

## CULTURE CONTACT OR COLONIALISM? CHALLENGES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF NATIVE NORTH AMERICA

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*What has frequently been termed “contact-period” archaeology has assumed a prominent role in North American archaeology in the last two decades. This article examines the conceptual foundation of archaeological “culture contact” studies by sharpening the terminological and interpretive distinction between “contact” and “colonialism.” The conflation of these two terms, and thereby realms of historical experience, has proven detrimental to archaeologists’ attempts to understand indigenous and colonial histories. In light of this predicament, the article tackles three problems with treating colonialism as culture contact: (1) emphasizing short-term encounters rather than long-term entanglements, which ignores the process and heterogeneous forms of colonialism and the multifaceted ways that indigenous people experienced them; (2) downplaying the severity of interaction and the radically different levels of political power, which does little to reveal how Native people negotiated complex social terrain but does much to distance “contact” studies from what should be a related research focus in the archaeology of African enslavement and diaspora; and (3) privileging predefined cultural traits over creative or creolized cultural products, which loses sight of the ways that social agents lived their daily lives and that material culture can reveal, as much as hide, the subtleties of cultural change and continuity.*

*Lo que frecuentemente se denomina arqueología del “período de contacto” ha adquirido en los últimos 20 años un papel prominente en la arqueología norteamericana. Este trabajo examina el legado conceptual de los estudios arqueológicos sobre el contacto cultural y aclara la importante distinción terminológica e interpretativa entre “contacto” y “colonialismo.” La tendencia a confundir ambos conceptos, y por lo tanto el mundo de las experiencias históricas, ha perjudicado el intento arqueológico por comprender tanto la historia indígena como la colonial. Bajo semejante predicamento, este artículo aborda tres problemas que se generan al equiparar colonialismo con contacto cultural: (1) poner énfasis en los encuentros de poca duración—en vez de las relaciones prolongadas—lo que ignora las formas y los procesos heterogéneos del colonialismo, así como las múltiples dimensiones de las experiencias indígenas, (2) poner menor atención a la intensidad de la interacción y a los grados de poder político tan diferentes, lo que no permite apreciar cómo la gente autóctona negoció en contextos sociales complejos, promoviendo además un distanciamiento entre los estudios de “contacto” y las investigaciones afines sobre la arqueología de la esclavitud y diásporas africanas; y (3) privilegiar rasgos culturales predefinidos sobre formas culturales novedosas o criollas, lo que impide apreciar las formas en las que agentes sociales vivieron sus quehaceres cotidianos, olvidando a la vez que la cultura material puede revelar, así como ocultar, las sutilezas del cambio cultural y de la continuidad.*

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Studies of culture contact and colonialism have assumed a recognizable place in contemporary archaeology. Whether in North America, Latin America, South Africa, western Africa, Australia, or Hawai’i, archaeologists have made enormous strides in documenting the complexities of interaction between indigenous people and the expanding European mercantilist and capitalist world economy and political sphere of the last half-millennium. The implications of this research are broad and profound, not only affecting the understanding of local histories, identities,

and indigenous cultural survival but also illuminating the global trajectories of European-derived imperial expansion, colonialism, and decolonization. Some have broadened this project by considering culture contact and colonialism in precapitalist and “precontact” contexts in Latin America, Mesopotamia, and elsewhere (Alexander 1998; Cusick 1998c; Domínguez 2002; Gosden 2004; Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Schortman and Urban 1998; Stein 2002), a worthwhile effort that may ultimately help break down the artificial disciplinary barrier between historical and prehis-

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toric archaeology that currently hinders discussion about historical processes and cultural histories (Lightfoot 1995; Williamson 2004).

Although a research interest truly as old as American anthropology, a focus on Native Americans in North America's so-called contact period did not assume a position of archaeological prominence until the 1980s. This is despite the wide-ranging acculturation research in anthropology during the 1930s, such as that summarized by Herskovits (1958), which did not engage consistently with the material record of Native histories available through archaeology. As practitioners of North American archaeology recognize, a central impetus for the expanded research program was primarily the approach of the 1992 Columbian quincentennial, the 500-year anniversary of Columbus's fateful 1492 landfall in the Caribbean that ushered in European colonialism and expansion in the Americas. Another influence involved the 1990 passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act by the U.S. Congress because this legislation prompted more collaborative work between archaeologists and tribal members. In anticipation of the quincentennial and in recognition of the lacunae in archaeological research dealing with the period, a number of influential publications appeared that grappled with issues of European colonialism and Native American responses (Fitzhugh 1985; Ramenofsky 1987; Rogers 1990; Rogers and Wilson 1993; Taylor and Pease 1994; Thomas 1989, 1990, 1991; Walthall and Emerson 1992; Wylie 1992; see also Axtell 1995). Since then, the subfield has expanded exponentially across North America and elsewhere, and recently archaeologists have begun to take stock of the field (Cusick 1998b; Deagan 1998; Lightfoot 1995; Murray 1996, 2004a, 2004b; Rubertone 2000; Silliman 2004b).

My goal in this article is to offer a different perspective on culture contact and colonial archaeology, especially as practiced in North America: I seek to interrogate the terms and parameters that define it. In particular, I want to examine the theoretical, historical, and political implications of the terms *culture contact* and *colonialism* as they pertain to the archaeological study of indigenous people in post-Columbian North America. I argue that we have not paid enough theoretical attention to the basis of our inquiries: "What the quincenten-

nial throws into relief is the need for archaeologists to take responsibility for the work their research does in a world that is structured by classist, racist, and sexist politics" (Wylie 1992:593). I take this charge seriously and suggest that the way we talk about and present our research on "contact" in North American archaeology is problematic for the way it "does work" within the discipline and outside of it.

The article argues that an uncritical use of culture contact terminology for clearly colonial contexts does the following: (1) emphasizes short-term encounters over long-term entanglements; (2) downplays the severity of interaction between groups and the radically different levels of political power that structured those relationships; and (3) privileges predefined and almost essentialized cultural traits over creative, creolized, or novel cultural products. I am not the first to have concerns about the terminology of culture contact (Hill 1998; Murray 1996:202, 2004b:215; Paynter 2000a:9, 2000b:202) or about the problems of uncritically linking culture contact to the acculturation models of the first half of the twentieth century (Cusick 1998a), but I hope to deepen the discussions here. At a theoretical level, this article attempts to rethink the metaphor (*sensu* Kuhn 1979) of "contact" in North American archaeology in the hopes that changing the metaphor will recast the process—colonialism—that it purports to represent. I agree with Williamson's concern that "the current conceptual instruments that we are using to investigate contact are actually making the job of understanding more difficult" (2004:191), but to complement her proposal for treating precontact/postcontact histories as a continuum (after Lightfoot 1995), I seek to revisit the "contact" term itself. The metaphor of "contact" structures not only our concepts and interpretations of the interactions of Native Americans and settlers but also the mental image formed by our audiences and collaborators when we narrate those histories.

