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## **Introduction**

The ruins of Fort Henry sit among a quiet hill slope in the highlands of northern Chile, not far from Bolivia and Argentina, in the Atacama Desert (Figures 1 and 2). Above the pre-Hispanic terraces and a small creek, a jagged architectural skeleton of rock walls persists amid the arid landscape. Throughout the 1980s the Chilean military was deployed there to guard against the possibility of a foreign invasion in this isolated borderscape. Their presence there, however, was part of a much longer process of nationalization of territory – “Chilenization” – through which indigenous peoples living in the area were forced to assimilate. For the local Atacameño people and other indigenous peoples who live in the area today, the mountain landscape is entirely sacred, where living and dead creatures are mutually dependent through an order that is ensured by rituals that have been carried out from pre-Hispanic times to the present (Castro and Aldunate, 2013). Abandoned in the early 1990s, little is left of the Fort today. Among the rocky structure, though, and its layout, are remnants of the soldiers themselves – what they ate, what they wore, the activities that kept them occupied, etc. In previous work, we considered the material culture of the Fort and how it relates to the broader process through which the Chilean state performed its sovereignty across this territory. This paper builds on that work to consider a different problem. How might we think about these ruinous materials of the Fort as keys to the formation of state subjectivities that once occupied it? What can these objects and materials tell us about that process? And finally, how is this Fort implicated

in much broader social and political networks and assemblages (Desilvey and Edensor 2012)?

Figure 1: map of the study area.

Figure 2: the remnants of Fort Henry (photo by authors).

Supported by ethno-archaeological methodologies and contemporary theories about the state and the politics of ruins (Beasley-Murray 2010; Gordillo 2014), we put forward an understanding of these materials that acknowledges the role they might have played in subject formation while also remaining open to how that process is always incomplete. Moreover, we also draw on other findings from ongoing research in the area to add more to our understanding of how the Fort interacted with local communities during its occupation. As such, we can account for how the ruins of Fort Henry were no doubt enrolled in multiple processes involved in state-society relations, including the uncertain formation of soldier subjectivity and the effects that this militarization had on the broader everyday geopolitics of life in the area, particularly for the Atacameño people. From an archaeological position, this is not the same as merely speculating with unfounded guesses about the significance of objects that are the artefacts of investigation. Research in this area carefully combines different kinds of data in a way that empirically grounds the claims it makes about material culture and its place in understanding broader social and political relations (see Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014; Carman 2013; Harrison and Schofield 2009; Schofield 2009).

In geography in recent years, much has been said of materiality and objects, but there has been little engagement with scholarship in archaeology. A plethora of assemblage theories have proliferated that breathe new life into the non- or more-than-human world (Lorimer 2005), from the perspectives of new materialism to nonrepresentational theories of affect, and now even object-oriented ontologies that claim to go beyond how objects become meaningful to human (see Ash and Simpson 2016 and Richmond 2018, among others). However, there are still concerns that some of these approaches go too far in neglecting the human. From feminist geography, for instance, Kinkaid (2019) has asked directly “Can assemblage think difference?” (compare with González-Ruibal 2019). While these recent approaches offer compelling descriptions and accounts of more-than-human reality, there remain questions about their explanatory potential and how they might help illuminate more “critical” approaches that seek the connections among objects and various formations of subjectivity (political, cultural, economic, etc).

We think that the literature on the materiality of ruins, in archaeology and beyond, offers some helpful lessons in researching objects and their materiality. Geographers DeSilvey and Edensor (2012) write about “reckoning with ruins” as a gateway towards thinking about complex geographies, while Harrison and Schofield (2009) outline the advances in “Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past” to highlight the many ways that researchers can get closer to things/objects in terms of the lives they led, particularly insofar as they become implicated in state-society relations and other complex geographies and networks of connection (also see González-Ruibal 2013). For scholars like Gastón

Gordillo (2014), the materiality of ruins cannot be understood as exerting a pure positivity in terms of using archaeological and ethnographic methods to make informed and empirically-grounded statements about how objects are implicated, in so many ways, in process of subject formation. Because these sites are so often so fraught with the negativity of state violence, destruction and dispossession, and because of the enduring force of alterity itself, Gordillo (2014) prefers the term “rubble” instead of ruins for attending to what they call the “object-oriented negativity” of these sites (p. 11). Asserting something about the materiality of objects as a positive presence in/for subjectivity is only one part of the equation. This work on the postcolonial geopolitics of ruins fits well within an emerging “spectro-geographies” (Maddern and Adey 2008) that insists on a series of embodied experiences that deeply trouble excessively positive versions of subjectivity. Absence, for instance, becomes a powerful force in itself, one that continuously troubles the figure of the subject everywhere it goes.

