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*Contemporary Archaeology and Conflict in an Age of Global Uncertainty*

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*Published in:*

Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Archaeologica

*DOI:*

[10.18778/0208-6034](https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-6034)

[Link to publication](#)

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Symonds, J. (2019). Difficult Pasts and Haunted Presents: Contemporary Archaeology and Conflict in an Age of Global Uncertainty. *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Archaeologica*, 34, 5-21. <https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-6034>

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## **Difficult Pasts and Haunted Presents: Contemporary Archaeology and Conflict in an Age of Global Uncertainty**

### **Introduction**

My observations are based on recent developments in historical and contemporary archaeology in the UK and the US and have been chosen to highlight some of the ways in which archaeology has been used to explore the remains of 20<sup>th</sup> century wars and political violence, along with ongoing racial and ethnic conflicts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is no secret that we live in difficult times and we should perhaps openly acknowledge that academia, and the humanities in particular, are under assault from the supporters of neoliberalism. The introduction of high tuition fees in many universities in the West, along with poor job prospects and low pay in commercial archaeology, has meant that fewer students are choosing to study archaeology. Many universities have also chosen to shrink the breadth and content of archaeology courses to create broad brush American style liberal arts degrees. The word archaeology is actually disappearing from course catalogues as departments rush to reposition themselves in the academic market place and deliver new stripped down courses in “heritage studies”.

As a consequence of all of this it is easy to suggest that the discipline of archaeology is between a rock and a hard place. It is certainly the case that in many parts of the world, including Poland, archaeology has been reduced to playing two roles. It is either conducted as a business activity, where firms compete for contracts to document and remove archaeological deposits ahead

of new developments. Or alternatively, archaeology is seen as a form of public entertainment through television documentaries, or historical re-enactments. Neither of these activities provides a stable foundation for archaeological science (Kobyliński 2015: 163). And by focusing on fieldwork techniques both personas somewhat unhelpfully focus on what archaeologists *do*, instead of what archaeologists have to *say*.

So what can be done? There is no simple solution, no silver bullet. But the world is changing at an ever quickening pace and old disciplinary certainties are disappearing. In my view we need to radically re-think how and why we do archaeology. By that I mean that archaeologists need to make their work more *socially relevant*, and to thereby re-focus public attention on what archaeology can say about the major challenges that face humanity. Rather than myopically focusing on an ever receding past we need to consider how multiple pasts can inform the present. Archaeology can and should play a crucial role in contemporary society and should be integral to the process of heritage future-making (Cameron 2010; Holtorf, Høgberg 2015).

### Historical Archaeology and the Contemporary Past

Archaeology has traditionally served nationalism and modernity by informing individual and collective identities. In this way it helped to fill the perceived “black hole” that exists between the past and the present (Rathje, LaMotta, Longacre 2001). But in recent years postmodern theory has removed the sense of loss and nostalgia for the past from our work. Some would say that there has been a “loss of antiquity” (Hicks 2003). It has also been realised that archaeological techniques can be used to study and understand any form of material culture, from Stone Age tools to 21<sup>st</sup> century objects. The American archaeologist Bill Rathje was one of the first to point this out. Rathje reasoned that archaeology could be about more than connecting the present to distant pasts and argued that it was possible to study “the interaction between material culture and human behaviour, regardless of time or space” (Rathje 1979: 2). His famous garbology project succeeded in producing a socially-embedded critique of American consumer society (Rathje, Murphy 2001). The insight that Rathje provided into refuse disposal promoted an interest in re-cycling, and this has led one North American archaeologist to claim that “no other archaeologist has had a greater impact on the modern world” (Schiffer 2015: 179).

The idea that archaeology can be used to study modern material culture is now widely accepted and contemporary archaeology is an emerging sub-field

of archaeology. In the last 17 years several edited volumes have presented case studies in contemporary archaeology (Graves-Brown 2000; Buchli, Lucas 2001; Holtorf, Piccini 2009; Graves-Brown et al. 2013). According to one recent article studying the entanglements of contemporary materialities has “social relevance and meaning in ways that may not exist for archaeologies of earlier time periods” (Harrison, Schofield 2009: 198). This is a bold and potentially liberating stance. For if (Connerton 2009) then our efforts to document contemporary life may make a crucial contribution to future society.

