing these erasures, the poem suggests that the production of settler and imperial violence hinges on

a settler knowledge production that not only obscures these separate histories but also completely effaces their linkages.

In response to this doubled erasure, the speaker issues a seemingly simple imperative: “Remember My Lai.” Given the thematic movement of the poem, the reference to My Lai suggests two meanings: (1) Ortiz’s imperative suggests that to remember “My Lai” is also to remember “My Lie”—in other words, the lie that covers over the genocidal actions of the United States toward Indigenous peoples and on Indigenous lands. To fully acknowledge the event that is My Lai, the poem suggests, one must also work to comprehend the violence of Sand Creek and its cover-up. In this imperative call, Ortiz indicates the critical relationship among settler colonialism, imperialism, and the necessity to compare their racialized states of killing and forgetting. (2) Given that My Lai stands in for and effaces the conjuring of “My Lie,” however, the poem conveys the dangers of comparison as an act of conflation. In this poetic doubling, where the remembrance of My Lai can also enact its own lie, the poet suggests that the memory of this historical event can, paradoxically, reproduce the erasures of violent U.S. settlements in the Américas through its attention to U.S. imperial encroachment in Asia. In addition, despite the 1980 Refugee Act, which allowed for the entry of 4,091 Southeast Asian refugees into Colorado, My Lai’s overdetermination in the American imaginary about Vietnam can also overwrite the racialized experiences of Vietnamese refugees in the United States and their complicated incorporation into the ongoing violence of settlement.²

I begin with this discussion of Simon Ortiz’s poem for two reasons. First, the poem speaks to my own position as a Vietnamese refugee who spent a number of my high school and college years in Denver and Boulder, Colorado, on traditional Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands.³ In his poetry, Ortiz traces the violence of U.S. settler colonial and imperial technologies, as well as their racialized aftermaths, which led to my family’s and my own displacement from Vietnam and our movements in settler colonial and Indigenous borders. Second, because of these contexts, the poem distills the potential of my own complex participation in these forms of remembering and forgetting through acts of comparison between racialized non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities. Such comparisons, in which I participate, can lead to the extension of settler imposition. That is, in the poem, Ortiz not only reveals how the disavowals of settler colonial and imperial violence determine which lives are considered deserving of remembrance; he also grapples with how efforts to resist these disavowals perpetuate the erasures of the intertwined yet separate productions of settler colonialism, imperialism, and racialization. This fraught relationship, between the political mobilization of racialized non-Indigenous and Indigenous communi-

ties, typifies a central conflict that undergirds settler colonialism and empire building in the histories of the Américas. It is this comparative constitution of settler colonialism in the Américas that this book seeks to illuminate.

In *Unsettled Solidarities*, I examine hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous encounters as they are represented in the contemporary literatures of these two communities. I trace the tensions arising out of these literary crossings as they emerge in different geopolitical sites, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Brazil.⁴ I argue that these cross-community entanglements offer a condensed theoretical lens through which to trace the liberal logics and instabilities of settler colonialism in the Américas, and the complicated incorporation of Asian and Indigenous communities therein. As Lisa Lowe discusses, liberalism operates through the “economy of affirmation and forgetting,” which privileges the liberal subject’s movement toward abstractions of freedom while disavowing its reliance on global divisions produced out of colonialism, slavery, and racialized labor. For Lowe, while liberal narratives of freedom promise the emancipation of the human subject, they “innovate new means and forms of subjection, administration, and governance,” which are in continual operation today.⁵ Within these histories, Asian and Indigenous peoples have been asymmetrically (that is, differently) impacted by settler and imperial actions, such as land seizures, elimination, displacements, exclusions, and enclosures that seek to consolidate territories for the settler colonial state and the (white) liberal subject. In addition, the settler state has relied, unevenly, on Asian and Indigenous labor in the process of settler and imperial consolidation and violence—for example, in the case of Chinese immigrant men building the transcontinental railroad through Indigenous territories, or Native military service in the Pacific theater of war. While continually bound to the violent consolidation of the racialized settler state, these two communities have both been central—yet differently positioned—targets of liberal assimilation and inclusion projects, which have gained increasing fuel since the mid-twentieth century. From commemorations of national service that emphasize the triumph of the individual, to performances of civil progress through public apologies and reconciliation efforts for state crimes, to invocations of a future liberal multicultural paradise, the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Brazil have engaged political and cultural forces that work to neutralize impressions of the violent settler state.