### Drawing Distinctions

Culture contact or colonialism? The point about terminology may seem pedantic, but conflating colonialism with contact underwrites misunderstandings of indigenous people in North American archaeology. An anecdote will illustrate. A

reviewer once questioned me on a manuscript concerning Native Americans living and working on a nineteenth-century rancho in California—Why did I call this context culture contact when it was clearly colonialism? The rancho and adobe site had been occupied in the 1830s and 1840s by a handful of Mexican Californians and around a thousand California Indian people laboring in a variety of economic roles (Silliman 2004a). Some conducted this labor voluntarily; others worked under coercion and force. The reviewer implied that I downgraded both the severity of interaction and the extent of possible change that had already occurred in Native American groups implicated in this particular colonial setting just by using the terminology. That is, could Rancho Petaluma, the research site, really be considered “contact” if the rancho involved willing and forced Native American laborers, some of whom had been in or near Spanish and then Mexican missions for more than 30 years? At the time I brushed off the criticism as a matter of semantics because I really meant colonialism when I said *culture contact*. In fact, I continued to use the term in my publications (Silliman 2001a, 2003) despite some consternation (Silliman 2004b), and numerous archaeologists have also used *contact* even while otherwise carefully arguing and elucidating complex colonial processes (Carlson 2000; Cobb 2003a; Deagan 1998; Johnson 1997; Lightfoot 1995; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Loren 2001b; Nassaney and Volmar 2003; Wagner 2003).

However, after a few years of reflection, it became clear that this involved more than a semantic problem. Referring to my northern California research as contact did seem to downplay, at least terminologically, the violence of the colonial frontier; the labor regime forced on indigenous people by settler populations; the presence of nonindigenous groups in the general region for more than three decades; and the ensuing material, cultural, and political entanglement. I began to reflect on how students, public visitors to the excavation, and my Native American consultants must have thought about my efforts to call this context “culture contact.” The same goes for my current archaeological research on Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation history in southeastern Connecticut. How could I consider my archaeological work on the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries of southern New

England part of the “contact period” when the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation community had been on a colonial reservation since 1683 after enduring severe casualties and dislocation following the Pequot War of 1636–37? Simply put, I cannot, nor can my tribal collaborators.

“Culture contact” remains a problematic phrase for describing *all* indigenous–colonial interactions in North America and elsewhere, and we need to reconsider our conceptual baggage. A recent review of the relationship between historical archaeology and anthropological archaeology expressed concern that “historical archaeology has yet to find a replacement for the bland ‘Contact period’” (Paynter 2000a:9). Yet the research itself is not bland; it is instead frequently mislabeled, sometimes undertheorized, and as a result, remarkably disempowered. Indigenous people, particularly in North America, find the last five centuries of attack on their cultural traditions, heritage, and lives more politically charged than simple “contact” might convey. In addition, we conduct our archaeology in a discipline that traces its heritage in colonialism, *not* in contact, but we have yet to fully come to grips with that legacy (Gosden 1999; Thomas 2000). As a result, we face a large problem in the ways that we present our studies of indigenous–European encounters solely as “contact” episodes to archaeology’s various audiences and collaborators, whether indigenous descendant communities, the general public, or students.

At issue are the explicit and implicit features that differentiate contact from colonialism. Therefore, I begin by clarifying my use of these terms and their applicability to different regional traditions in archaeology. The article focuses on Native American interactions with Europeans and European descendants because archaeologists who research Native Americans in the times following European settlement tend to refer to their period and topic of interest as contact rather than colonial. Perhaps telling is the likely noncoincidental lack of North American representation in a recent volume entitled *The Archaeology of Colonialism* (Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002), in which the idea of “culture contact” seems nowhere to be found. Although this article centers on North America, archaeological work pertaining to Aboriginal Australia should offer pertinent parallel cases, even though archaeologists working there seem more attuned already

to the colonial nature of these historical contacts (Harrison 2002; Harrison and Williamson 2004; Murray 2004a, 2004b). Moreover, I do not expect that my points about culture contact necessarily will have the same resonance with Latin American archaeologists, for they do not regularly confuse colonialism by calling it contact. The problem seems to lie in the study of regions north of Mesoamerica's urban cities and hinterlands.

### Terminology

*Contact*, or *culture contact*, stands as a general term used by archaeologists to refer to groups of people coming into or staying in contact for days, years, decades, centuries, or even millennia. In its broadest usage, this contact can range from amicable to hostile, extensive to minor, long term to short duration, or ancient to recent, and it may include a variety of elements such as exchange, integration, slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and diaspora. Its potential value lies in offering a comparative framework for the study of intercultural interactions, encounters, and exchanges, a point illustrated by a volume that integrates various time periods, study areas, and points of view (Cusick 1998c). Cusick has defined culture contact as "a predisposition for groups to interact with 'outsiders'—a necessity created through human diversity, settlement pattern, and desire for exchange—and to want to control that interaction" (1998b:4). Schortman and Urban define culture contact in the same volume as "any case of protracted, direct interchanges among members of social units who do not share the same identity" (1998:102). Gosden recently offered a similar definition but with attention to colonialism: "As there is no such thing as an isolated culture, all cultural forms are in contact with others. Culture contact is a basic human fact. What differentiates colonialism from other aspects of contact are issues of power" (2004:5).

In what follows, my critique of culture contact archaeology in North America does not attempt to undermine the value of culture contact studies on a broader level but, rather, to illustrate the ineffectiveness of this term for studies of colonialism. As a result of culture contact being a "basic human fact," the terminology rapidly becomes vacuous and uninformative, particularly in the case of North America colonialism. Similarly, I think that we are

fully prepared to grapple with the specific contact cases of colonialism and need not wait while we "develop theory and methods appropriate to the study of culture contact in *all* time periods" (Schortman and Urban 1998:104). Colonialism needs consideration in its historicity (Dirks 1992; Thomas 1994). Similarly, we must be wary of the negative consequences of terminological slippage for our audiences. If colonial intrusions into the Americas, Africa, and Australia involve only "predispositions for groups to interact with 'outsiders,'" the definition neutralizes colonialism and simplifies indigenous experiences of it, likely accounting for why the term is no longer in vogue in cultural anthropology.

*Colonialism* is generally defined as the process by which a city- or nation-state exerts control over people—termed indigenous—and territories outside of its geographical boundaries.<sup>1</sup> This exertion of sovereignty is frequently but not always accomplished through colonization, which involves the establishment of colonies that administer state control, manage interactions, and extract labor, raw materials, and surplus (Alexander 1998). Colonization usually takes place in the context of imperialism, whether, for example, expansion by the Aztec and Inca in ancient times or Europeans in the last 500 years. However, as developed further below, care must be taken not to conflate colonization, a vehicle or manifestation of colonialism, with colonialism, a process. Colonialism in the modern world, although sharing elements with other colonial times, operated on "fixed orders of racial and cultural difference" (Gosden 2004:22) and resulted from the trajectories of geographic expansion, mercantilism, and capitalism (Orser 1996). This colonialism is the focus of my article. Others have made it clear that this kind of colonialism may not apply to the ancient world, where one can sometimes argue for colonies (e.g., trade diasporas) without colonialism in Mesopotamia (Stein 2002) or even colonialism without colonization in the Mediterranean (Domínguez 2002).