### Really Useful Archaeologies and Archaeology as Psychotherapy

The idea that studying archaeological materials could create new and potentially radical ways of seeing was a key motivation behind postprocessual archaeology in the 1980s. Christopher Tilley, for example, was clear that the practice of archaeology is a form of socio-political action:

Archaeology should not primarily be concerned with the past for its own sake and as a means of escape from the socio-political reality of the present, but with using the past as a basis for strategic intervention in the present (Tilley 1989: 105).

So what should archaeologists be setting out to achieve? Is it possible to create really useful archaeologies? Matthew Johnson (1999), following the historian Hayden White (1987), has observed that:

[...] by definition our work serves to ironicize master narratives [...] we walk in a uniquely dangerous place of the human past, a space between often very powerful ‘master narratives’ of cultural and social identity and much smaller, stranger, potentially subversive narratives of archaeological material. Archaeology (has) the ability to render familiar things strange and reveal timeless things as transient (Johnson 1999: 34).

Archaeology, then, can stir things up. By unearthing new evidence it can provide different ways of seeing and provoke reflection and debate. It has been said that the act of archaeological excavation reveals that which should have remained invisible (Vidler 1992: 48). Michael Shanks has likened this process to a therapeutic encounter where a patient is asked to reflect and consider the relationship between past experiences and present behavior (Shanks 1992: 78). But how do archaeologists uncover a subject for reflection? Must we rely on good luck, and chance discoveries? Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas suggest that the archaeological process is far more than a “serendipitous and somewhat passive

notion of discovery” (Buchli, Lucas 2001: 17). Indeed, they argue that archaeologists use their skills to purposefully reconstruct that which is absent from the present:

Archaeologists constitute things in the present, not only conceptually but materially as well. This is a creative materializing intervention, which has redemptive and therapeutic powers which help individuals and communities cope with painful contradictions that otherwise would remain unarticulated (Buchli, Lucas 2001: 17).

So we should frame our subjects and gather evidence to tell stories which can be socially useful. Of course, thinking about archaeology in this way, as a purposeful socio-political intervention, arguably places a new burden of responsibility on the shoulders of archaeologists. After all, some people might say that it is really not up to archaeologists to decide what stories people need to hear. And there is of course the possibility that our actions might actually cause more harm than good. Gabriel Moshenska has made the important point that “good intentions are not enough in the complex ethical environment of conflict archaeology” (Moshenska 2017: 307). There is a real need to engage in an open and honest dialogue with public audiences, and to encourage plural debates with multiple voices. Only in this way can we hope to explicitly acknowledge the nuances and complexities of the evidence which we bring to light.

At times public involvement can pull archaeological work in quite unexpected directions. Moshenska gives an example of the archaeological excavation of a crashed World War II British fighter plane in London. It was known that the fighter had rammed a German bomber that was about to target Buckingham Palace, leading to a mid-air collision. The excavation, in 2003, therefore created a huge amount of public interest. Elderly local residents were assembled to reflect upon the event. When a television crew arrived the interviewer no doubt anticipated hearing tales of wartime camaraderie, and tributes to the RAF. They were therefore shocked when one elderly woman recalled, apparently with no sense of remorse, that a local mob had tried to capture and murder the pilot of the German bomber, who had survived the crash by parachuting to safety (Moshenska 2017: 311).

I whole-heartedly agree with Gabriel Moshenska’s assertion that: “the answer to the question ‘who owns the past?’ should be ‘nobody’” (Moshenska 2017: 311). However, I do think that there are times when boundaries need to be drawn. This raises the issue of should archaeologists take sides? Or should we be content to hide behind an imagined curtain of scientific objectivity? Alfredo

González-Ruibal has wrestled with this issue in relation to the mass political killings of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the politics of memory. His view is clear:

The archaeology of the contemporary past can make things public, re-assemble the parliament of things and add a tangible, experiential dimension to our knowledge of history. And above all, it can make us remember that ‘evil was here’ (Sontag 2003) not so long ago, behind our own homes, beneath our feet (González-Ruibal 2007: 19–20).