We engage with Gordillo (2014) and others below to make the case that the materiality of Fort Henry contains within it both the positive force exerted by the presence of objects in the lives of the soldiers, as well as the haunting absences that must also accompany any theory of subjectivity today. Considering our findings with Gordillo (2014) and others, we highlight the geopolitics of presence and absence that run throughout the materiality of Fort Henry, one that requires an amount of reasonable assertions about the force of objects (Meehan et al. 2013), but one that also avoids overly deterministic explanations of what subjectivity is and how it works. Theorists like Mitch Rose (2004, 2006, 2010) have drawn on Jacques Derrida to insist that subjectivity is an always uncertain and

incomplete process that meanders between presence and absence, a meandering in which the affective force of absence can become present, while the presence of the state also results in the disappearing of certain forms of life. While we might examine the objects of ruins archaeologically and arrive at explanations for how they helped subjectivity come into being, those same objects might also reveal the undoing of that same subjectivity. For Wylie (2007), the “spectral geography” inspired by Derrida can provide an important check on philosophies that perhaps rely too heavily on a metaphysics of absolute presence, as “the spectral is thus the very conjuration and unsettling of presence, place, the present, and the past. In this sense, it may be understood as a riposte to phenomenologies of being-in-the-world” (pp. 172).

This paper combines these recent contributions to put forward a geopolitics of presence and absence at the ruins of Fort Henry. We map out a micro-geography of everyday material culture at the Fort that (1) makes stronger claims than are sometimes found in theories of affective assemblages, and (2) also avoids deterministic theoretical approaches that tend toward meta-explanation. Ruins are unique sites to consider assemblage theories, for they necessarily require an attention to the force objects make while also acknowledging how that force is enrolled in multiple social and political processes that link the site to its broader contexts. There is significant debate among scholars about how best to conceptualize the objects of research as simultaneously social but also agentive in themselves, meaning they can be unpredictable and perhaps even unknowable. Our approach and its focus on political subjectivity justifies itself on the grounds that it is fundamentally part of a “military geography” (Woodward 2004), one in

which we consider the formation of subjectivity through the material culture of the Fort. By looking from geopolitics and political geography towards archeology of the contemporary past, we can make new kinds of connections between specific components of material culture to its broader geopolitical context. As such, we build on the call by DeSilvey and Edensor (2012) to consider the materiality of ruins from the perspectives of process-oriented nonrepresentational and assemblage theories, but also cultural and historical geographies as well (p. 479-480; also see Hell and Schölne 2010).

First, we provide a brief introduction to the theoretical debates described above. Then we move into the background of Fort Henry and summarize our research methodology. The main empirical sections then follow, beginning with the presence of artefacts found at the site. Here we explain how the formation of subjectivity implied by this military site is held up, if only partially and temporarily, by the force of the objects themselves. This affirmative presence of objects, however, is not the entire story. Subjectivity is always haunted by absences of various kinds, a reality that is also made apparent with a careful consideration of the site. These hauntological spaces of the site and its geography are also essential for understanding the geopolitics that flow through it. As such, we want to suggest that geographical theories and methodologies also have much to learn from archaeology (also see Hill 2015), insofar as the tiniest materials can hold the keys to understanding the grandest of stories.

## Theorizing the Presence and Absence of Ruins

Subjectivity is never complete unto itself; it always requires an outside. This is the groundbreaking thesis of Jacques Derrida and other post-structural philosophers like Gilles Deleuze that have shaped much thought on space and society in recent decades (Dixon and Jones 2004; Rose 2006). In geography, nonrepresentational theories have taken this up most strongly in recent years, as so many phantom forces inform our embodied existence but which we rarely become aware of. Wylie (2007, 2009) for instance draws on Derrida to explore the persistence of ontological absences at the core of subjectivity and thereby puts a check on recent methodologies and theories of presence that have reconfigured the ontology of embodiment and phenomenology in recent years following the affective and more-than-human turns. Subjectivity results as a combination of material presences in the landscape, as the body is always already “immersed” in its materiality and perspective – but that does not tell the entire story. Derrida proposed a “constitutive outside” to the subject as a necessary spatiality without which all meaning would be impossible. Along with every affirmation is the existence of a radical alterity, an “other”. As such, an *absence* is at the heart of all meaning and all presence, thereby disrupting essentialist epistemology and phenomenology by insisting on a radical openness to the future.

