Honours Research Proposal

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Mirani Litster
(2016376)

Supervisor: Dr. Lynley Wallis

*Frontier conflict: a comparison of the archaeological investigation of massacre sites in Australia and North America.*
Provisional Title:

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The Problem:

To what extent would a more widespread employment of archaeological techniques in the analysis of massacre sites aid in clarifying elements of the historical debate associated with frontier conflict within Australia? The comparison between North America and Australia (the prior having established more evidence for massacres as a result of archaeological excavation) allows for a model with which to compare the latter.

From this comparison, potential future prospects regarding how Australia could best utilise similar techniques could be discussed. In addition to this, the thesis would discuss the political and historical contexts of frontier conflict in Australia and North America.

The study is warranted because it deals with an 'issue of national importance' (Casey 2002:xii) and the central problems of the research will answer questions associated with a contentious and current debate. There has also been little archaeological inquiry into massacres sites within Australia and therefore it will highlight the contribution that this mode of investigation could potentially make towards clarifying elements of the associated historical debate. Furthermore, a comparison between the North American situation and the Australian situation has not previously been employed to better understand the role archaeology can play in understanding frontier conflict.

Significance and/or innovation:

In order to understand the significance of the proposed research it is necessary to establish the background of massacre historiography within Australia. In 1968 the term 'the great Australian silence' was coined by Stanner (1969:7). This refers to the issues 'we have unconsciously resolved not to discuss with them' (Stanner 1969:24-25). This includes an acknowledgement of the massacres perpetrated by European colonists of the Indigenous Australian inhabitants (Elder 1988:6). Stanner purported that this selective history was propagated by the prominent historians responsible for developing an excessively nationalistic history during the 1930s-1960s (Atwood & Foster 2002:1).

The advent of the 1970s saw an attitudinal shift to one which incorporated a greater understanding of the Indigenous Australian experience, however Atwood & Foster consider that this period was still quite 'one-dimensional in approach' (2002:4). By the 1980s a new approach
was adopted and this particular method of interpreting history incorporated a greater appreciation for the Aboriginal perspective (Atwood & Foster 2002:6).

This may have motivated the inclusion of many massacre sites into heritage registers, the significance of which appears to be largely determined through the oral and historical accounts of such events (Australian Heritage Database 1980a). The Myall Creek Massacre Area (Australian Heritage Database 1980a), the Risdon Cove Settlement Site (Australian Heritage Database 1980b), and the Pinjarra Battle Memorial Area (Australian Heritage Database 1992) are the most recognized sites to be incorporated into the Register of the National Estate, but others have also been included (Australian Heritage Database 1991).

The 1990s did not see a considerable amount of research into the 'great Australian silence' (Stanner 1969:7), but the debate over the apparent massacres of Indigenous Australians was re-invigorated by the work of historical revisionist Keith Windschuttle (Atwood & Foster 2002:15).

In Quadrant Windschuttle published an inflammatory argument that discounted the work of Phillip Knightley (2000:1-18). Windschuttle specifically criticised his analysis of the massacres at Forrest River, The Battle of Pinjarra and Waterloo Creek (Knightley 2000:107-114; Windschuttle 2000:8). Windschuttle considered that the evidence for certain massacres was 'weak' and that some massacres were 'the expression...of the rule of law' (Windschuttle 2000:8; Rowse 2003:1). This historical revisionism sparked a renewed debate and instigated the discussion witnessed at the relevant conference conducted at the National Museum of Australia in December 2001 (Casey 2002:ix).

This research will refine existing knowledge by indicating how the application of archaeology might benefit this debate. Haglund, argues that there are five main reasons for the excavation of mass graves. These are: to hold those responsible accountable, collect evidence, expose the truth of the atrocities to the world, provide dignity to the victims and importantly counteract historical revisionism (Haglund 2002:245; Haglund et al 2001:57). Whilst the archaeological investigation of massacre sites within Australia does not necessarily include mass graves, it is relevant in that it can be applied to this situation. Historical revisionism is important in questioning history (Rowse 2003:1), and it is Haglund’s opinion that it is the archaeological investigation that may provide a more objective historical account.

Nevertheless, it must be considered that archaeological investigation (that already conducted, and that potentially to be conducted) may not be of a significant contribution in expounding
elements of the historical debate if Indigenous communities do not wish for such work to be undertaken. This leads to an interesting consideration and further comparison between the North American situation and the Australian situation with regards to the interaction between archaeologists and Indigenous communities and the efficacy of this mode of investigation into their history.