### Archaeology, Ethnography, and the Not Always Forgotten Past

“Difficult heritage” (Logan, Reeves 2008; Macdonald 2010) – this area of academic study has seen a great deal of interest in recent years. I am aware a huge amount of work undertaken has been undertaken in Poland investigating the sites of WWII atrocities. Polish archaeologists and forensic scientists have undertaken cutting edge research on mass graves (Trzciński, Borkowski 2015; Włodarczyk 2010). And work on holocaust camps is developing a new archaeological sub-field of holocaust studies. I will, therefore, not discuss holocaust archaeology further in what remains of this paper, as developments in this field are well-known in Poland and have already been discussed in the aforementioned and other publications.

I will instead offer some thoughts on how archaeology can be used as a form of therapy that may assist the process of recovery and reconciliation after the traumas and losses of armed conflicts. In addition to this I will go on to explore how contemporary archaeology can shine a light onto political injustices and crimes against humanity as they happen. Such politically motivated contemporary archaeological interventions have the potential to re-position archaeological work. By this I mean that rather than resolutely facing backwards and retrospectively devising a commentary of past events as a form of societal hindsight, contemporary archaeology can have a panoptic vision which addresses contemporary political problems and encourages dissent and social action, in the hope that this will lead to more equitable futures.

It has been argued that the world wars and totalitarian regimes which dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century may be understood as failures of modernity (González-Ruibal et al. 2008). It is certainly the case that the last hundred years or so have seen a proliferation of armed conflicts, genocides, and repressive behaviour linked to totalitarian regimes. There would therefore seem to be powerful incentives to explore 20<sup>th</sup> century wars and other abuses of modernity using

archaeological methods. As already noted, a critical panoptic archaeology can throw a spotlight onto political crimes. It can also identify the perpetrators of such crimes, and expose their motivations. This brings us back to the crucial points that archaeological interventions are socio-political acts and that by choosing to undertake archaeological work on such material archaeologists are taking a political stance and so should be explicit about this fact. In the words of Alfredo González-Ruibal:

How can we survey a concentration camp, excavate a trench or a mass grave, or study a derelict ghetto without getting involved in politics? [...] archaeology can be an original critical voice in the social sciences (González-Ruibal et al. 2008: 259).

In the remainder of this paper I will present three short case studies. Two of the case studies will examine the aftermaths of 20<sup>th</sup> century armed conflicts, from the First, and Second World Wars. The third case will examine the documentation of illegal migration and political responses in the contemporary world. In the last ten years there has been a proliferation of archaeological work which addresses 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts and violence and inequalities in the contemporary world. Space does not permit me to survey this field here. I would therefore suggest that readers who wish to further explore archaeologies of recent conflict or archaeologies of migration should refer to the *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, and the “Journal of Contemporary Archaeology”.

### Finding the Fallen: Honouring the Dead from World War I

In 2008 a mass grave containing the remains of 250 British and Australian soldiers who had been killed during an offensive on the Western Front in 1916 was discovered at Fromelles in Northern France. The discovery of this mass grave created practical and ethical problems. What was to be done with the remains of these fallen soldiers? Archaeological features and deposits are routinely recorded and removed ahead of new developments by commercial archaeological companies. But this discovery opened up complex issues relating to the proper treatment of war dead, state responsibilities towards the families of fallen soldiers, and the creation of national war narratives.

Ninety years after the end of the World War I there were only a handful of people still alive who had lived through or fought in the conflict. The so called “Last Fighting Tommy”, Harry Patch, the last surviving soldier of the war from any country, was 110 years old. When Harry died on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2009,

the Great War became an historical event that could only be known by means of historical or archaeological research. The discovery of the Fromelles mass grave was therefore especially poignant as it represented a period of intense trauma that was on the very cusp of history. The potential political significance of the mass grave was immediately understood by the British and Australian governments. Within a matter of months a team of forensic archaeologists and other specialists was assembled to recover and re-bury the remains of the soldiers with full military honours in a newly constructed Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery nearby. The recovery of human remains commenced in May 2009, and the last reburial was completed in the presence of HRH the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2010 (Loe et al. 2014: XXII).