To fully grasp the co-constitution of self and landscape, Mitch Rose (2006) draws on Derrida’s idea of “dreams of presence”. These are fleeting and unpredictable moments of subject formation that have origins in “an unfolding plane of sensory, affective, or



perceptual markers” (p. 547), but that also are informed by something else: “the intrusion of the other” (p. 547), an already present outside or absence that keep subjectivity forever open and in-process. Nevertheless, “dreams of presence” are emergent constructs that seek to guide and order a world that often refuses to be guided and ordered. A complex metaphysics of presence and absence, then, is at the heart of Rose’s (2006) attempt to salvage a theory of subjectivity in the cultural landscape while also rejecting prevailing approaches that attempt to “read” the cultural landscape for its many signs, codes and politics of representation (also see Rose 2004). These can stay, Rose (2006) seems to suggest, but only after being subject to a Derridian deconstruction that complicates any taken for granted assumption about subjectivity and where it comes from. Rose (2006), in his own words, writes that “Dreams of presence are not signs that communicate to self-conscious subjects. They are orientations that allow subjectivity to occur” (also see Wylie 2005). Subjectivity emerges through engagement between self and landscape that makes sure that whatever subjectivity emerges, it cannot be said to precede its engagement with the landscape itself. There is always a phantom “calling” (Rose 2006, 2010) from without that initiates and guides the process.

This idea of a “call”, or what Rose (2006) calls a “call to care” attracts our attention most. For our purposes, we build on other recent work on assemblage theories that expand the purview of what is involved in this “calling”. Simply put, while objects and the material landscape should not always be reduced to what they mean for humans, they can also be crucial participants in socio-spatial relations that result in coherences in subject formation, even if for only a short time and never across the board. Miller (2014) draws

on Rose (2010) to suggest that retail capitalism, for example, utilizes objects to affectively produce the call to consumer subjectivity, although that is never a universal and guaranteed outcome. Similarly, in taking up questions of “the state”, Meehan et al. (2013) put forward something similar by considering the material world of objects as a key to its existence, rather than some transcendental assumption. For them, the contemporary state is made possible only through the work that objects do in everyday life, particularly objects of surveillance used by the police. Their conceptualization of objects – drawing on the object-oriented philosophy of Graham Harman – both grants them a special kind of power as instantiated in the field of state-society relations. The object is therefore not subordinated to human-centered approaches, but nevertheless is relevant for the ways that it does exert a force *for* the state. De La Ossa and Miller (2019) concur in their psychoanalytic reading of Meehan et al.’s (2013) “political geography of the object” as relevant for the U.S.-Mexico borderland where surveillance objects of the state circulate not only in the physical landscape but also in the region’s imagination and psyche.

In other words, while some recent theories of object-oriented assemblages seek to subvert the constructs of Enlightenment thought by insisting on a radical autonomy of objects (see Bennett 2010), other scholars have drawn on this work to reimagine what more familiar politics are and how they work. Yet if we hold on to Derrida’s idea of “dreams of presence” as a model for subjectivity, the presence of objects in subject formation is not enough. Often, even objects themselves can open windows of opportunity to consider the hauntological side of subjectivity and the absences it requires. Objects can also reveal the ontological vulnerabilities, absences and even the negative aspects

of subject formation that nevertheless make an impact on that process. Interestingly, recent work on ruins has explored these complex spatialities, from research in geography to anthropology and archaeology. As Beasley-Murray (2010) suggest, the meaning of material ruins is often multiple and changes across time. The same set of ruins can produce different impacts as times goes on as new kinds of social, political and material landscapes crop up around them. Recent work on the “archaeology of the contemporary past” (Harrison and Schofield 2009), for instance, advances our understanding of how material ruins cannot be thought of only in terms of radical presence, but also the complex process of loss, absence and even violence that negates life. In defining their “ethnographic archaeology”, Gordillo (2014) clarifies how their approach of “object-oriented negativity” (p. 11) differs from philosophies of more-than-human presence, inspired by Bruno Latour and others that have had such influence in recent years:

“Yet unlike most of these authors, I focused on ruptured, fraught objects that denaturalize the present; I also examined the forms of fetishization through which these ruptures are disregarded and silenced. My orientation was thereby guided by an object-oriented negativity, a concept that [...] seeks to politicize object-oriented approaches through an attention to destruction, violence and reification” (Gordillo 2014, p. 14).

Gordillo’s methodology reveals much more than a simple explanation of how materiality produces subjectivity in a mere reversal of the hegemonic doctrine of the Enlightenment. Seemingly in response to the kind of approach encouraged by Rose (2006), Gordillo’s

shift from “ruins” to “rubble” is an attempt to consider how so-called the materiality of ruins are enrolled in so many lived realities of postcolonial Argentina. Many participants in Gordillo’s research were unfamiliar with the word “ruin” and it was only when Gordillo describes physical materialities – walls, forts, mounds – that people understood. From there, the ruinous materiality of the sites is situated in much broader historical and political geographies of empire, nation-building, complex racial and ethnic identities and many other material infrastructures of transport and industrial agricultural production. For Gordillo (2014), the radical presence of these sites includes so much more than what elite discourses of the heritage industry often include when referring to “ruins”. As such, Gordillo (2014) suggests moving away from that term towards “rubble”, a figure that responds well to Rose’s (2006) “dreams of presence”, as a mixture between the landscape, the self and whatever it is that results in terms of the transformations that humans do make:

“In questioning my own abstracted veneration of the ruins’ material form, I gradually learned to see such objects through the lens of the most concrete, unglamorous term we have to name what is created by the destruction of space: rubble. But this shift in perspective also forced me to do away with the mainstream downgrading of rubble as shapeless, worthless debris, and instead to explore rubble as textured, affectively charged matter that is intrinsic to all living places” (p. 5).