The literary texts that I examine (all of which have emerged from the civil rights, cultural nationalist, and decolonization movements of the mid-twentieth century) engage the varying formations of antiracist and anticolonial political mobilization, conveying both the possibilities and the limits of these efforts as they are structured by or become incorporated within

settler liberal narratives of freedom and progress. In particular, these texts' imaginations of Asian-Indigenous relationalities provide a window into how race-based and anticolonial social justice movements impact one another as they are unevenly incorporated within these liberal formations of settlement. This book centers these sites of convergence not only to trace the liberal logics from which different social justice movements interrelate but also to examine how these narratives work through these tensions to imagine different forms of connections and ethical relationships that are attentive to the asymmetries of violence and liberal beneficence produced by settler colonialism.

Throughout this book, I maintain that imaginations of Asian-Indigenous crossings illuminate and grapple with what I call "settler racial hegemonies." The term "settler racial hegemonies" names the uneven incorporation of Indigenous and non-Native racialized communities' social, cultural, and political articulations into the imperatives of the settler state, thus reinscribing the territorial claims and telos of the settler nation. The term "hegemony," famously popularized by Antonio Gramsci, has been used broadly to define state strategies to acquire the consent of the people.⁶ In the Américas—especially given the asymmetrical process through which communities of difference have been made to encounter the settler, imperial, and racial logics of national formations—the protraction of settler power relies on the ways Asian and Indigenous formations of resistance are incorporated into the liberal values undergirding settler colonialism in the Américas.⁷ While popular conceptions of hegemony often register consent as active or even passive participation, I am interested in the ways that consent within the context of settler colonialism can often manifest in the formation of liberatory *dissent*. That is, how consent to the settler state can be enacted through actions that are seen as a refusal of or counteraction against settler and racial power. This break down of the normative binary lens of "consent/dissent" is possible given the asymmetries of race and settlement that structure settler colonial states, where the liberatory demands (or resistance) of one racialized/colonized community can hinge on the very logics that dominate the other. The scenes of Asian and Indigenous relationships in the narratives that I examine—which range from elusive and spectral moments of encounters to more extended characterizations—all have in common their confrontation of settler racial hegemonies as a central crisis for social justice organizing and solidarity movements.⁸

This crisis in social justice organizing is especially relevant in our current moment, given the increasing attention to the incommensurabilities between race-based movements on the one hand and Indigenous struggles for sovereignty and self-determination on the other. Recent work in critical ethnic and

Indigenous studies, for example, has highlighted the tendencies to conflate discourses of settlement into theories of racialization and to obscure the land-based specificities of Indigenous struggles.⁹ Contentions between hemispheric Asian American rights and Indigenous sovereignty movements have gained increasing critical focus, particularly in the context of Hawai‘i and Canada.¹⁰ The works that I examine engage the diverging and often colliding social justice imperatives, where hemispheric Asian Americanist calls for national inclusion into the settler state conflict with Indigenous struggles for territory, sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization. At the same time, Indigenous assertions of autochthony can feed into settler constructions of national time that relegate Indigenous peoples to the past tense while racializing Asians as “alien” and thus outside of the machinations of the settler nation. Such nonalignments reveal the tensions embedded in the possibilities for solidarity across these two communities and illustrate the difficulties of meaningful mobilization for the mutual attunement to Indigenous struggles and racialized inequities.¹¹

While the liberal logics of settler colonialism can be tracked through different geometries, the juxtaposition of hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous community articulations provides a theoretically heightened interpretation, given their often-opposing orientations within settler constructions of space, time, and tense. For example, such opposition is evident in the tropes of the Asian “perpetual foreigner” and the “vanishing Indian,” tropes that operate through what Jodi Byrd has called a “meme” that resonates and creates meaning throughout the Américas.¹² As such, Asian alien and Indigenous crossings magnify the contours and grammatical structures of settler racial hegemonies. These crossings heighten, too, understandings of the affective relations that constitute the asymmetrical formations of power. I thus argue that, as a site for analytical inquiry, Asian-Indigenous crossings are key to revealing how settler racial hegemonies operate and congeal through what I term “settler racial tense.” Specifically, the term “settler racial tense” refers to the ways that settler, alien, and Indigenous cultural and political articulations embody the *spatiotemporal logics* and *affective economies* of liberal ideologies. I highlight the multiple valences of tense (tense as a grammatical state and tense as an emotional state) as a metaphor for how settler colonialism functions, transforms, and finds meaning in the contemporary liberal moment.

Recent scholarship has engaged liberal extensions of settler colonial processes, from Byrd’s “cacophony of empire” to Lowe’s “intimacies of four continents,” where liberal ideologies conjoin (and disremember) the interconnected processes of settlement, empire, and racialization. Both authors also implicate antiracist and anticolonial liberatory movements that partici-

pate in the critical affirmations of liberalism's central tenets, which in turn reproduce inequities across the chasm of race and settlement.¹³ Adding to their scholarship—which focuses primarily on the legacies of British colonialism—*Unsettled Solidarities* highlights the liberal reproduction of racialized settlement in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Brazil, expanding the scope of analysis to the hemisphere. Focusing on these four sites in the Américas, I trace the continuities of British, Spanish, and Portuguese colonialism. By centering Asian-Indigenous figurations across the hemisphere, I reveal how these distinct settler colonial legacies are continually sustained through the proprietary dimensions of liberal ideology that thrive on the asymmetrical incorporation and neutralization of Indigenous and Asian political movements.

