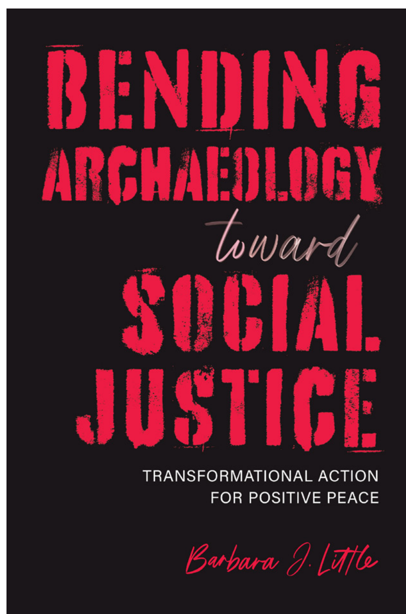

Barbara J. Little, 2023 *Bending Archaeology toward Social Justice: Transformational Action for Positive Peace,* Tuscaloosa AL: The University of Alabama Press in cooperation with the Society for Historical Archaeology, pp. 172+xvii; illus; A$61 (ppk).

Reviewed by Michael Lever.

I had keenly anticipated the arrival of this work. Although short (123 pages) its title resonates significantly with my personal vision of ethics as a primary motivation to engage in archaeology, in order to address wrongs of the past as they are manifest in current power structures. Barbara Little has worked widely in cultural resource management. hoped that her work would bring perspectives and insights into commercial archaeology, the field in which I am currently employed, particularly in a manner relevant to Australian practice.

Little does not fit comfortably into archaeological career trope definitions – at least not from her LinkedIn profile. With an undergraduate degree from Penn State University, and a Masters and PhD from SUNY University At Buffalo completed in 1987, her primary workplace has not been in academe, but a term of nearly 32 years at National Parks, up to 2012 as an archaeologist and subsequently as a Program Manager, Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education. The University of Maryland Department of Anthropology lists Little as an Adjunct Professor, noting that she had taught there from 1989 to 1992. Despite not being entrenched in the academic sphere, she has published extensively in full book format with at least five works on the topic of heritage, heritage assessment and evaluation. Little is then well placed to comment on the coalface of archaeology as it interacts with development and the ethical quandaries that arise from this, as well as being active in research and publishing spheres.

The current work is presented as the first in a series *Archaeologies of Restorative Justice* jointly published by the University of Alabama and the Society of Historical Archaeology (SHA). The series is driven by the efforts of the SHA to reform itself through recognition and address of inequities including racial and gender bias. The term Restorative Justice refers to processes in which not only are past wrongs identified, but ways are sought to heal and offer recompense for such wrongs – as contrasted with the more common notion of retributive justice. I would put it more broadly that the purpose of all archaeological theory and practice is ethics. That is, if the purpose of these endeavours is to assist in approaching truths of the past, and truth is an ethical value.

Archaeology has from outset been embedded in ethical debate whether overt or not. It has regularly engaged in practices likely unethical by standards of the time, and often certainly unethical by the later standards of societies that are left with the burden of repatriating or compensating for past archaeological activities. Balzoni, Elgin, Layard, Mellaart, Mulvaney, and so many more. The tags on unrepatriated archaeological objects in collections around the world bear the names of those who gathered them in the sake of varying values including empire, wealth and science, the worldviews of which without question overruled the rights of local and descendant communities to determine the fate of their own material heritage.

This sense of entitlement of archaeologists to the material record is not a historical concern but is a current issue. In New South Wales (NSW) where I am based, the material record of Aboriginal people is subject to the NSW *Parks and Wildlife Act* (1974), an almost 50-year-old and unrevised piece of legislation in which the legal definitions of Aboriginal heritage were reached without consultation with Aboriginal people. NSW, one of Australia's larger states with a substantial Aboriginal population, is the only state to still operate without standalone Aboriginal Heritage Legislation – let alone legislation that empowers Aboriginal people to define and determine the fate of their material heritage. The move beyond recognition of First Nations rights, to reach decolonisation of archaeological research methodologies and the activities that implement them, is a field gaining increasing traction among First Nation academics and allies e.g. Tuhiwai Smith (2022).