As such, rubble appears as a kind of affective assemblage that includes social and political relations that reverberate across the landscape and across time. What is left behind of the Spanish empire's attempt to subdue to the tropical lowlands of the Chaco – between Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia – exist alongside other forces shaping the landscape today, namely, large-scale industrial agriculture and the diverse communities that inhabit the area today. Others working on “archaeology of ruins” and again, “archaeology of the contemporary past” has also added to complex accounts of how the materiality of the landscape becomes implicated in the complex processes of becoming that constitute cultural and political life. These approaches add methodological support for those interested in the geographical lives of objects and the broader importance of the materiality of the landscape today. In such ways, non-representational and assemblage theories can enhance cultural and historical geographies in exciting new ways (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012). Gordillo's (2014) “ethnographic archaeology” encapsulates such an ambitious research agenda in a single in-depth project, one reason we spend so much time detailing it here.

Our approach to Fort Henry below advances several points that build on this recent work as well as other traditions in geopolitical theories of the “mundane” or “prosaic” state (Painter 2006). Developing our own ethnographic archeology towards the site, we are able to deepen our understanding of life at the Fort and the role of material culture in the formation of state subjectivity. Our analysis of select objects recovered at the Fort reveals both a radical presence and spectral absence in the emergence of state subjectivity among the soldiers stationed there. Furthermore, we can extend our understanding of

how the militarization of the region has impacted local communities. Before getting to the findings, we introduce Fort Henry below and provide details of our methodology.

## **Background and Methodology**

Fort Henry is just one of the latest examples of the expansion of Chilean state sovereignty into these territories of difference. Needless to say, as a military space, the geopolitical materiality of Fort Henry cannot be separated from its role as an imperial technology of governance and control, one that seeks to subsume indigenous difference into a more homogenous Chilean identity. This process of subject formation, or “*Chilenization*” (“*Chilenización*”), has unfolded in multiple ways since the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) when Chile annexed this territory from Peru and Bolivia (González, 2004). The local indigenous peoples that had inhabited the area were now under a new state apparatus that set out to expand its sovereignty. Boarding schools, mapping and other technologies of statecraft were deployed to incorporate the indigenous peoples into the construct of a Chilean identity, or to force them to leave if they were unwilling to do so. During the most recent military dictatorship that governed Chile from 1973-1990, troops were again deployed to this remote desert landscape to patrol the border and defend against any future invasion of enemy forces.

Our methodology included archaeological and ethnographic techniques carried out in two research campaigns in 2013 and 2016. It is important to point out that our research

encounter with Fort Henry is somewhat fortuitous, as the two researchers who collected the data were active in the region pursuing other projects prior to researching Fort Henry. One was working to reconstruct the nearby pre-Inca hydraulic network located in Paniri, and another focused on the socioecological transformation of region's wetlands in the context of neoliberalization. Combined, these projects used a variety of mixed-methods to gain knowledge of the area around Fort Henry. In 2013 and 2016, though, these two researchers combined forces to approach Fort Henry itself. Additionally, one of the authors lived in the area from 2015-2020 and was able to conduct several follow-up visits.

We began by using satellite images obtained from Google Earth and through ground truthing techniques were able to conduct a preliminary survey of the study site relative to its geographical surroundings. We then conducted a superficial intensive archaeological survey, focusing on the material culture located at the surface, while comprehensively covering the entire area around the study site. In a previous paper we provide details about the Fort's ruinous architecture and what remains of its layout, including specific surface features and the likely uses of different parts of the structure (Author, year). By documenting the objects found on the surface among the layout, we built a functional classification of the objects and the structure itself. Amid the ruins were also instances of "rock art" made by the soldiers as well as some pre-Hispanic and colonial petroglyphs. As such, we were able to build a plausible understanding of where the soldiers most likely slept, ate, defecated, fired their weapons, threw their trash, stood guard and where they positioned the radio tower and raised the Chilean flag (author date).

These findings are interpreted and complemented with ethnographic data. We conducted in-depth interviews among two former soldiers who were stationed at the Fort. One of them was interviewed on site and the other ex-soldier's interview was accompanied by photographs of the objects, infrastructure, and landscape. We also interviewed an archaeologist from the “Grupo de Toconce”<sup>[1]</sup> and a herder from one of the local communities who interacted with the soldiers. Additionally, we carried out informal interviews among inhabitants from the local communities near the Fort. This qualitative data allowed us to get the informant’s direct appreciation of their life experiences, gaining deep explanation of the material culture and validate our interpretations regarding the functional classification and the chronology of the site (again, a more refined chronology is presented in Author, year).