Finally, the paper would be relevant in that recent legislation was proposed in the United States that addressed the issue of frontier conflict. President Bush, will, in the latter part of 2005, sign a bill that will memorialise and protect the Sand Creek Massacre area into an historic site (Soraghan 2005:8). The precise location of the massacre site was established in a series of archaeological surveys conducted by Scott in 2004 (Monnett 2005:847). This clearly motivated the legislative process and is exemplary of how archaeology can benefit the understanding of massacres conducted as a result of frontier conflict. Can Australia learn from the situation in the North America?

Design and methodology:
The research that would be undertaken to answer this question would primarily consist of the consultation of archival documents and in addition to this, secondary sources. There has been a vast amount of research conducted into the historical record of massacre sites within Australia (Bohemia & McGregor 1992:26-40; Elder 1988:6; Gardner 1980:47-53; Kelly & Evans 1985:44-50; Moore 1990:61-79) and as a result this will form the basis of the research.

However, because there appears to be less comprehensive publication associated with the archaeology of massacre sites in Australia it would be desirable to attain ethics approval to conduct interviews with individuals responsible for the archaeological investigations of massacre sites. This would be the primary avenue of approach for ascertaining the information associated with the archaeology of frontier conflict in Australia.

Furthermore, the Australian Archaeological Association conference is running a session dedicated to The Archaeology of Frontier Conflict in November 2005 (Australian Archaeological Association 2005). Papers from this session would be of value to the thesis and the session could potentially open relevant discussion that could also be applied to this research.

Also, because the topic appears in popular discourse, electronic resources such as Pro Quest® will be utilised to garner a complementary understanding of the current political and social context of the debate.
Regarding the situation in the United States, archival documents and secondary sources will be referred to as there appears to be more published work available on the topic (Monnett 2005: 847; Fixico 1991:211; Harrington 1926:277; James & Lindsay 1973:364; Turner & Morris 1970:320-331).

Literature review:
There is extensive literature associated with the actual history of massacres in Australia. These include publications that consider the major acknowledged massacre sites of Forrest Creek, the extensive massacres in Tasmania, Myall Creek, the Coniston Massacre among many others (Atwood & Foster, 2002: 2-23 Bohemia & McGregor, 26-40; Elder, 1988: 6; Gardner, 1980: 47-53; Kelly & Evans, 1985: 44-50; Moore, 1990: 61-79).


Windschuttle and Moran are undoubtedly in the minority regarding their opinion of the extent of ‘massacres’ in Australia. Frontier Conflict: the Australian Experience presents a selection of papers (including one authored by Windschuttle) from the National Museum Conference in 2001 (Casey, 2002:xi). The contents of this conference were unofficially instigated by the Windschuttle papers in Quadrant. Worth noting is that there appears be resounding disdain for Windschuttle’s revisionist proposals.


In addition to this, Skull Wars by David Hurst Thomas, deals with the ‘battle for Native American Identity’ (Thomas, 2000: subtitle). This text deals largely with the repatriation and study of the recently located ‘Kennewick Man’ (Thomas, 2000: xxi), however the Sand Creek Massacre (among others) is detailed within the text (Thomas, 2000: 52-54). It places the discovery of such sites within the current political and social context that Thomas considers
highlights the practice of 'scientific racism' in the United States (Thomas, 2000: 52-54). It is a recent discussion and therefore relevant to this thesis.

Definitions:

Massacre
There unfortunately are currently no provisions under the relevant international statute - the Statute of Rome, that provide a definition of a 'massacre' (United Nations 2002), however Friedrich specifies that it involves more than one individual being killed and that the attack was unprovoked (1996: 654).

It is worth noting that there has been discussion over the semantics of whether or not the frontier conflict can be considered genocide. This is largely fronted by Windschuttle who considers that genocide did not occur as the massacres were lacking 'political intent' (Windschuttle 2002: 101), however Knightley, on the other hand, considers the treatment of Indigenous Australians as comparable to that of the European Jews by National Socialist Germany during World War II (Knightley 2000:107). This debate will be mentioned but not considered in detail.

Frontier Conflict
'Frontier conflict' represents the conflict between Indigenous peoples and 'European settler societies' (Davison 2000:201).

Limitations of the Study:
The main limitation that will confront the research process is the time-frame in which it has to be conducted. The thesis will be due in May 2006. As a result ethics approval, if it is to be attained, will have to be appropriated early in the research process.

Secondly, little publication exists regarding the actual archaeological investigation of massacre sites in Australia. However, if little information is garnered regarding the archaeology of massacre sites, the implications from those in North America can be utilised to suggest possible directions.
Program or schedule:
(In addition to the thesis, CRIM3002, ARCH7000 and ARCH2002 to be undertaken in Semester 2, 2005, HUMN7000 will be undertaken in Semester 1, 2006).

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Reference List:


Soragahan, M. (2005) 'Sand Creek Massacre legislation on to Bush. The president is expected to sign the bill turning the area where Indians were killed into a historic site', *Denver Post*, 27 July: 8.