The issue of ethics in archaeological practice in Australia is highlighted by the following: In Australia, many professions require practitioners to hold membership in governing professional bodies. These bodies both authorise the individual to practice, and also police ethical practice among members. Examples include the Medical Board of Australia, the Victorian Institute of Teaching, and Engineers Australia. There is no such mandatory requirement regarding archaeology in Australia. Some states such as Victoria issue lists of approved Heritage Consultants (Heritage Victoria, 2023).

These lists are based on formal qualifications rather than ongoing evaluation of ethical conduct. The only hurdle-based professional organisation for archaeologists in Australia is the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc. (AACAI). of which I am a member. AACAI membership is very low as a proportion of all consulting archaeologists in Australia. There is an explicit AACAI code of ethics, however there is no capacity to regulate the conduct of non-members, and little to no oversight or capacity to regulate the conduct of members. Anecdotally, in the approximately ten years of my tertiary archaeology education in Australia (allowing for part-time candidature), I received no education on archaeological ethics other than the standard administrative 'ethics' approvals required for post-graduate research. In stark contrast, my education degree contained constant overt and implicit consideration of ethics. Given all the above, a work that purports to bend archaeology towards the ethical concerns of social justice should be of inherent interest to those working in archaeology. Whether Little's brief work succeeds in this grand aim is questionable. As I will illustrate in some greater length below, the brevity of the work means that it transitions rapidly from highly compressed and dense theoretical considerations to generally scant case models with little room to flesh out in depth the interrelationships between theory and practice, let alone express theory in a digestible manner.

Despite the extent to which they may be overpowered in this brief book by dense discussions of theory and brief case studies, the notion of Restorative Justice and the understandings of human relations that underpin it are deeply core to the personal values from which Little writes. She appeals to the potential of 'archaeology's role in recognising and lifting up the sacredness of humans' (p. xvii). The sacred nature of humanity is not a notion I have often encountered in archaeological texts. Further, it is hardly usual to have love appealed to as a core value for archaeological action, yet this is precisely Little's proposition, 'At its core this book is about love… This book asks archaeologists to cultivate that love and bring it to the power of archaeology to join the struggles for healing, justice, and a thriving world' (p. 2). The concept of love referred to here is not expanded upon, and for all the centrality that Little places on it, the word itself is only mentioned a handful of times throughout the book. Love apparently has a self-evident meaning for Little.

Little demands a social justice based on love and appreciation of the sacred nature of humanity. However, her definition of the meaning and origin of the notions of social justice appears to be wholly based on the works and thinking of economic and rationalist philosophers, rather than on this undefined notion of love identified above. She cites Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, John Rands, Charles Mills and Martha Nussbaum in drawing the origins and current understanding of Social Justice as a concept based on rationality, fairness and reciprocity. This is tied to a brief sketch of past archaeological approaches to matters of ethics among archaeological authors in the USA. These attempts have primarily consisted of academic efforts to decolonise the discipline. Little places her work within the framework of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (2015), a set of ambitious aims intended to be reached by 2030, epitomized by the first goal: 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere'.

The book is arranged with an introduction and six chapters: Introduction: Archaeology and Social Justice; 1 Violence, Peace and Social Justice as Positive Peace; 2 Cultural Domain of Power; 3 Direct Interpersonal Domain of Power; 4 Structural and Disciplinary Domain of Power; 5 Climate Justice; 6 Reality, Hope, Imagination.

Chapter One opens with a theory laden exploration of types and modes of violence that exist on structural, cultural and individual levels. and a deeper exploration of key literature that Little draws on when outlining her definition of social justice. The chapter is reminiscent of the highpoint of post-processual theoretical explication of the late 1980's, replete with sequential quotes from authors invoked as authoritative and who are likely to be unfamiliar to the average archaeological reader. It includes chunky block diagrams and a detailed flow chart. This section reads more like a shorthand literature review than it does an invitation to the reader to engage.

In this chapter Little introduces her key conceptual innovation, the unwieldly named 'Diachronic Transformational Action' which consists of three parts (p. 33). The first part, 'Diachronic', is named such as it analyses the relationship between webs of power in the past and present, particularly through Walther Benjamin's notion of now-time, in which the past is pulled into and disrupts the present (p. 37). The second part, 'Transformational', reflects the aim to disrupt all three domains of established power, namely cultural/hegemonic, direct/interpersonal, structural/interdisciplinary. Lastly, the field of 'Action' is an overarching demand for cooperative effort in the demolition of the above-mentioned structures of power.

