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Structural violence and the industrial landscape
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ABSTRACT
In the late nineteenth century, a new wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe came to the anthracite coal region of northeastern Pennsylvania. A form of structural violence existed, and as a result the newcomers were underpaid, underfed, worked in treacherous conditions, and lived in substandard housing. Today, coal extraction in the region is almost non-existent, although many industrial ruins and abandoned homes can be found throughout the landscape. While these ruins can highlight the grandeur of capitalism, a more pressing need is to understand how these ruins are reminders of the long-term exploitation of the working class and the implications of this exploitation for the contemporary community’s general health and well-being.

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Introduction
While the celebration of heritage is often about shared accomplishments, the issue of heritage becomes more complicated when the past is marked by tragedy, exploitation, and unchecked capitalism, which is the case for the communities living in the coal region of northeastern Pennsylvania. The majority of the region’s descendants are of Southern and Eastern European background and their relatives came to the area in a large migration wave in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Figure 1) The scientific racism prevalent at the time of their migration allowed society to draw racial distinctions between the Anglo-Saxons, the ‘English Speakers,’ and the non-Aryans from Southern and Eastern Europe. Scholars and politicians argued that the latter were from the very lowest stage of human degradation invading the American shores, thereby justifying their exploitation. Barriers to equality were in place and dictated by ethnic background (Ripley 1899; Guglielmo 1999, 174). The ruins on the northeastern Pennsylvania landscape serve as a reminder of the industrial past and the structural violence encountered by the new immigrants. What ruins are saved and remains visible and what is removed from the landscape is, in the long run, highly political. These ruined landscapes are more than aesthetics. They are about job loss, health disparities, and environmental degradation (Mah 2009, 2010, 2012; High 2013a, 2013b). The structural violence that existed over a century ago with the exploitation of the coal industry’s workforce continues to impact the contemporary communities who have decided to remain in this ruined landscape.

Johan Galtung (1969, 1990) notes that structural violence is embedded in social structures of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and elitism that do harm by preventing people from meeting their basic needs. Structural violence is difficult to see as it disenfranchises minorities and restricts their access to economic advancement, educational opportunities, and governmental
representation. Structural violence uses privilege without directly physically assaulting the subordinated group(s); however, the results are measurable – economically, physically, and psychologically (Žižek 2008). For instance, in the anthracite region, many foreign-born miners were unable to advance by taking the miners’ exam because of language barriers. In the late 1880s, laws were created that prohibited interpreters from translating the exam. In many cases the new immigrants were paid less than the ‘English speakers’ for the same tasks (Novak 1977).

Structural violence is often the cause of premature death and unnecessary illnesses and disability (Little and Shackel 2014). Forms of structural violence are evident as the new immigrant work force was placed in the most dangerous and life-threatening jobs. Oral histories with residents of a coal patch towns provide a glimpse into the physical and economic deprivations on everyday life in the coal region.¹ For instance, miners’ asthma was common and caused by the prolonged exposure to coal dust particles resulting in the accumulation of carbon in the lungs. One former miner remembers:

> The air was so bad coming home I took 6 rests or I wouldn’t have made it. . . .You get weak, you get headaches. Your temples you think are goin’ to push out the back of your head. . . .Oh, it’s terrible. It makes you very sick. You just keep on vomiting. You think your insides are goin’ to come out (F. Z. 1972).

Another resident of a coal patch town remembers his father being injured and his family trying to make ends meet. His father, ‘was in the hospital for 6 months. He was hurt so badly. No compensation or anything. I don’t know how we lived. But we didn’t die of starvation’ (S. Z. 1972). Another resident described how his brother was killed in a mining accident at age 22, leaving his wife and four children. ‘Then she used to go washing and do housework for people. She kept them going. She raised them all’ (C. F. 1972). One miner described surviving a gas explosion and becoming severely burned. He explained, ‘All the skin, it was hanging on the edge here. So I took it, and just pulled it off . . . and threw

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¹For instance, miners’ asthma was common and caused by the prolonged exposure to coal dust particles resulting in the accumulation of carbon in the lungs.
it in the ditch.’ The doctors gave him 2 hours to live, and if he survived those first few hours, he would have a good chance of living. He was out of work for one year (G. P. 1972).