I have chosen to discuss this project for a number of reasons. First, the large budget of around £3 million pounds that was necessary to complete the work was jointly funded by the Australian Department of Defence, and the UK Ministry of Defence. This naturally drew media and public attention to the historical ties that exist between the UK and Australia. In this sense it was an exercise in soft political power which used joint action in a past conflict to re-affirm the contemporary political ties which exist between the two nations. Second, in order to complete such a complex project it was necessary to create a public-private partnership. A British archaeological contractor, Oxford Archaeology, was appointed to undertake the work. In 21<sup>st</sup> century Western neoliberal economies specialist expertise is often maintained in independent commercial archaeological firms. Such organizations, which are akin to civil engineering or architectural practices, exist outside local or national government departments and compete for projects on the basis of their in-house skills, their track-record for successfully delivering commercial projects, and best value. Third, and finally, this project offers a clear example of how archaeological work can be used to create a sense of closure, while at the same time serving to forge new national narratives for the purposes of ongoing state-sanctioned forms of remembrance.

The Battle of Fromelles, which was fought over two days on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1916, was essentially a diversionary tactic that was intended to retake a German strong point known as the Sugar Loaf, thereby diverting German attention away from the Battle of Somme. Despite its relative brevity, the joint Australian and British assault at Fromelles epitomises the futility of trench warfare and exposes the shortcomings of poor planning and weak leadership. The German front-line, manned by the 6<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Reserve division was well-defended, and the assault proved to be a complete failure, leaving c. 2,500 Australian and British dead, with many more injured (Loe et al. 2014: 7).

The archaeological outcomes of the Fromelles project were remarkable. The remains of 250 Australian and British soldiers had been buried in eight mass graves behind German lines a few days after the fighting. The re-discovery of these graves offered a rare opportunity to scientifically investigate the skeletal remains of First World War soldiers before re-burying them in individual graves in a new Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Fromelles. The fallen soldiers had been hastily buried still wearing their uniforms. Almost 6000 artefacts were recovered by the excavators. These included military badges, insignia, and buckles, which offered clues to the rank and regiment of some individuals. There were also purses, toothbrushes, tobacco pipes, and other personal possessions which the victims had been carrying with them at the time of their death.

But to return to my suggestion that archaeology may be used as a form of therapeutic intervention, one of the important lessons that may be learned from this example is how archaeological techniques can be used to resolve long standing uncertainties. In this case forensic recovery techniques along with DNA research and the co-operation of living families allowed a total of 144 Australian soldiers to be identified by name, with a further 75 being identified as having served with the Australian army. Two soldiers were identified as being from the British army (Loe et al. 2014: XXII).

A BBC news report from 2010, when the exhumations were taking place, reflected on the significance of the project and quoted Richard Parker, aged 47, whose great uncle Leonard Twamley had been killed at the age of 20 while serving for the Royal Warwickshire Regiment at Fromelles:

Even if his body isn't found, in some respects his memory is even more alive now. By researching what sort of person he was, we now know much more about him. My grandmother died without knowing where Len was buried...this would bring proper closure to a family tragedy that goes back 95 years (Jackson 2010).

### Peleliu, Micronesia: Heritage Management, Reconciliation

My second case study comes from World War II, and a well-preserved island battlefield in the Pacific Ocean (Price, Knecht 2012). In September 1944 US Marines invaded Peleliu, a small island in the Republic of Palau in western Micronesia. Peleliu had served as a staging post for the Japanese advance across the Pacific and had a strategically important airfield which guarded the outer approaches to the Philippines and Japan. For this reason the island was heavily defended with a large Japanese garrison of hardened fighters. At this late stage in WWII the Japanese commanders on

Peleliu had realised that it would be impossible to defend the beaches of the island for any length of time against incoming marines. The decision was therefore made to dig in and to defend the whole of the island, making use of the natural gorges and caves in the high ranges of the Ombleblochel Mountains (Price, Knecht 2012: 8). This unprecedented shift in tactics resulted in an “exceptionally vicious battle” (Price, Knecht 2012: 5). The Marine mission, which had been planned for 4 days, extended to 74 days of continuous fighting. The fatalities on both sides amounted to 16,000 men, and of the 11,000 Japanese servicemen who were defending Peleliu only 19 survived (Price, Knecht 2012: 11–13).