The chapter closes with a rapid jump to a potential example of community-based and structure-challenging archaeology, that of the African Burial Ground Project in Manhattan. Unfortunately, this depiction is too brief for those not already well familiar with the project to gain an understanding of just how it may have reflected and embodied the aims that Little seeks to demonstrate. There is however a concept that emerges from description of the African Burial Ground Project that is surely essential to commercial archaeology, and most pertinently in our case, the practice of Aboriginal archaeological heritage management. This is the explicit recognition that the archaeologist has two clients – the 'business client' who has engaged the archaeologist, and the 'ethical client' – the descendant or residential community to whom the archaeologist has an obligation beyond the strictures of legislation (I would add a second ethical client – the heritage and archaeology itself). Little mentions commencing efforts in USA commercial practice to involve descendant communities in archaeological work

through training and employment. Interestingly this has current parallels in Australia where at least two companies (Comber and Associates and Artefact Heritage and Environmental Services) have employed and are training Aboriginal staff to take on roles in heritage management to the extent permitted by current legislation for individuals without tertiary qualifications.

Chapter Two is highly USA-centric, basing notions of social justice in documents such as the USA Declaration of Independence and Constitution, yet several points made by Little apply well to other colonised countries including Australia. Little observes the way history as taught in the USA has long focused on heroic narratives of conquest within and without its territories, resulting in an ahistoric public consciousness of the detailed domestic past among many of its citizens. These gaps have been used by disempowered groups such as women and Black Americans to forge for themselves histories and historical contexts. Similarities may be observed in Australian history and archaeology.

More broadly, and highly applicable to Australian history, is Little's cogent observation that 'nothing in the history of the United States makes sense except in the context of whiteness' (p. 46). This of course is not a statement concerning race rather she cites Lea & Sims (2008: 11–12), that whiteness is a 'complex hegemonic and dynamic set of mainstream socioeconomic processes, and ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting (cultural scripts) that function to obscure the power, privilege, and practices of the dominant social elite'. Little proposes it is the social justice responsibility of archaeology to investigate and expose the historical roots of this white privilege in archaeology, the roots of which almost invariably have their source in overt racism, and to reform current archaeology accordingly.

Little proposes that it is not sufficient to identify racism in others and in the discipline of archaeology generally in order to achieve such reforms. Drawing on Henze and Green (2020), she identifies two alternative phases of reflection on racial identity, one phase that does not tend to result in meaningful change, and the second that is likely to reach such change. In the first phase, racism is noted by the individual as immoral but is generally identified as a practice engaged in by others. The second phase or mode of reform is characterised by a personal introspection which the individual identifies and examines their own racist tendencies and the entitlements on which they are based, leading to an acceptance of the need for change at the personal and disciplinary levels (p. 62).

This second phase may provide a bridge of sorts between Little's rational definition of social justice, and her call for love as the driver towards this. The second phase calls for personal introspection and what in religious terms could be described as meaningful penitence through the process of Restorative Justice. I assume that Little envisages that such introspection coupled with a love of humanity results in a desire to ensure that rationally defined social justice is available to all. Again, this chapter closes with brief (two pages) examples of pertinent case studies around the archaeology of Black Americans.

Chapter Three returns to Benjamin's notion of now-time and the concept that communities with painful pasts experience this pain in the present. In the face of mainstream attempts to portray the past and its pain as passed, such communities maintain and produce alternative histories that accompany their intergenerational trauma. The existence of all three of these factors – past pain, alternative histories, and intergenerational trauma – are generally denied by the white beneficiaries of historical and current social injustice, who often perceive accounts of past suffering as fictional, exaggerated or no longer relevant.

A somewhat lengthier case study section provides better insight to Little's theoretical points in this chapter. She provides case studies on sexual violence by Spanish colonists in California, statistics on lynchings in the southern states of the US between 1877–1950, the impact of First Nations child removal and boarding schools, and the important achievement in the passing of the 1990 *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act,* which somewhat redressed perceptions that First Nation Americans owned nothing – not even their ancestral remains.