Throughout this book, I examine works by Maxine Hong Kingston, Gerald Vizenor, Joy Kogawa, Marie Clements, Karen Tei Yamashita, Leslie Marmon Silko, Dorothy Christian, and Greg Sarris. Taken together, these texts reveal how Asian Americanist and Indigenous critical movements across the hemisphere—from the heroic/warrior traditions, to calls for reparations and redress, to transnational/cross-racial mobilization against global capital, as well as mixed-race narratives—are incorporated within or are structured by settler liberal ideologies that produce tensions across asymmetries of race and indigeneity. In so doing, these texts trace the liberal tenets undergirding settler colonialism—from individualism, state civility, multiculturalism/mixed-race futurity, to race as private property—and the ways they unevenly bring these community formations into collision. Ultimately, the texts provide opportunities to theorize strategies for solidarities that can attend to such tensions productively.

By tracing Asian and Indigenous crossings across different geopolitical sites in the Américas and examining what they reveal about liberal productions of settler racial hegemonies, *Unsettled Solidarities* offers three unique interventions within the fields of critical ethnic and Indigenous studies. First, this book constitutes the first monograph on Asian and Indigenous cross-representations in the Américas.¹⁴ While other book-length studies have explored the embeddedness of the Asian figure within settler colonial logics, or the figure of the Indian structuring critical (race) theorizing, my comparative approach provides a more sustained reading of the mutual participation of these two communities within the long (liberal) histories of the Américas. Second, by examining Asian-Indigenous crossings from a hemispheric American perspective, this book provides critical insights into the overlap and divergence between British, Spanish, and Portuguese colonialisms in the Américas. A pairing of these two communities not only destabilizes some of the major operating paradigms of racial formations and settlement from the

United States (black-white binary), Canada (Aboriginal-white binary), Mexico (*mestizaje*—La Raza, or mixed Spanish–Native), and Brazil (*mestiçagem*, or mixed Portuguese-black-Native); it also links the productions of these two identities to the mutual constitution of racialization, settlement, and militarized imperialism across the Pacific.¹⁵ Finally, by emphasizing the reproduction of settler racial hegemonies through the matter of tense (as spatio-temporal logic and affective formation), I offer a framework for considering the life of settler colonialism as an ongoing process that is continually negotiated by differently positioned communities. Centering settler racial hegemonies as produced through the matter of tense reveals the formations and the instabilities of the settler state and unsettles the logics of complicity and resistance that have often informed inquiries into power.

Critical Comparative Race and Indigenous Difference

Unsettled Solidarities draws from a genealogy of critical comparative work that registers both the distinctions and the entanglements of racialization, imperialism, and settlement as the formative conditions of settler states in the Américas. Although it is hemispheric in scope, this book is similar to the work of Byrd and Iyko Day in that it centers the logics of settler colonialism as they are constituted by the triangulation of settler, alien, and Native categorizations and articulations.¹⁶ I engage a distinct split between white settler and racialized categorizations, while at the same time working to highlight the duress under which that split interacts and congeals through the settler colonial logics that work to disappear Native peoples.¹⁷ This includes the different logics and dynamics through which settler states have enlisted Indigenous peoples into participation within settler colonial projects, for example, through military service in U.S. imperial wars that regenerate white settler access to economic dominance and territory. This emerges differently than but occurs adjacent to how racialized communities' affirmations of settlement can work to maintain the racialized and imperial logics of the settler state. The histories that produce these instances of complicity with settler state processes are complicated and differently enacted, which I work to highlight. Nevertheless, these complex relationships and interactions reveal the intricate overlapping and mutual impact of communities within what Byrd has aptly articulated as the "cacophony of empire."¹⁸