By definition, the process of removing colonies or transferring political control from colonizing entity to independent settlements or burgeoning nations is decolonization, a condition that truly happened in the "modern" world only in the mid-twentieth century. This phenomenon lays the foundation for postcolonial studies in humanities

and social sciences. Although a useful formal definition, treating colonialism (and its end) in only this structural manner deflects attention from the ways that indigenous people may have struggled with the realities of colonial and settler societies in their territories. On the one hand, evidence abounds indicating that shifts from colonial to postcolonial periods can bring about changes not only in administrative and governmental control but also in indigenous experiences, opportunities, and constraints in a system of domination. Latin America is a case in point where the loss of Spanish control of Mexico in the early 1820s resulted in the end of New Spain and its colonies and the beginning of the Republican period, with new contexts for indigenous people to act, react, and counteract (Langer and Jackson 1988).

On the other hand, the end of a settler society's status as a colony does not necessarily mean that this administrative label change has salience for all involved, as illustrated again by the end of the Spanish Empire in the Americas. Although the shifts in political control in 1821 marked a new period in the previous dominions of the Spanish Crown, frontier locations such as California did not witness meaningful shifts for the California Indians who worked in Franciscan missions and toiled on ranchos and in pueblos. That is, indigenous residents continued for another decade in the mission and another two and a half decades in the ranchos and pueblos before California was annexed by the United States in 1848. California was no longer part of a Spanish colony and might arguably not have been a colony of Mexico but, rather, a territorial extension of the solidifying nation-state. Yet the end of "colony" or "colonization" in formal historical terms did *not* mean the end of colonialism for California Native people. The 1830s and 1840s remained "colonial California" for Native people engulfed in its problems and prospects (Silliman 2004a), making my earlier anecdote pertinent despite not being "Spanish colonial" proper.

The same can be said for indigenous contexts in the United States from its inception. Gosden has argued that rather than entering a postcolonial or decolonized realm following independence from the British Empire, "the egalitarian American republic forced Indians to do what the French and British empires could not: to become true colonial subjects" (2004:30). For many indigenous people,

the internal colonialism that occurs when a settler population continues to try to exert control over social, political, economic, cultural, and sexual relations did not cease into the twentieth century. Some would argue that it continues today in a number of forms (Churchill 1998): "Such continuities make it difficult to believe that we are post-colonial anything other than a formal sense, with the divide between the colonial and the post-colonial making long-term historical analysis more difficult" (Gosden 2004:156). The "colonial period" is a definable moment in history for certain regions, but this periodization of history based on the structure of the settler nation cannot be allowed to box in colonialism as a process.

Therefore, I use the term *colonialism* in this article to refer to the dual process (1) of attempted domination by a colonial/settler population based on perceptions and actions of inequality, racism, oppression, labor control, economic marginalization, and dispossession and (2) of resistance, acquiescence, and living through these by indigenous people who never permit these processes to become final and complete and who frequently retain or remake identities and traditions in the face of often brutal conditions. The latter fits comfortably within the genre of postcolonial theory that has proliferated in the last few decades following broadscale decolonization but does so in a materially grounded, rather than textually privileged, way (Gosden 2004:18–23). This gives archaeology its theoretical and empirical power. The latter also indicates that I do not mean for a focus on colonialism to entail a focus on top-down change, overarching European powers, or deterministic outcomes. What matters is that we do not call these relationships primarily "culture contact" for the three reasons I develop below.

### **Emphasizing Encounter over Entanglement**

The first problem with labeling colonialism as culture contact concerns the way a long-term process of colonial entanglement is represented as a potentially short-duration collision of distinct cultures. Even though archaeologists have documented long-term culture contact, this terminology should not apply to colonial cases in North America. The label "contact" implies, particularly to nonarchaeologist audiences, a short-duration event, novelty of

encounter, separate histories of contacting groups, and the importance of exchange relationships. Although one might question whether such encounters are “culture” contact at all, the situations under this rubric are a different breed than the colonial interactions that characterized full-scale European settlement of indigenous areas. These types of encounters did occur, even in areas later characterized by colonialism, as exemplified by the European explorers sailing the waters of eastern North America, western North America, and the Pacific Islands in various centuries. They included moments of first (sometimes additional) contact and exchange—material, genetic, epidemiological, sexual—that had profound consequences for later interactions and the demographic sustainability of indigenous groups.

As Nicholas Thomas (1991:83–84) demonstrates for Melanesia, Europeans held no position during first contact to enforce demands or labor (a situation that Gosden [2004] would still term “middle ground” colonialism). Europeans may have approached their encounters and the indigenous people with whom they made contact from a colonial mind-set, but the interactions often constituted a different order than the settlement, missionization, and exploitation that frequently followed. Sahlins’s (1981, 1985) work on encounters between Pacific Islanders and British sailors, particularly Captain Cook, offers examples of this type of encounter. Sahlins charts the cultural histories and context from which Hawaiians and other Native islanders understood the British who explored their islands and their interactions with them, tracing out the different experiences and strategies employed by commoners and elite, men and women. Initial explorations by Europeans along California’s coast offer another example, one that has been investigated archaeologically (Lightfoot and Simmons 1998).

Yet most archaeological studies that fall under the rubric of culture contact do not concern these initial encounters, first contacts, or intermittent visits. In fact, archaeologists often try too hard to focus on these early moments or at least believe that they are actually focusing on such initial encounters when they are not: “The celebration of first contact situations also distracts attention from important changes that unfolded in remote areas . . . [as] indigenous peoples of the Americas were con-

structing new cultural identities as they adjusted to European diseases, technologies, and distant power struggles” (Hill 1998:148). After the decades or even centuries of colonialism that characterize much of what North American archaeologists study, such as missions, ranches, trade outposts, and military stations, the notion of contact is inappropriate. The same applies to Native villages and house sites associated with these settings: “Thus the historical archaeologies of indigenous societies do not cease with contact (or shortly thereafter). Rather they should be understood really to begin then and to continue up to the present, as they do for the colonial societies with which they share landscapes and experiences” (Murray 2004a:8).