Chapter Four commences with case studies of archaeology confronting structures of power and potentially meeting some aims of the SDG. This is accompanied by examples of manners in which unionist and socialist activism in the USA has succeeded in protecting the rights of workers. The complexity of studying and identifying processes of poverty and ethnic relations in the archaeological record are explored, noting the difficulty in accurately identifying manners in which past persons and society may have identified themselves as poor compared to the manner in which current archaeologists might perceive them. There is much said here about identifying poverty and processes leading to it in the past, but very little on how this knowledge may translate into eradicating poverty in the future, which is the aim of the SDG on which Little has focused here. Little's main proposal towards this here is the hope that current and future policy makers will be informed by archaeological insights to past poverty and will implement economic changes accordingly. To my mind this is at best an over optimistic and inflated view of the perception of archaeology by policy makers, who I believe are more likely to rely on qualified economic advisors and political agendas than they are on archaeologists in developing government policies.

Chapter Five depicts archaeology as uniquely positioned to demonstrate the relationship between humans and nature, and to transcend the nature-culture divide through understanding of the deep time interactions between humans and the environment. Little proposes that archaeology can provide insight to the effects of climate change on humanity through demonstrating the

demands for adaptation placed on past societies due to past environmental shifts.

Little returns to the concept of love as a prime mover. 'Archaeologists – indeed all people who love their home planet – must ask themselves how to repair their relationship with the Earth and with each other' (p. 122). I am cynical as to how many people would honestly profess a love for the planet rather than a pragmatic acceptance for the need to maintain and upkeep it.

Chapter Six provides a summary of the work's main points as provided here, returning again to the duality between violence as the obstacle to social justice, and love as the solution for it: 'Violence is the glue of an unjust society and that love is the glue in a just one. An archaeology of social justice finds that love and brings the power of the discipline to justice, healing and a thriving world' (p. 123). In brief, Little defines requisites of archaeology in the service of social justice in four points, that it must:

- Be just and fair
- Be based in humanity
- Be collaborative
- Be based in inquiry and imagination

To summarise, Little sets out an ambitious, but to my mind, insufficiently detailed vision for an archaeology that can drive social justice. There is a comparatively large amount of text given to theoretical background and the technical model of Diachronic Transformational Action. Yet only a very small amount of text is spent on defining the quality of love, which Little proposes as the essential driver of this change. From this lack of definition, I am left to assume that this love is to be taken as an all-encompassing and self-evident emotive desire for good. A problematic outcome of this is that love itself is highly culturally and situationally specific. With reference to examples provided above, we have long seen the impact that love of empire, money and conflicting religious convictions has had on the condition of humanity and the world. Although it certainly provides much food for thought, it is hard to conclude that this work meets the aims and objectives that it set for itself.

Critical evaluation aside however, Little's work brings to mind a pair of apocryphal images from anti-Vietnam War marches in the late 1960's. In one a young man places a carnation in the barrel of a USA Marine's gun pointed at him, in the other a young woman faces the guns of USA Marines, while holding a flower out before her. These were defining moments of Flower Power, and an expression if ever there was one, of the desire to share generalised undefined love, by a generation that hoped for a world that operated on love. As beautiful as these images are, and as much as I ache to thank these then-young people for their actions, the sad reality is that they changed nothing on the grander scale. The engines of war, the industries of wealth and death through arms supply, the power-mongers of the social elites, all continued their domination, to the deaths and suffering of millions of people. I deeply wish that love could reform archaeology and in particular commercial archaeology. But so long as commercial archaeology remains a competitive profit-driven industry that gains business through demonstrating efficient provision of service to developers, so long as those who seek it out as a career are overwhelmingly career-driven rather than values driven – then I suspect far more participants in the industry will be reading handbooks on efficient leadership, profit maximization techniques, and faddish wellness schemes than they will be pondering how to use love in order to diminish their profitability for the sake of social justice.

Academic archaeology in Australia has effectively become a private industry too, in which researchers need to generate funding through claims of maximum returns and elevated potential research impact. It is a hardscrabble world of direct competition between academics in which there is frequently even less funding scope for involvement of descendant communities than is the case in commercial archaeology, where such involvement is almost invariably legislated.

In conclusion, I hope that Little's book is simply the first in a series, a first blossoming, although barely bloomed, that will be followed by further works that will better demonstrate just how social justice can be served and enacted through archaeology. For the meantime, although I am not convinced, she has elucidated her vision in this work, and I suspend judgement to the practicality of her aims, I must congratulate her for holding out the first flower.

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