The Fort is in an area where the everyday life of the soldiers remains especially sedimented. It is a kind of time-capsule, where the remoteness and solitude of the site, and the hyperaridity, have preserved the military material culture in relative isolation. Based on the length of time spent in the study area and the ethnographic data especially, we know that there is little movement of people in this part of the highlands. At Fort Henry, we have never found evidence of what we know to be material signs of migrant paths, drug traffic or other movement of contraband. The site is relatively isolated as it is far away from the nearest highway as well, with the nearest towns being Cupo, Paniri and Turi, with a combined population of 53 (INE. 2017. Censo de Poblacion y Vivienda).



In previous work we have elaborated on key findings to explore the links between the material culture of Fort Henry and its place in the broader geopolitical landscape. The objects recovered at the Fort are suggestive of the everyday life of a soldier at the Fort and how the Fort was part of a larger infrastructure working to expand the sovereignty of the Chilean state. Drawing on Foucault's (1991) theory of discipline in state-society relations, we built a perspective of how the material culture of the Fort played a role in this process. We do not, however, consider the formation of state subjectivity itself among the soldiers in their day to day lives. Philo (2012) writes of Foucault's turn towards these other aspects of governmentality in the later part of his career. In the present contribution, we extend our analysis by engaging more directly with the objects and consider their force in light of more recent theories of the state (Meehan et al. 2013; Gordillo 2014) and the politics of ruins more broadly (Desilvey and Edensor 2012, among others). As we will see, the objects of Fort Henry present not only an active presence and force of the state, but also open up to the haunting presence of absence and vulnerability. The objects also point to how the Fort interacted with the local indigenous communities, thereby adding further reach of our understanding of ruins as geopolitical assemblages.

### **The Presence of Objects in State Subjectivity**

According to Rose (2004), deconstruction is not necessarily something that we do as researchers and/or critics, but rather points to something that is always already taking place everywhere (p. 463, 465). While this might seem like a universalist statement of its own, its true and radical meaning is far from that. As "dreams of presence" nonetheless

proliferate, they inevitably run against the incoherent insistence of a world on edge, a world that often refuses to cooperate. As a process philosophy, things are also never still for very long. Movement abounds, changing the physical compositions of everything that comes into contact with other things. Dirt, sand and other earthy matter accumulate on footwear unless regularly attended to, for example. Human bodies themselves have their own consistency and rates of growth or depletion. Hair and skin, for example, advance slowly each day, while the entire body can shrink if not nourished, or can wither away simply from the long passage of time and old age.

One very powerful socio-spatial formation of modern “dreams of presence” is the state itself, and the world of flows it endeavors to control, which is incredibly unwieldy; often highly evasive; and can be outright oppositional and hostile (Scott 1998). As mentioned above, Fort Henry fits within these complex geopolitics of statecraft in multiple and complex ways. What we want to consider more closely here is how everyday objects of the Fort’s material culture became agents of the state in subtle and mundane ways. While in previous work we considered how everyday items of personal hygiene and uniform attire were enrolled in the “reproduction of self-discipline” (citation redacted) we did not consider the embodied metaphysics of subjectivity involved in that process. In other words, the risk of this conclusion is that the objects themselves are subsumed into a theory of state-society relations that privileges an abstract notion of “the state” gaining a foothold in something called “subjectivity”. In the geographic conditions of Fort Henry, as a small and isolated outpost, we can consider the role of these objects as perhaps even extra important in the formation of soldier subjectivity. Among the most common objects

recovered at the Fort were plastic shaving razors and cans of boot polish. What work did these do?

We want to imagine the power of the state as emanating from the objects themselves for these soldiers stationed at Fort Henry. While we could say that it is more of a top-down and process that relegates the objects' force and significance to mere background or triviality, the sensibility we argue for is that the objects themselves played a role in this dance between the soldier and the state. Far away from the administrative centers, only small groups of soldiers were stationed at Fort Henry. We know this from the rock art they produced and from the size of the site itself. As such, we imagine the catalyst of self-discipline often stemming from the presence of these objects themselves, objects that are always inquiring: *When was the last time you shaved the hair on your face, soldier? Is there dirt and sand on your boots, soldier?* These are the questions persistently asked by the objects in Figures 3 and 4 as they monitored the soldiers stationed at Fort Henry.

Figure 3: Razors (photo by authors).

Figure 4: Boot polish and brush (photo by authors).