Many workers were in perpetual debt to the company because they were poorly paid and had to use the company store and pay inflated prices. The laborers’ families struggled to maintain a high protein diet necessary for difficult working conditions. They were always on the verge of starvation, because of unemployment, underemployment, or because they frequently participated in strikes protesting unfair labor conditions. A few strikes were as long as six months. If protein did exist it tended to come from low cuts of meat, or preserved meats like ground beef and sausage (Shackel and Roller 2012; Shackel 2017, 2018a; Roller 2019). Corroborating evidence from oral histories and other historical sources, like contemporary cookbooks, indicate that these communities mostly relied on vegetables and starches for the everyday diet of laborers and their families. One patch town resident noted:

My mother used to cook lots of soups, lots of homemade bread. She used to make all kinds of dough things with the cottage cheese ... and with the cabbage... and stove rags... It’s not potato cakes, but stove rags. Then when winter’s coming we’d get one leg of a cow... We’d go to the shanty and how we’d cut a piece from that leg and then we’d fry that meat” (A. M. 1972).

She later described how they could survive a six month strike:

Well, a lot of people still in Eckley have enough food for 2 or 3 months.... You cannot live in the patch from today until tomorrow.... We had potatoes in the cellar and they never froze, and cabbage, and a barrel of apples (A. M. 1972).

Despite this long-term history of structural violence that persisted in the anthracite communities, the region’s memory of the coal industry often focuses on how anthracite ignited the Industrial Revolution. Narratives also include stories about the hard work and sacrifice of the newcomers, and how they survived, made ends meet, and made a successful life for themselves and their families (Tarone 2004). Collieries dominated the landscape with large-scale machinery, like breakers, as well as waste piles, known as culm banks. Shanty enclaves occupied by the newest and poorest workers surrounded the main villages and towns. The narrative of a once great industry developed as northeastern Pennsylvania became one of the first, and now one of the fastest, deindustrializing regions in the United States. The land is scarred from strip mining, waste is scattered throughout the landscape, and vestiges of old industrial building stand vacant.

Scholars have grappled with understanding the meaning of industrial ruins and how these ruins and ruined landscapes are perceived by different stakeholders (Vergara 1999; Woodward 2002; Shackel and Palus 2006; Trigg 2006; Pálsson 2012; Apel 2015). Nora (1996) argues that ‘[m]emory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present,’ thereby explaining the contradictions that can be found in the memorialization of industry. On the one hand these industrial landscapes support a memory of the power and achievements of capitalism, and at the same time they serve as a reminder of human exploitation and the consequences of deindustrialization. Strangleman (2013) argues that ruins can be a place of ‘uncritical sentimentalization of the past, one where tensions of gender and race, if not always class, go unnoticed, one where the destructive impacts of industry on health and environment are obscured.’

Mah (2010) explains, ‘The concept of the ruin implies sad beauty, majesty, glorious memory, tragedy, loss and historical import. ...[R]uins reflect pastness, romance and nostalgia, while at the same time representing risk, commodification and neglect.’ High and Lewis (2007) write that capitalism makes destruction seem inevitable, even progressive. Capitalism takes control over the landscape and moves workers and their communities to the margins (High and Lewis 2007). Edensor (2005, 8) sees ruins as evoking an aesthetics of disorder, surprise, and sensuality. They offer a glimpse into the past and they are a reflection of the boom and bust nature of capitalism. High (2013a) is critical of Edensor’s (2005) for aestheticizing ruins, without commenting on what happened at these places and trying to understand the wider social and political meaning of the
place. Weizman (2011, 111), in the same vein, notes that ruins are places whereby controversial events and political processes can be interpreted.

Nostalgia can cushion the shock of change and individuals can call upon nostalgia during times of distress, loneliness, and anomie. It can also provide identity continuity (Rudacille 2015). Smith and Campbell (2017, 612–627) argue for a type of progressive nostalgia, whereby visitor reactions at industrial heritage sites and the use of nostalgia can be potentially productive, positive, and future oriented. Smith and Campbell (2017, 613) note that:

The process of remembering contains not simply an understanding that the past was not perfect, but rather an explicit understanding that it was hard, difficult and inequitable. That which is remembered is done so with a sense of loss tempered with overt pride, empathy and gratitude, which is in turn underlined by a desire to assert a sense of communal belonging and sense of place in the context of rapid deindustrialization and social change.