Unfortunately, in North American archaeological parlance, archaeologists generally label Native American sites as “contact,” not colonial, when they contain European goods, but the European sources of those goods and contexts of multiethnic interaction are referred to as “colonial,” not contact, sites. Orser (1996:59–60) hints at the persistence of this dilemma when he astutely observes that a collection of symposium papers on French colonial archaeology resulted in two volumes, one on colonialism when talking about the French (Walthall 1991) and one on contact when talking about the interactions between French and Native Americans (Walthall and Emerson 1992). The inheritance of this site nomenclature stems in part from Fontana’s (1965) early and highly problematic classification system for “historic sites archaeology,” which included a five-part scheme: “protohistoric,” “contact,” “postcontact,” “frontier,” and “nonaboriginal.”<sup>2</sup> Although “protohistoric” and “postcontact” are still in use, archaeologists seem to prefer now, in a shorthand manner, to place together under a “contact” rubric all studies pertaining to indigenous–European encounters, whether first contacts in the 16th century or industrial labor contexts in the early twentieth century (see Cobb 2003b).<sup>3</sup>

However, these long-term contexts we mistakenly call “contact” involve the intertwining of histories, experiences, and structures of colonialism. As Hill (1998) has argued, the same perspectives that might illuminate particular moments of first contact do not suffice when considering long-term processes of power relations and violence. Similarly, “a model of acculturation, developed to

explain cross-cultural exchange, is not an appropriate model for studies of conquest or colonialism" (Cusick 1998a:138). Considering a collision of cultural understandings may (or may not, according to Obeyesekere [1992]) reveal what Native Hawaiians "thought" as Captain Cook sailed the ritual path of *Lono*, but these models of cultural interaction cannot provide analytical access to the unequal relations of power, labor, economy, gender, sex, and politics that wrapped up colonizers and colonized alike in later times and other places. As Byrne (2003:83) has recently argued for heritage preservation in New South Wales, Australia, dividing these realms artificially "disentangles" indigenous and settler histories and promotes them as segregated cultural experiences. He rightly notes that this is a political process of representation, even though perhaps more a result of entrenched protocols of archaeological training, funding, and policies. These are the disciplinary ruts that we must escape, as Lightfoot (1995) has argued for the prehistory–history divide in North American archaeology.

Rather than episodes of contact between independent cultures struggling simply to make cognitive sense of each other, colonialism is about intersections. Intersections of identities, relations, and intimacies require a different perspective because they involve entanglement (Harrison 2004; N. Thomas 1991; Williamson and Harrison 2004), "shared histories" and shared predicaments (Murray 1996, 2004a, 2004b), and an "intertwining of two or more formerly distinct histories into a single history characterized by processes of domination, resistance, and accommodation" (Hill 1998:149). The entangling, sharing, and intertwining do not unify; however, "the existence of 'shared histories' and 'shared identities' does not mean that there can ever be, or should ever be, a single account of those histories or those identities" (Murray 2004b:215). Autonomous, self-contained cultures do not exist in colonialism, something that Wolf (1982) demonstrated over two decades ago; instead, individuals walk the fine, often painful, line between old ways and new directions, past practices and future hopes, dangerous times and uncertain outcomes. This does not deny cultural traditions and cognitive understandings, does not suggest that groups have no identity boundaries or resistant practices, and does not insinuate that colo-

onialism is final or determinant. What it does suggest, however, is that calling such interactions "contact" provides little clarity and obscures the nature of multiple intersections.

Archaeologist might argue that "contact" only serves as a convenient label, one past which they quickly move to discuss colonial relationships, but the term holds implications for disciplinary practice and for presentation of archaeological results. Drawing on Wolf's (1982) classic analogy for isolated cultures, Paynter makes a poignant observation about conceptual terminology and its implications: "Unfortunately, words like 'Contact Period' commonly used by archaeologists to talk about the interaction between would-be colonizing Europeans and their targets sound too much like the comforting click of billiard balls on the cosmic billiard table of world history" (2000a:9). Extending this metaphor, these billiard balls do not merge and reform as their paths intersect, and they only can break upon impact with other balls. As a result, some archaeologists, other scholars, and particularly the general public still look only for the shattered indigenous people scattered about on the velvet, cracked open or forced into pockets by the "white" cue ball. This is a problematic view of colonialism and indigenous action, and its greatest implications may be in the way archaeological reporting is perceived by nonspecialists.

The common image of contact manipulates process into event. One can recall a culture contact episode as a bounded, historical event—people come into contact, they change with respect to one another's traditions, and a final product appears. This forms the core of acculturation paradigms in the 1930s (Herskovits 1958). Murray sums up this dilemma with respect to Australia:

Where once the historical archaeology of Aboriginal Australia might have been conceived of as the archaeology of "contact," an encounter of brief duration after which Indigenous people became archaeologically indistinguishable from poor white rural or urban populations, we now understand that the process is more complicated and ambiguous (and more likely to yield counter-intuitive results) [2004b:215].

The same issues hold for North America: "As the inheritors of a long tradition of 'frontier' history, we are in danger yet again of conceiving North

American intercultural contacts as brief, decisive, and one-sided confrontations rather than as protracted, cumulative and reciprocal associations” (Wood 1994:486). Whether in archaeological publications, museums, or historic parks, we can present these contact events as severed and distinct from the present, as fleeting albeit significant moments in world history. The public—particularly mainstream America—may like the comforting click, a momentary sound in a larger historical narrative that frequently centers on European expansion and the rise of the modern world, but indigenous people whose histories we purport to recover and study find that click less than comforting: “Why do we put this distance between this contact period of history and ourselves? It is politically safer and emotionally less taxing” (Wilson 1999:5).

Unlike notions of contact, colonialism forces the recognition that these metaphorically untenable balls are actually part of much larger networks, open to negotiation, and in fact all transformed in those intersections. In many cases, so-called isolated cultures affected each other with material items, diseases, and incursions long before full-fledged colonialism gained momentum (Wolf 1982). The notion of individual cultures themselves in the “modern world” may even be a colonial creation (Dirks 1992), and the bounded ethnogeographic maps of early anthropology that still inform archaeologists today, for better or worse, are a case in point. Colonialism, as an analytical framework, ushers in a consideration of social agents—indigene, colonist—negotiating new, shared social terrain forged in sustained contact. It does not presume homogeneous cultures bumping into one another, especially as “colonial settlements were pluralistic entrepôts where peoples of diverse backgrounds and nationalities lives, worked, socialized, and pro-created” (Lightfoot 1995:201).

Colonialism is not about an event but, rather, about processes of cultural entanglement, whether voluntary or not, in a broader world economy and system of labor, religious conversion, exploitation, material value, settlement, and sometimes imperialism. We find it much harder to pinpoint when colonialism, rather than the “Contact Period,” ended. Colonialism is an unfinished, diverse project that cannot be ignored in today’s contemporary world, even if considering only its extensive

legacy. It ties the past to the present—“we are still in the contact period” (Wilson 1999:6)—and gives remarkable salience to contemporary struggles for indigenous people (Gosden 2004; Lilley 2000; Murray 2004a; Thomas 2000).

### Downplaying Severity and Power

A second problem plaguing culture contact studies is the way that notions of contact can downplay colonial relations of power, inequality, domination, and oppression. The problem has plagued acculturation studies since they began drawing on the 1936 “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation” (Redfield et al. 1936) because power was either ignored or downplayed to the point that it was then implicitly assumed to reside with the “conqueror” (see Cusick 1998a:129–132). Colonialism proper involved institutional and personal relations of power, labor and economic hierarchy, attacks on cultural practices and beliefs, and often racism with direct effects on indigenous people and their strategies or abilities for survival. Yet it did not strike one-sided, “fatal impact” blows to indigenous groups, despite the fact that the classic “first contact” cases of autonomous interaction often gave way to violence and attempted genocide (Hill 1998).