Inspired by Harman, Meehan et al. (2013) put forward the notion that objects can become arbiters of state power if deployed in a certain way, while also not losing their vitality as forces that can either "make or break" power relations (borrowing from Deleuze and

Guattari 2013, p. 259). Importantly for this discussion of Fort Henry, Meehan et al. (2013) suggest that objects of the state are capable of “patrolling” the world in powerful ways:

“We agree with Harman. Yet we have extended his metaphysics to argue that the relations between objects are not always accidental or ambiguous, not always naïve or innocent. Instead, we have examined how such objects can come together to force themselves upon other objects: to effectively patrol urban spaces and populations to prevent the world from becoming-other” (pp. 8-9).

We follow Meehan et al.’s (2013) reading of Harman as a way of getting closer to everyday life and being in the world. Importantly, objects patrol the world to neutralize and prevent a “becoming-other”. In the Atacama Highlands where Fort Henry is located, this process moves through the soldiers themselves as they commit to another operation, which is the patrolling of borders and preventing the “becoming-other” in terms of national territory (becoming-Bolivia, Argentina or Peru). In fact, the materiality of the military architecture itself works toward this end, as we identify in previous work how the Fort’s polycentric architecture was defended with machine gun nests in defense positions, which was common among these kinds of bases. The layout also works to instill discipline amongst the soldiers by way of a bailey where the Chilean flag was likely positioned, also a common feature of military bases of this kind (Author year).

If in this earlier work we suggested that the material culture and architecture of the Fort was a key infrastructure of the military state apparatus seeking to establish sovereignty over new territory, we now want to consider how the material culture was more specifically involved in the formation of the military subjectivity itself. In effect, we see soldiers patrolling the landscape, *while the objects patrol the soldiers*. Our exploration of the political geographies of these objects, however, does not end with the alleged coincidence or overlap of objects and subjects. Subject formation, in short, is also an embodied experience, one that is not adequately addressed in the one-way proposition of objects producing or helping produce new soldier subjectivities. Other found objects at the Fort Henry ruin point to the play of these materialities, thereby emphasizing another embodied ontology involved in the process of subject formation: the constitutive forces of vulnerability, absence and a kind of geopolitical haunting.

### **The Vulnerability and Absences of Embodied Subjectivity**

What is the state up against in its drive to produce particular subjectivities in the Atacama Highlands? The answer, in short, is other materialities. To be more specific, materialities that are inherent to embodiment. Building on Derrida and others, Harrison (2008) takes this up in considering how bodies are fundamentally “vulnerable” to the outside world, thereby depriving them of any essentialist tendencies that would explain their persistence or reproduction. Harrison (2008) surveys a variety of embodied

experiences that interfere with the smooth emergence of consciousness and subjectivity, such as “susceptibility, receptivity, lassitude, exhaustion, and sleep”, which he refers to as “phenomena which intimate the end of intention and action and which trace a passage of withdrawal from engagement” (pp. 424). These embodied experiences thereby contend with the materialities imposed by any human/state/object-oriented project seeking to maintain a grip on the world by actively producing it. Subjectivities are always vulnerable to the impact of these embodied experiences, thereby generating an uncertain and ontological ripple in the constitution of reality. Like Wylie (2007), Harrison (2008) cautions against excessive emphasis on the presence of objects and thereby places them in relief as only one important aspect of what being and becoming are all about.

How can we consider the affective forces of vulnerability and absence in the objects found at Fort Henry? One finding includes the objects and materials of consumption, remnants of which were found at the site among the rocky ruins. In the isolated highlands, far away from urban centers, these soldiers had to nourish their bodies to be ready to fight the (imagined) enemy. As mentioned above, we found the canisters of military food stuffs produced by Kern Industries, a U.S.-based corporation that produced food for the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam and Korea. Along with this war-food we also found military utensils (Figure 5). These findings point to the obvious vulnerability of these soldiers (hunger, exhaustion). Other objects of consumption, however, point to a more complicated intersection of vulnerability and absence in the lives of the soldiers. Many empty aluminum cans of beer and the shattered glass of pisco bottles were also found among the ruins of the Fort. Even though the objects of hygiene and attire act to “patrol”

(Meehan et al., 2013) these emergent state subjectivities, the consumption of alcohol at the Fort could signal a kind of excess, or potential disruption of those same subjectivities, even if drinking was often permitted in the military (reference redacted). At the same time it is also possible and perhaps more likely that the disruptive potential of alcohol was actually permitted by authorities and therefore formed a somewhat unpredictable chemical edge of state power (cf. González-Ruibal et al., 2010; González Gómez de Agüero et al., 2017), perhaps adding further intimate weight to the kind of group-cohesion that military subjectivity also sought to encourage.

Figure 5. War Food (photo by authors).

Figure 6. Caps of pisco bottles (photo by authors).