Tim Strangleman (2013) points out that, ‘all nostalgic reflection questions memory in a critical way. We have, therefore, to be careful not to dismiss memory as “simply nostalgic”; rather, we have to be far more attentive in interpreting what that critical account of the past and present represents.’ The reality of inevitable decay and destruction explains that ruins can challenge the long-perceived notion of the benefits of capitalism (Lam 2013; Brown 2015; Smith and Campbell 2017). Cowie and Heathcott (2003, 14) caution us that creeping industrial nostalgia threatens to erase the meaning of the consequences of the deindustrialization on the economy, people, and the environment. They write, ‘we have to strip industrial work of its broad-shouldered, social-realist patina and see it for what it was: tough work that people did because it paid well and it was located in their communities’ (Cowie and Heathcott 2003, 15).

These ruined landscapes in northeastern Pennsylvania connote the uneven violence of capitalism. While some buildings and landscapes are maintained, others are left abandoned and allowed to deteriorate. The unevenness of the landscape has more to do with the capitalist accumulation than with any natural life-cycle (Mah 2010, 399). Mah notes, ‘Industrial ruins are produced by capital abandonment of sites of industrial production; they can be read as the footprint of capitalism, the sites which are no longer profitable, which no longer have use value’ (Mah 2010, 399; also see Harvey 2000; Cowie and Heathcott 2003).

Savage (2003) explains that, ‘The deindustrialized landscape, like a ruined battlefield that heals over, is ripe for commemoration. As the physical traces of the industrial age – the factories, the immigrant enclaves that served them, the foul air – disappear, the urge to reaffirm or celebrate the industrial past seems to grow stronger.’ However, Stoler (2013) encourages us to think about the concept of ruination when thinking about the ruins and the industrial past. Ruination is what people are left with, and what remains can include the lack of descent wage paying jobs, general poor health, altered landscapes, distorted and ruined social and personal lives. The signatures of ruination are urban decay, environmental degradation, industrial pollution and/or racialized unemployment – the refuse of a capitalist market that has since moved on (Stoler 2008, 200). It is important to recognize the people who live in these remains and the impact on their daily lives today (Stoler 2013, 9). Stoler (2008) explains, ‘Ruination is more than a process. It is also a political project that lays waste to certain peoples and places, relations, and things.’ Stoler (2008) also notes that ‘ruination is a corrosive process that weighs on the future and shapes the present.’ Understanding ruination is a way of understanding how the signatures of structural violence can be read on the contemporary landscape.

**Some early descriptions of the ruined anthracite landscape**

The impact of mining in the anthracite region was striking from the very beginning of the industry’s expansion, affecting people, communities, and the environment. In 1866, a guidebook writer questioned the benefits of coal and the impact on the landscape:
Improvements unquestionably have been made, and great ones too; but why, in carrying them out, it should be necessary to mar (and it would seem to have been done almost wantonly in many instances) the face of nature by stripping the hill and mountain-side of the growth and grove of trees . . . doth give us pause (Quoted in Goin and Raymond 2004, 31).

Culm banks developed throughout the region; these are piles, hills, and small mountain-like rounded features located near breakers. Culm is a derivative from Middle English or Welsh, the ethnicity of the first miners in the region, and refers to coal mine waste or inferior anthracite and includes rock, soil, and pieces of small coal too small to sell. (Other regions refer to these waste piles as tailings, gob piles, slate dumps, or boney piles.) While these culm banks are large, some reaching over 100 feet high, they represent about 50% of the material extracted from the ground. The other 50% is the coal that has been shipped out of the region. In 1869, a Dr. Holister wrote:

The eruptions of culm piles, heightened into pyramids, all formed of the purest coal, around every breaker from Carbondale to Nanticoke, exhibit the certainty and rapidity with which our streams are being choked and our mountains turned wrong side out by a process alike exhausting and wasteful. It offers its advantage to the indolent consumer, but how fatal to the interior and exterior of our unresisting hills and valleys (quoted in Stevenson 1931, 72).

