

Pasts otherwise: Some comments on the historiography of concepts of 'colonialism' and 'entanglement' and the critique of the concept of 'contact' in Australasian Archaeology

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I am extremely sympathetic to the authors' critique of the term 'contact archaeology' and their argument that it detracts from the real inequalities and cultural and spatial dynamics of Indigenous and non-Indigenous colonial lifeworlds. It was precisely this concern that led me and several others during the late 1990s and 2000s, working with Indigenous collaborators and in dialogue with newly emergent perspectives on postcolonial and Indigenous histories, to argue for a range of alternative frameworks for writing about and practising archaeology in Australia. This body of work addressed the significant discursive erasure of Indigenous Australians in colonial contexts through narratives that placed emphasis on deep prehistory on the one hand (e.g. Byrne 1996), and that seemed focussed primarily on the agency of settler Australians on the other. The book *Shared Landscapes* (Harrison 2004) was an attempt to provide more inclusive ways of using archaeology, archives, heritage and oral histories to tell stories of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian history and the places in which those histories had occurred, mindful of these significant entanglements and inequalities, and drawing on these new perspectives (see reflective discussion in Harrison 2014).

My work, and the work of other authors on this topic in Australia at the time (e.g. see citations in Harrison 2014), much of which is not cited by the authors of the comment currently being discussed, developed in dialogue with scholars in the United States and elsewhere (including Silliman 2005, 2016 and Jordan 2009, 2014 on whose work the authors of this paper mainly base their critique of the term 'contact'). Silliman and Jordan also cited and drew on new concepts emerging from empirical work on historical Indigenous archaeology in Australasia. Although this exchange of ideas relating to the critique of the concept of 'contact' was happening much earlier – Torrence and Clarke (2000) themselves argued for the use of the term 'entanglement' in preference to 'contact' in their book *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating Cross-Cultural Engagements in Oceania* – it is exemplified in the volume *Rethinking Colonial Pasts through Archaeology* (Ferris et al. 2014) which I co-edited with Neil Ferris and Michael Wilcox, in which the significant cross-fertilisation of ideas from 'colonialism' to 'shared histories' to 'cross-cultural engagement'/'entanglement' is directly reflected in Jordan's (2014) chapter which the authors cite, alongside several others from authors from the United States and Australia. The critique of 'contact archaeology' which the authors make was always a significant part of these earlier discussions, and itself derived in part from work in Australia.

My disagreement with this paper, then, is a historiographical one. The implication that these concepts have not already been discussed in the Australian archaeological literature, and the arguments they bring to bear on the term 'contact archaeology', have not been raised convincingly before in an Australian archaeological context, does not accurately reflect the historiography of the discipline as I see it. But I think what is important about the paper is perhaps not so much the originality of the critique, but the fact that it still needs to be made, more than 20 years on. What I sense really sits at the heart of the frustration the authors express is not the lack of existing frameworks within Australian archaeology to do the work

for which they advocate, but rather, how limited the influence of these concepts and frameworks appear to have been on the ways in which archaeology has routinely been practised and written about in Australia over the intervening period. I would suggest a revival and re-reading of this earlier work is now more relevant than ever. If the word constraints on comments were less rigorous, I would provide an extensive reference list to assist with this process, and I hope readers will forgive me for what they might perceive as my own significant omissions and undertake further research into this earlier critique. Nonetheless I can only find myself in support of the important argument the authors present for the ongoing relevance of concepts of colonialism, entanglement and emergence to Australasian archaeology today.

References

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