This emphasis on the asymmetries of race and colonialism emerges in opposition to previous (hegemonic) models of comparison, from Western epistemologies of comparison that posit the Western ideal against non-Western "deviants" to antiracist and anticolonial epistemologies of the long 1960s, such as Robert Blauner's conceptualization of an "internal colonial model," which

registered communities of color as differentially yet commensurably oppressed. As Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick Ferguson have suggested, Western epistemological models of comparativity rest on the notion that bodies, identities, and nations are discrete entities. This spatial imaginary allows for the work of comparison to enact what Shu-mei Shih points out (via Frantz Fanon) is the doubled French and Creole sense of the word *comparaison*, simultaneously an act of delineation and of “contempt.” Fanon’s account makes clear that this invocation of *comparaison* by racialized and colonized subjects emerges out of and reproduces the dynamics of colonialism, imperialism, and racism.¹⁹ It is this materialized facet of comparativity that propelled the mobilization of antiracism and anticolonialism during the long 1960s. Although such models of equivalencies directly repudiate dominant notions of *comparaison*, when they are taken as a “blueprint for coalition,” as Hong and Ferguson suggest, they continue to presuppose the spatiality of dominant Western models of the self and other. These models, too, overlook “the ways in which these examples of racialized dispossession and abjection might depend, at different historical moments, on differentiated life chances and modes of incorporation for some racialized groups over and against others.”²⁰

Unsettled Solidarities also intervenes in critical tendencies toward racial triangulations, which often conflate or erase Indigenous communities in the processes of racialization. Recent emphasis on racial triangulation, laid out most explicitly by Claire Jean Kim, provides a model for moving away from white-nonwhite binaries and racial ahistoricities, two conditions that haunt previous “internal colonial” models of racial comparativity. In her theorization, Kim examines how popular U.S. discourses about various racial “others” have produced a “field of racial positions” imagined along two axes: superior-inferior and insider-foreigner. She argues that Asian Americans have been racially triangulated vis à vis African Americans in this field. In this triangulation, Asian Americans are valorized relative to black communities, yet ostracized from the U.S. body politic, thereby effectively keeping both groups under the control of Euro-American hegemony.²¹ This racial theory disrupts tendencies to hierarchize racial injury while also bringing into clear focus the relational terms on which racial groups are defined. However, attempts to engage racial triangulation tend to place a third racialized group up against the operating logics of white-black dialectics, which reinscribes U.S.-based models of racial formations. In addition, as Shu-mei Shih highlights, triangulation continues to privilege some groups that are readily triangulated over others, leaving some, particularly Native American/Indigenous communities, undertheorized.²²

In contrast to dominant models of racial comparison and triangulation, then, I locate my work among scholars in Native American/Indigenous stud-

ies, critical ethnic studies, and adjacent fields. Following these scholars, I center the qualitative differences between Indigenous and non-Native racialized communities' positionalities and untangle processes of colonization and racialization. By distinguishing colonization from racialization, I strive to foreground the territorial specificities of settlement and the continued dispossession of Indigenous lands and sovereignty that are often administered as a foregone conclusion in settler colonial and racial rights discourse, as scholars such as Byrd, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Jean M. O'Brien, Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, and Mark Rifkin, among others, have argued.²³ The difference between Indigenous and non-Native racialized communities amounts to the different relationships that Indigenous peoples have with the settler state, where struggles for justice become inextricably linked to land, national sovereignty, self-determination, or, in the case of Indigenous communities in Mexico, autonomy. In concert with these scholars' works, this book also disinvests in the assumption that the call for equal rights can redress the effects of settler colonization.²⁴ The deep entrenchment of these assumptions, despite Indigenous studies scholars' and organizers' foundational calls to the contrary, can be traced back to the instantiation of what Rifkin terms "settler common sense." Rifkin uses the term to describe a common sense experienced by non-Natives that works to naturalize settler epistemologies and their concomitant material reach.²⁵ While asserting that settler colonialism is the foundational condition of dispossession in the critical inquiries of power in the Américas, I untangle and then retangle race as part and parcel of the affective economies that activate settlement. In other words, the formation of settler colonialism is separate from and yet formed by the racialization of Indigenous and Asian alien communities, a racialization that circles toward proprietary whiteness on Indigenous lands.²⁶

Through this untangling and retangling of racialization and settler colonialism, *Unsettled Solidarities* addresses questions of how to register and theorize the role of non-Native racialized communities within the processes of settlement. Here disagreements about the usefulness of racial binaries or triangulations as theoretical lenses must, once again, be considered. In the context of Hawai'i, scholars such as Haunani-Kay Trask, Candace Fujikane, Jonathan Y. Okamura, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, and Dean Saranillio have argued that the rubrics for articulating Asian American belonging as well as Asian American resistance to white domination within the context of Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) lands are often vested in settler state logics and apparatuses that erase Kānaka Maoli presence and sovereignty. As such, recognition of Asian settler collaboration within settler colonial apparatuses of power, or what Fujikane and Okamura term "Asian settler colonialism," provides a necessary starting point that ensures the continual centering

rather than erasure of Indigenous concerns.²⁷ For Fujikane, considering the status and role of Asian settlers need not register intent but instead “the historical context of U.S. colonialism of which they unknowingly became a part.”²⁸ Fujikane argues that this emphasis on Asian settler colonialism provides a more “complex analysis of colonial power” by highlighting “Asian settlers’ maintenance of the colonial system from their differing locations within.”²⁹