The ferocity of the fighting which took place on Peleliu in September 1944 is shocking. The Japanese garrison had defended 608 caves and created tunnel systems which allowed them to move and hide in the dense jungle within the island's upland interior. Marines were forced to clear each cave and tunnel individually with grenades and flamethrowers. They were supported by tanks and artillery, along with airstrikes and shelling from US Navy battleships. But the Peleliu garrison were compelled by public opinion in Japan and by ancient military codes to fight to the death, rather than facing the shame of capture and surrender, and mounted an obstinate defence. Marines resorted to pouring liquid fuel and napalm into the caves and igniting the mixture. They also used explosives and bulldozers to seal the entrances of caves and tunnels so that those inside were trapped and buried alive (Price, Knecht 2012: 9).

Remarkable as it may seem, the carnage that took place on Peleliu was quickly forgotten. It was just one of many brutal encounters in the Pacific theatre of war and was overshadowed by the fighting that took place in the Solomon Islands at Guadalcanal in 1942, and by the fight for the island of Iwo Jima in 1945, both of which were subsequently immortalised in post-WWII Hollywood films. Ironically, the memory of Peleliu was only revived in 2010 by another series of films, *The Pacific*, which were produced by Stephen Spielberg and Tom Hanks for American TV as a follow up to their acclaimed *Band of Brothers* series. *The Pacific* re-kindled interest in the Pacific campaign and unleashed a wave of battlefield tourism as the descendants of American veterans and others descended on the island, often intent on collecting WWII artefacts as souvenirs.

This phenomenon led to a grant from the US National Park Service, and the Palau Bureau of Arts and Culture (BAC) was able to assemble an international team of conflict archaeology specialists, including Rick Knecht and Neil Price, from the University of Aberdeen, indigenous archaeologists, anthropologists, and an unexploded ordnance (UXO) disposal team. The team had a clear remit with three imperatives: conservation, tourism, and demining. It was hoped that archaeological recording of the WWII remains would allow sites

to be better managed, leading to a possible application for UNESCO World Heritage site status. And the demining, whilst serving to remove dangers to the island's population, was also intended as a first step towards the creation of sustainable heritage tourism schemes to assist the economic development of the island (Price et al. 2013: 13–16).

Peleliu is a poignant example of how attempts have been made to rehabilitate the site of one of the most ferocious battles of WWII. The island is still littered with UXO and human remains, but in this case the 21<sup>st</sup> century clear up and related research was about far more than the creation of memory and state-sanctioned honouring of the war dead. The international team of archaeologists and anthropologists were assembled in Peleliu in response to an increase in battlefield tourism and looting, and the need to develop sustainable and safe forms of heritage tourism.

Neil Price and Rick Knecht offer a different perspective on their work in Peleliu in a second article (Price et al. 2013). Here they explore how the material culture of conflict can shed light on the “multicultural histories of the fighting” so as to enable the battlefield to stand as a “lasting, reflective memorial to all those whose lives it touched” (Price et al. 2013: 193). This article examines the neglected narratives of the Japanese soldiers and Korean and Okinawan forced labourers and the Japanese and Palauan women who may also have been present in some caves. It also examines the tensions of race and class within the Marine Corps, and how the wartime experiences of African-American, Hispanic, and Native American soldiers may have differed according to their ethnicity and social status. The numerous battlefield memorials to both Japanese and American soldiers are also discussed in detail, showing how the process of memorialization can encourage reconciliation and reflection upon the futility of war (Price et al. 2013: 219–238).