Other findings around the soldiers' diet reveal how the Fort related to the surrounding communities. According to the interviews conducted with the herders, former soldiers and archaeologist, soldiers sometimes stole animals from local herders to supplement their diet with protein, including llamas, sheep, goats, rabbits and guinea pigs. Without this source, the soldiers were left with the U.S. military MRE (Meals Ready to Eat) and with limited access to Chilean canned and packaged goods. The thefts were, in fact, part of "training" exercises carried out by the military. This statement is confirmed by a former soldier, who told us that as part of the training, they were required to steal the animals from the local communities. This has also been recently corroborated by personal

communication with another former soldier stationed further south. This interaction is shaped by the dynamics of state-society relations, but also by the vulnerability of the bodies in such isolated military geographies. Local inhabitants also reported exchanging goods with the soldiers. In one interview, a woman told us that her grandfather was fascinated with this “gringo food”, as he was “bored with lamb meat”. As such, he regularly exchanged lamb for peanut butter. While the relationship between Chilean conservatives and the U.S. and the CIA has been widely discussed and documented, many details remain opaque. These findings at the least prove that U.S. war food made its way to the Chilean soldiers during this time.

Other findings point to additional absences. While stationed at Fort Henry, many soldiers made rock art by etching their names into the rocks. They often also included their surname, their origin and the battalion and military unit, along with a date. More personal rock art can also be found. The name “Claudia” was scratched into the rocks in several locations, once with the name Luis and the date of 1983 (Figure 7). Being in the highlands, far away from civilian life, including family and loved ones, produces a situation that could be potentially loaded with the feelings of isolation and loneliness. The absence of Claudia, in this case, affects this lonely soldier stationed at Fort Henry so much that he was moved to etch the name in stone using either a knife or a bayonet. The affective force of this absence is so strong that it literally moves this soldier to modify his surroundings, causing an inscription in the rock. Importantly, the military state seeks to fill this gap with instances of itself through the discipline required of the soldiers. This is effectively captured in the



slogan associated with Chilean statecraft in the Atacama's Highlands: "although the loneliness is great, greater yet is the love of my country" (originally cited in redacted).

Figure 7. "Luis + Claudia 8/7/83" (photo taken by authors).

The mere existence of this slogan is suggestive of the need of the state to produce such a love, rather than its being a natural or inevitable formation. In any case, subsequent ethnographic research has also uncovered other accounts of the soldiers and their libidinal lives. Interviewees have mentioned soldiers leaving the camp to visit the nearest city of Calama to "let off steam with prostitutes (*desahogar con prostitutas*)" (source: personal communication, 2016). Again, the state's grip on subjectivity is never total and these other material circumstances turn up alternatives. In the case of soldiers' leave to Calama, we can therefore also see how the militarization of the region intersects with the gendered economies of sex work and the potential violence therein. This is not surprising, perhaps, considering the long history of how militarization and the organization of sexual exploitation and violence often coincide (see Lisle, 2016). It is logical that "letting off steam with prostitutes" is entirely part of the same military power structure seeking to ensure control of the highlands as "Chilean". Lisle's (2016) work makes apparent how rarely critical theories of empire attend to sexuality and modes of sexual exploitation and violence.

## The Ghosts of Geopolitics

So far, this article has argued that objects of ruinous sites can reveal the production and vulnerability of state subjectivity. Following Derrida, this power of ontological absence has inspired research on “hauntology” and what Maddern and Adey (2008) refer to as “spectro-geographies”. Partially in response to the growth of research on a more “vitalist” ontology of objects and “more-than-human” worlds, Maddern and Adey (2008) suggest that:

“spectro-geographies may help us not to move too far in arousing the world.

We should be careful not to forget the lifeless geographies of ‘the broken, the static and the already passed’. Live geographies, let’s make them dead again”.

For them, Derrida’s work on ghosts and subsequent “hauntology” adds to a “more-than-representational” approach, but through a perhaps counter-intuitive look into the constitution of subjectivity itself as composed of “lessening, slowing, lingering, deadening, vulnerability, loss of hope, boredom and withdraw” (Maddern and Adey 2008, pp. 293). The work of Harrison (2008) and to a greater extent Wylie (2007, 2009) cited above form a part of these Derridian “spectro-geographies” and they insist on the importance of these hauntological figures that run through human existence. Our interest in this work is partly to emphasize, again, *what the state is up against* in its attempt to produce certain kinds of subjectivities amongst the population. Moreover, in the context of geopolitical tension, it is impossible to avoid the play of other kinds of spectral forces that appear, disappear and reappear across time. In other words, an object-oriented and embodied approach to

Fort Henry cannot be separate from the geopolitical circumstances that brought those elements together to begin with. If the absence of love and civilian life constitutes a kind of ontological absence in the lives of these soldiers, another kind of specter emerges to fill the gap: the threat of the foreign invader.