In the process of centering Asian settler complicities, this book seeks to track these “differing locations” of Asians within different settler colonial contexts in the Américas.³⁰ As such, my work bridges, on the one hand, the theories that emphasize Asians as settlers within the Native-settler dyad and, on the other hand, those that highlight their asymmetrical position in relation to configurations of white settlement across different settler spaces. Of the latter, a number of scholars have theorized whether different triangulations and geometries may be more applicable in different settler colonial contexts. Byrd, for example, moves beyond the dyad of settler-Native to include a third term, “arrivant,” that identifies communities and descendants of communities who arrive in the Américas not by choice but through the compulsory drive of settler capitalism and imperialism. Byrd charts the relationships of settler, arrivant, and Native through the analytic of “cacophony,” derived from the Chickasaw/Choctaw concept of *haksuba*.³¹ For Byrd:

In geographical localities of the Américas, where histories of settlers and arrivants map themselves into and on top of indigenous peoples, understanding colonialism as a cacophony of contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles offers an alternative way of formulating and addressing the dynamics that continue to affect peoples as they move and are made to move within empire.³²

The analytic of cacophony thus decenters settler-colonized binaries, which place historically aggrieved communities on one side of the dyad in contemporary critiques of settler colonial assemblages. Framing her analysis in the North American context, Day expands Byrd’s inclusion of arrivant in the Native-settler dialogic by positing the category of “alien” as an operative term that distinguishes enslaved persons and racialized migrants from settlers. For Day, the triangulation of Native, settler, and alien is dynamic, and they shift in relation to each other and to white settler investments in property and accumulation. These triangulated categories move the differentiated groups away from the language of choice toward recognition of the compulsory logics of white capitalism. Within Day’s conceptualization of alien, then, the term “arrivant” operates as one key but nonexclusive category that differenti-

ates itself from “settler.”³³ Rather than occlude the role that alien presence has had in settler colonialism, Day acknowledges the “inconsistencies” where “the alien may not only be complicit with the settler colonial regime but may eventually inherit its sense of sovereign territorial rights, such as Asian settlers in Hawai‘i.”³⁴

In conversation with this long history of critical comparison and Indigenous difference, I offer the term “settler racial” as an imperfect but nevertheless malleable identifier with which to describe the relational formations of power and complicity that structure settler states. By using “settler racial” as a modifier for processes of power, I work to identify the distinct yet interconnected processes of settlement, imperialism, and racialization in the context of the Américas. As an adjective, “settler racial” modifies structures and logics of power, such as “hegemonies,” to highlight the participation of white settler and racialized communities in settler colonial projects. The participation of these various groups, however, given racialized communities’ uneven statuses as “alien,” cannot be completely conflated—thus the grammatical precedence of “settler” prior to “racial.” At the same time, the term “settler racial” also emphasizes the connection between the two terms, since racialized communities can and do reproduce and benefit from settler colonialism. In my use of “settler racial,” I also want to highlight the complex position of Indigenous communities within the “cacophony of empire.” That is, as communities also racialized within settler colonial processes, attention to Indigenous participation within settler racial hegemonies is central to this book.

My entanglement of “settler” and “racialized” subjectivities is intended to highlight, rather than obscure, the foundational processes of settler colonialism in the Américas and the collusion of racialized communities. While recognizing how “settler racial,” a key descriptor in *Unsettled Solidarities*, may continue to occlude different relationships of power across and within identity categories, I deliberately invoke the gendered, class-based, and imperial implications that are attached to both the terms “settler” and “racial.” In addition, through my analysis here and my use of the term “settler racial,” I intend to center women of color feminist, queer of color, and Indigenous epistemologies of relationality (what Elizabeth Povinelli has termed “cosubstantiation” and Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls “intersubstantiation”) that emphasize the porosity of embodiment beyond the privatized individual, toward relationalities to other human/nonhuman, animate/less-animate, and ancestral beings.³⁵ In the narratives that I examine, representations of Asian alien and Indigenous crossings highlight the complicated nexus of “settler racial” entanglements and, taken together, produce critical knowledge through which these two communities “move and are made to move” in the context of the settler colonial Américas.³⁶

Settler Racial Hegemonies as a Matter of Tense

Unsettled Solidarities centers on the argument that hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous literary cross-representations reveal what I term “settler racial hegemonies,” or the liberal logics out of which settler, alien, and Indigenous communities come to participate in the reproduction of settlement and empire across the Américas.³⁷ The theoretical basis of this book is grounded in my argument that, given their often diametrically opposing positionalities in the settler imagination, hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous convergences provide a unique illumination of settler racial hegemonies, which are reproduced through what I call the matter of “settler racial tense.”³⁸ I use the term “tense” as an apt metaphor for how Asian-Indigenous crossings highlight the spatiotemporal logics and affective formations propelling racialized settler processes.