To characterize colonialism, some might argue that archaeologists already have a way of distinguishing different kinds of contact that emphasize the nature of inequality and power relationships, such as “directed” versus “nondirected” contact (Spicer 1962; see Cusick 1998a:137–139). Recent archaeological studies have used that distinction for reasonable interpretations (Saunders 1998; Wagner 1998), but I wonder why we still bother with such a term as *directed contact* for Native North America when *colonialism* better captures the process and links our archaeological work to broader historical and anthropological studies. I have met many cultural anthropologists who recoil at the thought that archaeologists still use the term *culture contact* to describe colonial processes. Even considering what culture means to participants in the interaction, “the notion of ‘culture contact’ fails to take into account that, in colonial contexts, cultural processes were themselves effects and forms of power” (Den Ouden 2005:16). Moreover, it would be hard to imagine how Schrire’s (1995) book *Digging through Darkness*, about South



African archaeology, history, and personal experience, might have differed—and I would argue, lost significant impact—had she not talked about colonialism and instead focused on directed or nondirected contact.<sup>4</sup> Her third chapter, “Chronicles of Contact,” outlines much more than cultures bumping into each other; she (1995:49–70) describes encounters in South Africa between the Dutch and Khoikhoi as palpably and strikingly colonial.

The recognition of violence and harsh realities does not at all mean that North American archaeologists now need to think of something like “conquest” as a valid model—far from it, in fact. Despite its common usage in Latin America, *conquest* has been criticized even in that historical tradition as a term that portrays too “final” of a scenario when the on-the-ground realities were more complex and negotiated (Taylor 1994:154). The point is to recognize how violence- and power-free the notion of contact can be. Take, for instance, the words of a Latin American historian: “The Spaniards’ encounter with the Indians was not simply culture contact in which beneficial innovations were freely adopted or merged with the existing cultures. It was a conquest” (Hassig 1994:147). Culture contact transforms here into a restatement of acculturation, and likely Hassig is not the only one who undergoes that terminological slip.

The need to remember the violence, disparities, and intersections during colonialism should not dispel possibilities of contact episodes where people met as autonomous groups and neither had political or power sway over the other. Anthropologists and historians have used these important cases to levy criticisms of the “fatal impact” model that portrays European contact delivering a one-sided crushing blow to a passive and incapable indigenous population. These contact cases, or what Gosden better terms “middle ground colonialism,” have revealed how indigenous resistance and agendas helped chart the trajectory of later relationships and how indigenous people made sense out of colonists and their material culture based on pre-existing meanings and traditions (e.g., Clarke 2000; Rogers 1990; Whelan 1993).

Yet we must consider carefully the many years of postcontact life for Native Americans and recall the diversity of indigenous experiences possible in the realm of colonial entanglement. For instance, Native Americans who traded with Jesuit mis-

sionaries at small outposts near the Great Lakes would have had very different experiences than those in southern California who were forced to work from dawn until dusk under the control of Catholic Franciscan missions. Maritime indigenous groups along 16th-century coastal Maine would have had very different experiences trading with European fishing vessels than seventeenth-century eastern Massachusetts groups who were proselytized in “Praying Indian Towns” by English colonists and violently incarcerated after King Philip’s War in 1675. Even in severe cases, Native Americans in California and New England who battled militarily with invading European forces interfaced very differently with colonialism than members of those same indigenous groups who were incorporated into colonial households as domestics or field hands. I doubt that any justification exists for categorizing all of these instances under a “culture contact” label.

If taken too far, one might claim that my criticism of culture contact could portray all indigenous people as passive victims in a colonial scheme or all indigenous histories as subsumed in a broader colonial narrative. However, such a position would be academically false and politically disengaged. Rubertone notes that we run the “risk of encouraging explanations that emphasize colonial encounters as the single transforming, if not traumatic, event in Native peoples’ lives, rather than acknowledging their ability to withstand and sometimes resist these invasions and the incursions that followed” (2000:434–435). I agree strongly. However, admitting the profundity of the latter does not require that we abandon a focus on colonial processes in place of an emphasis on culture contact. It simply means that we have to devise more sophisticated analytical lenses and terminologies that can capture the uniqueness of indigenous experiences, lives, and traditions in colonial or post-colonial eras. We must be vigilant to prevent a needed focus on colonialism-as-context from turning into an unwanted focus on colonialism-as-defining moment.

Recognizing overarching structures and relations of power in colonialism does not deny indigenous agencies, intentions, resistances, or traditions. In fact, quite the opposite is true, despite early anthropological traditions that focused on the formation of “conquest societies” (Foster 1960). Con-

textualizing individual action within a colonial world places social agents in real-world situations and distinctive practices through which they negotiate identities and communities. To ignore colonialism's sharper edge means to overlook the settings in which indigenous people frequently found themselves laboring: missions, plantations, ranches, forts, mines, and farms. Focusing only on cases of autonomous contact, trade and exchange, or armed conflict abbreviates the diversity of indigenous experiences in post-Columbian North America and elsewhere. "Contact period" research tends to privilege these moments. A balanced approach emphasizes the creativity, practices, and resiliency of indigenous people *and* the severity of colonial rule, labor requirements, economic inequality, religious persecution, and so on. In contrast to the case in actual "contact" sites, archaeologists do not have an easy task of recovering indigenous people in those colonial spaces of long-term domination where individuals found it difficult to stake a material or spatial claim, but results are promising (Deagan 1983, 1996; Harrison 2002, 2004; Silliman 2001a, 2004a, 2005). For instance, Lightfoot et al. (1998) demonstrate the persistence and negotiation of cultural identities among different indigenous groups cohabiting within the context of Russian colonialism.

As a way of integrating colonialism and power when studying North American indigenous people, the historical archaeologies of slavery offer a point of comparison. Why do historical archaeologists in North America typically not consider plantation slavery studies as culture contact? Are these not cases of different cultural groups (i.e., African and European) coming into regular contact and confronting each other's cultural practices while negotiating their own? The few who have situated their work in culture contact studies have expressed significant hesitation and anxiety in doing so (Armstrong 1998; Singleton 1998), particularly because their other publications grapple explicitly with colonialism and its various expressions (Singleton 1995, 1999, 2001).

In the 1980s, many plantation studies drew on acculturation models derived from early-twentieth-century cultural anthropological research on Native Americans, but these attempts did not acknowledge their link to Native American issues (Singleton 1998:174), nor did they evade criticism

(Howson 1990; Singleton 1998). Howson (1990) has maintained that these acculturation-style models did not truly address the complexities of inequality, resistance, and the structural order of plantations, and Ferguson (1992) has argued instead for a model of creolization. In a related vein, Epperson notes that emphasizing the partial autonomy of oppressed slaves in creating new meanings and practices is worthwhile and appropriate but that "overemphasizing the autonomy of slave culture runs the risk of mystifying relations of power" (1990:35). I think the same outlook can sharpen our archaeological view of Native American experiences in colonial times. Little parallel to plantations exists in cases that we might call "first contact" situations in the Americas, but the division breaks down quickly thereafter when faced with colonial institutions like missions, ranches, and mines or with noninstitutional but still starkly colonial settings.