Rather than fix the materialities of Fort Henry as a political assemblage of the past, something confined and stabilized in our representation of it, we want to insist that volatile geopolitics could once again militarize the region at any moment. In previous work, the foreign “other” appears as expedient ghost:

“Geopolitical contexts could reactive the site and bring back the drunk soldiers, who, practicing shooting with a perfectly clean-shaven faces and polished boots, will be experiencing the cold Atacama Desert nights as they expect the return, amidst the Paniri and San Pablo hills, of the eternal imaginary enemies, ghosts so profitable to the national oligarchy that it has never once had to pay the death toll of saving the patria” (reference redacted).

Recall that these soldiers stationed there were mobilized in a context of geopolitical tension among nations. Military objectives were to prevent a loss of territory. The Pinochet regime was seeking to drawn attention away from a series of problems related to its regime of terror and raised the preemptory alarm about territory and national sovereignty. If the soldiers at Fort Henry were haunted by the memories and absences of their loved ones and life as a civilian, this gap was, in part, filled by the imaginative geographies of

the state. It was filled not only by the presence of objects “patrolling” their space (discussed above), but also the play of geopolitical ghosts. A soldier longs for Claudia so much that her name is etched in the stone, a kind of cry against the world. This inscription literally shapes the space of the Fort. Filling this gap is the military state with its requirements, including the requirement to kill and be killed if necessary. This requirement relies on another absence: the ongoing and perpetual threat of the foreign “other”, the either Bolivian, Peruvian or Argentine invader in this case. One absence is effectively and affectively replaced by another. In this way, the calling upon the “eternal imaginary enemies” of the state resembles a spectral appearance, insofar as “the spectral ushers in an endless process of returning, without ever arriving” (Wylie, 2007, pp. 171).

What is the state up against in its project of producing particular forms of subjectivity is, namely, the vulnerability inherent to the embodied subject and the constant haunting of absence. We have seen this haunting emerge, primarily, in two instances at our reading of everyday life at Fort Henry. First, we pursue the affective dimensions that are referenced in the state slogan “although the loneliness is great, greater yet is the love of my country”. The slogan acknowledges that soldiers stationed there will be lonely. This ontological gap in the embodied subject, then, is targeted by a second kind of haunting appropriate for the process of subject formation: the recurrence of a foreign threat, the ghost of the “other” invading the territory of the nation-state.

Yet among our findings were other signs of ghostly presence/absence at the Fort itself. Qualitative findings around the communities revealed that some soldiers stationed at the Fort were also originally from the surrounding indigenous communities. Military service

was obligatory during the time of the dictatorship, making the military a powerful institution to continue the work of Chilenization in the borderlands, described above. One participant explained the reasons why the Fort was actually abandoned in favor of a second structure located roughly 800 meters away, saying that "The fort was haunted with the spirits of the *abuelos* (ancestors)", causing them to become fearful of the structure. Near the second structure, we also found signs of military activity, including many rifle shell casings of the Chilean military and other devices such as explosive detonators. As such, local indigenous people are seen to also have an influence on the micro-workings of the Fort. They, too, emerge at the confluence of Chilean statecraft and the alterities of indigenous difference that continually haunt the nation-state in its current form. In any case, in the years since 1990s when indigenous rights were bolstered with the indigenous law, some local peoples have claimed the land where the Fort stands. Upon the entrance to the road that veers off toward the Fort is a sign that says in official letters "property of the Chilean military". Locals who challenge this property regime have added the word "was" to the beginning of the phrase, asserting a challenge to the state control by banishing it to the past. Today, the military has abandoned the site completely but continues conducting exercises in the area (mainly in El Ojo de San Pedro, see Figure 1), preferring short-term camps using tents and trucks (Prieto et al. 2019). The military continues to be the legal owner of the land.

## **Conclusion**

Ruinous sites, then, are composed of layered materialities that geographers and others have attended to in recent years in the turns toward assemblage thinking more broadly.

As this article illustrates, archaeology has a lot to offer researchers interested in the lives of things, objects and materials of many kinds. For theories of geopolitics, this includes the apparatuses that work to produce certain kinds of subjectivities, as well as the moving ground of embodiment and more-than-human circumstances that such apparatuses are always up against. We build on such approaches that move beyond poetic speculation and start to think about the complex politics of objects – how they help build worlds as well as reveal their more complex components, particularly around embodiment. The Fort is surely suspended in the spaces between a modern Chilean state and the indigenous territories of difference and alterity that it seeks to incorporate, a project that is notoriously diffuse, contradictory, violent and full of ambivalences. The haunting this paper is concerned with might also include the alterity of postcolonial difference itself, as articulated in the landscape of remote military outposts in the outskirts of the national territory, where indigenous difference persists. The ruinous materiality of Fort Henry, while perhaps easy to overlook from a geopolitical perspective at first glance, are seen to encapsulate such a multiplicity of forces that we must weigh carefully for an understanding of state power and how it finds its way into the most mundane and intimate spaces of everyday life.

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[1] El Grupo de Toconce is a group of archaeologists and ethnohistorians who started to systematically develop research for the first time in the Loa River basin in the early 1970s.