The Space and Time of Settler Racial Tense

In its spatiotemporal aspect, settler racial tense indicates a settler grammar, which produces relationships of proximity across communities and events along the continuum of time and tense. Among its definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “tense” identifies “any one of the different forms or modification . . . in the conjugation of a verb which indicate the different times (past, present, or future) at which the action or state denoted by it is viewed as happening or existing.” “Tense” also considers “the different nature of such action or state . . . as continuing (imperfect) or completed (perfect).” By this definition, we might best consider settler racial tense as an inherited settler colonial grammar that conjugates the cultures and actions of asymmetrically positioned communities into different tenses. As Povinelli writes regarding the logics of liberalism, “the actions of different cultures were assigned different tenses—not merely different times, as Johannes Fabian so nicely demonstrated, but different tenses.”³⁹ For example, not only were Indigenous communities rendered outside of settler space and time but settler governance also often responded to Indigenous mobilization for justice by registering such demands into a future-oriented projection. Such a reorientation, from reparation for what has happened or is happening to its deferment into a future when such possibilities can be fully addressed, neutralizes decolonization efforts and creates ongoing effects of settlement. She maintains that liberalism wields the “tense of the other” as an available strategy through which demands for justice can be dissolved or resolved according to the directionality of the state.⁴⁰ This book adds to Povinelli’s considerations of tense by highlighting how both Asian and Indigenous cultural and political articu-

lations can unevenly inherit or become incorporated within settler colonial grammars (space, time, and tense) that interact with and promote the continuation of settler colonialism across the Américas.

Asian-Indigenous convergences offer key insights into this settler racial grammar, in part because these two groups have been spatially and temporally configured in diametrically opposing ways.⁴¹ Although with variations, the image of the “alien” and “Native,” central to the logics of national inclusion and exclusion that helped shape common concepts of the settler nation, has been asymmetrically transposed onto these two communities, and meaning is attributed to their images (and bodies) along a temporal rubric. The figure of the Asian has often been conceived as “alien” to the settler colonial body and described as “technologically advanced” along a temporal scale that slides toward the depiction of their unassimilable “old worldliness,” depending on predominant economic needs and prevailing social sentiments.⁴² Such depictions conjugate Asian aliens outside of, and yet central to the continual rewriting of, the “normative” time and space of settlement, placing them varyingly in the past perfect or conditional perfect future tense. Assertions of “native-ness” have marked the dialectics of settler colonialism and thereby Indigenous peoples in these colonized spaces. Indigenous studies scholars have argued that the contradiction between claims of white settler “native-ness” and the existence of communities “prior” to colonization has been negotiated through settler narratives that situate Indigenous peoples in the past tense, thereby allowing white settlers to maintain their own discursive constructions from inside the “sanctified” space of colonial rule. For Povinelli, this “governance of the prior” and concomitant logics of tense are the inherited grammar that fuels engagements with Indigenous presence within late liberal forms of governance. Indigenous peoples have also been configured, paradoxically, as alien to the continent, specifically through scientific proliferation of the Bering Strait theory, which has collapsed Indigenous peoples as Asian and has enabled conceptualization of Indigenous peoples as both outside the white telos of time and space and as historically alien to the continent. This alienation of the Indigenous from the continent reveals the malleability of settler logics to legitimize settler claims to land.⁴³ I expand Povinelli’s theorization of social tense by elaborating on what I call settler racial tense, which identifies how the protection of normative settler time in the Américas depends on the attribution of different times and tenses to both the colonized and the non-Native racialized “other.” The literary moments of Asian-Indigenous connection that register the temporality of these two communities’ experiences reveal how liberal settler strategies toward the neutralization of demands for justice rely on the interconnected histories and malleable logics of settler racial time and tense.⁴⁴