In the early twentieth century studies began documenting the living conditions of the new immigrants in the anthracite region. Sociologist Peter Roberts’s Anthracite Coal Communities: A Study of the Demography, the Social, Educational and Moral Life of the Anthracite Regions (Roberts 1970 [1904]), condemned the coal industry for destroying the landscape and the environment. He commented on the changing landscape and described the by-product of several generations of mining and environmental degradation:

A great change has come over this charming landscape . . . . But in nothing is the change so marked as in the character of these mountain streams . . . . Now the rain and snow have no natural reservoirs . . . . Every storm means a flood . . . . The mining industry perfects the work of destruction (Roberts 1970 [1904], 6).

Later in his book he described:

The contamination of our streams, the black creeks full of water laden with coal-dust, the dismal acres where the refuse from washeries has long been turned – these make a dreary environment. Trunks of trees stand in the valley, veritable ghosts of stately pines which no more know spring-time and summer. In many places acres of culm heaps, which are the refuse of a century of mining, stand as black monsters defiling our fairest valleys; the huge black breakers and shafts enveloped in a cloud of smoke and steam and dust when in operations; the scores of mining patches where houses have been built with depressing uniformity, while around them are the heaps of ashes, tin-cans, old bottles, empty beer kegs, etc. (Roberts 1970 [1904], 155). (Figure 2)

After World War I, as the coal industry began its steady decline, the region faced above-average unemployment. As a result, many families encountered severe economic conditions (Dublin and Licht 2005). While coal production increased during the Second World War, the industry continued its dramatic deterioration after the war. Many veterans chose not to return to north-eastern Pennsylvania. The region experienced some of the highest unemployment rates in the U.S. Women found work in the many new knitting mills that fled organized labor in the northeast and urban Mid-Atlantic States. Some men developed boot-leg mining operations, while others commuted weekly to northern New Jersey or the upper Midwest to work in the area’s light industry (Dublin 1998). By the 1960s, the downtown urban centers began to fall into decay from the lack of capital reinvestment (Shackel and Westmont 2016).

**Memorializing coal on the landscape**

In the early 1960s, Deasy and Griess (1961, 1–8), geographers associated with Pennsylvania State University, studied the impact of mining in the region and believed that some people would want to make a pilgrimage to view the anthracite landscape and memorialize what remains of this type of capitalism. They marveled at the earth moving equipment and they believe that tourists would
journey to see the power of the machinery extracting coal as well as the power of the towering breakers, which would have ‘an almost hypnotic appeal’ (Deasy and Griess 1961, 4). They believed tourist would find of interest the one- or two-man hole in the ground mines where tourists could, ‘strike up an acquaintance with a real miner’ (Deasy and Griess 1961, 4). These one- or two-man holes were probably boot-leg mines. Many of the unemployed workers who did not want to find employment outside of the region began to dig unauthorized shafts on company property. Many were undetected, and the coal from these mines found their way into northeastern Pennsylvania homes.

Deasy and Griess (1961, 3) made reference to the allure of visiting the slums of Paris and New York’s Harlem and the Bowery, and while visitors may find the anthracite landscape repulsive, it cannot be ignored. The impacted landscape in the anthracite region is one of the largest concentrations of disturbed terrain in the world. Billions of tons of debris in the form of culm banks and mine dumps are found throughout the landscape of abandoned strip mines. Deasy and Griess explained that, ‘In comparison, such engineering feats as the Suez and Panama canals and the pyramids of Egypt pale to insigniﬁcant’ (Deasy and Griess 1961, 3). They later refer to the area as a ‘man-made Bad Lands.’

The coal breaker is the most recognized symbol associated with the anthracite industry in northeastern Pennsylvania. Since Deasy and Griess’s observations in the early 1960s, hundreds of coal breakers went idle and were abandoned with the decline of the anthracite industry. They were huge hulking masses that slowly began the process of decay. Many were being dismantled for scrap and tourists and urban explorers came to view and experience these structures before they disappeared from the landscape.

