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Barbara Voss's discussion of Leland Stanford and the Chinese railroad workers that he employed reminded me of a line of Mark Twain's on anti-Chinese racism, which feels rather apposite in the current political climate:

No Californian *gentleman or lady* ever abuses or oppresses a Chinaman, under any circumstances, an explanation that seems to be much needed in the East. Only the scum of the population do it—they and their children; they, and, naturally and consistently, the policemen and politicians, likewise, for these are the dust-licking pimps and slaves of the scum, there as well as elsewhere in America. (Twain 1891 [1872]:397)

This represents something of an oversimplification, as we can see from Voss's paper and the collaborative research project from which it emerges, as well as highlighting the liberal perception of a meaningful distinction between the everyday oppression of street violence and harassment and the structural oppressions inherent in global capitalism.

For me, three points in particular stand out from this paper: first, the attempt to craft a new approach to the archaeology of migrant labor; second, a critique of the limitations of historical archaeological practice that necessitated this innovation; and third, a vigorous exercise in situated institutional autocritique. I want to examine each of these points in turn.

The silence of the Chinese railroad workers in the absence of diaries, letters, or other first-hand historical sources has de-individualized them as a group, even as historical archaeologists have unearthed a wealth of information on their clothing, food, and material culture. The archaeology of those whose lives are deemed disposable under capitalism is too often a

struggle against erasure, and resistance can take the form of restoring agency. What Voss's approach resembles most closely is an archaeological prosopography, and more specifically the "mass school" of prosopography as described by historian Lawrence Stone, focused on tracing the outlines of subaltern groups in broad brushstrokes, employing a variety of social-scientific and statistical methods. The archaeological study of Chinese railroad workers is particularly well suited to a prosopographical analysis, with a high degree of uniformity within the population in everything from cultural, linguistic, and geographical background to economic status and employment. There is a case to be made for further exploration of prosopography as a tool for archaeological studies of migrant laborers and other historical populations at the margins of capitalist society who, as Stone notes, "are dead and therefore unavailable for an interview" (1971:48): this chimes with Voss's view that material culture can provide testimony to lives and can overcome historical anonymity, even in the absence of individual names.

Voss's critique of the conventions and limitations of historical archaeology sets up and knocks down a few straw men, such as archaeologists' narrow focus on "sites" and the apparent "paradox" of people being more mobile than the structures and deposits that they create. But the meat of this critique lies in the point, made repeatedly if not explicitly, that, within an intricately networked and interconnected capitalist society, the excavation of the Stanford family home is part of the archaeology of the Chinese railroad workers whose surplus labor paid for its construction. Alongside breaking free of received notions of "site," Voss has powerfully undermined the notion that an intervention of this kind can ever be simply "an archaeology of" one clearly defined population, place, or pattern of behavior. This deliberate methodological reframing is based on an explicit recognition that artificial distinctions between interconnected lives and economies are aimed in part at eliding the everyday functioning of capitalism.

A superficial reading of this paper might find it strange that there is no explicit attempt to recover the agency or individuality of the Chinese laborers through the archaeological work, but here again Voss is struggling against the limitations of the material culture. The focus on futurity, and in particular on the senses of hope and risk, aims to reanimate the railroad workers as individuals situated in their own presents and making choices within a limited and tightly controlled set of circumstances. While the paper does not present much archaeological evidence that speaks to these choice-making behaviors, it offers a promising direction for historical archaeologies of individuals and communities living under intense constraint.

Turning finally to the self-situating concluding section of Voss's paper, I was reminded of a statement that I was obliged to include in a recent publication, stating that "no potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors." In light of the privileged connections to powerful institutions that enable most academic scholarship, this is as much of a lie (and almost as meaningless) as ticking the box marked "I have read and

agreed to the terms and conditions." This potential conflict of interest was brought home to me most powerfully by contemplating one of the largest contemporary analogs of the nineteenth-century Chinese railroad workers and their working and living conditions.

The rapid development of the Gulf states in recent years has led to an influx of migrant labor from India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and elsewhere in Asia, with the majority employed in construction and domestic service. Like the Chinese in the nineteenth-century United States, these workers arrive heavily indebted to agents and struggle to earn enough to cover their repayments, working long hours in intense heat and dangerous conditions. An ethnoarchaeological study of these migrant laborers and their elaborate networks of travel, financial remittances, communication, obligation, and debt might shed light on the lives of migrant laborers in the past (Khalaf, AlShehabi, and Hanieh 2015). Who is better placed to conduct such a study than the British, American, and French universities that have established branches and campuses in Qatar and Abu Dhabi, including my own employer, University College London (UCL)? However, such research is unlikely to be forthcoming from UCL, who have been strongly criticized in the UK Parliament for the treatment of migrant workers on their Qatar campus.