The meetings between the Asian and the Indigenous in the literary narratives that I examine also reveal the settler racial conjugations through which these two communities respond to settler colonial productions of time and tense and to each other. Here I use the term “conjugation” to identify how Asian and Indigenous communities have also placed themselves or other communities into a different tense in relationship to the settler nation. Although far from monolithic, hemispheric Asian American responses to narratives of the “perpetual foreigner” and “yellow peril,” coupled with anti-immigration and anti-miscegenation laws, have long informed hemispheric Asian American identity formation and resistances. Such seemingly resistant articulations often include assertions of national belonging and an emphasis on the “modernity” of one’s existence, thus taking as a given settler renderings of time. On a different trajectory, settler histories of broken treaties and land theft with Indigenous nations have been abetted by the narratives of the vanishing Indian.⁴⁵ This history has informed Indigenous calls for sovereignty based on claims to autochthony, a claim of “first-ness” that often speaks through logics of settler temporality but can elide what Rifkin terms “temporal sovereignty” and “temporal multiplicities.”⁴⁶ For Rifkin, temporal sovereignty opens up access to temporal multiplicities, thereby providing space to articulate Indigenous presence and legitimacy without relying on settler rubrics of belonging. As sovereignty struggles in Hawai‘i illuminate, the convergences of hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous communities lay bare these intersecting strategies as an ongoing present. They also reveal the often-colliding temporalities and spatialities through which justice is understood and demanded by the two communities.⁴⁷ These colliding spatial and temporal moorings depend crucially on the matter of tense, where, for example, critical expressions of Asian and/or Indigenous futurity can reverberate in ways that undergird the givenness of different aspects of settlement, empire, and racial inequities.

From varying thematic and political vantage points, the narratives that are the focus of this book register and respond to what Linda Tuhiwai Smith by way of Ashis Nandy has called the “‘code’ or ‘grammar’ [the deep structure] of imperialism” in the context of racialized settlement in late liberalism.⁴⁸ For Povinelli, late liberalism describes the forms of governmentality implemented as a response to, and the neutralization of, the demands made by social justice movements of the long 1960s. The critiques of colonial domination, dispossession, and racial paternalism by Native and non-Native communities of color were partially neutralized by what Wendy Brown terms the “culturalization of politics,” whereby contradictions in the “frameworks of liberal justice” were registered, reinterpreted, and redistributed as

a problem of “cultural” inclusion.⁴⁹ “Culture” was then defined and measured within the rubrics of social science as an artifact that could be recognized and dealt with, without rupturing the foundational frameworks of what Povinelli terms “the liberal diaspora.” For Povinelli, neutralization is contingent on a grammar of social tense whereby different communities and events of social harm are temporally situated, grammatically marked, and refigured into “problems of threshold, scale, and performative realization.” These performances by the state deflect questions of ethical action in the “durative present” into the “absolute difference between presence and absence or the critical difference between the future anterior and the past perfect.”⁵⁰ Liberalism’s reconfiguration of demands for social justice into different social tenses and the concomitant politics of recognition are one avenue through which the liberal diaspora maintains its hegemony.

In the texts that I examine, hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous articulations for social justice are unevenly structured by or become incorporated within settler liberal tenets of individualism, civil progress, liberal multiculturalism, and race as private property. These liberal tenets operate through what Lowe terms “the economy of affirmation and forgetting” and, the literary texts reveal, are structured through the malleable grammars of social tense. The scenes of Asian-Indigenous crossings convey the different ways that the two communities’ social justice articulations can activate liberalism’s codes and grammars of settler racial domination. Such scenes also reveal how these compromised articulations converge and impact one another. That is, given the “intimacies” embedded in the knowledge production of settlement, empire, and racialization, Asian and Indigenous political and cultural articulations “authorized by liberal political humanism” unevenly and often unwittingly reproduce the givenness of settlement, and/or the participation of imperial projects across the Pacific, and/or the obscuring of the fact that these processes are mutually constitutive phenomena.⁵¹ The interconnected yet often indeterminate clauses that grammatically structure my previous sentence point to the very process of settler liberal arrangements and consolidations of settler racial hegemonies. Through the critical juxtaposition of these two communities, this book seeks to convey the uneven spatiotemporal logics and ruptures of settler racial liberalism. It is precisely the extenuation or erasures of these connections that mark the seeming impossibility of attributing complicity or resistance to contemporary projects that fall under the categorization of liberation. These crossings thus open opportunities to conceive of the microdynamic orientations (of tense) that anchor ethical/political action, providing needed insights into how frameworks for solidarity can miss and meet each other in time, space, in the short and long term.

The Affective Production of Settler Racial Tense

Although I contend that the Asian-Indigenous meetings in the literary narratives that I examine provide a critical and malleable lens through which we can trace the grammatical reproductions of settler colonialism, these literary convergences also tell much-needed stories about the people bound within, mobilizing, and interrogating those very logics. While the scholarship in affect studies is marked by disagreements about the distinctions between affect and emotions, this study draws specifically from Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of affect as emotional forces that mobilize and congeal collectivities.⁵² Ahmed writes: "Emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made." That is, emotions convey not some discrete internal architecture but "create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place."⁵³ In my analysis, I consider Asian-Indigenous crossings as affective encounters that reveal emotions as forces that simultaneously index and drive the tense conditions of settler colonial domination in the Americas.⁵⁴