Now that the breakers and many of the industrial related structures associated with early anthracite mining have vanished, the culm banks scattered throughout the mining region are one of the only reminders of this industry on the landscape. Goin and Elizabeth Raymond (2004, 39) note that the culm banks are viewed by some miners and descendants of the miners as monuments to the hard work performed by numerous anonymous new immigrants who toiled and survived in this industry. These features have become part of the vernacular landscape. Similarly, Kirk Savage (2003) notes that in western Pennsylvania slag piles (the waste product of making from the process of making steel) are not sanctioned by the state, however, they are unofficial monuments to industry.

Today, the only existing breaker in the anthracite region is the movie prop constructed for the 1968 Paramount movie The Molly Maguires in what is now Eckley Miners’ Village. After filming
the movie Paramount left many of the movie props in place, including the fabricated coal breaker. Because of the excellent preservation of the town, the Anthracite Historic Site and Museum Corporation, affiliated with the Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, purchased Eckley in 1971, and then donated it to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Warfel 1993, 6). In 1975, it became one of several museum sites in the anthracite region to interpret the history of the anthracite coal industry. Today, representations of the movie prop breaker can be found on tee-shirts, mugs, and baseball caps. Eckley is now one of three sites that make up the Anthracite Museum Complex administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission that interprets work and everyday life in historic northeastern Pennsylvania (Shackel 2016).

There are other forms of memorialization related to anthracite heritage that can be found throughout the region. Pilgrimages to the Lattimer massacre site means traveling off of the interstate highways and through the small patch towns of northeastern Pennsylvania to reach the destination. The massacre occurred in 1897 when immigrant miners of Eastern and Southern European descent went on strike for equal pay and better working and living conditions. The sheriff and his posse opened fire on 400 unarmed protesters and left 25 men dead and nearly forgotten. While the massacre has been erased from national attention, local historians, clergy, community leaders, and a handful of academics have kept the story alive. Nora (1996) explains that ‘without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep [these places of memory] away.’ To support this memory making, a Catholic mass was held annually at the site on the date of the massacre from the 1970s through the early 2000s. A centennial commemoration in 1997 brought together community leaders and members of the United Mine Workers of America. However, reinforcing the memory and making the pilgrimage meaningful continues to be a challenge. The anniversary memorial ceremonies ceased in 2005, although resurrected in 2011 as a multi-denomination event (Shackel, Roller, and Sullivan 2011; Roller 2015, 2018; Shackel 2018b).

In Mahanoy City, there is a memorial that commemorates the rise and fall of the Molly Maguires, an organization that consisted mostly of Irish-descent laborers. (Figure 3) The Molly Maguires have been vilified for their militant actions against the coal operators in the anthracite region since at least the Panic of 1873. Other histories characterize them as working-class laborers rising up against the exploitations of the coal barons. Many newspapers across the country condemned the organization. Members of the organization found guilty were hanged for their crimes against capital. The organization’s few supporters included The New York Labor Standard, edited by the Irish-born Joseph P. McDonnell, and the Irish World (Hand 2015).

By the 1970s there was a growing movement in Pennsylvania to recognize the Molly Maguires as advocates for the working class. While many of the accused members of the Molly Maguires were hanged in 1878, 100 years later Pennsylvania Governor Milton Shapp issued a proclamation honoring the Molly Maguires and explained that he was ‘paying tribute to these martyred men of labor.’ The following year, Shapp signed a posthumous pardon for John Kehoe, one of the Molly Maguire leaders (Hand 2015). In 2010, a Molly Maguire Historical Park was established in center of Mahanoy City. The park includes a statue created by sculptor Zenos Frudakis, of a Molly about to be hanged, with a sack over his head and noose around his neck. It was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development as well as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, awarded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Hand 2015).