One of the most significant contributions of this second article is the detailed consideration that it gives to indigenous Palauan perspectives. While primarily tasked with mapping and recording the WWII combat zones, the international team also paid attention to the presence of pre-war features from the Palauan villages, structures, middens, and sacred sites, which were damaged or destroyed by the fighting. This work revealed elements of a hitherto invisible pre-conflict landscape and added time depth to the investigations, making the project far more than a documentation of two and a half months of fighting in 1944 (Price et al. 2013: 220–225). Price and Knecht's concern for the contemporary indigenous inhabitants of Peleliu shines through in their discussion of how the horrors of WWII have left many haunting presences on the small island (Price et al. 2013: 225–228). The many ghost and spirit stories that were collected by the team revealed the level of anxiety which was still prevalent in the island as a consequence of having the remains of so many dead soldiers within the island's caves and landscapes: “The ‘foreignness’ of the

dead was a consistent theme, the idea that they did not belong in Palau; they were not wanted” (Price et al. 2013: 228).

By retrieving and removing the remains of the foreign soldiers, and arranging for their respectful disposal, the team were thus addressing a key concern of the indigenous population. This allowed the islanders to take back the emotional and spiritual ownership of their island from foreign invaders. So in this example therapy and closure were enacted in multiple ways. Aside from encouraging some form of reconciliation between the former warring nations through a process of memorialisation, and the careful long term management of the battlefield, the project also helped to restore indigenous rights.

### **Migrants and the US-Mexican Border: Contemporary Archaeology as Political Action**

My final case does not come from a distant conflict, or for that that matter from an official war between states, but from a contemporary archaeology project in the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona. The Sonoran Desert forms part of the US-Mexican border and hundreds of Mexican migrants die there every year as they attempt to gain unauthorised entry into the US. This phenomenon is being studied by Dr Jason De León's Undocumented Migration Project (UMP) at the University of Michigan. De León's research is a mixture of archaeology, ethnography, and forensic science, and collects spatial and material data on the movements and strategies of unauthorized migrants. De León and his co-workers are explicit about their motivation for mapping the residues of migrant movements and openly state that their work is intended to inform the public discourse on migration into the US: “Insofar as naming and describing diverse types of sites helps to shape the objects of this discourse, we suggest that classification may further aid critique and political action” (Gokee, De León 2014: 133).

De León's research articles explore the materiality of migration by documenting the types of material which are discarded by migrants, along with evidence for the use and adaptation of materials. The challenge of crossing a desert with temperatures in excess of 115 degrees Fahrenheit has led to the growth of a complex Mexican smuggling industry which supports would-be migrants with specialised supplies. Dark clothes and black water bottles are favoured in the belief that they will allow migrants to evade detection by border guards. But in reality the dark colours only soak up the heat and lead to overheating and water that is too hot to drink (De León 2012: 484–485). And rather than wearing hiking boots, the most common forms of shoes which have been found discarded in large numbers are inexpensive sneakers. Migrants often think that these shoes will allow them to fit in when they reach the

US. But the sneakers are inappropriate for desert walking and lead to friction blisters or more serious foot injuries (De León 2012: 486–487).

De León's close study of migrant artefacts is a politically charged "materializing intervention" (Buchli, Lucas 2001). Instead of simply seeing plastic bottles and shoes as trash, discarded in the desert, his work has allowed these items to be linked to human suffering and to the strategies which migrants have devised to support their unauthorised entry in the US. But there is more to this research. Every year several hundred migrants die while attempting to cross the desert. Their skeletonized remains are periodically collected by US border patrols and classed as "recovered human remains". De León has noted that this terminology glosses over the actuality of migrant deaths: "[...] referring to migrant death sites as 'human remains' may work to sanitize precisely the sorts of necro-political and structural violence that a dead body in the desert should be calling attention to" (Gokee, De León 2014: 151).

In his 2015 book *The Land of Open Graves*, De León produces a scathing critique of so called Prevention through Deterrence (PTD) the federal border enforcement policy that encourages migrants to cross the border in unpatrolled areas leading into the desert. For 20 years this policy has failed to deter border crossers and has turned the Sonoran Desert into a killing field as thousands of undocumented migrants attempt to cross the border from Mexico into the US. The distribution of artefacts and dead bodies suggest that migrants are being lured into the desert at points where a crossing would take several days and survival is unlikely. The rugged landscape and the harsh climate of the Sonoran Desert are therefore being used as a natural line of defence which frequently leads to certain death for those who enter. By studying the material now and interviewing potential migrants face-to-face in the border lands of northern Mexico, De León creates a powerful contemporary archaeology which makes a direct contribution to a crucial public discourse in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. His work has not only exposed the motivation and desperation of would-be migrants, but has also shed light on the cynical tactics of US border policing.

