

Historical Archaeology, Contact, and Colonialism in Oceania

James L. Flexner

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Abstract The archaeology of colonialism can destabilize orthodox historical narratives because of its critical engagement with multiple lines of evidence, revealing ways that different perspectives can complement or contradict what was assumed to be known about the past. In Oceania, archaeology that blends evidence from landscapes, sites, and artifacts with written documents as well as oral traditions reveals the role of indigenous people in shaping colonial encounters across the region over the last five centuries. The challenge lies with how to interpret this material in terms of ongoing struggles over land, resources, and identity in the region today, encapsulated by the tension between global and local.

Keywords Historical archaeology · Colonialism · Oceania · Australasia · Indigenous archaeology

Introduction

Almost 30 years ago, Connah (1983) suggested that historical archaeologists in Australia faced a dilemma, in the true sense of the word, when they tried to balance the need to do question-driven research against the need to document rapidly disappearing cultural resources threatened by development. In the 21st century, a new dilemma has emerged in South Pacific historical archaeology that resonates in many other areas of the world, which has to do with how we reconcile Western models of culture with the complexities and ambiguities of the colonial past in the context of contemporary society. How do we address the violence of European settlement, especially in the dispossession of native lands? How do we understand

J. L. Flexner (✉)

School of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Australian National University,
AD Hope Building #14, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia
e-mail: james.flexner@anu.edu.au