Another effort to support anthracite heritage is an oratorio for choir and chamber ensemble by Julia Wolfe titled Anthracite Fields. It premiered in Philadelphia in 2014 and was awarded the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Music. The piece commemorates the devastating history of coal mining in northeastern Pennsylvania. The massiveness of the industry and the inhumane working conditions are essential elements of the piece. The first movement, Foundations, has the choir announcing all of the mine workers whose names start with John and who are listed in the Pennsylvania Mining Accident Index for 1869–1916. The repetition of naming continues for a long time through the first movement, demonstrating the fantastic number of workers injured or killed in the mines. Breaker Boys, the second movement, calls our attention to the exploitation of boys, mostly between the ages of 8–12,
working as slate pickers. The third movement, Speech, has excerpts from John L. Lewis, former president of the UMWA, who fought for miner’s rights and better safety working conditions. We are reminded of the inhumane conditions of working in the mines, and are reminded that those living in urban areas are probably unaware of the exploited labor that brings them comfort in the winter. The fourth movement, Flowers, is the bright spot of the piece. It is about the strong sense of community in the patch towns. They all cultivated gardens and grew flowers. The final movement, Appliances, reminds us of the power and energy that we use today that is powered by coal (http://juliawolfemusic.com/music/anthracite-fields).

**Without an optimistic future**

In northeastern Pennsylvania the ruined landscape is a reminder of the long-term economic hardship and the structural violence found in the region. The ancestors of the current population were not seen as equals. They more frequently faced extreme physical, nutritional, and mental hardships as they dealt with substandard housing, dangerous work conditions, and frequent encounters with starvation. They also faced harassment and verbal abuse from the established population. Miners were caught in an unending cycle of being indebted to the company store, which kept them living in substandard conditions. These historic conditions most likely has had a long-term effect on the general health and well-being of the population. It has taken its toll on the region’s general outlook and declining prosperity.
Several economists used data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and created a scale of happiness and found that northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Statistical Area (which includes Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton) (MSA) is ranked 367 out of 367 metropolitan areas in the U.S. The region has a lower than average median annual income, a higher unemployment rate, and ranks low in the well-being index (Glaeser, Gottlieb, and Ziv 2014, 63).

In 2014, Gallup and Healthways released a report describing Americans’ sense of well-being with regard to their emotional health, work environment, physical health, healthy behaviors and basic access to health care. The survey ranked northeastern Pennsylvania 177th out of 189 metropolitan areas (Gallup-Healthways Well Being Index 2014).

Northeastern Pennsylvania ranks low among MSAs for populations that are educated, as well as for quality of education. (Bernardo 2016). The Brookings Institute report, ‘America’s Advanced Industries,’ rated the top 100 metropolitan areas for STEM related jobs and northeastern Pennsylvania was also rated the third worst place for small businesses and ranks low for STEM related jobs. The region has a lower than average median annual income, higher unemployment rate, and ranks low in the well-being index (Falchek 2015; Muro et al. 2015).

A recent CDC study indicating death rates related to cardiovascular disease (CVD) illustrates higher mortality rates in the American South and this non-infectious disease is also prevalent through Appalachia, extending into the far reaches of northeastern Pennsylvania and into the southern tier of New York (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015).

The field of epigenetic may be one way of explaining the higher than average rate of CVD rate in northern Appalachia, which includes northeastern Pennsylvania. Epigenetics is the study of the change in genetic expression that does not involve the underlying DNA sequence. It is the change in phenotype without changing the genotype, which affects how cells read genes. Epigenetic marks serve as on/off switches for genes. The cells that make up different parts of your body – brain, heart, muscles – all have the same DNA. However, these cells take on different functions depending on how epigenetic marks turn on or off particular genes. Therefore, the study of epigenetics is about examining how the epigenetic marks may switch on or off and have a role in sustained generational changes. In this case, changes that may impact health and well-being.

The northeastern Pennsylvania’s population mostly consists of descendants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Southern and Eastern European immigrants. The coal baron’s poor treatment of their new workforce was legitimized by the racialization of the new immigrant, a form of structural violence. When examining CDC data for coronary heart disease death rates and controlling for Whites, 35 years and older, the data indicate an extremely high death rate in the anthracite region and compares to some of the highest rates found in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015).