Engaging affect as emotional forces, this book specifically argues that a settler racial grammar of tense is mediated and mobilized by what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling." According to Williams, structures of feeling indicate the "affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity."⁵⁵ My conceptualization of settler racial tense assumes that the grammar of social tense is formed through the affective economies of the settler state, the embodiment and instabilities of which are constituted by the state's reliance on the *tensions* across settler, alien, and Indigenous communities. Here I speak of "tense" or "tension" in its emotional and mechanistic sense, where the affective formations of settler racial relationalities work "to stretch tight" the spatiotemporal proximities that generate late liberal settler arrangements of relations and power.⁵⁶

In the texts that I examine, Asian-Indigenous crossings reveal how settler racial hegemonies are produced and reproduced through the affective economies of hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous communities. At the same time, differentiating ideology from affect—that is, differentiating an idea from how the idea is actively lived—these texts also register settler racial hegemonies as constituted by Williams's notion of "dominant," "residual," and "emergent" formations and collectivities. For Williams, feelings are distinguished from ideology in that feelings capture "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt."⁵⁷ Thus, while the texts of my study

reveal the work of affect/emotions in the reproduction of settler racial hegemonies, this affective lens also provides a window into the instabilities, and the anxieties, of the settler racial state.⁵⁸ That is, in the imaginative encounters between hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous communities and their delineation of settler racial logics, there emerges an affective genealogy, which I argue evokes the “residual” and “emergent” ruptures constitutive of “dominant” formations.⁵⁹ This affective potentiality can be traced specifically through the critical emotions across collectivities represented in the narratives.

That is, these moments of literary crossings not only encapsulate settler racial hegemonies as structures of feeling; they embody affective excess that has the potential to undermine the coherence and reveal the instabilities and anxieties as *tensions* of the settler state. The conjuring and performance of such emotions exist as a potential that can both delineate or hail collectivities that can reconstitute the dynamics of settler racial power, while at the same time opening up orientations toward others that can leave a critical impression. Ahmed writes, “If bodies do not arrive in neutral, if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation. . . . It suggests that how we arrive, how we enter this room or that room, will affect what impressions we receive. After all, to receive is to act. To receive an impression is to make an impression.”⁶⁰ As she suggests, the effect of being affected by another is contingent on the “angle of arrival.”⁶¹ Hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous narrative encounters reveal how these two communities emerge out of different angles of arrivals (informed by the very context of their divergent emergences) and so leave different effects or impressions on one another. It is precisely in these moments of connection, as represented in the literary texts, that elided or new impressions can be illuminated or formed. I suggest that the literary encounters provide us with a window into unseen impressions that hint toward possibilities of the mutual attunement to decolonization. While the representations of such impressions may not fully form into a material realization (particularly within the narrative frame), they nevertheless possess a meaningful trace that can be drawn across an archive of literary crossings.

The narratives that I examine often track affective ruptures of settler racial hegemonies through the concomitant ruptures of literary form. Williams highlights art as a privileged medium that embodies given social forms, or what Povinelli terms “social projects.”⁶² Yet he also suggests that these cultural productions do not fully encapsulate a given social moment, and instead have their “specific kinds of sociality” that work to transform preexisting social structures.⁶³ That is, emergent structures of feeling are lived within the

interstices of a particular form or aesthetic. Williams writes that “although they are emergent or pre-emergent, they do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action.”⁶⁴ Similarly, Lowe argues that “modern liberal humanism is a formalism that translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom.”⁶⁵ While the texts of interest emulate common genres and forms within the archive of hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous literatures writ large, the narrative encounters between hemispheric Asian American and Indigenous peoples often rupture the perceived narrative logics, trajectories, and temporalities inhabited by these structures. These rupturing encounters lead to affective detours. For example, while ostensibly about the histories, lives, and trajectory of her Chinese male relatives in the United States, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *China Men* incorporates key scenes of encounters between her relatives and Indigenous figures in Hawai‘i and California.⁶⁶ In one scene, the narrator’s great-grandfather encounters a ghostly Hawaiian woman while on his break from his job clearing the land. She invites him to enter the decimated village, but he is too spooked and leaves the area immediately. Moments like these not only break from the typical conventions of the historiographical form (through its break from realism in its incorporation of ghostly figures); they also take the reader out of the celebratory trajectory of the narrative (where the triumph of her great-grandfather’s labor on Hawaiian land is curtailed by histories of violence on Kānaka Maoli peoples). These ghostly presences open up expressions of Indigenous affective formations that can work to impress upon or circumvent the affective formations of Asian American settler belonging through labor. I argue that such formal and aesthetic divergences provide a palpable register to track the instabilities inherent in settler racial hegemonies. These formal divergences, which take place within scenes of crossings, offer intensities that give an emotional pulse to the “pre-formation” of connections and solidarities among communities situated asymmetrically across settler racial hegemonies.⁶⁷