An answer to the question of why plantation contexts are not characterized as culture contact is that the so-called contact literature currently offers little clarity to the experiences of enslaved Africans or to plantation social order. This marks a sharp reversal of an earlier trend, in which the anthropology of people with African ancestry in the New World fell squarely in acculturation, or culture contact, research (Herskovits 1927, 1958). The reasons for the reversal are detectable in the hesitation of African Diaspora scholars: "Plantation slavery can be addressed within the study of culture contact but only when it is recognized that relations of power were central to the construction of any interaction" (Singleton 1998:173). The need for this disclaimer should awaken many "contact period" archaeologists in Native North America to the notion that their work has yet to grapple fully with issues of power and colonialism and to examine the ways in which indigenous people became implicated in often severe relations of inequality, labor, and racism.

For all the reasons cited above, the terminology embedded in culture contact frequently implies short-duration encounters, autonomy, and, most important at this juncture, *labor-free and culture-only* relations. Such characteristics do little to address the full range of African and African-American experiences on plantations, but the more pressing dilemma is that such a focus also does relatively little to illuminate the experiences of indigenous

people who joined or were forced into Spanish missions in Florida, Mexican ranchos in northern California, Russian trading posts on the Pacific Coast of North America, English “Praying Towns” in New England, or—farther afield—Spanish and Mexican haciendas in Mexico or settler livestock stations in northern Australia. This results in plantation archaeologists seeing the work of historical archaeologists on Native Americans as irrelevant (measured by a relative lack of citations), despite the fact that many studies of colonial-period Native Americans actually *do* engage with topics of creolization (Cusick 2000; Deagan 1996, 1998; Loren 2000), identities (Lightfoot et al. 1998; Loren 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Silliman 2001a; Voss 2002), labor (Silliman 2001b, 2004a), and resistance (Rubertone 1989; Scarry 2001; Scarry and McEwan 1995).

Again using lack of citations as a measure, culture contact archaeologists in North America typically return the favor by not consulting plantation and slavery studies for any insight into the politics and practices of social inequality and colonial administration. The lack of engagement ignores the astute observations by Farnsworth (1989:230–231), after studying both slave plantations and Spanish missions in North America, that these two institutions share many of the same characteristics. Speaking broadly, Paynter makes a similar observation about common themes in historical archaeological research: “The most obvious historical point of common interest and work is in the contact period. This too-often-ignored period of colonialism and conquest, in North America and elsewhere around the globe, saw the massive dislocation of indigenous people and their practices from crucial land resources by new ways of life based on capitalist accumulation, white supremacy, and patriarchy” (2000b:202). Archaeologists’ work on indigenous people must be recast so as to tackle these broader issues of colonialism in North America.

Complementing the lack of attention to colonial relationships in Native North America, the disconnect between the archaeology of slavery and the archaeology of Native–European “contact” also relates subtly to the perception that Native Americans and Africans share no common heritage, despite the one poignant yet diverse experience—colonialism—that the two highly diverse groups did

share. Colonialism does not offer the ultimate origin of difference, traditions, and cultural practices, but it provides a context that cannot be ignored when discussing culture. The minimal overlap between those who profess to study the contact period and those who study plantation slavery in North America also relates to the assumption that Native American and African historical experiences in the Americas were separate, despite the multitude of interethnic unions between them that carry strong political connotations today, particularly in New England. This overlap should be noticeable in a *culture* contact realm, but contact period researchers typically ignore it. Acknowledging the complex interplay of colonialism would rectify the imbalance. Finally, contact period archaeologists typically do not engage with questions of race, despite the importance of this topic in cultural anthropological studies of colonialism (e.g., Den Ouden 2004; Thomas 1994) and African American archaeology (Epperson 1990; Franklin 2001; Orser 2000, 2003; Singleton 1995).

### **Privileging Predefined Traits over Creative Cultural Products**

To identify the third problem in culture contact archaeology requires looking at definitions of culture continuity and change. One of the more difficult positions upheld, however implicitly, by the notion of culture contact is that the collision of people in the post- A.D. 1400 global world involved only an exchange, adoption, retention, and discard of cultural traits. Acculturation models are founded on this assumption. Although acculturation terminology has decreased within the discipline, the core ideas often linger, particularly in popular interpretations of the past: a “donor” culture introduces to or forces on a “recipient” culture new ideas, material, practices, or relations. In this view, predefined cultures, whether European or indigenous, change because of their encounters with other cultural systems, typically involving a directional shift from what they had been prior to contact toward something akin to the contacting culture. Distinct, bounded cultures make up the poles from or toward which these groups move, despite the multiethnic nature of colonialism.

Arkush (2000) offers a recent illustration of the persistence of this notion. He (2000:194) argues for

acculturation as a valid framework, for Native Americans being the “receptor culture” (albeit not passively so), and for nondirected contact, all despite the fact that his study involves late-eighteenth- and early-twentieth-century interactions in California between Paiute and Euro-American settlers in what is clearly colonialism. Although Herskovits (1958:119) warned against assuming that the change will always be toward white European or American cultures, Native Americans are typically still presumed to move toward Europeanness with the adoption of Western material goods (for critiques, see Lightfoot 1995:206–207; Orser 1996:60–66; Rubertone 1989:34–36, 2001:430–432).

Alternatively, what if instead of becoming more European, however defined, with the adoption of introduced material items, Native Americans or other indigenous people fashioned a way to remain Native in very changed and very conflicted circumstances? What if change and continuity—as we often think about in archaeology—are thought of as the *same* process? This does not presume an essentialized identity but, rather, one that can be maintained or mobilized, entrenched or regained, in colonial worlds. In seventeenth-century southern New England, Narragansett people confronted colonialism, not contact, head-on and altered their burial and material practices to strategically survive the colonial world—but not by “acculturating” to Europeanness (Nassaney 1989; see the focus on resistance in Rubertone 1989). In northern California, indigenous people adopted European material items at the Russian colony of Ross (Lightfoot et al. 1998) and at the Mexican-era Rancho Petaluma (Silliman 2001a) but in particularly *Native* ways that give little indication of “acculturation.” In the Great Lakes region, the Chippewa and other tribal nations used the fur trade and natural resources market, coupled with indigenous economic relations of reciprocity, to dodge incorporation into a capitalist economy for close to two centuries (Cleland 1992, 1993). Other studies have revealed that indigenous people changed their material repertoire with the addition of European goods but that they held to traditional ways of using the landscape and viewing place, such as in New England (Rubertone 1989, 2000). These cases speak of individuals living through new colonial worlds, sometimes resisting and other times making do, but never acculturating.

We can perhaps think of cultures in contact as a way to sort out these issues, but I remain unconvinced that such a notion offers the most comprehensive framework. For one, the issues revolve around more than a simplistic notion of “culture” because they summon identity, ethnicity, and active agency. Only in the 1990s with the influence of interpretive, contextual, and feminist archaeologies did agent-centered approaches secure a foothold in studies of culture contact (Deagan 1996, 1998; Lightfoot 1995; Lightfoot et al. 1998). These interpretations relied not on atomistic, self-interested individuals performing on a colonial stage but, rather, on culturally produced and culturally producing, historically contingent social agents dealing with complex situations. These influential contributions served to shift emphasis from acculturation, which implied more one-way movements of cultural traits, to transculturation, which involved complex mixtures of cultural and individual interactions that offered the possibility of multiple directions of influence (Deagan 1998). They also inspired efforts to look at the complex material ways that indigenous people and settlers forged ahead in colonial worlds (Harrison 2002, 2004; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Loren 2001a, 2001b; Murray 2004a, 2004c; Rubertone 2001; Scarry 2001; Scarry and Maxham 2002; Silliman 2001a, 2001b; Wesson 2002; see van Dommelen 2002 for a related example).

