The concept of place has rarely been applied to the archaeological study of warfare. Given that cultural landscapes embody meaning, however, the idea that places can be the focus of competition makes it evident that they can also shape associated conflict. As archaeologists move toward a more nuanced study of conflict in the past, such considerations will take on increasing importance, although as of yet most such studies are heavily reliant on textual sources and overtly symbolic material culture. This paper presents a case study from Burnt Corn Pueblo, in the Galisteo Basin, New Mexico, USA, and argues that evidence for conflict there at the beginning of the 13th century CE can be usefully interpreted through Ancestral Pueblo concepts of place.

War and Place

War is the ultimate placemaker. Personal perceptions of battle typically focus on the human cost: lives lost, bodies maimed, families forever ruptured. In contrast, the relationship between warfare and the material world is envisioned largely in economic or strategic terms, such as capture of the enemy’s resources or loss of our own, and familiar terms such as ‘scorched earth’ are understood in this light. Neither frame of reference covers the intentional demolition of features that have no military value. There is thus particular shock when warfare involves the destruction of cultural monuments and historical sites, and we struggle to explain them as a consequence of pique or malevolence. Despite the human suffering associated with the Balkan wars of the 1990s, some of the most enduring images of those conflicts relate to the

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obliteration of mosques and churches (see Chapman 1994). The cheers that were reportedly heard when artillery fire struck the famous Stari Most bridge in Mostar, Bosnia, obliterating a landmark that had no strategic significance, seem particularly disturbing.

Understanding the annihilation of cultural monuments as a mode of conflict engages the idea of place, a topic that has received little attention from archaeologists studying warfare in prehistory. Until recently, our preference was for ancestors uncorrupted by violence, what Lawrence Keeley has termed the ‘pacified past’ (1996). One legacy of this preconception is that the conversation about prehistoric conflict remains focused on conceptually remote ‘core’ issues, such as the presence/absence of war or its fundamental motivations (cf. Ember & Ember 1997; Ferguson 1997; Haas 1990; LeBlanc 2003; Otterbein 2004). With few exceptions, prehistorians have most directly been concerned with what warfare tells us about human society in general, rather than in the processes of warfare within particular contexts. Despite general calls for a social archaeology of war (i.e. Parker Pearson 2005:26), it is telling that recent literature exploring this topic is heavily focused on the 19th and 20th centuries, emphasizing memorabilia, monuments, and overtly symbolic material culture rather than the empirical remains of war itself (c.f. articles in Gilchrist 2003, Saunders 2002).

A central reason for limited research on issues of place in the context of war in prehistory is that place is fundamentally concerned with meaning, traditionally a difficult subject to approach through strictly archaeological evidence. It is also the case that anthropological concepts of place and landscape rarely address their role in conflict (e.g. Feld & Basso 1996; Myers 2000; Rodman 1992; Schama 1995; Stewart 1996; Torren 1999; Weiner 1991). Indeed, place can seem inherently benign, a serene ordering of the world in space and over time, a ‘symbol of stability, a spatial and temporal anchorage’ (Munn 1970:46).

Inevitably, however, the idea of place must be linked with exclusion. Place demands priority, ownership, and occupation. Since place is entwined with order, social, natural, political, it plays a central role in reifying that order, particularly in the face of dissident perspectives (cf. Ashmore 2002:1178; Snead 2008b; Tuan 1979). Western Apaches told Keith Basso of being ‘shot’ by stories related to places in the landscape and thus compelled to conform to the culturally-constructed ideals they embodied (1996:56). Since places are not only the result of history or ‘dwelling’, but are also established through intent (i.e. Bradley 1993:5), placemaking must be considered a competitive process.

The ultimate manifestation of the relationship between place and conflict is destruction. Recent literature on destructive war in 20th century contexts