## Conclusion

In this article I have worked from the well-worn postprocessual premise that archaeology is a socially-embedded and inherently political practice. I have argued that archaeology can have important therapeutic powers and can help individuals and communities to deal with deeply buried traumas. These case studies illustrate approaches to difficult heritage from World War I and World War II and show the different ways in which a sensitive approach to war dead, conflict landscapes, and memorialization can be used as a form of therapy that encourages closure and reconciliation. The second case study, from the Pacific island of Peleliu, also

serves to demonstrate how archaeology can serve indigenous land rights, restoring a sense of spiritual ownership of the island to its indigenous inhabitants and paving the way for a sustainable cultural tourism industry. My third case study explored unauthorised Mexican migration across the US border in southern Arizona. I included this case study to make the point that contemporary material culture can be studied to address current political debates.

I will finish by re-iterating my central point. As archaeologists we should work to ensure that our research is socially relevant and addresses the major challenges that face humanity. These are many and varied, but our world has become more uncertain in the last year and the prospect of global conflict is probably closer now than at any time since the end of the Cold War. The present incumbent of the White House has taken to issuing opinions, and sometimes threats, by Twitter. I would therefore like to end by quoting a tweet. But this is not a tweet from Donald Trump, but from former President Barack Obama. The tweet, which makes use of a quotation from Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom* appeared on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2017, following the violent events at a far-right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. It has since been recognised as the "most liked" tweet in Twitter's history: "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite" (Lee 2017).

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## Summary

### Difficult Pasts and Haunted Presents: Contemporary Archaeology and Conflict in an Age of Global Uncertainty

This article examines the role of archaeology in contemporary society. It works from the premise that archaeology is a form of socio-political action and explores some of the ways in which archaeologies of the recent past can have therapeutic or cathartic effects. Three case studies are presented. The first two focus on the recovery of war dead and the memorialization of conflict landscapes at Fromelles, in northern France, and Peleliu, in Micronesia. The third explores the materiality of unauthorised migration in the US-Mexico borderlands of southern Arizona. The central argument presented in this article is that in an age of global uncertainty, where support for the humanities is in decline and respect for academic knowledge is diminishing, archaeologists should re-position their work to more clearly focus on contemporary social issues. If archaeology is to survive as a discipline it must be seen as being socially relevant research, with the capacity to contribute to contemporary public discourses.

**Keywords:** contemporary archaeology, difficult heritage, conflict, psychotherapy

## Streszczenie

### Trudne przeszłości i nawiedzone teraźniejszości: Współczesna archeologia i konflikt w erze globalnej niepewności

Autor analizuje rolę archeologii we współczesnym społeczeństwie w oparciu o założenie, że dyscyplina ta jest także formą działania społeczno-politycznego, i jednocześnie zajmuje się potencjalnymi efektami terapeutycznymi lub oczyszczającymi niedawnej przeszłości. W artykule przedstawione są trzy studia przypadków. Dwa pierwsze koncentrują się na poszukiwaniach szczątków osób poległych w czasie wojny oraz upamiętnieniu krajobrazu

konfliktu we Fromelles w północnej Francji oraz Peleliu w Mikronezji. W trzecim przedstawiona jest materialność nielegalnej migracji na pograniczu amerykańsko-meksykańskim w południowej Arizonie. Autor podkreśla, że w dobie globalnej niepewności i malejącego poparcia dla nauk humanistycznych oraz szacunku dla wiedzy akademickiej, archeolodzy powinni w większym stopniu skupić się na współczesnych problemach społecznych. Jeśli archeologia ma przetrwać jako dyscyplina, należy ją postrzegać jako badania ważne społecznie, zdolne do współtworzenia współczesnych dyskursów publicznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** współczesna archeologia, trudne dziedzictwo, konflikt, psychoterapia

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