The forging ahead creates part of what might be termed “colonialism’s culture” and constitutes a postcolonial theory of colonialism (Thomas 1994). “Colonialism’s culture” is not simply imposed from a European core or pre-given as a uniform entity; it is made, remade, and contested in “projects” and in the interaction between individuals (Thomas 1994; see also Gosden 2004; Murray 2004a). The creation of colonial cultures takes place both in the colony and in the motherland; it is not a push from core to periphery. Variability characterizes not only indigenous responses to colonial encounters (N. Thomas 1991; see Waselkov 1993 for an archaeological example) but also the assumed uniformity of indigenous and colonizing groups (Lightfoot 1995; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Schortman and Urban 1998:108–109; Simmons 1988; Stoler 1989; Thomas 1994). Colonial frontiers, the front-line of much sustained European–indigenous contact, manifested the fluidity and complexity of

colonists sometimes not confident of their own identities and role in a broader colonizing scheme (Dirks 1992:7; Stoler 1989:137; Thomas 1994:143–169), of colonists often far away from the core of *presumed* cultural uniformity in European nations (Lightfoot 1995:200; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995), and of individuals interacting face to face and negotiating the details of life and identity on the cultural frontiers of colonialism.

Colonial settings tend to confuse our assumptions about the easily recognizable sides in culture contact, not only in revealing more diversity in the seemingly homogenized two sides of “colonial” and “indigenous” but also in highlighting the movements of individuals in and out of those assumed sides as they acquiesce to or contest various colonial projects. This vision of colonialism admits a contextually fluid and ambiguous, yet often defended, boundary between the presumed dichotomies of colonizer and colonized (Murray 2004a:10). Similarly we have yet to take Ferguson’s astute statement to heart: “Although Indians were native to the New World, we may safely say that neither Native Americans, Europeans, nor Africans were ‘ancestrally indigenous’ to New World plantation settlements” (1992:xli) or, I would add, to other venues such as missions and settler towns. As a result, archaeological discoveries of ceramics from Europe or stone tools from local sources at a colonial site do not easily speak about their uses or their mobilization in identities. These objects do not simply demarcate “cultures.”

Rather than arguing that colonialism brings about an opportunity for individuals, particularly indigenous ones, to suddenly remake their traditions and to craft a new kind of instrumentalist identity, these perspectives indicate that colonialism must be understood as simultaneously creative and destructive. Focusing on colonialism easily summons policies of destruction and scorched earth (and often should!), but these images must be tempered with the ways that indigenous people (and colonists) devised a new world of “shared” landscapes, experiences, and histories. Such a perspective is in no way apologetic:

Paradoxically perhaps, I see colonialism as often being a source of creativity and experiment, and while certainly not being without pain, colonial encounters cause the dissolu-

tion of values on all sides, creating new ways of doing things in a material and social sense. A stress on creativity takes us away from notions such as fatal impact, domination and resistance or core and periphery, emphasizing that colonial cultures were created by all who participated in them, so that all had agency and social effect, with colonizer and colonized alike being radically changed by the experience [Gosden 2004:25].

In no way should this perspective be construed as building up a notion of colonialism as a “good thing,” nor should it take postcolonial theory to the extreme of calling all colonial identities hybrids lacking any ties to the precolonial past or to authenticity as defined by courts that decide on Native American heritage and lineage. Instead, it calls for exploring *who* maneuvers, redirects, deploys, and subverts colonialism and *how* they do so. That is, colonialism becomes a context, albeit out of necessity, in which indigenous people find ways to survive.

As an example, labor is a node of colonial interaction laced with power, but rather than seeing labor as only an economic or political force imposed on indigenous people by colonial settlers, it can be viewed simultaneously as a vehicle for social action on the part of those performing the labor (Silliman 2001b). Doing so has begun to clarify the nature of colonial experiences for Native Americans in California’s Spanish missions, for these institutions focused on much more than “spiritual conversion” in their bodily discipline and economic activities. Missionaries regularly used labor as a conversion tool (e.g., “idle hands are the devil’s workshop”) and as a means of sustaining the colonial community, but a labor-as-practice approach has given me ways to envision material culture in the context of social and physical labor relations. In this view, it is possible to see how indigenous people responded to labor and made use of its materiality for their own ends and projects (Silliman 2001b).

Similarly, a colonial framework has revealed the complexities of material culture in Native American living areas and their relationships to labor duties at California ranchos following mission secularization (Silliman 2004a). These ranchos, especially the large one forming the focus of my

research, required hundreds of Native people to work on farming, herding, and manufacturing tasks through policies of peonage-like indebtedness, outright capture, and political alliance building with neighboring tribal leaders. Investigating part of a Native worker living site on Rancho Petaluma (1834–1850s) produced numerous artifacts pertaining to residential life in the context of labor duties. Materials ranged from chipped-stone tools, to glass bottle fragments, to scissors and thimbles. Ignoring labor might have led me to talk only about Native American cultural patterns as though they were isolated from the colonial labor regime in which people worked for many hours a day. Centering on colonialism, rather than contact—with its de-emphasis on labor and power—gave me the purchase that I needed to track the effects of colonial labor in Native households and gender relations through studies of dietary debris, discarded tools, and objects of daily life (Silliman 2004a).

Another central difficulty with the cultural traits notion lies in our conceptions of material culture in the realm of colonialism. Despite great advances in interpretive archaeology and material culture studies, some archaeologists still prefer to see material culture as a reflection of culture rather than an active participant in constituting it. This theoretical issue lies at the heart of our misunderstandings of colonialism. The perspective comes across clearly in culture contact studies where “European” artifacts reflect “Europeanness” rather than constitute the medium for expressing or contesting such an identity. As a result, the material culture of indigenous lives during these times of upheaval and oppression becomes scattered and ambiguous by virtue of terminology. In North American archaeology, glass bottles and metal tools are frequently termed “historical artifacts” regardless of who used them (i.e., Europeans or Native Americans), but indigenous-produced stone tools or shell ornaments are rarely, if ever, called that, even if found well into defined “historic” periods. The clarity of indigenous material practices clouds when labels predefine these “historic” and “Native” artifacts as incompatible in origin and purpose and as irreconcilable when materializing colonial period identities.

In truth, however, these objects were the complex material package that constituted indigenous resistance to and residence in colonial worlds.