This high mortality rate related to CVD in northeastern Pennsylvania may be in part explained by the long term structural violence that prevailed in this coal mining region. The deprivation of health care access, chronic stress related to poor nutrition and underemployment, and being exposed to a toxic environment, and dangerous working conditions may have transgenerational effects and therefore impact the general health and well-being of the contemporary community. The community faced additional stress with the loss of the coal industry, resulting in emotional trauma and continued nutritional stress. Racial hierarchies that were naturalized in the late nineteenth century legitimized the foundation of what became a long-term history of poverty and health disparities in the area. While there are many variables that lead to a region’s relatively poor health and relatively ‘unhappy’ condition, the development of epigenetic studies provides a vehicle to understanding the ruination of the region by considering the transgenerational effects related to health and well-being and the results of long-term structural violence.
Conclusion

In her ethnography of deindustrialized Niagara Falls, New York, Alice Mah (2014) explains that while many of the community members feel a sense of injustice and that they have been left behind in a dilapidated contaminated area, many are reluctant to blame the corporations that spoiled the environment, and abandoned their communities. As an ethnographer, Mah (2014) explains that while she was in the community for only a short time, she gained an understanding of the social and environmental issues facing the community. ‘I was able to draw attention to a neglected area, “left behind,” in the uneven geography of capitalist development, with hazardous toxic wastelands largely hidden from wider public awareness’ (Mah 2014, 10).

The abandoned industrial landscapes in northeastern Pennsylvania are a product of building, excavating, dumping, and abandonment, a process that continued for well over a century, leaving a clear signature of what once was, and leaving the present-day community searching through the obscured meanings of its heritage, a heritage of structural violence that continues to impact the existing communities (Shackel 2009, 2013). The concept of ruination can help focus our attention on the present conditions of life in the region. There are several underground mine fires that still burn in the anthracite region in abandoned mines threatening some of the smaller patch towns (Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection 2017). Many of the natural resources have been compromised and the smaller industries that once employed children and women, like silk mills and cigar factories, sit abandoned on the landscape. The last remaining breaker on the landscape, the St. Nicholas Breaker, has been dismantled and sold for scrap. There continues to be a net out-migration from the region as many of the offspring of the traditional community have moved to larger cities, like Baltimore and Philadelphia. Within the last decade a few businesses have moved into the region and the tourism industry has slowed the dramatic economic losses.

In northeastern Pennsylvania, places like Steamtown National Historic Site and the Anthracite Heritage Museum in Scranton, Eckley Miners’ Village in Weatherly, and the Ashland Mine tour memorialize the region’s mining and industrial heritage and draw tens of thousands of visitors to the region each year (Arden 2009, 8). Boulders of coal can be found in front of museums and shopping centers, as a memorial to the fuel that once generated a livelihood for the majority of its residents. Coal is even etched into religious carvings in Roman Catholic Church altars, like in Sugar Notch, Pennsylvania. (Figure 4) While no longer the backbone of the region’s economic engine, the community memorializes its past industrial heritage in museum exhibits, planned memorials, and in film and music.

While the growth of tourism is important for the region’s economy, the memorialization of the place does not pay significant attention to the devastating impact of this industry on the environment and the legacy of the region’s poor health and well-being. The general long-term structural violence associated with the coal industry and the flight of capital has left the place in ruins. There is a danger of these ruins being fetishized for their aesthetic value at the expense of forgetting the contemporary communities that continue to be affected by more than a century of coal extraction. The examination of ruins can be a platform for studying the structural violence of the past as well as the present.

Note

1. The oral histories referenced are on file at Eckley Miners’ Village in Weatherly, Pennsylvania. Eckley is operated by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Dr. Bode Morin, Site Administrator for Eckley Miners’ Village provide access to these records.
Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Paul A. Shackel is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Maryland. His research projects focus on the role of archaeology in civic engagement activities related to race and labor. His recent books include: New Philadelphia: An Archaeology of Race in the Heartland (2011), and a coauthored volume with Barbara Little - Archaeology, Heritage and Civic Engagement: Working toward the Public Good (2014). He is currently engaged in a project that focuses on labor and migration in northern Appalachia in the United States and is the subject of Remembering Lattimer: Migration, Labor, and Race in Pennsylvania Anthracite Country (2018).

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