Many Native Americans built and maintained identities through novel combinations of material culture. As such, I advocate studying material culture not as either “Native” or “European” but as items taken up by individuals to forge their way in new colonial worlds (see also Loren 2001a:67; N. Thomas 1991). The defining element for material culture rests at least as much in its use and negotiated meaning as in its origins (Silliman 2005; van Dommelen 2002:123–124). We must get away from essentialist notions of what indigenous material culture looks like and instead focus on how individuals materially and contextually constructed or expressed identities—those of traders, laborers, spouses, warriors, ritualists, seamstresses, field hands, men, and women—in colonial settings with the resources at hand. In these ways, we can still hold onto the promise of previous culture contact studies that reveal the singularity and complexity of Native persistence, survival, and change but can now contextualize them within the last 500 years of colonialism.

### Conclusion

North American archaeologists face several predicaments in the study of indigenous people in the “contact period.” How do we analyze their experiences in ways that simultaneously admit the harshness of colonial intrusion and capture the meanings of lived lives? How do we divest our studies of autonomous, bounded cultures and replace them with individual agents negotiating cultural practices and discourses in multiethnic settings? How do we forge better ties with archaeologists working on the African Diaspora and enslavement? How do we come to grips with the legacy of colonialism that helped to define our discipline of North American anthropology? In part, the answer lies in revisiting our disciplinary terminology and the implications of our work for the descendants who bear the legacy of colonialism. As highlighted above, both of these turns suggest that archaeologists need to be very careful when using “culture contact” as a conceptual device in situations that are clearly colonial.

Culture contact sounds as though entire cultures come into contact via brief encounters; as though the collision happened between autonomous cultures that remained bounded; and as though colo-

nial relations of power, labor, economy, and identity carried little weight. In North America, culture contact archaeology typically refers to studies of the Native side of European–indigenous encounters. On the other hand, colonialism emphasizes individuals struggling with power, domination, and economic transformation; underscores long-term episodes of violence, oppression, and negotiation; admits individuals forging their way into new worlds and identities; and recognizes no bounded cultures while also recognizing the possibilities of ethnogenesis and cultural survival and revitalization. Many North American archaeologists who focus specifically on colonialism emphasize only the European aspects: colonies, colonial policies, and colonial government. Interestingly, this is very much unlike our colleagues who work in Mexico and the rest of Latin American and tend to keep colonialism in the foreground. For North America, what we need is a sophisticated archaeology of colonialism that centers on indigenous peoples and their relations with, and in spite of, colonizers and settlers.

I do not suggest that we must abandon a notion of “contact,” and I do not seek to exclude from this genre those archaeologists who do not work on clearly colonial settings but want to focus their perspectives around a notion of culture contact. We certainly have much to discuss. Similarly, I do not think that archaeologists should agonize for hours over whether or not they have a culture contact or colonial case. Instead, we should take quality time to understand the colonial and postcolonial literature and to trace out the implications of terminology for research and for descendant communities. The need for reconsidering terminology is particularly salient for the archaeological studies that move beyond “first contact” situations to examine the colonial worlds that indigenous people navigated for decades, if not centuries. Referring to this research as the “historical archaeology of indigenous people” (see Rubertone 2000) perhaps marks a step in the right direction. We may, in fact, find that neither *colonialism* nor *contact*, as terms, best captures the complete process of entanglement in all of post-Columbian North America. Regardless, the point remains that we need to return the historical realities of colonialism *and* contact to the places and times where they belong. Conflating them will continue to prove detrimental to our abil-

ities to recover realistic pictures of the Native American past and to converse with those who find our archaeological work interesting or pertinent to their lives.

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## Notes

1. A recent redefinition of colonialism offered by Gosden attempts to understand that although colonialism in the modern world is different than anything preceding it, the process shares with earlier versions in Rome or Uruk the central role of material culture: “Colonialism is not many things, but just one. Colonialism is a process by which things shape people, rather than the reverse” (2004:153). I suspect that this approach will prove useful for comparative studies of colonialism, but I do not opt for this broad definition in this article. Much of what I discuss as North American colonialism concerns what Gosden calls *terra nullius* and “middle ground” colonialisms. *Terra nullius* has as its characteristics the “mass death of indigenous inhabitants; technologies of transport, communication, production and militarism of unusual sophistication; the drive supplied by the capitalist world system to seek new raw materials and markets, and which provided a supra-national set of values; ideologies such as *terra nullius* which provided the ideological and legal basis for taking over land, plus hardening categories of racism creating a hierarchy of human beings and allotting different forms of labour and reward suitable to each, the Christian church and ideology which offered other sets of global organization and the necessity to save the pagans” (Gosden 2004:27).

Middle ground colonialism was “created through a mutually beneficial exploration of differences in the form of sociability on all sides and the values so produced. While not beneficial to all the individuals involved, none of the participating groups was disadvantaged, although the newly extended field of social action added a new dimension to social action which was impossible for anyone to control” (Gosden 2004:31). Gosden offers the North American fur trade as an example, where “it was not always the power and values of the colonizers that came to dominate. Rather, it is very common for new cultural mixes to arise out of colonial middle grounds” (2004:113).

2. Fontana’s distinctions are based on the kinds of artifacts present rather than on any aspects of social or historical processes. Archaeologists have adhered to something akin to Fontana’s model, but they tend to have retained only the categories of “protohistoric,” to refer to sites before full-scale European colonization but with some contact and documentation, and “contact” (a.k.a. “historic”), to refer to times of sustained European interaction with Native Americans and subsequent extensive written documentation. I find the design-

nations *historic* and *protohistoric* deeply problematic for reasons that parallel my concerns with *contact*. As far as nonarchaeologists are concerned (e.g., cultural anthropologists, students, the public, Native Americans), these terms continue to grant history only to Europeans by virtue of literacy and their perceived dominance. The privileging of European literacy ends up turning a periodization for classification purposes into a substitute for process, particularly when the words carry political weight outside of specialist archaeological circles. The corresponding sibling term, *prehistory*, holds even more problems, as it continues in students' and public members' eyes to lump Native Americans with dinosaurs and mammoths. Even though professional archaeologists mean this term to refer to times without documents, I feel that we should probably discard it completely (see Nassaney and Johnson 2000:7).

3. Cobb's edited book serves as an example of how colonialism can be interpreted in poignant cases that span multiple regions and periods but simultaneously how the classification of studies under a "contact" rubric draws the overarching theme into confusing territory. For instance, are late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century commercial

whaling stations with Inupiat laborers in the Arctic properly part of a "contact era"? Cassell's (2003) chapter would suggest not, as he never uses the terminology; instead, he speaks of industrial labor within the realm of colonialism and capitalism. My own chapter reveals my growing personal difficulties with terminology as I alternate between *contact* and *colonial* in my discussions of nineteenth-century California (Silliman 2003). I mean this illustration not to criticize the content or vision of Cobb's volume in pulling together solid lithic studies that illuminate European-indigenous interactions and technological persistence and change but, rather, to underscore how a timely topic can get caught in a web of problematic terminology.

4. Some have even opted to refer grippingly to the study of these colonial encounters in southern Africa as the "archaeology of impact" (Hall 1993; Perry 1999) and have illustrated, like Schrire, though with different perspectives, the nature of colonialism in the modern world (Hall 1999).

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